



RESEARCH PAPER

You Sell Me Out: Representation of Peripheral Pakistan in Daniyal Mueenuddin's In Other Rooms, Other Wonders

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ABSTRACT

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This paper endeavours to look at the cultural representation of rural Pakistani in Daniyal Mueenuddin's seminal work *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009). Taking the postcolonial framework given by Edward Said and more recently by Graham Huggan and Sarah Brouillette, I argue that this particular work is an instance of global commodification of cultural difference and exchange due to its re-orientalist tendencies. The cultural otherness, so portrayed, becomes an object for alterity industry in which writers participate consciously or unconsciously. Mueenuddin's interviews are used to further nuance the readings of this collection of short stories and his status as a representative Pakistani author to address the issues of being cultural sell-out, different reception in different markets with a particular focus on the Western market and what constitutes 'authentic' in contemporary postcolonial world.

Introduction

'When creative writers like Salman Rushdie are seen, despite their cosmopolitan background, as representative of Third World countries; when literary works like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) are gleaned, despite their fictional status, for the anthropological information they provide; when academic concepts like post colonialism are turned, despite their historicist pretensions, into watchwords for the fashionable study of cultural otherness – all of these are instances of the postcolonial exotic, of the global commodification of cultural difference' (Graham Huggan 2001)

Cultural representation, or the representation of the colonized in relation to the colonizers, also referred to as the other, is one of the main concerns in postcolonial theory (Said 1). This research will investigate the representation of rural Pakistan in

In Other Rooms, Other Wonders (2009; hereafter *Other Rooms*) by Daniyal Mueenuddin because of what I believe is its representation of rural Pakistan as a cultural artefact for Western consumption. This publication brought him, an American-born Pakistani author, farmer and former lawyer, instant fame with several awards, such as, the best American Short Stories award judged by Sulman Rushdie (2008), National Book Award (2009), Commonwealth Writers' Prize (2010), shortlisted as a Pulitzer Prize finalist (2010), *Guardian's* best book of the year (2009) and selected as one of *The New York Times* hundred notable books of the year awards. Instantly he became known as "representative" voice of Pakistan alongside other Pakistani luminaries such as Mohsin Hamid, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie and Muhammad Hanif in the US, and in the wider Western world. There is no apparent reference to Islamophobia as such, but the very fact that the ignores the issues about which almost every other Pakistani writer was writing at the time (i.e. Hamid's resistance or counter-narratives in form of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Shamsie's discussion of food and Karachi based political writings in *Salt and Saffron* and Sidhwa's fascination with women's agency in partition novels) has benefitted Mueenuddin greatly by what Ahmad describes as the 'cultural hangover from the empire' (cited in Gupta & Johnson, 276)

Given the burgeoning interest of the West in Pakistani (Islamist) culture in the first decade of the 21st century, particularly following the '9/11' Twin Towers event, Pakistani Anglophonic fiction has emerged as a tool of cultural industry becoming effectively a commodity of global exchange. In this context, arguably, a recent urge to explain Pakistan to largely a non-Pakistani readership has become a strategy used by some Pakistani Anglophonic writers to be heard, and rewarded, in the West which seems to be willing to learn about the unfamiliar other. The exotic representation of the (Pakistani) other, such as oriental traditions and customs, spicy food, luxurious textiles and decor, spiritual inclination or quests, harems and – in particular – Muslim religion and beliefs, is part of a newly articulated Postcolonial commodified representation. Kwami Appiah and Hamid Dabashi brand the current generation of Asian Anglophone fiction writers as 'comprador intelligentsia', as a group of Western trained writers and thinkers who in the aftermath of 9/11 mushroomed as the representative voices of their culture and who 'trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism' (Appiah 1992; Dabashi 2011). Arguably, these works get Western patronage so that the (Muslim) orient remains a racial, geographical, and ideological conception which complements the imaginations of Western audiences. As Brouillette, in the context of publishing writings from margins observes, 'the global market with its own compulsions now dominates and its locus is the West – whether London or New York' (2007). These texts are received quite differently in the perceived 'home' country of the authors and in the global market. So, I suggest, they could be accused of selling out marginality and its culture for metropolitan consumption. Nayar brands the postcolonial writers as 'metonym[s]' of the countries they belong to (2008). Thereby, it is necessary to question whether the representations they offer are realistic or whether they unconsciously seek to reinforce the widespread images already associated with the countries they portray and its people.

