

The Poetics of Power in Langeston Hughes's selected poems A Foucauldian Reading

شعرية القوة في قصائد لانغستون هيوز المختارة
قراءة فوكوية

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Abstract

This paper investigates the use of power in Langeston Hughes's selected poems using the American Structures of Power. This study aims to inspect and analyses the selected text from the perspective of a Foucauldian concept of power and knowledge relationships that exist in the outcomes of these power relationships. Langeston Hughes, in his selected poems, discusses the policies and the politician's role.

The study analyses power structures in American society and their depiction in Langeston Hughes' poetry. It aims to shed light on the function of power in literature and how civilization has influenced it. The paper also touches upon cultural identity. The discussion highlights the complexity of power and its constant interplay with other forces, challenging simplistic notions of cultural purity and societal development. Overall, the paper thoroughly examines power structures in Afro-American literature and society.

Keywords : American Structures of Power, "Theme for English B," "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", civilization, Hybridity, "I, Too", cultural identity



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ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة موضوع القوة وتوظيفها من قبل الشاعر الافريقي الامريكي لانكستن هيوز في قصائده المختارة التي تصور تراكيب القوة الامريكية. تهدف الدراسة التفحص وتحليل النصوص المختارة في ضوء مفهوم ميشيل فوكو وعلاقة القوة بالمعرفة.

كذلك يجسد البحث الجانب الاجتماعي لتراكيب القوة في المجتمع الامريكي كما يسلط الضوء على وضيفة القوة بالأدب وتأثيرها على الحضارة والهوية الثقافية. كما تتطرق الدراسة الى تعقيدات القوة وتدخلها الثابت مع القوى الأخرى وتأثيراتها في الأدب والمجتمع الافريقي الامريكي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تراكيب القوى الأمريكية، "فكرة الانجليزي درجة ثانية"، "يتحدث السود عن الانهار"، "انا ايضا"، الحالة الهجينة، الهوية الثقافية.

Introduction

French postmodernist Michel Foucault delivers important contributions towards reshaping power theory through his concepts of dispersed power across all systems which exists through discourse and knowledge Delivery of truth (Foucault 1991; Rabinow 1991). Power operates at a unique level for Foucault because it represents the fundamental essence which defines human existence. "His work marks a radical departure from previous modes of conceiving power and cannot be easily integrated with previous ideas, as power is diffused rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them" (Gaventa, 2003, p. 1).

According to Domhoff & Dye (1987, p.9) "Structure of Power" identifies "the way power and authority are related among people within groups such as a government, nation, institution, organization, or society." America has been established as a nation with well-defined territorial limits and distinctive landscape features and a prolonged and debated historical timeline together with position in social political and economic statistics between countries. Characterization of American people proves much harder than other nationalities. Many American residents who reside in the country do not identify with American nationality because they lack long-time roots and ancestral lineage. Your nationality develops through your allegiance toward cultural groups. Different groups hold different views about nationality because they either adopt the residential choice or prefer sports team approach or consider defense of their chosen identity as the primary factor. Storry

et al., in 1997, explained that American nationalism has become a weak force in the United States according to their investigation (p. 3).

A struggle is required to hold power, Foucault views power relations as constantly taking place within multiple contexts. To use Foucault's terminology, is to establish a binary connection between powers, which causes it to have no other object or substance but the force itself. This is because the balance of power is inherently a "power relationship." According to Cremonesi et al., 2016, p. 28, power as a concept represents any kind of force in its definition (p.28). According to Foucault power emerges through continuous power struggles. According to Foucault power needs to operate as multiple entities in all instances of distribution. For Foucault the concept of power remains linked to its counterpart thus unfolding only through force without an external matter or substance. Power operates exactly this way according to this description. Power relationships automatically exist when two parties maintain equilibrium between themselves. The expression "power" applies to any sort of force and no other form. According to Foucault power and knowledge are necessarily connected through undisclosed means because power techniques predominantly depend on existing knowledge (McHoul & Grace, 2015, p. 28).

The statement of the problem in this study is to analyze the use of American structures of power in the works of Langston Hughes and to explore how civilization influences literature in relation to the concept of power. The study aims to provide insight into the role of power in literature and how it is influenced by civilization.

The study aims to examine and analyze the use of power in Langston Hughes' works from the perspective of a Foucauldian concept of power and knowledge relationships to gain insight into the relationship between power and knowledge in the American structures of power as depicted in Langston Hughes' poetry and how it affects policies and politicians. Ultimately, the study provides a deep analysis of power structures in American society and their portrayal in Langston Hughes.

