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Alyssa Ayres, *Speaking Like a State. Language and Nationalism in Pakistan*

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Review of Ayres, A. (2009). *Speaking Like a State. Language and Nationalism in Pakistan*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 217 pp.

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1 Introduction

With the monograph *Speaking Like a State. Language and Nationalism in Pakistan*, Alyssa Ayres examines the "logic of the nation" in which culture and language are the source of political power through the complex case of Pakistan. The fascinating volume challenges – through several different and complementary lenses – the idea that in the world of modern nation-states, a distinct "national language" is necessary to claim the nationhood itself. Through the paradigmatic case represented by Pakistan, the book places language as a central object of investigation in order to explore various themes that interest the theoretical studies of linguistic anthropology. As noted by the author, in the modern state of Pakistan, the formation of national (and linguistic) ideology goes hand in hand with the religious-based foundation. Exploring how different leaders who ruled through the newly born nation chose Urdu as the symbolic national language of its great – Islamic – cultural and religious past, Ayres suggests right

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from the start that the emergence of Urdu was "neither obvious nor natural" (2009, 16). As we shall see, the volume presents how the state of Pakistan has dealt with the challenges of creating national consciousness and cohesion in a multilingual territory: as a postcolonial state who faced the abrupt and dramatic changes – both geographical and cultural – caused by Partition (1947) the book explores the difficulty of implementing cultural and linguistic reforms in such a multifaceted landscape. In this sense, Ayres focuses on the processes of linguistic-cultural (and religious) homogenisation underpinned by different political reforms and different propaganda tools (such as radio, literature and cinema) that in many cases led to instances of language revivalism, violent protests "in the name of language", and contrasting results in the structuring and deconstruction of group identity boundaries in Pakistan. Indeed, the "Two-Nations Theory"[1] underlying the national ideology, together with the assumption – and imposition – that Urdu should by right be the national language of the territories reorganised into the modern form of the nation led to – often of a violent nature – conflicts: the case of the prejudices against the Bengali language – which participated in the reasons for the splitting with today's Bangladesh (1971), and the case of the *Punjabiyat* movement and the 'marginal' conflicts against Sindhi, Siraiki, Pashto and Balochi – which participated in the fractures in the tissue of the national narrative – will be addressed in more detail in the following paragraphs. Ultimately Ayres offers an interesting insight by comparing the similarities and differences between Pakistan's experience, the complex case of India and the revealing case of Indonesia, as "the most successful national language project perhaps in human history" (Ayres 2009, 172).

The research developed in *Speaking Like a State* is indeed of immense value and interest to scholars in the fields of history, political theory, South Asian studies and history of culture and nationalism.

The book I am reviewing opens with an introduction and is divided into ten chapters of which the last is the conclusion. Furthermore, this review is organised as an *excursus* of Ayres' book in order to better understand the contents of the individual chapters. Since Ayres' monograph was published a few years ago, although it is a comprehensive and relevant text, I have included some suggested reading of more up-to-date recently published articles. In the conclusions, however, having clarified the key points of the monograph, I will briefly offer a personal evaluation of the reading of the work in its entirety.

1 The 'Two-Nations Theory', an ideology of religious nationalism that claimed Muslim Indian nationhood, will be explored in more detail in the next paragraph.

2 Urdu and the Nation

Aiming to trace the roots of the 'national language' idea for Pakistan, Ayres introduces with the first two chapters the historical, linguistic and political itinerary that characterised the "Evolution of Partition Idea" (Ayres 2009, 134) and finally the articulation of the independent nation. The assumption that Urdu was the "natural" language for Pakistan – to "protect" – (17-18) arose from two interconnected factors: the geographical location of the Muslim League's primary support, and the "Hindi–Urdu dispute".

