

This article was downloaded by: 10.3.98.93

On: 16 Jan 2019

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Companion to  
Pakistani Anglophone Writing



Edited by Aroosa Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam

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### 'Brand Pakistan'

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315180618-29>

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**Published online on: 04 Sep 2018**

**How to cite :-** Barirah Nazir, Nicholas Holm, Kim L. Worthington. 04 Sep 2018, '*Brand Pakistan*'  
*from:* The Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing Routledge

Accessed on: 16 Jan 2019

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315180618-29>

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## ‘BRAND PAKISTAN’

### Global imaginings and national concerns in Pakistani anglophone literature

*Barirah Nazir, Nicholas Holm, and Kim L. Worthington*

Who can or should be counted as a Pakistani anglophone author? This seemingly innocent question raises many issues, such as relations of belonging and community under globalisation, the role of literature in nation-building, and even the status of the Pakistani nation itself. Is a Pakistani (anglophone) author a product of location or ethnicity, communal imagination or Western imperialism, the nation state or the global literary market? These enormously complex questions are not limited to the scope of Pakistani literature, of course, but speak directly to claims made about ‘national literature’ and the way it is promoted and read across the globe. This chapter will explore the complications and contradictions inherent in defining contemporary Pakistani anglophone authorship in a global context. Employing a cultural materialist framework, it will then argue that claims about Pakistani anglophone literature need to be understood as bound up with the marketing strategies adopted by global publishers and that this has ramifications not just for the way this literature is marketed and the authenticity it claims or is claimed for it, but also for the literature and authors that are afforded international acclaim.

#### **Defining a Pakistani author**

The anxieties and controversies that animate discussions about Pakistani authorship are particularly evident in the case of anthologies and overviews of Pakistani writing. Clearly, not everyone who writes about Pakistan will be immediately accepted as a ‘Pakistani writer’, nor can assumptions/attributions of this title be a straightforward question of self-affiliation or critical reception, which are often at odds. Muneeza Shamsie, in her introduction to the anthology *A Dragonfly in the Sun* (1997), raised the problem of defining a ‘Pakistani’ writer when primordial means, such as blood and genetics, are not the only criteria, while her more recent collection, *Hybrid Tapestries* (2017), has been criticised on social media for the inclusion of Tariq Ali and Salman Rushdie, who are denounced as insufficiently Muslim. Tariq Rahman justifies his inclusion of texts/authors in *A History of English Literature in Pakistan* on the basis of criteria that are ‘loose rather than strict, cultural rather than political’ (1991: 11). As Rahman’s inclusion of authors is premised on their Muslim identity or their tendency to lean towards Islamic ideology, he identifies writers like Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Ahmed Ali, and Mumtaz Shahnawaz as Pakistani, even though they wrote prior to the creation of the Pakistani state. Elsewhere, in multiple anthologies, Zulfikar Ghose has been identified as a Pakistani writer, despite having never

lived in Pakistan (Hashmi 1978; Shamsie 2017). Ghose himself has openly disassociated himself from any nationality, claiming that such identifications are constricting (Brouillette 2011: 9). Regardless, his work has been consistently claimed as that of a Pakistani author (Hashmi 1992, 1993; Brian Shaffer 2006: 26; Shamsie 2012, 2013) and he received the Lahore Literature Festival's Lifetime Award in 2015.

The uncertain nature of Pakistani authorship has also been evident in conversations and assumptions regarding the status of prominent individual authors, despite them not having lived in Pakistan for many of their formative and/or adult years. Mumtaz Shahnawaz is widely claimed to be a Pakistani writer by nearly all local and international critics because of her Muslim identity and her novel, *The Heart Divided* (2004), which favours Partition, despite the fact that she lived in the newly born Pakistan for just two years. Daniyal Mueenuddin, hailed within Pakistan and globally as a 'Pakistani writer', migrated to America as a child and only returned to Pakistan after several decades. Mohsin Hamid, perhaps the writer most decidedly claimed to be 'Pakistani' in recent years, is simultaneously linked to Pakistan, America (where he studied and worked but left after 9/11), and the UK (he holds a British passport and lived in England for many years). Nadeem Aslam, a Pakistani-born (Gujranwala) British writer, emigrated to the UK as a teenager; Kamila Shamsie, a Karachiite by birth, is a British national who studied in New York; Uzma Aslam Khan was born in Pakistan but studied in the USA, and periods of her childhood were spent in the Philippines, Japan, and England; Bapsi Sidhwa lived most of her life in Pakistan, but is now an American citizen. Even more controversial is the status of Rushdie, who was born in British India, two months prior to Partition, to a Muslim family, briefly lived in Pakistan in 1964, and finally emigrated to England. Among the major reasons why Rushdie is not considered a Pakistani writer by most local critics are his atheist leanings, his celebration of hybridity, his self-identification as a 'mongrel', and his claim to disaffiliate from the 'ghetto mentality' of those writers who limit themselves to national borders (1991: 19).<sup>1</sup> Unashamedly, he flaunts his international status noting that 'one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant is to be able to choose his parents' (Rushdie 1991: 434).

