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Book Review

Shenila Khoja-Moolji. *Sovereign Attachments: Masculinity, Muslimness, and Affective Politics in Pakistan*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021. 288 pp. $34.75. ISBN 9780520336803. Reviewed by:

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Against the backdrop of the attacks on the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar by gunmen affiliated with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (hereafter, Taliban) in 2014, several tropes of sovereignty appeared in Pakistan. These tropes challenged the dominant form of state sovereignty as a given (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 2) and advanced alternative visions of sovereignty through the relationships between claimants and their publics.

In the book *Sovereign Attachments: Masculinity, Muslimness, and Affective Politics in Pakistan,* Shenila Khoja-Moolji discusses how different forms of sovereignties come to interact with one another and how these are nurtured through performances of masculinity and Muslimness in Pakistan. In doing so, the author looks at how the Taliban and the state-produced texts are replete with gendered figurations (of the paternal father, innocent child, mourning mother, and dutiful daughter) that help ignite affective intensity towards sustaining sovereign relations.

Drawing on the feminist and cultural theory scholarships on gender, affect and memory, Khoja-Moolji argues that sovereignty has been articulated and contested through gendered figurations in postcolonial societies. Gender and sexuality help "constitute and are constituted through sovereign attachments" (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 7). Further, they help "sovereignty

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acquire texture: it gains a history, is replete with figural nodes, emerges as performative, and has a cultural and affective dimension" (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 7).

This book is divided into two parts. The first part considers different personifications of sovereign power in the state, the soldier, and the *mujahid* (loosely translated as those engaging in *jihad;* reference here to the Taliban fighters). In the second part, the book illustrates how relationships of sovereignty are intensified through kinship, affect and memory. Throughout this book, Khoja-Moolji discusses how the claims of "Islamo-masculinity" shape the gendered roles ascribed to sovereignty claimants and the feeling public, enabling women to undergo gendered labour and affective comportments. The author also introduces readers to how "counter-publics" are formed in opposition to the dominant sovereign claims.

In the chapter "Narrating the Sovereign", the author draws on autobiographical texts of three leaders of Pakistan—namely, Pervez Musharraf, Benazir Bhutto, and Imran Khan—to discuss how Muslimness and masculinity shape their understanding of state sovereignty and their role as sovereign heads. While the Islamo-masculinist tropes are apparent in discussions around Musharraf and Khan, Khoja-Moolji shows us that Bhutto "performed a unique form of sovereign masculinity: a sovereign female masculinity" (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 42), allowing her to be a feminine agent practising masculinist trope of sovereignty while seeking to re-envision "moderate Islam" (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 52). The chapter on figurations of a soldier (or *jawan)* and sovereignty looks at Inter-Services Public Relations (hereafter, ISPR) archives to understand how, in an imagined collective called nation-state, *jawan* becomes an "object of the nation's love" (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 55). The production of video songs and movies in the public sphere allows the state to stage love and trust in *jawan*, who "claims to defend Islam-Country" (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 80), while simultaneously displaying disgust for the backward Taliban.

Similarly, in their sovereignty claims, the Taliban argue that the Pakistani state has failed to implement *sharia* fully. In their wish to reform the Pakistani state, they "transform the *ummah* (Muslim community) into both a space of belonging and a space of control" (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 90). Their articulations of sovereignty claims in the magazines (such as *Azan* and *Ihya-e-Khilafat*) note that the nation-state is a man-made construct that ought to be replaced with

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khilafat (a polity that implements Islamic law) (Khoja-Moolji 2021, pp. 88-91). Through the "sartorial practices" of enforcing bodily norms (for instance, resisting cutting off one's beard), the Taliban seek to visually assert themselves as representing authentic Muslimness.

In both *jawan* and the Taliban reading of state sovereignty, the other is always reduced to something that "threatens the object of love", is "an object of disgust, even hate", and is an aberration in the "contexts of manhood and Islam", and therefore, become the object which needs to be decimated (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 66). In this reading, Khoja-Moolji evokes Sara Ahmed's 'affective economies' to show that emotions are not inherently present within a body but circulate between bodies, producing and reproducing socio-cultural spaces. The three chapters comprise the book's first half, encompassing a comprehensive reading of multiple—oft-competing—performances of sovereignty, which rely on Islamo-masculinity to demarcate "who is included and excluded from the political community" (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 123).

