

Marketing the Postcolonial Exotic Texts: A Comparative Study Between Alaa Al Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building* and Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator*

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Abstract

This study highlights the status of postcolonial writers in the market, providing analysis with detailed accounts of postcolonial authors' global trade in literature, as well as the role of media and market of the literary texts. The study will also discuss the response of these postcolonial writers to their reception, and how they actually parade their exotic works to worldwide audiences within a global marketplace. In particular, the study will examine the marketability of Arab and South Asian postcolonial texts in the Western marketplace, focusing on the relationship between the postcolonial texts and the international marketplace including the publication and reception of these literary texts.

Further, the analysis will shed the light on the role of translation into English language in increasingly promoting a global reach, especially concerning the Arabic texts and the South Asian fiction written in English. The research will trace the works of two authors who attracted international attention; the bestselling Egyptian writer Alaa Al Aswany, in his novel *The Yacoubian Building* (2002), and the Kashmiri author Mirza Waheed in his novel *The Collaborator* (2011), describing the exoticist elements in Arab and South Asian writings and how they are marketed and distributed for Western audiences. In these texts, the focus will be on the commercial dynamics of postcolonial texts, in addition to the role of translation in marketing these exotic texts. Finally, the study will mainly depend on the influential ideas of Graham Huggan in his book *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing The Margins* (2001) to study the reasons for why these postcolonial novels have become fashionable and have acquired an increasingly commodified status.

KeyWords: Marketing/ marketability, Postcolonial Literature, International Marketplace, Exotic Texts, Translation.

* College of Arts, Mutah University.

Received: 5/7/2020.

Accepted: 14/9/2020.

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تسويق النصوص الغربية ما بعد الاستعمارية: دراسة مقارنة بين رواية علاء الأسواني (عمارة يعقوبيان) ورواية ميرزا وحيد (المتعاون)

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ملخص

تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على حالة كتاب ما بعد الاستعمار في السوق، حيث تقدم تحليلاً مفصلاً حول التجارة العالمية في الأدب لكتاب ما بعد الاستعمار، بالإضافة إلى دور وسائل الإعلام والتسويق للنصوص الأدبية. ستناقش الدراسة أيضًا تفاعل هؤلاء الكتاب مع تسويق أعمالهم الأدبية، وكيف يوجهون أعمالهم الغربية في الواقع لجماهير عالمية في السوق العالمي. على وجه الخصوص، ستعرض الدراسة قابلية تسويق نصوص ما بعد الاستعمار العربية والجنوب آسيوية في السوق الغربية، مع التركيز على العلاقة ما بين نصوص ما بعد الاستعمار والسوق الدولية بما في ذلك نشر واستقبال هذه النصوص الأدبية.

علاوة على ذلك، سيلقي التحليل الضوء على دور الترجمة إلى اللغة الإنجليزية في تعزيز الانتشار العالمي بشكل متزايد، خاصة فيما يتعلق بالنصوص العربية وأدب جنوب آسيا المكتوب باللغة الإنجليزية. سيتتبع البحث أعمال مؤلفين اثنين لفتا الانتباه الدولي؛ الكاتب المصري الأكثر مبيعاً علاء الأسواني في روايته "عمارة يعقوبيان" (2002)، والكاتب الكشميري ميرزا وحيد في روايته "المتعاون" (2011)، مع وصف العناصر الغربية في الكتابات العربية والجنوب آسيوية وكيف يتم تسويقها وتوزيعها للجماهير الغربية. في هذه النصوص، سيتم التركيز على الديناميكيات التجارية لنصوص ما بعد الاستعمار، بالإضافة إلى دور الترجمة في تسويق هذه النصوص الغربية. أخيرًا، ستعتمد الدراسة بشكل أساسي على الأفكار المؤثرة للناقد غراهام هوغان في كتابه (النصوص الغربية ما بعد الاستعمارية: تسويق النصوص الهامشية) (2001) لدراسة الأسباب التي جعلت هذه الروايات ما بعد الاستعمارية عصرية مكتسبة إقبالاً متزايداً.

الكلمات الدالة: التسويق/ قابلية التسويق، الأدب ما بعد الاستعماري، السوق الدولية، النصوص الغربية، الترجمة.

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تاريخ قبول البحث: 2020/9/14 م.

تاريخ تقديم البحث: 2020/7/5 م.