Literature Review

Postcolonial writing has been defined as that writing which resists and writes back against stereotypical representations of the (former) colonies, but it could be

argued that in the contemporary global world it has lost this function. Anis Shivani, in an Indian context explains that new writings from inhabitants of former colonies have lost this an important political function and, instead, partake in 'continued commodification of exoticised Orientalism in global capitalist exchange' (2007). This is synonymous with Huggan's conception of postcolonial exotic which, he believes, is a 'profitable source for the marketing of cultural otherness' (2001).

Edward Said distinguishes between two forms of Orientalism in his book *Orientalism*. The first is manifest Orientalism which refers to the stated views about 'oriental society, languages, literature, history and society' whereas the second, latent Orientalism, is more unconscious. The latter replicates generally perceived views about the nature of the orient such as 'its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability' (1995). My analysis of Mueenuddin's work is more based upon, though not confined, to discussion of this latent Orientalism, as the writer, a western born-and-bred oriental, may not have consciously sought to authenticate "oriental" features in his writing. I suggest that M's work evidences a new trend. Orientalism is now converted to Re-Orientalism due to the impact of globalisation where oriental writers themselves partake in exotic representations of the East which are then marketed in West. The colonial stereotypes of the orient are 'recycled' and 'reinforced' by local orients, i.e., the postcolonial writers of today's Pakistan. In these terms, these Pakistani Anglophone texts deliberately play upon stereotypes and sell out Pakistani culture for quick (Western) popularity and, instead of writing back to empire, seek approval from it. Akash Kapur in *Why are so many Indian books about pickles?* deduces that in the work of such writers 'everyday objects are repackaged into totems of cultural significance for western consumption' (np). The writer who is a career author becomes a consumer and recycler for a Western audience rather than an individual artist (Dirlik, 2015).

Material and Methods

Theoretical Framework

Drawing on Huggan's notion of contemporary postcolonial representations as often being cultural sell-outs, I will consider the ways in which the domestication and commodification of gendered and cultural difference are produced for the benefit of mainstream audiences in Mueenuddin's short stories. In what follows I extrapolate from selected short stories to reveal how the other is represented and when that other is given his/her say, and on what terms s/he can speak. This feudal system, with its brown land-owners is portrayed as merely replicating the by-gone era of Gora (white) masters. In other words, Colonialism by white masters is replaced and mirrored by powerful local elites who take their place, apparently satiating the need of Pakistanis to cling to a Master to whom they could faithfully serve. Despite his 'postcolonial' status, then, I argue that Mueenuddin portrays an imperialist mentality focusing on familiar oriental binarisms and can be read as an apostle preaching (neo)colonial desires. He, thus, betrays the very postcolonial realities he might be expected to serve. Stuart Hall reminds us that cultural identity is not an essence but a construct, and cultural identities are 'made within the discourse of history and culture...not an essence but positioning' (1990). It is my contention that Mueenuddin's stories do not "position" (in Hall's term) the Pakistan and Pakistanis he represents, but rather work

to assert an “essence” that denies plural individualism – and do so in ways that reiterate colonial stereotypes in ostensibly “authentic” and realist terms. My work will examine the ways in which Mueenuddin’s stories reinforce these stereotypical representations of Pakistani natives.