The American Structures of Power

Mitchel Foucault developed different perspectives on power during his institutional research phase (Madness and Civilization, The Birth of the Clinic, Discipline and Punish) and his later studies on sexuality and governmentality. Foucault presents in his initial works that institutions generate power rather than the personnel who operate these institutions. Foucault examines in his books how modern disciplinary systems create power structures that remove individuality from authority making it appear throughout institutions such as prisons and schools and factories. Foucault uses the Panopticon as his foundational model to explain how other institutions operate because "it automatizes and disindividuates power." The power principle emerges from a structured arrangement of bodies with surfaces and lights and gazes that creates automatic mechanisms to capture individuals within their relationships. (Felluga, 2015, p. 238)

The power deindividuation process creates an illusion that power exists within the machine itself rather than within the operator. After

finishing Foucault's "Discipline and Punish" one develops a paranoid sense of helplessness against this effective yet dispersed social control system. Foucault explains through his later writings that power exists within individual people even when they undergo surveillance or receive punishment (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014, p. 28). In his later writings Foucault adopts the concept of "government" to explain how power functions (p. 28).

Enslavement and indenture are a critical part of the process of developing American society and policy; however, they have a negative impact not only on the power structure of America, but also on the political role of the country. Immigration is an essential part of the process and has been a significant contributor to the development of each of these features of American life. In addition, new immigrant groups and bodies of cultural literature appeared simultaneously throughout this time period. It's impossible to refer to this occurrence as "modern immigration," since individuals have been moving for such a significant amount of time, that is impossible to classify this phenomenon as "new immigration"(Owusu, 2003, p. 11).

Contemporary American culture is a mixture of all the historical cultures that people are impacted by, yet some figures, symbols, and story lines have a significant powerful effect. The range of ideas, traditions, loyalties, and dialects that may be found across America are enormous. Regional and local identities in America are highly powerful.

Foucault rejects the notion that power exists as a direct manifestation of dominant groups who use episodic coercion but rather

interprets it as present throughout society. According to Foucault power exists throughout society because it originates from every aspect of social life thus it cannot be considered either an agency or a structure (Sargiacomo, 2009,). This power system functions as a “metapower” alongside being referred to as a “regime of truth” which spreads throughout society through continuous construction and modification. According to Foucault power functions as knowledge because it emerges from accepted scientific understanding and established truths.

Truth emerges exclusively through various forms of societal constraints which produce it as a worldly phenomenon. The system produces consistent power effects through its operation. Each society maintains its own "regime of truth" which includes specific "general politics" of truth through accepted true statements and their verification methods and truth-seeking procedures and truth-sanctioning mechanisms and truth-identifying instances and truth-recognizing authorities (Foucault & Rabinow, 1997).

Foucault stands apart from most power theorists because he acknowledges that power serves constructive purposes in society while others view it as a force that compels people to act against their will (Gaventa, 2003, p. 2). Foucault argues that power should not be described through negative terminology, because it performs actions such as exclusion, repression, censorship, abstraction, masking and concealing. Power functions as a creator because it establishes reality while defining domains of objects and truth rituals. According to Foucault (1991, p.194) “The individual and the knowledge that may be gained from him belong to this production.”

Power is also a major source of social discipline and conformity. In shifting attention away from the “sovereign” and “episodic” exercise of power, traditionally centred in feudal states to coerce their subjects, Foucault identifies a modern disciplinary power system within the administrative structures and social services which emerged during 18th-century Europe including prisons schools and mental hospitals. People learned to self-discipline through surveillance-based assessment systems which eliminated the need for force or violence (Sargiacomo, 2009).

Foucault examined psychology, medicine and criminology as bodies of knowledge which developed norms and deviance through their construction. Bio-power according to Foucault describes the process of controlling physical bodies to create miniature versions of social control systems that operate across larger populations. The discursive practice which Foucault describes remains dynamic even though the disciplinary and bio-power terms establish norms and deviance categories (Foucault, 1991). Foucault functions as a social and political critic who identifies a specific social space where he calls it the “organic intellectual.” Hayward expresses his thoughts about human ability to detect and oppose social limitations and transcending norms in his work. He berates us because people should act in accordance with their stated beliefs. He viewed this aspect as the fundamental component throughout the entire process. The search for absolute truth should be avoided because truth exists as a social construct of power which aims to remove truth from contemporary hegemonic structures. The act of speaking serves as a power domain

because it enables people to resist authority through 'evading, subverting or challenging' power strategies (John, 2001).