The All-India Muslim League (AIML), which until 1946 was concentrated in areas of northern India (where the Muslim community was a minority) was the political party that advanced the 'Two-Nations Theory', a fundamental ideology that reinforced the concepts of cultural and ethnic difference defined on a religious and civil basis, supporting that "Hindus and Muslims belonged to two separate nations which could never satisfactorily live side-by-side" (Ayres 2009, 24). Reasoning about the progressive and complex differentiation between Hindu and Muslim communities, the author emphasises the colonial responsibility in the creation of linguistic and cultural barriers, resulting in the Hindu-Urdu controversy. To this regard, in the first Chapter, Ayres addresses the issue of conflicts over culture and religion, firstly introducing the role of the East India Company – and for instance the Fort William College institution – in the definition of linguistic boundaries and the undermining of the cultural economy connection between Hindi and Urdu.

As pointed out, the concept of a new Muslim state, as supported by Muslim nationalist poet Mohammad Iqbal (1877-1938),[2] takes its name from student Choudhary Rahmat Ali's pamphlet "Now or Never" (1933): the adoption of the name Pakistan (an acronym resulting from the amalgamation of Muslim-majority provinces)[3] reinforced religious ideology and cultural distinctiveness in order to provide legitimacy nation existence. As suggested: "The nation along with its ideology was already there for centuries but the country came into existence afterwards. Hence Pakistan's geography is a result of

2 Mohamman Iqbal, poet, politician and academic, is considered the spiritual father of the Pakistani nation, as well as the ideologue and forerunner of the idea of Pakistan identified in the Northwest Indian areas as the final destiny of the Muslim community. In 1930, he gave an important speech to the All-India Muslim League about the concept of the Muslim state, the *millat*. This address – delivered in English – can be read in its entirety: see Pirzada 1970, 153-70.

3 The pamphlets "Now or Never", published by the young Cambridge University student Choudhary Rahmat Ali, were released periodically until the end of 1946. In these handouts he brought together the names of the provinces for the Muslim community, extrapolating the acronym 'Pakistan' from **P**unjab, **A**fghania, **K**ashmir, **S**indh e Baluchis**TAN**.

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its ideology" (Ayres 2009, 134). Moreover, the word 'Pakistan' refers to the 'land' (*-stān*) of *pāk*, where the latter adjective denotes purity, noble virtue, or even a sacred life. Yet, both *pāk* and *-stān* morphemes have Sanskrit origins: the fact that the term chosen by Pakistan's foundational ideology associated to the idea of purification and discernment with the Indian-Hindu counterpart was instead linked to a common linguistic origin appears as a case of etymological irony as well as an element in disharmony with the 'Two-Nations Theory', which generates opposition e competition.[4]

Tracing the process of differentiation between Hindi and Urdu, where the British presence has played a fundamental role, Ayres investigates the role of two other languages interfering with the linguistic registers of power, namely English and Arabic.

In the first case, English was indeed a language of prestige: with independence from the British, Pakistan also inherited the institutions of administration and education, structuring an élite of English-educated citizens. Moreover, the national language implementation projects themselves (such as the first language laws, state education reforms and media campaigns) were conveyed or transmitted in English: this symbolic dilemma is represented by many speeches made by the leaders of the new nation were delivered in English, such as the paradigmatic case of Mohammad Ali Jinnah's notorious public speech stating that "Urdu is the language of Pakistan and no other". Despite the efforts made by the nation's various rulers in establishing institutions to propagate Urdu education, English has continued to remain in the linguistic orbit as a symbol of modernity and progress[5] (i.e. the most recent during the 1990s, is the revolt operated by Aga Khan Rural Support Program in the Northern Pakistan that demanded English as the medium of education).

In the case of Arabic, being the language of the Quran, the prestige of this medium shifts to religious identity formation, with the establishment of *madrasa*, private Islamic schools and the "Iqra Centres": General Muhammad Ayub Khan (1907-1974) was the first Pakistani leader to support the institution of Arabic language teaching as part of national planning (as a secondary language along with English); later, General Zia ul Haq (1924-1988) promoted a new system of *Iqra Centres*, namely a mass literacy and education campaign that continues to this day.[6]

4 Although the Urdu alphabet (*Nasta'līq*, derived from Persian) differs from that of Hindi (the *Devanagari*, Sanskrit script) the grammar of these two languages could be described as almost identical.