Data Analysis

The first striking example of Mueenuddin’s status as what I’ve called a cultural sell-out is evident before we even open the collection in the form of the cover of *Other Rooms* (Norton edition, 2009). The cover offers an orientalist illustration of three differently coloured intricate minarets associated with oriental Muslim architecture particularly in the Asian sub-continent. The orientalist architectural form is an essential ‘identity kit’ instantly evoking mystic intricacies associated with East. This identity kit often involves formal stylistic stereotypes such as the domes, pointed arches, fountains and minarets, calligraphy, ceramics, textiles, tiles and painted glasses. Historically, it was through these fixed imagistic stereotypes that the stylistic display of the orient was achieved and confirmed. Lisa Lau, in her thesis on the presentation of women in contemporary South Asian fiction, describes it as a curious coincidence that the designs of book jackets published by such writers ‘culturally coded’ (2002). This coded depiction, she posits, builds readers’ expectations of a journey into the exotic East. It is important to note that these paratextual elements have nothing to do with any of the tales in the collection or with the writer himself but is a clever marketing tactic by the publisher. To anchor this built-up image is a patronizing quote on the cover from a *Financial Times* reviewer who declares the book to be ‘the best fiction ever written in English about Pakistan... and about South-Asia in a long time’. Needless to say, that this declaration clearly ignores many other superb stories about Pakistan written by (diasporic) Pakistani writers like Hamid or Shamsie. In terms of its presentation and marketing, then, the book successfully validates its status as an ‘authentic representation’ – a concept which is relevant to shape literary production and reception - being certified by a Western reader here. A label on the top of the cover tells the reader about its positive reception abroad: e.g., that it was a National Book Award finalist (2009). All this leaves the reader with no suspicions about the nature of the “authentic” representations of Pakistan they will find within. So, Mueenuddin’s ostensible insider status is effectively enhanced by this strategically produced book cover which is clearly aimed at a Western audience. Lisa Heldke has also reported that a writer identifying himself as an insider almost immediately gains authority, in terms of cultural representation, in the eyes of an outsider audience (2003).

The very title *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* highlights the exoticness of the twice stated other, i.e., the east in this case. It also clearly divides the world into compartments inhabited by two different species – us and them, or selves and others. Mueenuddin appears, then, at the outset, to be projecting his experiences and descriptions of Pakistan, already enframed as ‘other’. This other is what Said argues as ‘the contrasting image, idea, personality, experience of West’ (1995). Mimicking the style of an imperial travel writer, Mueenuddin appears to be making the access of a western reader possible into the realms of the distant East’s wonders.

Mueenuddin spent formative years of his life in America and came back to manage his father's lands in Rahim Yar Khan – a remote rural area in Pakistan. These lands were gifted to the (neo)colonial elites by once sub-continent colonial masters who survived the transfer of power during the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.

In this section, I'll analyse two selected stories, 'In Other Rooms, Other Wonders' and 'A Spoiled Man'. The former deals with ambitious young girl, Husna's, desperate attempt to gain social mobility by selling her sexuality to an old feudal master Harouni. Husna lives in Lahore and works in Harouni family. Ironically, the man dies (as in many other stories like 'Provide Provide' and 'Saleema'), ruining her great expectations. 'A Spoiled Man' is the story of a poor old man, Rezak, [ethnically Pathan – an ethnic group of Pakistan based on Pashtu language] who after receiving his prospects in form of job of Rs. 9000, something more than his life-time saving, loses his newly bought feeble-minded young wife, reports to his masters including Sohail Harouni (nephew of K.K. Harouni) and Sonia, his American wife and is silenced by powerful local authorities. The three stories 'Our Lady of Paris' and 'Lily' which don't deal with local landscape as such and 'A Burning Girl' which is stylistically different (a first person narrative about burning woman by in-laws due to domestic issue) will not be used for this article while other stories 'Nawabddin Electrician' about a father of thirteen children in the household of Harouni who shoots a robber who tried to snatch his motorbike earned using his manipulative tactics and oily tongue; 'Provide Provide' in which Zainab, a woman who woos Harouni's manager Jaglani, local politician, for the sake of baby and loses her adopted baby as Jaglani dies of cancer and 'Saleema' where an already married Saleema eyes a servant Rafik a level up in the social ladder and has to lose her job and man both owing to death of Harouni, will be occasionally referred to in the discussion.

