

A Foucauldian Analysis of Postcolonial Hybridity in a Kuwaiti Novel

Authors : Annette Louise Dupont

Abstract : Background and Introduction: Broadly defined, hybridity is a condition of racial and cultural 'cross-pollination' which arises as a result of contact between colonized and colonizer. It remains a highly contested concept in postcolonial studies as it is implicitly underpinned by colonial notions of 'racial purity.' While some postcolonial scholars argue that individuals exercise significant agency in the construction of their hybrid subjectivities, others underscore associated experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and alienation. Kuwait and the Philippines are among the most disparate of contemporary postcolonial states. While oil resources transformed the former British Mandate of Kuwait into one of the world's richest countries, enduring poverty in the former US colony of the Philippines drives a global diaspora which produces multiple Filipino hybridities. Although more Filipinos work in the Arabian Gulf than in any other region of the world, scholarly and literary accounts of their experiences of hybridization in this region are relatively scarce when compared to those set in North America, Australia, Asia, and Europe. Study Aims and Significance: This paper aims to address this existing lacuna by investigating hybridity and other postcolonial themes in a novel by a Kuwaiti author which vividly portrays the lives of immigrants and citizens in Kuwait and which gives a rare voice and insight into the struggles of an Arab-Filipino and European-Filipina. Specifically, this paper explores the relationships between colonial discourses of 'black' and 'white' and postcolonial discourses pertaining to 'brown' Filipinos and 'brown' Arabs, in order to assess their impacts on the protagonists' hybrid subjectivities. Methodology: Foucault's notions of discourse not only provide a conceptual basis for analyzing the colonial ideology of Orientalism, but his theories related to the social exclusion of the 'mad' also elucidate the mechanisms by which power can operate to marginalize, alienate and subjectify the Other, therefore a Foucauldian lens is applied to the analysis of postcolonial themes and hybrid subjectivities portrayed in the novel. Findings: The study finds that Kuwaiti and Filipino discursive practices mirror those of former white colonialists and colonized black laborers and that these discursive practices combine with a former British colonial system of foreign labor sponsorship to create a form of governmentality in Kuwait which is based on exclusion and control. The novel's rich social description and the reflections of the key protagonist and narrator suggest that such fiction has a significant role to play in highlighting the historical and cultural specificities of experiences of postcolonial hybridity in under-researched geographic, economic, social, and political settings. Whereas hybridity can appear abstract in scholarly accounts, the significance of literary accounts in which the lived experiences of hybrid protagonists are anchored to specific historical periods, places and discourses, is that contextual particularities are neither obscured nor dehistoricized. Conclusions: The application of Foucauldian theorizations of discourse, disciplinary, and biopower to the analysis of this Kuwaiti literary text serves to extend an understanding of the effects of contextually-specific discourses on hybrid Filipino subjectivities, as well as a knowledge of prevailing social dynamics in a little-researched postcolonial Arabian Gulf state.

Keywords : Filipino, Foucault, hybridity, Kuwait

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