



Marginalization and Empowerment

Dev Virahsawmy's *Toufann*
Week 6

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Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, students should be able to:

1. Identify the marginal and empowered status of some characters in the play.
2. Relate the marginal and empowered status of some characters with postcolonial theory.

Recapitulation: Dramatic significance in the play

- Virahsawmy opens ways that connect with a network of allusions and references requiring complex levels of reading as well as Mauritian socio-cultural competencies.
- In *Toufann*, Virahsawmy activates the uses of kreol expressions and parodies the original *The Tempest* by Shakespeare as well as post 1968 Mauritian cultural scenario.
- There is the uncensoring of queerness in *Toufann*, thereby unveiling the metaphor for the political problems associated with postcolonial societies that encourages heterosexuality and submissiveness: The case of Ferdinan loving the robot Aryel illustrates the break from heterosexuality and the outgoing Kordelia shows her rebellion from her father Prospero by getting impregnated by Kalibann, Prospero's servant.

Marginal status of the characters

- The situation of the island in *Toufann* is that of neo-colonialism, imperialism, and sustained subservience for instance, in the coup d'état Prospero suffered and the erosion of sovereignty leading to political structural adjustment programmes through the marriage of Kordelia and Kalibann. Neo-colonialism could mean the continuity of Prospero's rule despite being banished from his kingdom but he acts, in Kordelia's words, as 'Bondie' in the island.
- New forms of showing superiority lies in the use of technology by Prospero who gives a semblance of control over the fate of the other characters; for example Kordelia must marry Ferdinan, Kalibann is a 'vorien', and Aryel must always follow his commands.

Marginal status of characters due to events

- While the 'post' in postcolonialism signifies the end of colonialism in terms of timeframe and imperialism as direct domination, it does not imply after imperialism as a global system of hegemonic power. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak maintains that 'we live in a post-colonial neo-colonized world' (Harasym, 1990: p. 166), while Homi Bhabha regards postcoloniality as 'a salutary reminder of the persistent "neo-colonial" relations within the "new" world order and the multi-national division of labour'. (1994: p. 6, Reprint 2012)
- The events in *Toufann* are played in a way that there is situational irony that satirizes the condition of the characters, capturing continuities in showcasing marginality. For example Lerwa Lir faces the stranded boat condition that was once faced by Prospero, Prospero faces family deception with Yago in the past and filial deception with Kordelia in his present, Aryel and Ferdinan are both relegated as people incapable of feeling pleasure and Kalibann is constantly reminded of his 'batar' position by Prospero despite being his 'asistan'.

Marginal status of characters due to the setting

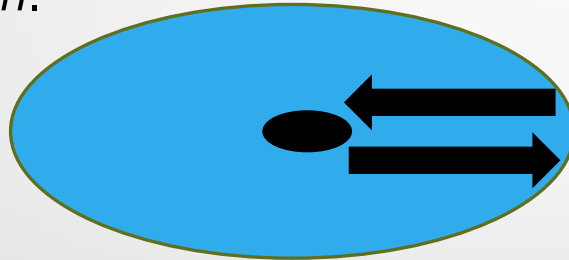
- The setting of the island, enhanced with Prospero's technological development attribute marginal status to characters other than him in the play as he believes he controls them with a remote control controlling the Tofann. Controlling the Tofann for Prospero is controlling the island and everyone in it.
- The setting at the beginning in *Toufann* reveals the power dynamic at play which is underpinned by the frequent changes in weather conditions due to technology's supremacy by Prospero. All lies in the remote control. Removing the remote control from Prospero means attributing to Prospero a marginal status.

Empowerment of the characters: The idea of a play within a play

- The empowerment in *Toufann* comes from the metadrama idea that is a play within play.
- A play within a play is a dramatic device wherein the function of such narration is to add entertainment while delving into the symbolic and psychological significance for the inner play as the outer play gives the illusion of power supremacy to only Prospero for he has the remote control of the Toufann.
- In *Toufann*, the play within a play is revealed in the machination of Kordelia's rebellion in league with Kalibann to outsmart Prospero in his endeavour of causing pain to Lerwa Lir and his subjects.
- The play within a play disclose the fact that Prospero, like before, did not learn his lesson as once he was deceived by his brother Yago and now he is deceived by his daughter Kordelia. Deemed as marginal and not included in the plans of Prospero, Kordelia emerges as a marginal who manages to decentralize the power of Prospero by scheming against the latter with Kalibann.

A play within a play: Empowered characters

- Characters are empowered when the power shifting dynamics show that there is a play within a play in *Toufann*.



- For example in the above diagram the binary opposition of the empowered is denoted in the black circle in the centre (representing Prospero) and the margin of the big circle (representing others) denotes the marginals. However, this diagram can be malleable as the marginal characters through their independent actions can come to and fro near the centre in *Toufann*.

A play within a play: changes in the setting

- The particularity of the setting in *Toufann* makes the idea of a play within a play effective in the sense that the island setting controlled by the use of technology resides on the one who has mastery of this very technology. This means that not only Prospero has access to technology but also Kalibban (portrayed as his other in the play.)
- The changes in setting arrangements (the boat of Lerwa Iir, the illusion of Kaspalto and Dammaro, and the prison cell of Ferdinan) that are beyond Prospero's control room determines the outer segment of the course of the play.

Empowerment of characters from postcolonial theories

- Empowerment of *Toufann's* characters becomes prevalent due to their hybrid identities and shifts in power dynamics.
- Postcolonial theorist like Bhabha assert that the hybrid condition applies to everyone within postcolonial societies - and to all other people for that matter, as the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowing.
- The notion of hybridity marks both the continuities of colonialism and its failure to fully dominate the colonized. In terms of continuity, identities and subjectivities were profoundly reshaped by the colonial experience and accordingly colonialism finds continued expression through a multiplicity of practices, philosophies, and cultures imparted to and adopted by the colonized in more or less hybrid forms.
- Hybrid identities in *Toufann* engages with Bhabha's interpretation of hybridity as a potential site of resistance and subversion found in the manner in which it breaks down the symmetry of the self/other (for example, Prospero and others) distinction.

Empowerment of characters from postcolonial theories

- The notion of hybridity has been invoked as a measure of local agency in the face of globalization. Hybridity is seen to signify the creative adaptation, interpretation and transformation of Western cultural symbols and practices, and shows that formerly colonized peoples are not simply passive victims in the face of an all-powerful Western culture. *Toufann* succeeds in this rendition through the diverse cultural repertoire in the Creole dialogues of the characters.
- Hybridity is intimately connected to resistance, in that it signifies the creativity and adaptability of the subaltern in the face of power, and demonstrates that the colonial encounter as well as contemporary islanders relations cannot be understood in terms of a one-way relationship of domination and power take-over. That is why the ending of *Toufann* is suspended in disbelief as Kaspalto and Dammaro (representative of the population voice) comments on their say in the decision of sustaining Prospero's supremacy in the form of Kordelia and Kalibann's rule on the island.

References

1. Bhabha, H.K., 2012. The location of culture. Routledge. New York.
2. Harasym, S., 1990. The post-colonial critic: Interviews, strategies, dialogues. New York: Routledge.



Thank you for your
attention.