In these stories ownership of land is portrayed as an instrument of power and the main instrument of exercising control over local people. The feudal landowners' ascent to law-making assemblies, as shown in 'Other Rooms' is quick: 'In the 1980s, the old barons still dominated the government, the prime minister a huge feudal landowner. Their sons...became ministers at thirty' (120). Land ownership in these stories defines the life destiny of characters – the ones without land are 'others' and the ones with land decide what to do with 'others' – peasants and lower-class masses. Rezak, in the story 'A Spoiled Man', has a movable cabin which he carries with him as 'home' while Husna's family in 'In Other Rooms' has lost all the land once gifted to them by the English colonisers: 'The senior branch of the family consolidated its lands and amassed power under the British, who made use of the landowning gentry to govern' (114). Quite simply: the lack of land is equated with the lack of power.

It is the figure of K. K. Harouni, the feudal landowner who appears in all the stories in the collection, connecting them, that epitomises the idea of a postcolonial, land-owning 'elite' that has easily stepped into the shoes of the departed colonial masters. Harouni has a 'handsome golden face' (114), speaks English and writes recommendation letters for subjects in distress. This brown "sahib" – the connecting figure among all stories – is like a 'king' (137) enthroned in the house, has a large number of servants, gardeners, chauffeurs, and 'the junior ones who saw K.K. only from a distance' (137) at his service. They treat him like a (colonial) master of past times. He has a big house in which even an annex has twenty rooms, a cemented

swimming pool and starched napkins that, we learn, are arranged as fans on a long dining table which could seat eighteen people at one time. There is a room in the house named the 'white verandah', suggesting the ways in which Harouni emulates his previous colonial masters in his performance of postcolonial, local 'mastery' (120). Harouni's likes and dislikes are what Macaulay described as purpose of colonisation - to create a native class which would be 'English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect' (729). This is an obvious colonial situation about which Fanon has written extensively in *Black Skins, White Masks*: the longing for whiteness- 'the black man wants to be white...there is but one destiny for the black man. And it is white' (2008).

He wants Husna to learn some skills as part of white man's civilizing mission, the traditional notion that black man is white man's burden. When Sarwat, daughter of Harouni- sees Husna with Harouni she utters with disgust 'Please Daddy, I doubt if this is a humanitarian mission' (131). This is a sly suggestion that implies that white colonial 'master's' exploitative relations with "brown' servant women were disguised as instructive and humanitarian - and that Harouni seeks to hide his exploitation of Husna in similar terms. But the skills Husna learns are entirely different.

She becomes Harouni's concubine and considers this relation in purely economic terms. She deliberately becomes Uncle's envied possession as she has limited education, no money, family or other support to uplift her (114). Described as mediocre, 'with no charm or individual talent', Husna knows 'she could never hope to marry or attract a young man from one of the rich established families'. Her only outlet is shown in being Harouni's mistress, thereby; she ensnares him using her virginity (127) - an avenue of social mobility in return of better food, air-conditioning, monthly allowances, and the privilege of using a car. However, her attempt to gain some sort of social mobility ends up in failure due to the death of Harouni. Following this, she gets nothing and has to obey the orders of Harouni's family as Rezak in 'A Spoiled Man' had to. Both these subservient people have no power as their family is without any land, the major tool of colonial exploitation, and are ruined when their 'benefactor' dies. The implication is that the abusive power relations that existed in the colonial era have simply been reproduced after the departure of the colonists: power, linked to land ownership, still prevails.