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Introduction

According to Claire Squires (2007), marketing a literary text is defined as "a form of representation and interpretation, situated in the spaces between the author and the reader — but which authors and readers also take part in — and surrounding the production, dissemination and reception of texts" (P. 3). This shows that the degree of production, distribution and reception of texts are governed by specific particular authors, trends and writing styles. It is also governed by the authors' abilities to interact with their readers and to what extent they are able to give the readers what they search for in any text they are reading.

Sarah Brouillette (2007) argues that the books which relate to postcolonial literature play a significant role in filling an important niche in book trade. For her, there are certain characteristics in most salable postcolonial writings, that is, the language of these fictional postcolonial books is "relatively 'sophisticated' or 'complex' and often anti-realistic; it is politically liberal and suspicious of nationalism; it uses a language of exile' hybridity, and 'mongrel' subjectivity" (P. 61). Brouillette clears out what the exotic texts are meant to be; that they combine the urban, cosmopolitan aesthetics with a sort of local color that strikes contemporary editors and reviewers.

According to Anna Cristina Mendes (2016), "during the past two decades, an impressive inventory of postcolonial literary works by South Asian authors achieved visibility in the marketplace mostly as an offshoot of being awarded coveted literary prizes" (P. 215). For example, the Indian writer Salman Rushdie is considered as one of the highly publicised Third World writers who possessed 'callingcards' in the international book markets "because of [... his] authentic native attachment to a specific Third World locale" (Brennan, 1989: 2-3). Mendes also argues that Rushdie and other celebrity Indian writers gained such reputation because they have been "hyper-visible" (P. 216). For her, "the access of these writers (mostly diasporic/cosmopolitan ones) to the global literary market is controlled by the editorial decisions of publishers in metropolitan centers like Paris, London or New York" (Mendes, 2016: 216-217).

Further, Mendes claims that most of South Asian diasporic and cosmopolitan writers are accused "of trading stereotypes and favouring particular literary styles and genres in return for easy profits in Western markets" (P. 218). She continues her discussion by arguing that

contemporary South Asian social realist literary works are usually commercially successful in the West, she demonstrates that:

South Asian social realist literary works of the last decades have acquired a privileged positionality, as their authors have been benefiting from both the reach and distribution available to multinational corporations, and also from having managed to carve out global readerships beyond home and diasporic communities.(P. 227)

Thus, the success of any postcolonial work also depends on its viability as a commodity in the global market.

Unlike South Asian postcolonial texts, which are mostly written originally in English to command a high global readership, the Arab postcolonial non-Anglophone texts still face disadvantages in the global markets, due to several reasons: The difficulty to find local publishers who venture into book production, the lack of solid funding and the still nascent national markets. Thus, these obstacles must have been solved through creating an enduring transnational movement, which could mainly happen through the process of translation. The deployment of English has certainly enhanced the marketability of South Asian literature in the west; it has helped writers such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy to gain a world audience and to win prestigious literary awards such as the Booker Prize. Yet, if celebrated South Asian writers have transformed the novel in English by incorporating some of the energy of India's linguistic and cultural diversity into their fiction, the issue of translation is a pressing concern for postcolonial Arab authors who choose to write in Arabic. The issue of translation did not guarantee a global reach since it also involves many obstacles. Geoffrey Nash (2017) suggested some of these problems:

The western point of view that Arabic literature is "problematic" and is still therefore to some degree "embargoed," . . . 2) The limited criteria that determine which type of text gets translated and which does not. 3) The quality of translations produced. (P. 2)

In his article "Embargoed Literature", Edward Said argues that Arab literature is still "embargoed" in the West although one of its most prominent figures, the Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988. Eight years before Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize, Said says that he has been asked by a

major New York commercial publisher to choose novels from the Third World literature to be translated. Said gave him a list of works where two novels belonged to Mahfouz. When Said asked several weeks later about which novels have been chosen, he was informed that none of Mahfouz's novels were chosen because, to quote, "Arabic is a controversial language" (Said, 1995: 97). Said then comments: "What, exactly, the publisher meant is still a little vague to me--but that Arabs and their language were somehow not respectable, and consequently dangerous, louche, unapproachable, was perfectly evident to me then and, alas, now" (Said, 1995: 97).