It's clear, then, that the majority of the current generation of 'Pakistani' anglophone writers are best understood as either transnational or cosmopolitan in their outlook. This prompts a question: which 'parents' have they 'chosen'? They cannot be exclusively defined as 'Pakistani' in any localised, geographically-constrained sense as nearly all of them have been educated or have lived outside Pakistan for lengthy periods. Most Pakistani anglophone fiction writers writing today continue to shuttle between Pakistan – their country of (familial) origin – and their adopted homes in North America and the UK. It could be argued that rather than looking out from Pakistan to the wider world, these writers assume the authority to 'look into and on' a nation they have not lived in for long or no longer live in – and to do so from a Western perspective. At best, they live in 'in-between' spaces, occupying a liminal status due to privileged international mobility while staying connected to their country of birth (or of their parents' birth); they are (or claim to be) paradoxically both 'local' and 'cosmopolitan'. Understood in positive terms, it could be claimed, as Pakistani-American writer and critic Anis Shivani does, that 'they are injecting their country into world literature' (2013: n.p.). Others, however, suggest that such writers betray their nation in numerous ways, as we shall discuss below.

Questions of Pakistani authorship are further complicated by their implication in wider conflicts regarding the nature of the Pakistani nation. Ever since its creation, Pakistan has grappled with the issue of defining its identity in ways symptomatic of Benedict Anderson's concept of a nation as 'an imagined political community' (1991: 6): premised not on disputed geographical boundaries (drawn by departing colonisers), but connectedness in a cultural and ideological sense. Traditionally (and this proviso is important) the Western concept of a nation

has been associated with the sharing of one language and one religion – a criterion which Pakistan apparently fulfils via the binding forces of Urdu and Islam (despite multiple provincial languages and dialects and the existence of other religious minorities). But French political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot, among many others, highlights the conflicts that lurk beneath Pakistani nationhood. He argues that Islam has been used to produce and nurture nationalistic sentiments among diverse ethnicities (e.g. Punjabis, Sindhis, Balochs and Pakhtuns) who do not share ideological, cultural, or ethnic values (2002: 36). In this sense, Pakistan is a mosaic, like so many postcolonial nations – a synthetic product of various ethnicities with small fractions of minorities conjoined under the banner of Islamic Pakistan. Interethnic tensions have existed as long as the nation has. Yet, despite awareness of the interethnic differences that exist within Pakistan, there is also a strong desire to possess a distinct, and globally understood, national identity, as Mubarak Ali suggests:

Since the beginning, Pakistan has been confronted with the monumental task of formulating a national identity distinct from India. Born out of a schism of the old civilisation of India, Pakistan has debated over the construction of a culture of its own, a culture which will not only be different from that of India but one that the rest of the world can understand.

(2000: n.p.)

### **Global imaginings, national concerns**

Given Ali's assessment of this 'monumental task', it seems important to ask not only *if* the world 'understands' Pakistan, but *how*? In global media, especially since 9/11, Pakistan is often characterised by images of terrorism and extremism; the patriarchal denial of women's autonomy ostensibly underwritten by religion; sectarian division; and by ignorant, camel-riding people traversing vast deserts. Pakistani anglophone fiction, taken as a whole, both challenges and reinforces such representations. It is also, perhaps inevitably, received and read in terms of its conformity with (internal and international) readers' expectations, that it does one or the other. On the one hand, the nation's anglophone literature is a platform which serves to showcase its diversity and dispel negative representations; on the other, it is vulnerable to the charge that it reinforces and replicates precisely these mediated assumptions. It is no small irony that many authors who are claimed, or claim, to be 'Pakistani' arguably partake in the dissemination of precisely the kinds of stereotypical representations that reconfirm, at least to some degree, Western assumptions about the nation. Claims about authorial national identity are therefore a particularly nuanced and unstable issue in the context of Pakistan, complicated by Western mainstream media (mis)representations of the nation, and by the very form and content of the literature that is claimed to be 'Pakistani'. To be sure, questions about the relationship between authorial identity, (authentic) literary representation, and nationhood are not unique to Pakistan – indeed such concerns are shared by many postcolonial nations – but they take on particular resonance in the context of Pakistan's ongoing attempts to affirm its unique national identity in the face of Western (media) representations, especially since 9/11. Yet, surprisingly, to date, the issue of Pakistani authorial national identity has received very little serious attention from readers, critical or popular.<sup>2</sup>