The 'others' in these stories, like Husna and Rezak, are not allowed equal status as human beings as the postcolonial representatives, clinging to colonial power-structures, don't consider them fully developed human-beings. Sarwat is comfortable with Harouni 'having Husna around' and Harouni believes 'She is a good company[...]no genius[...]but[...]can play cards' (131). In short, she is portrayed as a plaything while her inability to participate in the socially acceptable manner of "civilised" behaviour is highlighted. Sarwat's descriptions of her can be seen as symbolic. She describes her as 'a frog in the corner' and a piece of 'furniture' (130) and Harouni jokingly compares her with pony (118). Similarly, Rezak in 'A Spoiled Man' is also projected as someone who doesn't enjoy arts nor has any intellectual capacity or ability for philosophical discussion.

It is not surprising to notice that both others cannot speak English, or speak it poorly. Husna has bad accent exposed while socializing with the upper class (115); Rezak cannot understand any single word of conversation conducted in English (239)

which duly suggests that the importance of English language in the colonial setting is being reproduced here, in these postcolonial stories, to mark these characters as "inferior."

Throughout the stories, the orient is rendered a mute spectator and Mueenuddin plays on the myth of lazy native. Passivity and languor are the dominant qualities of the native characters and the landscape. Husna and Rezak are represented as embodiment of lethargy, inaction and passivity, without the luxury of sovereign subjects who can rise in defiance of injustice and dictatorship. They are definitively portrayed as subaltern, as- the oppressed subjects more or less of inferior ranks who can speak but are not heard or are disregarded. Rezak tries to speak against injustice and reports his problem to Sonia 'the American wife' but is beaten up by the Police for speaking and accused of selling her, another negative image associated with Pathans: 'Nobody took her - you sold her down the road, you pimp...or perhaps you killed her?' ('A Spoiled Man' (241). After being unable to communicate his resentment to the authorities, he makes sure to be perfectly silent about what had happened as he had been told to do. The subaltern's voice goes unheard, in a postcolonial setting that mirrors the power structures that prevailed in colonial times, even though he tries to use his agency. Mueenuddin, when interviewed, confirms these stereotypes about the servant class depicted in stories by saying "I don't think the guys I'm dealing with are thinking in revolutionary terms...they've not gotten that far" (NY Times, 2009).

Ghulam Rasool, the manager also endorses this apparently "native" passivity by saying, "our sahib is very good to us, he gives us everything we need and more" ('A Spoiled Man', 239). Rezak and others are thus portrayed as puppets that are fed by Sahibs and do whatever they are asked to. Rezak's only identity is being an 'American wife's pet servant' as Omar Bukhari, son of inspector general describes him (243). Rezak's steady degradation from a valiant Pathan to a silent subject is explicitly summed up in the following lines:

'They gave him the money to live beyond his station, they made him hope - for too much. And when he lost the girl, their instruments punished him for having dared to reach so high, for owning something that would excite envy, that placed him in the way of beatings and the police. Now he belonged to the Harounis. This was how he understood justice.' (244)

The way the servants are treated is not different from slaves and certainly do not suggest postcolonial freedom. Ambreen Hai in her article 'Postcolonial servitude in 'Other Rooms' points out that in colonial fiction, servants as racial sub-others were a regular feature in imperial British fiction. She suggests that in post-colonial south-Asian fiction this domestic help reappears as immersed in a culture of servitude that post-dates the end of formal colonialism (36). This, I argue, is the case in M's stories.

In *Other Rooms*, the stories 'Provide Provide' and 'Saleema' depict such relations between Husna and Harouni; Saleema and Jaglani. Their relations are considered acceptable but marriage is utterly disregarded and the idea mocked at. In these 'Master and Slave' sexual relationships, portrayed in these stories, women are wooing men to get prestige and the orientalist idea of Harem is played upon. In only one story, 'Provide, Provide', the master marries his concubine Zainab but keeps it

secret and, after his death, she is rejected by family. Husna remains a sweet little concubine till the very end and meets the same fate as Zainab after the 'provider' dies. The situation could be linked back to the colonial era where the rape of colonized women by colonial masters was officially sanctioned and promoted. However, interracial marriages were strongly disapproved for the fear of unsettling the whole social order 'racial purity' and destabilization of social rank.