Nada Tomiche (1978) mentions in her book, *La Littérature arabe traduite* that the actual translations of Arabic works into English and other European languages began only after the Second World War. However, the number of Arabic literary works translated was very limited (1978: 2). Similarly, Denys Johnson-Davies, an eminent Arabic-to-English literary translator, asserts that the British did not take Arab literature very seriously, and he also blames British prejudice for this lack of openness to Arab literature. In one of his interviews, he mentions that "They [the British] couldn't bring themselves to believe that an Arab, who is probably sitting in the desert somewhere...that an Arab could be sophisticated...So it took a long time for people to get used to the fact that possibly something could come out of the Arab world" (Johnson-Davies, 2012: n.p.). Thus, apparently, the issue of language has severely affected the marketability of Arabic postcolonial text, since, in addition to the dilemma of finding a publisher, the issue of translation is still irritating. A large number of Arabic masterpieces are deprived of worldwide fame because of the lack of translation.

The analysis here will discuss a unique case offering Third World postcolonial texts that gained a huge fame locally as well as globally. The analysis will examine specifically the reasons for why these exotic texts such as *The Yacoubian Building* and *The Collaborator* either won or were listed for international literary prizes, in addition to the reasons for the commercial success of these writers which made them desirable and attractive to Western publishing houses.

Al Aswany, the author of the first text in the analysis, is an Egyptian writer who was born in 1957. He is also a founding member of the political movement "Kefaya" in Egypt. In 1980, Al Aswany received a bachelor's degree in dental and oral medicine at Cairo University. Later, he received a Master degree in dentistry from the University of Illinois at Chicago. In addition to being a dentist, he is known for his best-selling novels. He wrote many weekly cultural and political articles which represent his vocal criticism of the Egyptian government, in addition to literary critiques in several Egyptian newspapers, like: Al-Sha'ab, Al-Arabi Al-Nasseri, Al-Dustour and Al-Shorouk. His articles have been published in many popular international newspapers such as The New York Times, Le Monde, The Guardian, The Independent and others.

Al Aswany's literary publications include a novella, *The Papers of Isam Abd El-Ati* (1989) and two volumes of short stories (1990) and (1997). The novella and the short stories were eventually reprinted in the collection of Niran şadiqah (*Friendly Fire*) (2004). His first major novel *Imarat Ya'qubiyyan*, which was published in 2002, has attracted a huge number of readers in Egypt and throughout the Arab world. Four years later, the English version of this novel, *The Yacoubian Building*, appeared achieving a similar reputation and success with the global readers.

In his next novel, *Chicago* (2007), Al Aswany apparently reflects on his own experience as a student in a medical school in the Midwestern city, where he comments on the lives of students and professors and their various struggles including religion and sexuality. Al Aswany's last novel, *Jumhuriyyah ka'an* (*The Republic, As If*) (2018), was published in Beirut and banned in Egypt for its criticism of state institutions. In this novel, he has been inspired by his active participation in the Arab Spring in 2011, believing that participating in the demonstrations to defend revolutions and human rights is also his responsibility as a writer.

The Yacoubian Building, which was highly celebrated in the Arab world and was the best-selling Arabic novel for 2002 and 2003, has also been translated into around 30 languages, including English. Several reviews have been written on the English version of this novel due to its huge success in both Arab countries and the West. In 2006, the novel has been transformed into a film which holds the same name of the novel and it has achieved the biggest budget movie ever produced in Egypt. Although the movie was a huge hit in Egypt, it has been attacked by a vast number of Egyptian parliament for depicting a highly sensitive issue in the Arab world,

which is homosexuality. They have also asked for deleting some scenes related to homosexuality since they go against Egyptian and Arab moral values.

The novel is mainly about the social change and the corruption in modern Cairo in a way that addresses the social taboos and widespread governmental corruption, such as the cheating in the public elections in the country. The residents of the Yacoubian building, on which the novel was based, are almost all corrupt human models. Al Aswany chose this architecture in order to record the events of his novel as a picture of social life in Egypt for more than half a century. The author offers a realistic depiction of Egypt after the 1952 revolution focusing on social injustice, political oppression and corrupt dictatorship. The novel also explores a number of notably vital issues, such as "political corruption, Islamic movements, homosexuality, domestic terrorism, sexual exploitation and class privilege" (Michael Allan, 2013: 3).