Cara Cilano uses the term 'transnational' to describe the new generation of Pakistani writers as global citizens (2009: 193). She suggests that the work of these writers merges local and global concerns and marks a break from the (predominantly) nationalistic fiction produced in

Pakistan in the 1990s. Madeline Clements makes similar claims in *Writing Islam from a South Asian Muslim Perspective*:

Rushdie, Hamid, Aslam and Shamsie orient themselves towards the 'global' in their internationally disseminated novels, both in terms of their geopolitical subject matter and selection of settings which are of symbolic and strategic significance to world powers.

(2016: 9)

A brief consideration of some recent contemporary South Asian (including Pakistani) fiction appears to confirm this claim about 'global orientation'. Aslam's first novel, *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993), is set in rural Pakistan, while his *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) is set in a fictional British locale called Dasht-e-Tanhaai, and *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) in Afghanistan. Although he returns to a western Pakistani/eastern Afghani setting in *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013), the novel looks out on the world, exploring the 'War on Terror' from the perspectives of local, Muslim characters. Shamsie's first two novels, *Kartography* (2002) and *Broken Verses* (2005), are set in Pakistan, but *Burnt Shadows* (2009) deals with global issues in a wide variety of international settings in different periods of the twentieth century, culminating in 9/11. The action in Hamid's debut novel, *Moth Smoke* (2000), takes place in Lahore, and while this is also the setting for his second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), the majority of the latter details the narrator's experiences of living in the USA and his decision to return to Pakistan following 9/11. Increasingly, then, the works of these 'Pakistani' writers portray locales and concerns that extend beyond the borders of the nation. This is to be expected and lauded: a writer from a certain nation, culture, or ethnicity should not be expected to write only about that nation, culture, or ethnicity. Why can't a New Zealander write about New York or a Canadian novelist situate her work in Multan? A great deal depends, however, on how such writers position themselves in national/cultural terms and, just as importantly, how they are positioned by their publishers, publicists, and reviewers.

### 'Brand Pakistan'

An alternative way of exploring questions about the nationalistic labelling of writers is to suggest that it has to do as much (or more) with the marketing of the work, rather than with the ostensibly autonomous writer herself. In simplistic terms, the politics of identity has been moved into, and is subsequently shaped by, the marketplace. John and Jean Comaroff, in *Ethnicity, Inc.*, argue that 'Cultural identity [...] represents itself ever more as two things at once: the object of choice and self-construction, typically through the acts of consumption, and the manifest product of biology, genetics, human essence' (2009: 1). They maintain that in an era of capitalist globalisation, cultures are essentialised as brands (through patenting customary ways of living and items, for example) and the most sustainable and successful are the ones who brand the best. In the current geopolitical context, a substantial number of writers have thus emerged who are marketed, or market themselves, as representatives of *authentic* cultures (or nations), and benefit from this. This is an idea shared by Aijaz Ahmad, who argues that 'Third World' English literary texts are a product of imaginings of the West (or authors imagining such Western imaginings), so that 'the Third World' and its literature has been successfully fashioned into a global merchandising tool/product (1992: 13). Maximum sales are achieved through marketing tactics such as authors' commercial appearances and managed interviews, mass-market sales of affordable paperback editions, and the development of carefully courted relationships between publishers,

reviewers, and the newspapers/magazines in which reviews appear (such as *TLS*, *London Review of Books*, *New York Review of Books*, *New York Times Book Review*, *Boston Globe*, *Village Voice*, *Guardian*, *Salon*). Understood in the terms proposed by the Comaroffs and Ahmad, the term 'Pakistani writer' has become a kind of geographical and political marker for writers whose work is marketed as *representative* of their place of origin, even if they are dealing with a wide variety of topics and places. Pakistan and its literature are far from alone in this regard: J.M. Coetzee, for example, has lived in Australia for many years, and much of his fiction is allegorical or without a clear 'national' setting, dealing instead with transnational issues of racial and gender oppression. However, he is almost always referred to as a 'South African' writer, a reference to the country in which he was born and lived for the first six decades of his life. Coetzee accounts for this situation with references to a 'vast and wholly ideological superstructure constituted by publishing, reviewing and criticism that has forced on me the fate of being a "South African novelist"' (qtd. in Morphett 1987: 460). To highlight the extent to which Pakistani writing is implicated in just such an 'ideological superstructure', we will use the term 'Brand Pakistan' in the remainder of this chapter.