By transmitting and producing power, discourse also reinforces it, but also unearths it and destabilizes it (Foucault, 1991, p. 100); this power cube concept doesn't fit very well with Foucauldian ideas of power but it offers the possibility to 'deconstruction and strategic action' (Foucault, 2007, p. 289) at the level of interpreting the psychological and cultural meanings of 'invisible power' and 'hegemony' as a lens to carry on with the whole. The Foucault's approach has been widely employed to challenge and demystify the development paradigms and discourse in general with locus on how power is attached to development discourses.

According to Bhabha's terms that define cultural interactions, emerge through performative actions regardless of whether these interactions are hostile or friendly. The interpretation of difference should avoid quick assumptions about predetermined ethnic or cultural traits found in traditional tablets. The minority perspective views difference as a dynamic process of social negotiation, which seeks to validate newly formed cultural combinations that appear during times of historical change. The right to signify from marginalized positions does not require traditional practices to persist but draws its power from the ability to reestablish tradition through the uncertain and conflicting experiences of minority communities.

Homi Bhabha developed Hybridity as a concept which describes how new transcultural forms emerge from colonial contact zones.

Postcolonial theory features the term "hybridity" as its most debated vocabulary while reaching extensive usage. A new species emerges when two distinct species mate to produce offspring which becomes known as a hybrid species. Hybridization exists in various forms which include cultural, political, racial and linguistic manifestations. In linguistics the theory of pidgin and creole languages demonstrates the underlying concept introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin through his linguistic and cultural theories of multivocal language power and story transformation. Bakhtin employs the term to describe how multivocal language situations possess transformative power which extends to multivocal narratives. Bakhtin developed the carnivalesque concept during the Middle Ages to describe how "a boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of mediaeval ecclesiastical and feudal culture" while simultaneously representing the social phenomenon of polyphony of voices. During the Middle Ages humorous manifestations created an endless world which stood in opposition to the official and serious nature of mediaeval ecclesiastical and feudal culture (Bhabha, 2006, pp. 155–157).

Bhabha together with Hall actively endorse the "hybridity" concept to understand human identity. The dominant concept during this era deeply embedded itself in scientific principles. The prevailing scientific ideas establish Africans Asians and other ethnic minorities as "inferior to white people" in most instances. The growing acceptance of this ideology brought forth the fear that mixed identities would eliminate the European racial identity.

Hybrid identities receive less social status than minority group affiliations which can be proven through membership of black, Asian, Pacific Islander and related communities. Bhabha demonstrates that cultural heritage remains active in the current moment which compels us to rethink our understanding of cultural interactions (Sievers & Vlasta, 2018, p. 98).

Through Bhabha's analysis of colonial hybridity the balance of power shifted because it created uncertainty and doubt among dominant colonial officers. Bhabha illustrates his point by providing an example of how cohesive groups in society have used their group identities to assert their superiority over other groups. He then suggests that this concept of identity is not true since it is insensitive to the understanding of subject positions. In other words, Bhabha suggests that the concept of identity should be extended beyond the singularities of individual ownership to include the processes that result in distinctions in culture. In a similar vein, if two different groups were to come into conflict with one another on account of the cultural differences that exist between them, the identity gap that exists between the two distinct groups would need to be presumed to be the root cause of the conflict. (Huddart, 2006, p. 4)

Power and Hybridity

The work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose study of colonizer-colonized interactions emphasises their interdependence and the reciprocal formation of their subjectivities, is the most recent connection that has been made between the word “hybridity” and his

body of work. According to Bhabha, every cultural statement and system is built in a place that he refers to as the “Third Space of Enunciation.” According to Bhabha, the idea that certain cultures have more “purity” than others is an unsustainable one since cultural identity is always formed in a context that is troubled with contradiction and ambivalence. According to him, acknowledging this ambiguous space of cultural identity may assist us in overcoming the exoticism of cultural variety in favour of acknowledging an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may function (Ahmed, 2022, p. 106).

The impression that theories that emphasize mutuality inevitably minimize compositionality and promote continuous post-colonial reliance is what gives rise to the critique that was just made about the phrase that is discussed above. The hybridity concept itself fails to prove that mutual exchange invalidates imperial hierarchy or establishes equal trade relations. The evidence presented in hybridity fails to support these two claims (Kraidy, 2006, pp. 1–2).

American society underwent a major population transformation during the past fifty years. The demographic changes in America stem from immigration patterns. The combination of decolonization and American labor shortages functioned as the main drivers behind the abrupt start of colonial immigration. The quick onset of colonial immigration can be attributed mainly to this factor. The systems studied by Gardiner et al. (2000, p. 187) cover multiple academic fields from sociology to government and economics to business among others. A power structure within a hierarchical organization that

subordinates all units to higher entities can be designed formally to achieve goals like justice and efficiency.