The writer sheds light on the successive changes that occurred in the thoughts and behaviour of the Egyptian society in the post-open period through realistic models that live among the members of the society. This is represented in, for instance, Buthayna, the hard-working girl who is struggling to obtain a small amount of money to fulfill the requirements of her family who does not stop blaming her. But her beauty and the social conditions that are classified under the poverty line, almost made her an easy prey for opportunistic men. Another model in the building is Hatim Rashid, the aristocratic man who belongs to an ancient family and occupies a prominent position among the elite of the press men. From a young age, he suffers from several psychological problems caused by the bad relationship between his parents that made him lost when he reached the stage of manhood. Because of these internal psychological struggles, he grew up with a desire towards homosexuality which became an urgent need for him to forget his childhood. He, thus, had an affair with Abdu, a poor married Nubian man, in addition to supporting him financially.

The building has become a changing environment for its inhabitants. There is Haj Azzam, a member of Parliament who embodies the ambition to reach power, which eventually led to the indescribable consequences of his involvement in corruption, electoral fraud and suspicious dirty works. There is also the model of extremism represented by Taha Al-Shazli, the son of the building's guard, who has long dreamed of joining a military college in order to make his father proud of him. With his father, he lived a poor life in

front of the mockery of the wealthy inhabitants of this building, where his sweetheart lives. But all his hopes were shattered and blown out, so he decided to join one of the prestigious colleges. Shocked by the huge social differences between him and his colleagues, he surrendered to despair and frustration, and became attractive for a group of extremists aiming at politicizing Islam that mixes religion with evil. Hence, this young man isolated himself from the others and began to cast his anger against the community by taking revenge from those who had oppressed him. He ended up drowning in his blood next to a member of the state security. Al Aswany's message in the story of Taha is clear, as Janine Jones (2012) declares: "lack of economic opportunity and government violence and corruption are leading to the religious radicalization of young Egyptian men".

The other text in this comparative analysis is *The Collaborator* for Mirza Waheed. Waheed is a novelist who was born and brought up in Srinagar, Kashmir. He moved to Delhi when he was eighteen to study English literature at the University of Delhi and worked as journalist and editor in the city for four years. He has worked in various Indian cities after leaving his hometown, Srinagar. Later, he moved to London in 2001 to work for the BBC World Service, working as an editor. Waheed has been writing since he was ten and his first novel *The Collaborator* is written in 2011. In addition, he has published his second novel, *The Book of Gold Leaves* in 2014, and later, his last novel *Tell Her Everything* in 2019. Waheed has gained several awards and book prizes and honours for the success of these novels.

The Collaborator, is considered as one of the few thoughtful books and commentaries written about the case in Kashmir. The novel, which has been published in 2011, is set in the early 1990s in the village of Nowgam, close to Pakistan borders. This critically acclaimed novel obtained a lot of awards and recognition. In fact, the novel is written in the backdrop of Kashmir in the 90s when turmoil struck the place and turned it into a place of barbarous conflict, chaos, massacres and fear. The novel addresses serious questions of human rights abuse on Kashmiri civilians. During the course of the novel, the author offers some examples of shocking and irritating realities, such as: the torture and beheading of Farooq, chopping off the nose and ears of Shaban Khatana and slashing of his wife's tongue by the Indian security forces.

In the story, Indian soldiers do not stop chasing fighters everywhere. The novel describes four teenage boys from Kashmir, who were previously spending their evenings playing cricket and singing Indian movie ballads on the banks of the valley. These boys have disappeared one by one in their attempt to cross into Azad Kashmir, a disputed town under Pakistan's control, for the purpose of joining the armed struggle against the Indian army. Only one of their friends, who is the son of the town leader, is left behind. This son (the collaborator) appears to have been forced to cooperate with the Indian army. So he goes to the valley plateau to count the bodies while every day he fears that the body of one of his friends will be found among the dead. The final part of the novel returns us to the story of this collaborator and his frightening relationship with the Indian captain, Kadian, who employed him.

Like *The Yacoubian Building*, *The Collaborator* was a success and an international bestseller, a finalist for the Guardian First Book Award and the Shakti Bhat Prize, and long-listed for the Desmond Elliott Prize. It was selected by Waterstones as a part of its big literary debut promotion, 'Waterstones 11'. In addition, the book was featured in 2011 "book of the year" in The Telegraph, New Statesman, Financial Times, Business Standard and Telegraph India and among others.