We have to ask: Why does Mueenuddin portrays sex and descriptions of women whose limited agency is linked with sleeping with somebody in power? Native women are shown as having no care for religious or cultural values. They, as portrayed, can traverse the divide separating the civilized from the uncivilized, but only with the assistance of a (powerful male) saviour modelled on the departed colonial 'masters.' In a telling interview, when asked about this, Mueenuddin states that 'one of the main ways in which they [women] exercise power is through men and obviously among the best options with which to entrap a man is with sex' (57). He believes this claim is justified by his observation of the behaviour of women in rural Pakistan. However, from my own experience as a Pakistani woman, I think this is an over-generalization, and that few women behave in the ways he portrays as the norm. Shivani believes the exotic consumer product is deliberately limited in strangeness for the sake of instant marketability (2006) therefore attempts are made to depict a depoliticised and recognisable version of the target culture. This could explain why Mueenuddin, in his stories, makes use of notions of predator female sexuality that are perhaps more familiar to his targeted Western audience. He portrays Pakistani women as using their bodies as tradable commodities in ways that are more recognisable to global capitalist markets than they are to 'native' readers in Pakistan.

Mueenuddin's portrayal of white women - 'the memsahib' is interesting (230). Sonia, the wife of Harouni's nephew, Sohail Harouni, in 'A Spoiled Man' is portrayed in a positive light, but as the benevolent, patronizing arm of colonial endeavour. She tries to take care of her subjects, as she offers Rezak a rich salary and speaks for provision of electricity and radio in his cabin. In contrast, the local brown Master, Harouni, mocks the idea with the utterance, "Are you kidding? These guys don't get bored" (230). When the American wife talks to Rezak, his feelings are expressed as 'His heart, his soul melted, as if a queen had spoken to a foot soldier' (228). This is unlike Hamid, who links the white skin colour of Erica with sickness in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Munos 2012). Mueenuddin keeps intact a native fixation on white skin colour with its association with the generous and benevolent American Sonia who says, patronisingly, 'This is my place, now. I don't do enough, but I feel as if here I can at least do something for the good' (226). So, the saviour portrayed is still a person from west as shown by her attempts at cultural immersion. This very idea of the West as a kind force of benevolent patronage is quite cleverly implied by the writer.

Nearly all stories report massive corruption in the country and aid in presenting a negative reputation of country, some of which is true also. The police are shown as thoroughly corrupt in all the stories and stereotypical proverbs associated with this institution are used by Mueenuddin - as in 'The night is made for lovers'... (241), and 'sweetheart, where did you sleep last night?' (242)- Supposedly used when Pakistani police beats prisoners. Sonia from 'A Spoiled Man' declares 'everyone's a crook, nothing works here' (226). The poultry shed owner (in which story) bribes

forestry officials to chop down trees and clear up some space; Shah Sahib, the secretary from the titular 'In Other Rooms' clear checks of the cook in return of extra food (117); Jaglani in 'Provide Provide' sells his master's land for cheap prices to become rich himself (62).

A popular stereotype associated with *desi* people and likewise Pakistanis is their superstitious nature. In his story sequence, Mueenuddin uses at least one superstition to re-emphasize the image associated with *desi*. Harouni's wife in 'In Other Rooms' uses 'amulets, philtres, spells' and 'hajj (pilgrimage) to win her husband's heart back (123); the manager Ghulam Rasool in 'A Spoiled Man' has a superstitious personality - a man with 'superstitions' and Sonia - the American is shown as comfortable with this as if she has ingrained these beliefs about locals (227).

Hai asserts Mueenuddin's uniqueness in presenting 'diverse servant subjectivities and experiences' (40) but, I argue, his servants are type characters; all women are desperate for social mobility, a safety net while men are powerful. The stories in *Other Rooms* thus posit before us binary otherness in a narrative shaped by capitalist power dynamics. The servants exhibit similar characteristics while all people from the ruling class - (post)colonialist elites - look exactly the same whether it be Sonia or Harouni's daughters. In short, the 'natives' are not considered as individuals with distinctive characteristics and peculiar traits; they are just shaped in a pre-conceived mould without individual characterization. This kind of typecasting characterization, according to Said, is major discursive strategy in the orientalist writings (1995). Characters drawn as individuals are rare in the work which thus reconfirms the identifying characteristics of Eastern "others" expected by the reader who has been primed, from the start.