The organization implements this structure to achieve maximum effectiveness. A power structure can also consist of informal positions which resemble dominance hierarchies. Social group members establish ranking systems through aggressive conduct to determine their positions within the hierarchy. Members within this power structure fight to reach positions that are higher in rank. A dominance hierarchy functions as an example of this hierarchical structure. A society built on equality stands in complete opposition to cultural systems that promote dominance (Calhoun et al., 1990, p. 495).

The study of politics contains power as its central element which appears throughout all disciplines within political science. Power structures simplify the process of making adjustments or adaptations. The impact of power and its deployment methods in human society stands as the central focus of any historical analysis of political violence or domestic or international war or insurrections or coups or rebellions or conquest or pillage or siege or defence or military or paramilitary operations during the past two thousand years. The analysis of political violence alongside domestic and international war alongside insurrections and coups and rebellions and conquest and pillage and siege and defence and military operations demonstrates how power structure's function (Joël Krieger et al., 2001, p. 674).

A particular perspective suggests that the traditional working class now exists in multiple distinct segments while the boundaries between working class and white-collar "middle class" have faded into

obscurity. The distinction between traditional working class and white-collar middle-class workers has faded into obscurity (Goldthorpe & Lockwood, 1961, p. 133).

One other critical aspect of the reorganization of the power structures It is possible that the power structures in American culture will go through significant shifts, as a consequence of the impact that immigration has had on culture. This is something that is quite plausible. This is due to the fact that immigration has had an impact on culture. It is far more frequent for a person's culture to bring people together than it is for it to build a gulf between them. "It is possible for a government that is competent and educated to use it as a defence against the negativity that is connected with disparities among ethnic groups" (Paleri, 2022, p. 822).

Power In Langston Hughes' Poetry

Hughes' poems present his individual viewpoints alongside his aspirations, dreams and ambitions. Real life influences authors to create diverse poems which result from their deep connection to reality. The strong impact of real life manifests clearly throughout the poems of Hughes. The environment we live in together with our personal life experiences form the basis of our individual identity. Human surroundings create lasting effects on individual development which apply to every person.

The writing process of authors depends on both their personal experiences and their historical context regardless of whether they

address themselves directly in their work. The writer's curricular content selection and personal identity traits consisting of gender background ethnicity and socio-economic standing deeply influence their literary creations between works. The level of our understanding about an author enables us to discern the fundamental ideas which permeate his complete literary body. Knowledge about an author provides readers with the capability to reach a more profound understanding of their work. The life story of Langston Hughes contains poems from multiple cultural backgrounds while his multicultural background and global travels with different power systems influenced his writing style according to Rampersad (2003).

Applying Michel Foucault's concept of power to Langston Hughes's poetry will involve five major perspectives that account for the way how power dynamics shape identity, resistance, and oppression in his work. Foucault viewed power not as a fixed entity but as a network of relationships that operate through institutions, discourse, and everyday practices. This lens is particularly useful when examining Hughes's poetry, which often explores race, class, and societal hierarchies in America. Here's how Foucault's theories can intersect with Hughes's poetry:

Power and Discourse

Foucault's Perspective: Power is enacted through discourse, which shapes what is considered truth and normality. Through his major poetry: Hughes critiques dominant discourses about race and identity, as seen in poems like "Theme for English B." The poem explores how

identity is shaped by societal expectations and interrogates the assumptions underlying the "truths" about race. Hughes uses the logic of debate to prove the validity of his speech, as he recognizes the dominant narrative of the school, telling them the colour is not a measure for the human value and appreciation.

I wonder if it's that simple?
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.
I am the only colored student in my class. (lines vi-x)

Hughes goes on accounting for human free will and choice in life and that they cannot be framed according to a limited sectarian attitude. So, the whole spectrum of human activity is projected fairly throughout this poem. Hughes employs a student to raise the voice of justice and make it heard by the white teacher. Furthermore, the human psychology cannot be fathomed by the others who are mostly indifferent to the voice of human nature.

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me xvi
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who? (lines xvi -xx)

So, Hughes shows the aspect of hybridity, that the student her in the poem reflects the third space that enfolds the collective cultures of both the African and the American, he develops his personal identity in the light of his experiences. The mutual and reciprocal association

between the individual and the locality should be considered for he is rendered part of this place and its society.