The rise of 'Brand Pakistan' needs to be understood within the geopolitical context of the post-9/11 'War on Terror', and globalisation more broadly. Indeed, one reason for its 'boom' in the past decade or so is a global desire to 'know' about Muslim nations, and Muslim identity, following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. Pakistani writer Aamer Hussein argues in an interview that Pakistani writers were writing well before 9/11, but this event 'gave them a particular label' and encouraged them to be read in certain ways – ways that sell, globally if not locally (Hussain and Piracha 2013: n.p.). In a similar vein, Shamsie draws attention to the relationship between Pakistan's currently position 'at the centre of geopolitical conflict' and the simultaneous 'flourishing of new [Pakistani] cultural expressions in music, art and literature [in international circles]' (2017: 256). Bina Shah insightfully suggests that:

the Western world is dying to understand Islam, Muslim people, and the cultures that go with them. And since Pakistan is the only Muslim country in the world with so many English speakers, and a tradition of writing in English, it seems that Pakistani writers are meeting a fortuitous demand by being in the right place at the right time. (2010: n.p.)

In an interview in *The New Yorker*, Mueenuddin sardonically notes that 'there must be Lithuanian writers who are not getting the attention they deserve because their country is not in the news' (Habib 2009: n.p.). Others are wary of the 'fortuitous demand' noted by Shah. Pakistani writer Bilal Tanweer criticises the 'anthropological approach' evident in an interview given by Jamil Ahmad to CNN about his book *The Wandering Falcon*, in which Ahmad was asked eight questions about the political situation in Pakistan and only one related to his writing (2011: n.p.). In an interview entitled 'Occupational Hazards', published in the *Guardian*, interviewer Decca Aitkenhead pushes Hamid to comment on Rushdie's *fatwa* and any similarity he might see between Rushdie and himself, hinting at the precarious political situation in Pakistan. When Hamid innocuously replies by equating the risks involved in being a writer to any other job, like that of a pilot, the interviewer declares he is 'wary of commenting' (qtd. in Aitkenhead 2007: n.p.).

It is appreciable that if 'Brand Pakistan' is premised on the promise of insights into Muslim people and cultures, in turn fed by international (media) portrayals of Muslim terrorism, then many Pakistani cosmopolitan writers might choose to offer counter-narratives to global

political representations. Ironically, however, in a bid to explain Pakistan as something more than a breeding ground for religious extremism, or a place where men mistreat women under the guise of religious sanctions, such writers may potentially bring more attention to these as key aspects of Pakistani life. Tanweer claims that the Western world is so obsessed with the 'factual information' which Pakistani anglophone fiction might provide that the artistic credibility or aesthetic merit of work is given little attention: 'Fiction from Pakistan is not supposed to have artistic engagements – it's required to provide information, not an experience. In other words, it must be a reliable Dispatch from the Terrorists Lair' (2011: n.p.).

For all this acknowledgement of writers' possible capitalisation on the West's desire to 'know' Pakistan via literary representation, there are some benefits too. Arguably, the desire to 'understand' Pakistan resulted in the publication of *Granta's* significant issue on Pakistani literature in 2010. International support and interest has been particularly advantageous, given that the local publishing industry is impoverished (*Alhamra Literary Review* had to stop after two issues and the Pakistani branch of Oxford University Press largely focuses on educational titles). It may well be that *The Wandering Falcon* finally found a publisher in 2011, decades after it was written and after numerous attempts by Ahmad to get it into print, precisely because of the new climate of contemporary global interest in Pakistan. Ironically, though, the decades-old tribal focus of his collected stories, which are set in the North Western Frontier Province, which borders Afghanistan, may do a great deal to feed mistaken Western assumptions about Pakistan and pander to notions of 'exoticness' that would be unfamiliar to many living in the larger cities, or the south of the nation.