There is, I believe, a strategic racial subalterity in the selection of a Rezak 'a man from mountains' a Pathan as a protagonist in the story. In Pakistan, Pathans are the most stereotyped ethnic community and Mueenuddin endorses stereotypical images of Pathans in this story by portraying a character, Rezak who conforms with notions of Pakistani people, as circulated in the West. This may be the result of Mueenuddin's pandering to Western interest in the most disturbing northern region of Pakistan, the north, which is considered to be a terrorist hideout, where the Taliban are active and has strong links with Afghanistan's Mujahedeen. Rezak is presented at first as simple subaltern subject and secondly his ethnicity as Pathan casts him as a 'type' character, a geographic other. The association of superficial pride with old Rezak 'I'm from the mountains brother, I can carry you up on my back, and one of these in each hand' (222); their habit of eating tobacco (naswar) he tucked a quid of tobacco in his cheek, chopped green naswar' (223); their lack of hygiene 'mattress with ripe animal odor' (224); hospitality in offering 'time-expired chicken' (223); and the purchasing and selling of women 'the money which her family would take in instalments' (232).

Mueenuddin's target audience are clearly Western readers. He inserts ample anthropological information about Pakistani culture and customs into his stories, needing to explain these to readers for whom it is "other." This is one of the strategies Huggan adumbrates for marketing the margin (2001). When Harouni dies, for example, the narrator prefaces the story by stating (in a comment that would be

redundant for Pakistani readers), 'In Islam, a body must be buried as soon as possible, ideally before nightfall' (139). In an interview with Elizabeth Rubin, Mueenuddin explains his position as author and his focus on western audience by stating: Most of my readers are in the West. He continues, 'I do have Pakistani readers, but when I think about readers I think about readers abroad. I key my stories to readers who are not intimately familiar with Pakistan – for example, I translate all Urdu words'. This might be linked to the less than positive reception Mueenuddin's work flinched in Pakistan, as suggested in a recent review, entitled 'The Clear Picture', published in Dawn. Mueenuddin, therefore, in an interview with Yabroff, evidently explains of his little interest in 'selling four thousand copies[...] in Pakistan.

The work draws on Mueenuddin's experiences in the peripheral Pakistan and is notable for in re-asserting the stereotypical notions – the latent orientalism –of what many Western readers already know about Pakistan – a third-world; dirty, corrupt, and utterly neo-colonial patriarchal land where labour is cheap and women are conniving to trade their sexuality for social gain – as it is implied they did in the colonial past. Communal and religious values are absent in the stories, except when portrayed as superstitious and backwards customs that need to be explained to readers (or mocked as evidence of the nation's inferiority). This essay does not dispute Mueenuddin's greatness as a writer or his suitability as a recipient for the writing prizes he has received. What I do dispute, however, are the many claims that his story collection offers an 'authentic' portrayal of contemporary Pakistan – rural or not. The ostensible realism and accuracy of representation in the stories, and the authenticity of the writer, is thus used to create a representation of Pakistan (conceived as a singular, essential entity) which is often not faithful to the divergent lived experiences of the nation's inhabitants.

Conclusion

The analysis of these stories and other supporting material fairly exhibits status of Mueenuddin's work as stereotypical and cultural sell-out for Western audience. The author's conscious attempt to divide natives into two distinct groups, and his own affiliation with feudal class, his inkling for western world more or less makes the representation in the work a bit skewed and unauthentic. However, the word of caution is that the results cannot be generalized to encompass all Pakistani Anglophonic literature, and the current analysis only serves to show how these particular stories might reflect the particular society represented.

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