5 For a more updated reflection on the role of English in Pakistan see Aftab, Willoughby 2023, 87-104.

6 For a more recent evaluation of the education system see Tamim 2014, 280-99.

Finally, the second Chapter concludes with the violent case of Bengal, as a paradigm of the concept of "unbridgeable boundaries of difference" (Ayres 2009, 46) in the broader reflection on the politics of culture – in which language functions as cause, solution and 'muse' for self-nation – and the problematic need for cultural homogeneity pursued by nationalist agendas. The sub-national conflict related to Bengali is part of the motivation that led to the secession of East Pakistan in 1971. Despite the fact that the first census of the new nation in 1951 revealed that 56% of all Pakistanis claimed Bengali as their first language (meanwhile only the 3% claimed Urdu), the controversy grew over the *Indicness* of the Bengali language. Since it is a language that is not written in an alphabet derived from the Arabic-Persian script and has a vocabulary mainly derived from Sanskrit, the Bengali language became a place of prejudice because it was not representative of the Islamic religious culture that underpinned the founding of Pakistan, unlike Urdu which was considered "primordially intertwined with Muslim consciousness" (Ayres 2009, 44).

3 Why Can't a Nation be Multi-Ethnic and Multilingual?

As anticipated in paragraph 2, with the politics of culture implemented, hence the decisions taken regarding the unique role of the Urdu language for the nation-state, Pakistan immediately faced conflicts (including violent ones) over the legitimacy of the different languages of power that were present in the new national geography. In the third Chapter of the book "The Nations and Its Margins", Ayres investigates in more detail the problems related to a multi-ethnic and multilingual landscape such as that represented by the modern Pakistani borders, and thus the dichotomising process that rendered linguistic, literary and cultural traditions – other than Urdu – as 'regional' (instead of national), making Sindhi, Siraiki Pashto and Balochi 'marginalised'. In this Chapter, it emerges how the nation was "insufficiently imagined" (Ayres 2009, 33), or rather it becomes more apparent the idea that Urdu could naturally (or primordially) be the emblematic language of the Pakistani Muslim nation was hardly supportable and thus the cause of revolts and internal conflicts. Similarly, to the case of the Bengali language, perceived as non-Islamic and therefore unsuitable, the province of Sindh has been the theatre of violent clashes related to the discriminatory processes of language and local identity. Sindhi, like Bengali, enjoyed regional eminence during the British era (1843-1947), as it held administrative authority and boasted a long literary and poetic tradition. Due to the territorial and demographic upheavals of Partition, the cities of Karachi and Hyderabad (mostly

populated by Hindus)[7] experienced a huge flow of migrations that profoundly changed their urban tissue: the city centres were claimed by the Urdu-speaking *mohājir* ('immigrant' or 'settler'), in a context where the channel for expression had almost always – or predominantly – been Sindhi. In this framework that divided the population in half (since Sindhi and Urdu were largely not mutually intelligible) let to the development and institutionalization of a Sindhi "national consciousness": at the University of Sindh (Hyderabad), which declared Sindhi as the official language of administration in August 1970, nationalism gained popularity and saw the emergence of groups such as Sindhi Adabi Sangat and the MQM group.[8] In contrast, the Urdu press denounced Sindhi supporters as "leftists, anti-Islamic […] anti-Pakistan dissidents" (Ayres 2009, 53), subsequently causing extreme violence and mass killings.