### Authenticity, essentialism, and exoticism

As we have noted, one of the major consequences of the transformation of Pakistan (or its literature) into 'Brand Pakistan' is the potential of a turn towards reductive essentialism and exoticism. Graham Huggan, an early voice in such discussions (albeit not in relation to Pakistani writing), describes the commodification of cultural difference or otherness as a feature of what he terms 'the alterity industry' (2001: x). He cautions against assuming that the fictional representation of cultural 'alterity' offers real-life access to the lived reality of 'exotic' others:

[T]he exotic is not, as is often supposed, an inherent quality to be found 'in' certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them.

(2001: 13)

Huggan uses the terms 'staged marginality' and 'strategic exoticism' to describe the 'domesticating' work of (postcolonial/decolonised) authors who fetishise difference through cultural/locational mystification in order to benefit via global promotion and sales (2001: 19, 87). Here, it is worth noting Rushdie's much earlier claim that cultural/national 'essentialism is the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism' (1991: 67). For Rushdie (and many others), national essentialism 'has re-emerged with a vengeance in the packaging of several recent Indo-Anglian [and, we suggest, Pakistani] novels, as well as in the type of uncritical response to them that highlights their provenance, symbolic if not material, from an "exotic culture"' (1991: 75). Thus understood, the alterity industry could be imagined as a gigantic (Western) parasite feeding off cultural difference packaged as 'exotic'. A great deal of critical debate on such issues has taken place since Rushdie made this comment. Indeed, extensive scholarly attention has been devoted

to precisely those issues of 'exoticism'/'essentialism' raised by Rushdie and complicated by others in the past few decades. In the South Asian literary context, however, almost all of this work has been focused on Indian anglophone texts and authors. Hence there is an urgent need to attend to contemporary Pakistani literature in similar ways.

One of the charges that have been levelled against writers from formerly colonised nations, or the margins more generally, is that many make use of their ex-centric position to 'sell' an exotic image of their nation (or culture, or religion). This is a claim that is quite routinely made with respect to contemporary Indian anglophone literature, perhaps most vehemently in discussions of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). Why this novel in particular has attracted such criticism is open to debate; it may be precisely because of its enormous international success. Critics such as Huggan, Alex Tickell, and Padmini Mongia (who coined the term 'the Roy phenomenon') attribute Roy's success, to a greater or lesser degree, to her cosmopolitanism, which helped her sell 'authentic' India through a book which reeks of exoticness. Tickell squarely chastises Roy for the 'exoticising' exploitation of regional 'difference', and thus of 'staged authenticity' (2007: 161). Lisa Lau offers a more nuanced approach to the question of the 'authentic' (or not) representation of India in Indian writing in English ('IWE'), posing important questions about the very notion of authentic representation itself, questions that are deeply relevant to discussions about contemporary Pakistani anglophone writing: 'a significant flaw in these accusations of inauthenticity and discussions of the "real" [is] the presumption that there exists somewhere an authentic account against which everything else can be measured (and found wanting)' (2011: 28). Similar claims are made by Aamir R. Mufti in the article 'The Aura of Authenticity', where he argues that, paradoxically, if 'authentic' local narratives are intended to 'interrupt the manner in which something called *the West* narrates itself and its others', then we need to be alert to the ways in which the very idea of (postcolonial) localised authenticity is in fact the product of 'Orientalist descriptions' (2000: 100; emphasis original). This is an idea Mufti develops at much greater length in *Forget English!* (2016), where he argues that the naming and lauding of culturally/nationally 'authentic' texts in the 'canon of world literature' in fact depends on 'an Orientalised consciousness' which is the result of a colonial imposition of 'narrowly conceived ethnonational spheres' that have become 'units' of international exchange (2016: 146). Mufti's larger critique is of (naive or exploitative) 'World Literature' studies/consumption; he warns against the 'ascription of authenticity to "local", instead of examining and denaturalizing the historical processes of vernacularization and indigenization, which will reveal their colonial genealogy' (2016: 149). Interestingly, despite being born and raised in Pakistan, Mufti's focus in his discussions of South Asian literature is almost always on texts from India. The relative lack of such a focus on Pakistani literature, to date, may well be due to the relative 'newness' of the emerging 'canon'. For all of this, there is now a considerable body of anglophone literature that is produced and marketed under the banner of Brand Pakistan, and this deserves critical attention of the kind discussed above.