In the preface of his *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing The Margins*, Graham Huggan (2001) states some of the main reasons that made many of the exotic writers and texts successful. He presents some instances of postcolonial exotic, for example: some postcolonial South Asian writers, like Salman Rushdie, are seen as representative of the Third World countries, despite of their cosmopolitan background. Also, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is gleaned since it provides anthropological information. He argues that: "academic concepts like postcolonialism are turned, despite their historicist pretension, into watchwords for the fashionable study of cultural otherness" (P. 7). Huggan also defines the postcolonial exotic as: "The material conditions of production and consumption of postcolonial writings, and the influence of publishing houses and academic institutions on the selection, distribution and evaluation of these works" (P. 7). Studying the marketing of Al Aswany's and Waheed's works will lead us to the term 'staged marginality' that denotes "the process by which marginalized individuals or minority groups dramatise their 'subordinate' status for the imagined benefit of a majority audience" (Huggan, 2001: 12). Additionally, Huggan demonstrates how literary value is dependent on the writers' commodification and strategic

exoticization of several concepts such as "marginality", "resistance", and "authenticity" (P. 116).

The Yacoubian Building and *The Collaborator* represent not only "postcolonialism as a form of localized resistance" but also "postcoloniality as a form of global commodity exchange" (Huggan, 2001: 6). For instance, *The Yacoubian Building* has been widely read in Egypt and throughout the Middle East. Perhaps it has been highly marketed because it vividly sheds the light on the political case not only in Egypt, but also in most of Arab countries. The novel provides a frank picture of the repression to the Egyptian human being. In addition, the novel provides a true picture of electoral fraud and its sale in favor of the Egyptian regime, and about the extent of corruption in the system. On the other hand, the novel monitors the rise of Islamic extremism and the corruption of political leaders, and shockingly addresses issues of homosexuality and prostitution in a somehow conservative society.

The Yacoubian architecture, which was built in 1934, becomes a mirror that reflects on its surface human and intellectual pictures and relations that shine the close connection between the bottom and top of society. In fact, the novel generally was highly celebrated because of several reasons. First of all: Its frankness in dealing with some issues, its critical attitude to Egypt and Cairo, and in its touching some taboos, and most importantly its practicing to self-flagellation, in its dealing with its community and its people. Nana Asfour (2018) commented on the celebration and fame of this novel claiming that:

It is undoubtedly this groundbreaking literary rendition of Egyptian realism, served with a heavy dose of humor, that has made the book such a hit with the local audience (two years running), and that, despite the awkward translation in parts, renders it an entertaining and revelatory read for those intrigued by Egyptian culture. (n.p.)

In a similar way, Janine Jones (2012) sees that *The Yacoubian Building* gained notoriety in Egypt "for being one of the first novels to break the homosexual taboo by featuring an openly gay character".

Furthermore, the novel's approach to local people's concerns makes it successful and highly readable. The novel touched what the reader knows, and perhaps what he does not know, making it close to the ordinary reader, especially through the simplicity of its style and the vocabularies used by its

characters. Most of these characters are described in the novel as being strong, influential, active in spreading corruption, damaging the economy and the spirit of their society. Therefore, the author is credited for his audacity, and his storming of issues that appear in the prevailing discourse during the recent years as forbidden and approaching them requires boldness and creative courage.

The media also played a role in the novel's fame. Many of those who contributed to the novel's fame were media people, and accordingly, they did not deal with it critically as much as they dealt with it socially and in the media arena, especially after preparing it cinematically. Finally, this novel was also attractive to many different types of readers because it contained a good deal of characters who are different in class and position. The novel focused vividly on the class system in Egypt. It is noticed that the residents of the Building hardly talk to each other and they are separated by the walls of the building. Makayla Heisler (2015) argues that this separation represents different time periods:

This separation of the building is also significant because it shows the separation of classes in Egypt; the building is separated into the highest classes on the bottom floor (merchants and westernised Egyptians), the revolutionary class (military officers and engineers) in the middle floors, and the poorest class (servant workers) on the top floor. (n.p.)

In the same way, *The Collaborator* gained a notorious fame popularity because it focuses on many complex issues like: "identity, justice, struggle, and oppression which are usually absent in the mainstream narrative on/of Kashmir". Basharat Shameem (2014) continues that:

The vast majority of writings on Kashmir, written from these positions, come up, with their own monolithic projections regarding the realities of the conflict. However, we are now witnessing the emergence of many indigenous voices which endeavour to portray the many shades of experience of this conflict. Prominent among these voices/writers are Mirza Waheed. (P. 145)