The Chapter proceeds with minor examples of conflicts at the margins of national territories: firstly throughout the case of both the mohājir and the Siraki (a language that referred to 'Multani' or 'Bhawalpuri' dialects of southern Punjab) Ayres discusses of a reverse Herderian process, which saw the people adapt to the language of a nation, while minor languages became part of new ethnic categories. Secondly Pashto, the primary language spoken in the Northwest Frontier Province, on both sides of the Durrand Line, as a language suspected of channelling irredentism along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border; finally the case of uprising in the large territory of Baluchistan, considering the role of language and cultural politics in its strong nationalist movement.[9]

4 The Case of Punjab

The *excursus* on language movements considered so far is extended in Chapters 4 and 5 by examining the case of Punjab, and respectively the Punjabiyat 'ethnonationalist' movement between its elite and popular forms, seeking "rediscovery of the rational basis of the national identity" since "to be a Punjabi is to be as much a Pakistani

7 Hindus in fact comprised 64% of the population of Sindh prior to Partition: their migration to India left the cities of Karachi and Hyderabad carved in half, since in 1951 made up 57.55% of the population in Karachi and 66.08% in Hyderabad. See "Sindh, Sindhi, and the Emergence of the Category *Mohajir*" in Chapter 3 (pp. 48-55).

8 The Sindhi Adabi Sangat (Sindhi Literary Society) participated in the efforts to declare Sindhi as an official language for Sindh; the MQM group ("Muttahida Qaumi Movement"), founded by the student leader Altaf Hussain (1953-) was a nationalist group that stressed the centrality of Urdu-speaking *mohajirs* as "a mobilizing construct".

9 For a more recent reflection on the nationalist movement in Baluchistan see Shakoor 2016.

as Punjab is an integral part of Pakistan".[10] The author highlights to this specific movement, localised in Lahore – the heart of Pakistan's 'hegemonic' region – as a model of nationalism that draws on the theorisations of social communication as well as on Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner's texts[11] focusing on the terrain of language in the articulation of the modern state.

As a starting point, Ayres presents as emblematic the banning of works in the Punjabi language by Fakhar Zaman (1943), who was accused of obscenity in 1978. F. Zaman, in order to dismiss the charges, went to the Lahore High Court in response to the obscurantist and oppressive petition against the historical freedom of expression and the development of the Punjabi literary language. Punjab is the most populous province of Pakistan, and its demographical and geographical size allowed it to dominate Pakistan's institutions,[12] providing the widespread of resentment about its cultural legitimacy and symbolic capital – that takes shape in the idea of "Punjabistan". Following the suggestion that national languages "were very far from simply choosing themselves as the natural expression of majority usage" (Eley, Suny 1996, 7) a census[13] shows how Urdu represented a very small percentage of the overall population of Pakistan. Becoming a prestige language for a minority elite group, Urdu (supplemented by English) "marginalised Punjabi", despite it being "the first language of the majority of the country's population" (Ayres 2009, 73). The Punjabiyat movement claimed the restoration of a 'lost' identity throughout a campaign of cultural revivalism, developing a historical-literary recovery project – supported by various Punjabi writers.[14] This ethno-literary project progressively developed taking on a more openly stated agenda: through the allegorical literature that was published (as in Fakhar Zaman's *Bewatna,* 1988) Urdu assumes the role of "oppressor" (or even "murderous" and "man-eating") against Punjabi who performs as a strong, resistant and iconic 'hero' that fights for the lost self (Punjab). Ayres outlines

10 Partial text, Article 18 of Writ Petition no. 3603 of 1978 in the Lahore High Court, Fakhar Zaman son of (Retd) Major Muham-mad Zaman resident of 178-C Model Town, Lahore (Petitioner).

11 Namely: Anderson 1991; Gellner 1983.

12 Indeed, Punjab – as the land of five (*panj*) rivers (*āb*) – emerges as one of the most productive and agriculturally as well as technologically advantaged territories, where the education-literacy dimension is well developed in a demographically predominant scenario compromising the 55.6%% of the population of Pakistan (according to the 1998 census). See paragraph 4.