The second half of the book discusses how figurations of women are intensified through "gendered labour, kinship feelings, and memory work" in the state and the Taliban's claims of sovereignty (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 123). In the chapter 'Subordinated Femininities', Khoja-Moolji comprehensively discuss how figures of *muhajira* (one who migrates) and *mujahida* (one who participates in jihad) in Taliban magazines, and the army woman (representing an army wife, the military widow, and a female soldier) in ISPR magazines further advance the narrative of an ideal women-subject for *khilafat*- and nation-building projects, respectively. The author painstakingly discusses how various narrative scripts—referred to here as origin stories—have been used to tell stories about transformation and political allegiance. These stories help decipher not only how women have always been ascribed a subordinate role to the masculinist sovereign claims but also help inform how the women co-participate and align their gendered responsibilities to perform Muslimness for their respective entities. While women are mainly represented as wives, mothers, and sisters who seek pride in the ultimate sacrifice of their sons, husbands, and brothers for the political project, they are also permitted to "break gender norms" and help participate in combat (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 140).

In advancing the subordinate roles ascribed to women, another chapter discusses how the paternal and fraternal publics enable the sovereign claimants to rescue, protect, propel violence, and rebuke. In the discussion about Naureen Laghari, who was associated with the

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militant Taliban, Khoja-Moolji discusses how the state rearticulated her as a *'quam-ki-beti'* (national daughter) who had committed a mistake and needed to be rehabilitated. At the same time, in the case of Mukhtar Mai, we see the state reprimand the women who "do not abide by patriarchal scripts of compliance" (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 143). Similar figurations of 'wayward sisters' who are figures of ridicule and have been considered to have gone astray are rampant in the Taliban magazines. In both instances of the state and the Taliban articulations, kinship feelings of *beti* and *behen* advance both paternal and fraternal publics' role as protectors—and establish women as subjects of male protection. The chapter titled 'Managing Affect' discusses how states attach specific emotions to bodies, which regulate compliant and deviant subjects. In discussing how mourning becomes a political tool for both the state and the Taliban, Khoja-Moolji highlights how a 'mourning mother' not only performs affect but also teach "appropriate affective management" to others (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 171). Even as a mother mourns the loss of her son, she "correctly interprets it as her sacrifice for her nation, one that she remains willing to undertake again"—thereby undertaking a certain 'emotional labour' towards the sovereign entity (Khoja-Moolji 2021, p. 176). However, at the same time, the author introduces us to 'melancholic mothers' (those mothers who do not practice emotional labour for the state, but vehemently critique the statist narratives in mourning of their dead kins) as those who resist these performative tropes in sovereign practices and seek to hold them accountable.

Khoja-Moolji's book is refreshing in its conceptual contribution, approach, and insights into gendered tropes of competing sovereignties. The interdisciplinary nature of the work allows its readers to traverse through gender and religion studies, sociology, political science, and international studies, among others. Using cultural texts as archives of sovereignty allows her to highlight how women—and their reproductive bodies—become tools for shaping and sustaining identities. Through her articulation of sovereignty as a form of affective attachment, Khoja Moolji contributes to a growing effort to study Pakistan through emotional scholarship. In doing so, it contributes to feminist intervention and how the figurations of women become the source of nation-ness.

Given the methodological commitments to gender, memory and emotions, the book could have drawn on and benefitted from the recent scholarships in social sciences that interpose

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how the three elements work in tandem with one another. For example, a more significant scholarly discussion on Karin M. Fierke's 'political self-sacrifice' could have expanded on how emotions push for sacrifice as an essential characteristic of sovereignty. Such an engagement would have further enhanced the theorising of sovereign attachments. Moreover, the comparative analysis of the Pakistani state and the Taliban through the same frame of reference to sovereign claims discounts the historical processes of postcolonial state-making. While the Pakistani state was a historical creation underpinned by postcolonial conditions, the Taliban state project, in contrast, is relatively nascent and can, at best, be seen as a reactionary outburst. In essence, a broad discussion of the postcoloniality of the Pakistani state could have helped generalise a narration of how sovereignty is being contested across postcolonial societies. Notwithstanding these minor shortcomings, this book is lucidly written. It is essential for those studying gender, state, society and international relations.

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