Another reason for *The Collaborator's* popularity is that the novel appears to be a stunningly humane work of storytelling with an unpredictable hero. According to many reviewers, the novel is considered to be one of the most shocking and brilliantly compelling novels of recent times. Waheed lights the way into the heart of a war according to the real events he witnessed as a young child in Srinagar. The publishers Penguin/Viking of *The Collaborator* has described it as a "heartbreaking and shocking story of what happens to a community, and a family, that must live through a conflict that is all too real" (Waheed, 2011). This novel is considered to be one of the most horrific and successful novel in the late current era, since it vividly described the bloody and violent actions practiced against the victimized innocent Kashmiris who try to cross the border to India . In the novel, Waheed illustrates that:

Young and old, men and children, dead. All dead on a bridge, blood, washed with fire-brigade horses. . . There was talk of dead bodies in the ditches and nallahs, the Army had started capturing and killing hundreds of boys attempting to cross over to Azad Kashmir. They saw, they shot. They saw more, they shot more. (2011: 117)

Moreover, Waheed presents an intelligent fresh voice on the ever-entangling Kashmir issue. With glimpses of brightness, Waheed has to uncover the lives of Kashmiri people from up close as an insider's perspective. In his novel, Waheed mentions many realistic fact that showed the horrifying and catastrophic side of the war at that time, like:

More than 70.00 people have been killed in Kashmir since 1989; around 8.000 people have disappeared; at least 25.000 children have been orphaned; and over 4.000 people are in Indian prisons. Thousands of women have been widowed in the conflict, including 2.000 'half-widows' whose husbands remain missing. (Waheed: 2011)

In the same perspective, the novelist Kamila Shamsie reviewed *The Collaborator* for *The Guardian* and stated some of the main reasons that made the novel one of the bestselling. In her point of view, the novel is:

gripping in its narrative drama...Waheed gives us a portrait of Kashmir itself. Away from the rhetorical posturing of India and Pakistan, he reveals, with great sensitivity and an anger that arises from compassion, what it is to live in a part of the world

that is regarded by the national government as the enemy within, and by the government next door as a strategic puppet.
(n.p.)

Thus, clearly *The Collaborator*, with its lyrical voice, opened the readers' minds to a situation and lives of people they do not know much about. The novel succeeded in gaining a global attention with its stunning ability to depict a rural Kashmiri life of exotic people who are struggling for their own independence.

Conclusion

Literature is a commodity that is subject to the standards of quality and marketing. Either it is good and its people know how to market it, so it becomes desirable and popular, or it is poor and its owners do not improve its advertisement and publicity, so it becomes neglected and ignored. The research here studied mainly some of the specific aspects that help any text to be marketed, like: title, cover package, formatting and the general field in which this text has been situated. Also, the research studied the ways in which global marketplace is connected with the postcolonial agenda and the explosion and the expansion of postcolonial studies as part of cultural field. The study then presented *The Yacoubian Building* and *The Collaborator* as two postcolonial texts which are presented as cultural commodities of exchange to the global audience. Meanwhile, the study highlighted the crucial role of translation of the non-Anglophone texts that helped to expand cultural awareness and understanding in the region that these texts represent, and thus helped in marketing them.

The research offers many reasons for why an exotic text like *The Yacoubian Building* has gained a worldwide fame since it has succeeded to a great extent in depicting the societal crisis in Egypt in the last thirty years. Contrary to what Sarah Brouillette mentioned earlier about the success of the exotic postcolonial novels being related to the use of sophisticated and complex language, *The Yacoubian Building* appeared to be successful and attractive due to the simplicity of its language, in a way that it combines vernacular and non-vernacular language that is easy to understand. *The Yacoubian Building* also becomes one of the best sold novels because it brings many issues to light in a comical way. Heisler (2015) asserts:

Through its lighthearted manner, the subject matter describes many issues that have plagued the Arab culture since its beginning. These themes have set *The Yacoubian Building* apart from other Arab novels in the sense that there are no barriers in its description of the problems encountered. The novel creates a sense of identity for all the classes in the nation, not just a single individual. n.p.

Like *The Yacoubian Building*, *The collaborator* also achieved attention since it focuses on the identities and the personalities of several characters around the main protagonist. All the young Kashmiri boys, for example, Hussain, Gull, Muhammad and Ashfaq, face hardships to become part of the active resistance movement. Away from being independence fighters, the author also highlighted other sides in their personalities. Unlike most of *The Yacoubian Building's* corrupted characters, Hussein, for instance, is represented as an individual who believes in an idealistic and utopian world although his father wants him to become a strong freedom fighter due to his strong sense of determination. Likewise, Muhammad is represented as a brave character with a strong sense of honour since childhood.

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