13 The Census of Pakistan (Government of Pakistan, 1951) shows that Urdu was the first language of a very small percentage of the population of Pakistan overall (3.3% in 1951), yet rising to 7.53% in the 1998.

14 For instance, among the most prominent authors: Najm Hosain Syed (1936-), Munnoo Bhai (1933-2018), and Shafqat Tanveer Mirza (1932-2012).

the main authors and their publications (folk songs, poetic forms and modern narrative) that participated in the project to recover historical heroes and the marginal national memory of Punjab and expands the analysis of the establishing the notion of Punjabi heroism in the context of popular culture.

This turn to the 'counter public' in the Punjabi language is particularly interesting because it takes into account the different tools that the Punjabiyat movement employed to 're-fashion' the so-called lost self: in these two Chapters, Ayres moves from print to 'non-print capitalism' by analysing the medium of cinema and claiming how

> the Punjabiyat movement places a great deal of emphasis on aesthetic rather than economic-instrumental considerations, suggesting that we ought to take seriously the idea that culture or aesthetic values may not be epiphenomenal developments. (Ayres 2009, 14)

A key example of the cultural and linguistic revivalism in the popular culture is represented by the celebrated and hugely successful film *Maula Jaṭ* (1979), in which a peasant-warrior seeking for revenge is the protagonist of a violent and symbolic story. This intriguing case not only shows an example of visual and literal vernacularization, but the importance of symbolic capital in the formation of a national subjectivity. To close, recalling Gramsci, literature (as well as visual culture mediums) plays a key role in crafting and legitimizing the history that conveys linguistic, cultural and ideological unity in the nation. The case of Punjab, as observed, suggests that in the creation of a national present is necessary to give attention to the 'margins' and their local memory.

5 Imagining Pakistan

As examined in Chapters 6 and 7, even if Pakistan was created and naturalized as the expression of the nation, it lacked it-self of national culture consciousness: the idea of the necessity of a strong national culture led to the astonishing process of reconfiguration, re-fashioning and re-situation of the history of Pakistan, i.e. the legitimization of the nation-state through an antique past and the primacy of territory and locality. As inquired by Dr. Jamil Jalibi (an esteemed scholar of Urdu literary history) in *Pākistānī Kalcar* (1964): "What is our past, and what is our relationship to it? Are we the logical result of the past's historical flow?". In this sense, Ayres examines Pakistan's historiography using as a starting point of reference Choudhary Rahmat Ali's pamphlet *Pakistan: The Fatherland of the Pak Nation* (1935) in which he depicts through a series of maps the

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millennia-long political and geographical history that would define the primordial existence that locates present-day Pakistan **[fig. 1]**.

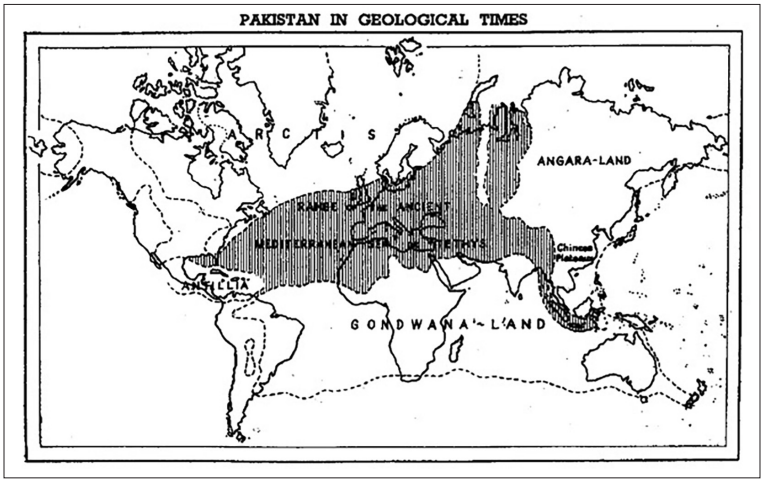

Figure 1 Rahmat Ali's Pakistan in geological times (Ayres 2009, 197)