A recent essay by Rohma Saleem begins to address this critical gap by exploring the extent to which two contemporary works of Pakistani anglophone fiction might be guilty of pandering to Western desires for the reconfirmation of stereotypical, essentialist notions about the nation and Islam, particularly with respect to the portrayal of women. This is certainly a welcome intervention. However, Saleem's argument, focused on Aslam Khan's *Trespassing* (2003) and Qaisra Shahraz's *Typhoon* (2007), is arguably informed by precisely the kind of 'Orientalised consciousness' that Mufti explores with such care. The novels are reduced to texts which *simply* 'appease the Western thirst for the mysterious and elusive East' and reiterate 'vilifying tropes of [the] East as necessarily backward, steeped in poverty, corruption, conservatism, a natural antithesis of the liberated West' (Saleem 2017: abstract); in short, they are described as 'deliberately



[...] appealing to the voyeuristic demands of the western reader' (Saleem 2017: 140). Pakistani anglophone writers (via brief analyses of Khan's and Shahraz's novels) are accused of attempting 'to stand in as intermediaries, as translator on one culture for the other', which 'suits them to perfection, since it gives their role heightened significance' (Saleem 2017: 141). Saleem uncritically adopts Lau's suggestion that *some* Indian writers may be 'guilty of skewered, partial, and selective representation, or wilful misrepresentation altogether [...], or outright betrayal' and asserts that 'The scenario is not much different [in the] Pakistani literary scene' (Saleem 2017: 142). She argues that Pakistani writers have just two options: 'either exotic presentation of [the] Orient or an engagement in subversive criticism of one's traditions' (Saleem 2017: 142; emphasis added); they are *either* 'native informers' beguiled by the prospect of international fame and financial reward, *or* 'authentic' (a word that haunts the essay) representatives of their nation. This is an unfortunate reinscription of the kind of either/or logic that dogs and stymies some postcolonial and neocolonial critical discourses; it appears blind to the hybrid or 'mongrel' (self-)positioning of so many contemporary Pakistani writers, including those branded as Pakistani. As Lau and Mufti suggest, the notion of 'authenticity' itself needs to be probed much more carefully, as does the subversive potential of what Homi K. Bhabha terms 'sly mimicry' to unsettle notions of the 'real' (2004: 85).

Saleem thus dismisses Khan's and Shahraz's novels as exemplars of literary 'betrayal' – not only of (authentic) Pakistan but also of Islam (both of which are problematically, monolithically conceived): she reads them as anti-Muslim texts produced for 'anti-Muslim (Western) consumers' (Saleem 2017: 148). The inclusion of local language phrases in novels is dismissed as pandering to 'occidental tastes' (Saleem 2017: 151);<sup>3</sup> cosmopolitan authors are reduced to the role of outsiders 'peeping' in on Pakistani culture (Saleem 2017: 152) and accused of 'rehashing the same worn out themes' of 'marginalised women, the almost unbridgeable gaps between privileged and non-privileged, [...] riots, chaos, [...] lack of security, strikes, lockouts, shutter downs' (Saleem 2017: 153). In sum, then: 'Pakistani English fiction writers are playing a second fiddle to their western counterparts who *deem* Pakistan primitive in every sense of the word' (Saleem 2017: 154; emphasis added) and Pakistanis as 'irredeemably different from, more backward than, and culturally inferior to those who construct and consume the picturesque product' (Saleem 2017: 157); 'This kind of literature is lavishly praised for its miniaturist description but *its intention* is nothing more than to feed the western desire of knowing the east' (Saleem 2017: 155; emphasis added). As these comments suggest, broad and undefended assumptions are made – with respect to how the West 'deems' Pakistan, and about authorial 'intention' – that fly in the face of extensive critical debates that flag up issues of both intentionality and reader response as problematic. Saleem concludes with an assertion that, unfortunately, undermines her critical authority: 'One can only hope that [...] given time', Pakistani anglophone fiction will 'mature and [...] be completely independent of its former mentors' (Saleem 2017: 159). The fact that this fiction is written in English by often self-declared 'mongrels' and marketed internationally (as Mufti discusses so eloquently) renders this vision of autonomous, authentic 'independence' very dubious.<sup>4</sup>

