

DOCTORAL THESIS

The historic voice of Bukid: a postcolonial reading of Manila and Bicol's contemporary

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Abstract

Writing the history of children's literature in the postcolonial era remains important, because it serves as the counter-assertion to the history of the child and the history of children's literature dominated by the West. The once-silenced voice of the postcolonial child must resurface in literary criticism, because it asserts the strangeness and otherness that the West has refused to acknowledge and of which it has remained largely ignorant.

The present study offers a postcolonial reading of children's literature in the Philippines in the context of succeeding waves of Spanish and American colonization. In making close-readings of selected works, I analyze the dynamic between metropolitan Manila and provincial Bicol, in the effort to reconfigure operative binaries of city and country still shaping the economic, historical and cultural realities in everyday Filipino/a life. Philippine children's literature remains "Manila-centric"—not only because the capital city retains the monopoly of cultural production nationally, but because it perpetuates the legacy of colonialism in language and educational policy required by elites in the center. By contrast, Bicol represents the power, voice, and authority of the once-marginalized periphery, whereby an alternative to Manila in children's literary discourse has emerged, born out of (as I argue here) a specifically and culturally situated local discourse: that of the *bukid* or mountain. *Bukid* is the Bicol term for the rice field, mountain, and volcano. The iconic mountain-volcano of our region, the Mayon Volcano, represents the power of *bukid* now appearing on the horizon of the metropolitan imaginary. The mountain is speaking back.

Historically, *bukid* has served as a shelter for the marginalized. It also has provided refuge for revolutionaries rebelling against the colonizers based in the center. As an as-yet under-theorized voice linking local landscape to history, the voice of *bukid* is crucial to the study of Filipino/a children's literature, because its very solidity and monumentality are integral to Filipino/a consciousness everywhere. (Every region has its own mountain.) The voice of the *bukid* not only challenges the binarism between the city and the country, but makes a critique of the current centralized system of production impoverishing the regional capacity for children's literature in the Philippines. My personal experience as a Filipina-Chinese woman writing on behalf of our children remains connected to these marginalized spaces seemingly so distant from the metropolitan imagination. According to Gloria Anzaldúa, "The work of the *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images of her work how duality is transcended" (80).

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