The visual representation results in an anachronistic attempt to imagine the borders of contemporary Pakistan as a result of the exaggerated historical narrative – a constructed primordialism – placing its past in contrast with the Hindu majority.[15] Moreover, the "Cultural Zones Scheme" – the origins of what is termed "Muslim separatism" – as mapped by Ali Rahman, focussed on the restricted interpretation of the "Islamic" dimensions of the nation, leaving the "margins" contribution to the nation as "provincial", limited and with no merit (considering, for instance, Punjabi or Sindhi history). As distinctly framed by Gramsci (1985, 256-7):

> History was political propaganda, it aimed to create national unity – that is, the nation – from the outside and against tradition, by basing itself on literature. It was a *wish*, not a must based on already existing conditions.

The confusing national epistemology produced a form of historical revisionism entered the educational texts, which "dramatically

15 As the Muslims community was not equally distributed throughout the territory and, prior to Partition, comprised approximately 20% of the empire's total population. See Chapter 6 and throughout the figures from 9 to 23.

affected the relationship between state education and religion",[16] as reported by Ayres:

> a massive distribution of radio and television sets will be undertaken [...] separate radio and television channels will be established for broadcasting educational programmes to schools and adult literacy centres. On these channels, substantial time will be allocated to the recitation and translation of the Holy Quran so as to saturate the air with the message of God and further forge the bond of national cohesion among the Muslims in different parts of the country. (Ayres 2009, 131)[17]

As a continuation on the discourse of the homogenisation project that aimed to form a coherent national culture, the author presents in Chapter 7 a list of works that illustrated the emergence of historical and ideological revisionism.[18] Finally, she offers an interesting insight on the concepts of 'recognition' of the nation in conflict with the new historical-geographical concept of the Indus person and region. Based on the important work *The Indus Saga and the Making of Pakistan* (1996) by Aitzaz Ahsan, the geographical significance refers in particular to the line of the "Gurdaspur-Kathiawad Salient", which demarcates the separation between the Indus region and which would have always had the characteristics of the nation – primordially related to that of Pakistan – and therefore distinct from the Indian area. In this sense, Indus peoples acquire the right to national claim even though they are representative of a continuum that incorporates religious, cultural and linguistic diversity. The author therefore wonders, since

> the idea of, the struggle for, and the actualization of Pakistan was manifestly impossible without the participation of Punjabis, Sindhis, and Sarhadis [...] how can the state present a national history that is truly *national* without including the contributions and sacrifices made by people of and in the regions that comprise Pakistan? (Ayres 2009, 146)

To conclude, the profound preoccupation on the part of state political planners with the construction of a superordinate national identity has

16 As suggested by Ayesha Jalal's essay *Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining* (1995) "officially approved textbooks display an exasperating degree of confusion as to when and where to begin cataloguing Pakistani history" (Ayres 2009, 125).

17 The quotation obtained from Ayres' monograph refers to the following text: Government of Pakistan, *The Education Policy*, 1972-80, 29.

18 A complete list opens Chapter 7, where the author considered works related to the emerging historical revisionism (pp. 138-9).

profoundly conditioned the perception of the regional and local areas that now make up present-day Pakistan, conveying (through different communication tools) an imagined, ethnically heterogeneous national past in which "Urdu culture thus became the synecdoche for the larger imaginative leap of anchoring the entire historical narrative" (148).

6 Speaking Like a State: The Indonesian Case

Having discussed language policy, the role of literature and foundational narrative behind independent Pakistan, with Chapters 8 and 9 Ayres explores the potential and actual results of language policy decisions in a comparative study concerning India and Indonesia. More precisely these chapters argue how language policies in South Asia (where various languages coexist) launched nationalist enthusiasm, exploring how the success of a national language "in countries seeking to forge one is intimately related to the symbolic ideologies with which it is invested" (Ayres 2009, 152).

