EMOTIONAL ORIENTALISMS: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF EMOTIONS IN HIV AND AIDS DEVELOPMENT WORK IN PNG

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Abstract

This thesis is a call for greater reflexivity on the role of emotions in development. It argues that emotions are integral in both reproductions of Orientalisms and in producing resistances to Orientalisms. The framework for this research is a combination of Postcolonial Studies and Emotional Geographies, and a case study of HIV and AIDS development work in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The methods used are several forms of critical discourse analysis applied to: mainstream development research; development policy (at several levels); in-country experience; and the middle ground between policy and policy enactment. The data sources were: 30 mainstream HIV and AIDS development research articles; 4 policy documents; 20 in depth interviews; and a free writing journal documenting 3 months of participant observations in a PNG HIV and AIDS development organisation. Results reveal evidence of emotions, of attempts to avoid unpleasant emotions, and of attempts to elicit emotions in others in all aspects of the development process. In the case of PNG HIV and AIDS Development work, it seems that emotions, or the attempts to influence emotions, have the potential to promote or resist Orientalisms. Of particular note are feelings of uncertainty, confusion and disorientation. If one is reflexive, these emotions may be powerful in generating resistance to Orientalisms, but without reflexivity they can reproduce them in powerful ways. I conclude this thesis by claiming that a reflexive understanding of the roles of emotions can uncover covert and persistent forms of Orientalisms in development work. Emotional reflexivity can also help find new ways of thinking and being that can move the ‘West’ beyond Orientalisms. In particular, I call for more reflexive ways of embracing and accepting the uncertainty that is inherent in the development process.