


Chapter 20

The Empire Plays Back: Postcolonial Theory and Counter-Discourses of Representation in the Arab- Made Game Arabian Lords

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ABSTRACT

*This chapter is in many ways inspired by *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* and addresses postcolonial issues developed by Fanon, Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and Mignolo. However, while much attention has been given to the literary activities of ‘writing back’ to the colonial power, there has been little scholarship on postcolonial thoughts in game studies. Using Mignolo’s notions of border thinking and epistemic disobedience, this chapter explores how digital games serve as alternative spaces of knowledge production and resistance. The study adopts both semiotic inspection and postcolonial methods to analyze *Arabian Lords*, an Arab-made video game, which seeks to challenge and counteract the stereotypical portrayal of the Orient as an uncivilized ‘Other’ in opposition to the civilized West. The findings suggest that playing back to the center helps expand*

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the postcolonial debate beyond its traditional boundaries. However, within this virtual space, complex sociocultural dynamics and experiences emerge, reshaping players' perceptions and imaginaries.

INTRODUCTION

Published in 1989, *The Empire Writes Back* by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin is a seminal contribution in post-colonial studies. The book embarks on a groundbreaking exploration of the ways in which writers from formerly colonized regions, such as Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia, use literature as a means of asserting identity, reclaiming cultural heritage, and resisting imperialist ideologies and narratives. The book remains a foundational reference for understanding how literature can serve as a powerful tool for resistance, self-definition, and cultural expression. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* adopt a broad definition of the term post-colonial, arguing that it applies to “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 2). In light of this, the debate over the term’s exact meaning and definition does not appear to have been resolved. The concept of ‘post’ in post-colonial is quite problematic as it does not solely refer to the chronological period that comes after the end of colonialism. Rather, it also has relevance to colonialism itself as long as many countries could not free themselves from formal colonial rule and remain under direct military occupation. The prefix ‘post’ in postcolonialism also refers to what is better known as neocolonialism, which manifests itself in various forms, political, economic, cultural, and technological, and acknowledges the ongoing cultural and intellectual movement that keeps changing in response to the effects of colonialism. Brydon (2000) further expands on this by stating, “post-colonialism describes the process of rethinking attitudes toward colonialism and its aftermath, including the terms and categories in which that knowledge has been cast” (p. 4). Among the various ways that people react to and oppose colonial control is through nationalist literary production. The idea of “writing back,” which describes the process of rewriting the colonial narratives from indigenous viewpoints, is one of the central concepts in *The Empire Writes Back*. This idea seeks to counteract the Eurocentric narratives and remove barriers that have long silenced or dismissed various social groups and identities. Writing back is, therefore, more than a critique; it is a voice for the voiceless which allows them to retell, reconstruct, and celebrate their own history from below in the way that they see fit. Under this critical scholarship, Gandhi (2019) writes, “postcolonialism is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (p. 4). Such a viewpoint finds clear and direct answers in literary works like Achebe’s

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