Always bearing in mind how the colonial past affected the foundation of modern states in South Asia,[19] the comparison with India specifically stresses its greater linguistic pluralism. Even in the Indian case, the broad multilingual landscape immediately worried the leaders dedicated to the implementation of cultural and linguistic policies in independent India: although Hindi emerged as one of the most widely spoken languages in the territory, it could never boast more than 40% diffusion among the population, being flanked first and foremost by English and at least eighteen other modern languages spoken by millions of people and with strong literary traditions.[20] More precisely, Hindi (in the *Devanagari* script) became an official language on the 14 September 1949, while English (associated with Hindi as the 'official' language) was to remain in support of Hindi as an official language in a 'phase-out' plan that would meanwhile allow Hindi to develop and take root properly among Indian citizens (over a stipulated total period of fifteen years). Despite the original intent of the Official Language Commission, the

19 To this end, the author reflects on the effects of the wave of decolonisation in the realisation of nation-states in the twentieth century. She then suggests that the new post-colonial epistemologies share the idea of "one language for all" as a necessary condition, along with theories of political development, modernisation, and nation-building held together by language planning.

20 Indeed, the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution establishes – in several mandates from 1949 to 1992 – the legal affiliation of the following languages to the category of "national languages": Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Sindhi (1967), then Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali (1992).

English phase-out arrangements never took place, leaving English with the great prestige of an administrative language and triggering violent protests vehemently objecting the implementation of Hindi as the hegemonic sole official language. The "Anti-Hindi Agitation" in Madras, Tamil Nadu (1949-1964), represents the most violent case of resistance and – sadly – a common thread with Pakistan's experience: the political class formed in English (in the above-mentioned period) was put at risk by the imposition of Hindi on Tamil speakers.[21] After the major States reorganization in 1956, a solution was found in the concept of "Unity-in-Diversity", yet recognizing the new categories of minority and majority languages.

To conclude, as seen from Pakistan's multi-layered multilingual experience, also in the Indian case literature and mass cultural communication tools have been fundamental in the design of the modern state: for instance, the employment of radio programs such as the successful All-India Radio (for the diffusion of a codified Hindustani vocabulary) and the foundation of Sahitya Akademi (1954) a sort of national literary recognition bureau committed to the "conscious effort to establish a national sensibility of unity-in-diversity through literature" (Ayres 2009, 167).

Moving to the second comparative case study, Ayres introduces the unique case of Indonesia, investigating the intriguing challenges faced in the promotion of a new language, Bahasa Indonesia, – while respecting regional languages and cultures – that literally become "the language of a nation and thus the national language" (Ayres 2009, 182). The author firstly illustrates the similarities between Pakistan and Indonesia's challenging histories: both modern-states share a past of colonization and have been ruled by highly centralized polities and authoritarian regimes since their independence. Furthermore, both countries are characterized by the presence of a large Muslim community as well as strong ethnolinguistic diversity.[22] Yet a key point resulting in the perhaps most successful national language project in human history lays in the explicit aim to create a national language allied with concept of modernization and progress – in discontinuity from the traditional/old. Bahasa Indonesia was in fact literally 'constructed' as a unique modern tool of expression, with extensive vocabulary and grammar, that consciously lacked of a remote past. This new lingua franca was

21 Such objections were not limited to Tamil speakers: the states of Bengal, Mysore and Kashmir also had serious objections to the assumption of Hindi as the only official language.