For all her admirable passion, Saleem's essay highlights the perils inherent in uncritical (essentialist) assumptions about Pakistani authorial identity and Pakistani literature. It glosses over important relationships between notions of authenticity, exoticism, and cosmopolitanism that should, we believe, inform analyses of Pakistani anglophone literature – and its relationship with Western publishers, publicists, and readers. Critical debate reverts far too easily to convenient assertions about 'insider' and 'outsider' representational veracity, assertions of 'betrayal' or 'selling out', assumptions about 'real'/'authentic' or 'posturing'/'inauthentic' national or cultural or ethnic identities, complicated by discussions about whether or not the author(s) in

question really *are* Pakistani or qualified to write as such, given their physical Western situation or assumed Western audience. When a text crosses the nation's borders, to what extent does its author *intend* to 'feed' Western desires for knowledge about the East? Regardless of intention, to what extent is it *read* by international readers as merely an entertaining information manual about a far-off land, or a means of understanding the relationship between 'us' and 'them'? Is Shamsie naive, misguided, or on the mark when she writes, 'I don't think a good novel works if you are trying to pander to a particular kind of market' (qtd. in Bilal 2016: 149)? This invites some tricky questions for 'Brand Pakistan'. Do anglophone Pakistani cosmopolitan writers anticipate an ideal reader based in the West? To what extent might they deliberately write for such a reader? Can they be accused of 'selling out' their culture and nation for fame and money? Alternatively, to what extent might they deliberately 'censor' their works in the ways Chandra suggests in the quotation provided at the start of this chapter?

### Materialist critical approaches: avoiding a regressive return

The problem with accusations of cultural 'selling-out', via capitulation to the 'alterity industry', is that it lays the blame for negative aspects of 'Brand Pakistan' at the feet of Pakistani *authors* (as does Saleem) without fully accounting for the ways in which they are constructed as saleable entities in wider circuits of global cultural and capitalist markets. In a capitalist context, writing is a paid occupation. A writer writes to get published and thus be remunerated, and remuneration depends on meeting publishers' requirements, which in turn involve catering to market demands. No matter how much writers might resent this, these are the facts. Writing in response to Huggan, Bhabha elaborates on the modern phenomenon of 'global cosmopolitanism' in the new preface to *The Location of Culture*, emphasising that its ostensible celebration of a multicultural, diverse world and peoples located at the periphery is utterly conditional on neocolonial expectations of profit from the region (2004: xiv–xv). The 'diversity' of people from ex-peripheries is acceptable only if this diversity is *marketed* to ensure they are contributing economically, politically, and socially to the neocolonial centre (2004: xiv). In such terms, the (saleable) positionality of the author matters more than the quality of their work, let alone any claims (however complex) that may be made about their representational validity or 'authenticity'. In short, this emphasis on the geographic positionality of a literary work (or its author) keeps alive earlier orientalist and now cosmopolitan desires for readily consumed and assimilated 'otherness'. It also invites questions about the culpability of authors who may use their cosmopolitan identity/positioning to prioritise profit at the expense of representational 'authenticity' – if this is indeed possible. The extent to which they might knowingly or deliberately conform to such 'positioning' is one that demands much more attention and research.

In *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Huggan argues that it may be possible to 'truthfully' represent cultural difference in ways that are not exploited by market forces. Simply put, he pitches the idea that postcolonial authors can maintain cultural autonomy if they consciously avoid manipulating and exploiting what is unique and different about their culture (2001: 32). He uses the term 'postcolonial exotic' to describe the deliberate domesticating process through which commodities are taken from the margins and absorbed into mainstream culture (Huggan 2001: 22). In contrast, Sarah Brouillette rejects this distinction between authentic and 'staged' representation, insisting that there is no such thing as 'authentic'. She suggests that writers' 'exoticist' strategies/positionings are always already determined by their reception in the eyes of 'global reader(s)' to whom their work is directed (consciously or not), and by the 'publishing industry' which decides on the viability of content in a metropolitan market (2011: 23–24). Brouillette's account is more nuanced than the above comments suggest. She retains Huggan's touristic analogy (of

readers visiting briefly) but goes a step further when she distinguishes, for example, between a number of kinds of ‘cosmopolitan’ reader (compared with Huggan’s singular category, the ‘global reader’) – say, market reader, ethnographer, cosmopolitan, and tourist – while acknowledging that they all, to some degree, assume that they gain access to foreign cultures by reading texts produced in the margins. Huggan and Brouillette agree that postcolonial authors, in *staging* otherness, become trapped in a circuit of commodification which compromises any (subversive, especially anti-colonial) political function the author of the text might have envisaged.