Surveillance and Control

Foucault's Perspective: Institutions enforce control through surveillance, creating self-regulation among the oppressed. Hughes's Poetry: In "I, Too," Hughes reflects on the gaze of white America and the imposed invisibility of Black individuals. The poem resists the controlling power by asserting the speaker's right to visibility and equality. In his poem "I, Too", Hughes celebrates his humanistic aspects as an American citizen who witnesses the marginalization process of the society. Being of African origin, Hughes affirms the equality of human nature disregarding the external and dominant narrative of ethnicity and colour in the country. Moreover, he affirms the emotional association that the individual develops in any locality which registers its impact in the human consciousness. Through his poetry the poet fights against surveillance and control which the marginalized African-American citizens face to deliver a moral and universal message to both the world and the dominant class about black humanity and their love for America and their celebration of national identity despite their exclusion and strange treatment. Thus, he says:

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh, And eat well,
And grow strong. (lines i -vi)

Hughes moves on to foreshadow the future of his race as he elaborates on their freedom and self-esteem as it is due to a free man. They will be treated in honorable way not as slaves or lower creatures, and no one will dare to underestimate their values.

Tomorrow, I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then. Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—
I, too, am America. (lines xii - xx)

So, the black skin will no longer be treated indifferently by the white, who will certainly realize the true value of human beings. The poet hoists the American banner high to withstand all the negative allegations of their inferiority and disqualification of citizenship. Hence, through literature the poet maps his history and future as he is reshaping the overall image of America.

Resistance to Power

Foucault's Perspective: Power is not absolute; resistance is always present within power dynamics. Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" embodies resistance by celebrating Black identity and questioning systemic oppression. Hughes uses poetry as a counter-discourse to challenge dominant narratives. Langston Hughes suggested in his 1926 essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," the power and creativity of black art would be found within a celebration and understanding of the culture of "black common

people.... They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself" (Marable, 2003 308).

Biopower and the Body

Foucault's Perspective: Biopower refers to the regulation of populations and the control over bodies. Hughes's Poem like "Theme for English B." critiques the systemic forces that dehumanize and marginalize Black bodies, reflecting on how institutions exert power over marginalized communities. In "Theme for English B," Hughes focuses on the governmentality of the establishments, using the school as significant powers in shaping the cultural and collective consciousness for society.

I guess being colored doesn't make me not like
the same things other folks like who are other races.
So will my page be colored that I write?
Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white—
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American. (Lines xxv-xxxiv)

The student in this poem encounters a cultural and moral dilemma reflected by educational system with all its cultural establishments and how they framed the black people within limited boundaries to underestimate their true potential power and aesthetic contribution to

American heritage. The poet emphasized the interdisciplinary and the cultural hybridity that formulates the American Identity. The collective collaboration of various individuals will foster and polish the unique Identity with its powerful cultural diversity.

Knowledge and Power

Foucault's Perspective: Power produces knowledge, which in turn reinforces power. In "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Hughes critiques how power structures define concepts like freedom and justice, asserting the necessity for re-imagining these ideas from the perspective of the oppressed.

By applying Foucault's theories, we can see how Hughes's poetry not only critiques the structures of power but also reclaims agency and voice for the marginalized, creating a space for resistance and empowerment. So, through this poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," he shows in powerful manner the profound knowledge and ancient civilization of the African and he uses it as a defense to show the marginalizer that the black African have their deeply rooted and established identity and self-awareness are older than the American foundation. The poet lists a group of rivers in Africa, Asia and America to empower his stance that his knowledge about rivers is deeply engrossed in his soul. He used the metaphor as he compares his soul with rivers to show his significant value:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of
human blood in
human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi ... (Lines ii - xi)

The poet uses the cultural aspect to refute the white man's allegations about the inferiority of the black people, for they are found earlier before the existence of the new world. They should be given the due respect and treated in just and fair way for they constitute together with the whits the American texture.



Conclusions

This study provides a deep analysis of power structures in American society and their depiction in Langston Hughes' selected poems. The study provides insight into the role of power in literature and how it is influenced by civilization. The document delves into Foucault's theory of power, particularly the idea that power is in constant struggle and constantly connected to another force. The use of power in Hughes's poems is analyzed according to Foucauldian perspective, examining the relationship between power and knowledge and how it affects policies and politicians. The poetic discourse reflects the significant impact of art on society and its governmentality. Overall, this study displays a comprehensive examination of American structures of power and their relationship to literature. Hughes establishes his cultural identity through fusion with the societal structure and making himself visible through his poetry and cultural responses.



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