22 To this regard, the author points out a further comparison between the spread of Urdu speakers in Pakistan (no more than 3%) and of Bahasa Indonesia in Indonesia (only 4.9%), meanwhile Punjab constituted 56% of Pakistan and similarly the Javanese 40% of Indonesia.

identified, chosen and sponsored firstly by the Youth Pledge of Indonesia's young anti-colonial nationalists (*Sumpah Pemuda*) that envisioned the unification of a great geographical area into one with a larger sense of cohesion. Although Javanese language, for instance, enjoyed a rich cultural heritage and was widely spoken, the vanguard of the early independence movement of the young nationalists enabled this 'constructed' language to reach 4.9% of diffusion as the first language spoken by the population by the time of independence (1945). The success of this planning, as mentioned, lies in the juxtaposition of the idea of a modern Indonesian state in which the language of unity allowed citizens to participate in the national public sphere, coexisting with the country's other linguistic and cultural traditions in a relationship that did not emphasise a hierarchy among the languages of power. As follows, Indonesian language become a vehicle of expression for the modern nation-state: the briefly introduced engineering project orchestrated involved in the creation of a new (linguistic and ideological) internal vocabulary takes into account the demands of modern life both linguistically (terminologically) and ideologically.

To conclude, as concisely expressed by the author Ayres (2009, 184-5):

> Speaking Indonesian never required Indonesian citizens to abjure their cultural history, nor their sense of faith – while speaking Urdu ideologically reminded Bengali, Punjabi, Sindhi, Siraiki, Pashto, and Balochi speakers (among others) that the national language implicitly displaced their cultural and regionally-specific Islamic pasts.

7 Conclusion

As seen through the chapters addressed, Alyssa Ayres' work offers a series of interconnected and interdisciplinary discussions regarding the analysis of the linguistic-cultural logic of the Pakistani nation. The relevance of this volume lies in its incisive ability to present the difficult burden that post-colonial Pakistan had to face – through different historical examples – hence, making evident the different aspects that characterise the dilemma that unfolds between nationhood and choosing single national language. From the very first chapters Ayres addresses a theme that we could call the 'linguistic paradox' by tracing the historical, political and cultural roots that constitute the state project "to forge a Pakistani ethnicity through the cultural heritage of the Urdu language created antipathies where it sought unity" (Ayres 2009, 6). As mentioned, the attempt to reconcile the (Muslim) ideology of the Urdu national language

with the modern nation-state of Pakistan has inevitably provoked regional claims and violent clashes with other linguistic and cultural traditions. The intense process of Urdu legitimisation not only alienates the Bengali language (hence East Pakistan), but also expands to "minority" contexts: this is the case with the process of ethnogenesis involving the Sindhi language and the Mohajir category, the process of dichotomising opposition to the Siraiki movement in southern Punjab and finally the strengthening of nationalist sentiment in Pashtunistan. In "The Nation and Its Margins", it becomes clear how the cultural policy model adopted in order to reorder a displaced national centre did not really take into account the territorial (hence socio-cultural) dislocation inherent in the Pakistani national project.

Another noteworthy aspect of Ayres' work is certainly the careful analysis offered on the unusual structural characteristics of the Punjabiyat movement. Through the study of Punjabistan, she not only offers a reflection that differs from the classical concept of nationalism, but also demonstrates the resilience of Punjab culture (both literary and visual) between the finer meshes of Pakistani territory and the relentless desire to restore and protect it. However, I believe that the investigation of local (or marginal) linguistic and cultural processes deserves to be deepened with up-to-date vertical and specific investigations, as suggested by the inclusion of reading recommendations from more recent publications (in the article chapters and bibliography). Regarding the paradox of the ideology of modern Pakistan and the study of processes related to the national language, I believe that Ayres' monograph offers an excellent understanding of the powerful role of language in shaping nations, thus worthy of being a original textbook. Ayres's work proves to be a truly valuable contribution for language studies (from regional to global), especially throughout the excellent and intriguing comparative work between the case studies of Pakistan, India and Indonesia.

In conclusion, the author offers a complex linguistic (as well as historical and cultural) account of Pakistan, masterfully disentangling the broad concepts of nationalism, mono- and multilingualism, cultural revivalism, language planning (its models and methods), between regional, national and finally global spheres. For this reason, Pakistan represents the starting point of a reflection much broader than its territorial and ideological boundaries, reaching the interest of scholars interested in gripping readings on linguistic processes for expanding interdisciplinary studies.

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