The ‘foreignness’ of author’s names, their unfamiliar accents, and their often darker skin all contribute to the idea that they are essentially ‘other’ – and yet their impeccable English, smart Western dress, educational credentials (and so on) mark them out as reliable commentators on the places they have *come from*. Timothy Brennan suggests that these authors are clearly marked as writers of a ‘transnational class’. More, he suggests that ‘being from “there” in this sense is primarily a kind of literary passport that identifies the artist as being from a region of underdevelopment and pain’ (1997: 38). As transnational corporations are strongly grounded in Anglo-American centres, diversity is thus a result of a commodified literary marketplace in which the very location of authors serves an integral role.

Given these concerns, we believe it is important to analyse the (partial) role of Pakistani anglophone writers and of the international publishing market in the formation of the recent canon of Pakistani anglophone fiction. Materialist writers like Huggan, Brouillette, and Brennan clarify that the contemporary periphery is not simply ‘writing back’ (in the popular term established by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin) but rather writing in ways which ensure that their work will be packaged and promoted by the centre, even if this means resorting to exoticist strategies, consciously or not. Globalisation, in this sense, emerges as a sanctioning neo-colonising force which restricts the emancipation of ex-centric narratives from the exotic bandwagon of otherness. Quite ironically, this restriction is itself an enabling process: by making texts palatable and familiar to readers, this strategic exoticism garners global visibility for Pakistani anglophone fiction.

Quite simply, post-9/11 and the War on Terror, ‘Brand Pakistan’ is likely to sell, due to the Western fascination with Muslim identity and terrorism. If this is true, the extent to which writers who are branded as ‘Pakistani’ confirm, undermine, or exploit marketing assumptions (and readership appeal) is clearly what is at stake. How do Pakistani writers respond to this allegation of exoticism in contemporary Pakistani anglophone literature? Most of them rebuff this kind of critique. When asked about this, Mohsin Hamid briefly responded: ‘I try not to mention the minaret, because when I’m in Lahore, I don’t notice it’ (Khan 2015: n.p.). Muhammed Hanif, author of *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008), dismisses any such pressure from market forces by downrightly asserting that he freely writes whatever he wants (Bilal 2013: 4). Mueenuddin is apparently happy with the international acclaim he has received and does not even consider local reception important. He disregards Pakistani readership as too small and limited, declaring that he has no interest in ‘selling four thousand copies [...] in Pakistan’ (Habib 2009: n.p.). In a *Guardian* interview with Natalie Hanman, Shamsie insists that Pakistani writers are telling stories that are no different from other writers across the globe, but nonetheless acknowledges the demands of international readers, stating that ‘there will be journalists who come to you and they want to find the Muslim in you, the Pakistani in you’ (2014: n.p.). In contrast, Khan speaks of the pressure Pakistani writers face in having to conform to popular Western clichés, but she believes they can choose to resist these practices (Aftab 2012: n.p.). In sum, Pakistani anglophone fiction appears to face a complex interplay with market forces, especially given the latter’s enchantment with ‘Brand Pakistan’. This invites a far more nuanced discussion about (and anticipation of) textual reception in international

markets than has currently been undertaken if we are to avoid a regressive return to the binaries that inform colonial orientalism. It also makes clear that writing as a representative of 'Brand Pakistan' entails walking a fine line between cultural/religious essentialism and 'truthful' representation, if the latter is at all possible.

### Notes

- 1 Of the *Satanic Verses*, Rushdie wrote: 'Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves' (1991: 394). Mohsin Hamid similarly uses the term 'mongrel' to describe himself in an interview with Harleen Singh published in *ARIEL* (2012: 149).
- 2 For the most part, Western discussions of 'Pakistani' literature pay scant attention to issues that animate internal Pakistani discussions about nationhood or interpretations of Islam (say), or that engage with concerns such as home-grown terrorism (say). While we acknowledge these important concerns, a full discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.
- 3 This flies in the face of so much that has been written about the way in which the inclusion of indigenous, non-English words and phrases might function to challenge (Western) readers' attempts to homogenise and appropriate the culture/ethnicity portrayed in postcolonial texts. The extensive 'African Language Debate', played out between Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and commentators on their respective works, is just one example.
- 4 In a comment about why Indian Booker Prize winning novels (by Roy, Kiran Desai, and Aravind Adiga) received negative or lukewarm responses in India, Vijay Nair provocatively asks: 'Is it because they hold a mirror to realities we refuse to acknowledge?' (qtd. in Lau 2011: 30). Put another way, is it the role of anglophone writers to represent only the 'good' and incontestable aspects of a culture/nation? Is this authentic? Do they not have a right, and responsibility, to write about what is not so good, or even wrong (in their estimation), about their culture/nation?

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