



Colonialism and Anticolonialism in English Fiction: A Study of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and H. G. Wells' *The Country of the Blind*

Sabah Salim Jabbar

University of Baghdad, College of Languages, Department of
English Language, Iraq, Baghdad

sabahjabar@colang.uobaghdad.edu.iq

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3626-3617>

الاستعمار ومناهضته في الأدب القصصي الإنجليزي: دراسة في رواية دانيال ديفو

(روبنسون كروزو) وقصة هيربرت جورج ويلز (بلد العميان)

صباح سالم جبار

Abstract

Colonialism as a movement was very popular in Europe more than two centuries before. It aimed at controlling and exploiting several countries in Africa and Asia in addition to imposing their power and control on uninhabited islands. It received adherence and criticism as well. There also appeared activists and nations who stood against it and its practices. English novels discussed this notion greatly by pointing out the bad practices of the colonizers and how the colonized received them. This paper explores two narrative fictions that tackle the different aspects of the term. While Defoe, in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), shows a colonial European figure who expresses his superiority, Wells, in "The Country of the Blind" (1904), deconstructs the notions of colonialism and superiority and reveals the destructive consequences of imperialist attitudes. Simultaneously, the two narratives expose the problems of otherness and how to deal with it.

Keywords: anti-colonialism, colonialism, Daniel Defoe, Europe, H. G. Wells, other, Robinson Crusoe, The Country of the Blind, novel,

الملخص

كان الاستعمار حركة شائعة في أوروبا قبل أكثر من قرنين من الزمن. ويهدف إلى السيطرة على العديد من البلدان واستغلالها في إفريقيا وآسيا بالإضافة إلى فرض هيمنتهم وقوتهم على الجزر غير المأهولة بالسكان. وتلقى الاستعمار تأييداً مثلما تلقى انتقاداً أيضاً. وظهر العديد من الناشطين والبلدان الذين وقفوا بالصد منه ومن ممارساته. وكان للأدب قصة كبيرة في الترويج للاستعمار أو انتقاده. فكانت الرواية الإنجليزية من بين الصنوف الأدبية التي ناقشت هذا المفهوم بشكل كبير عبر تشخيص الممارسات السيئة للمستعمرين وكيف استقبلتهم الشعوب التي كانت ضحية لها وتسمى بالشعوب الخاضعة للاستعمار. ويدرس هذا البحث عمليين سرديين يتناولان مفهومين مختلفين لهذا المصطلح. ففي الوقت الذي أظهر فيه الروائي الإنجليزي دانيال ديفو في روايته روبنسون كروزو (١٩١٧) شخصية المستعمر الأوروبي الذي يعبر عن علو كعبه، نرى أن ويلز في قصته الطويلة بلد العميان (١٩٠٤) يحطم مفاهيم حركة الاستعمار وعلو الكعب لها ويكشف العواقب الهدامة لمواقف الإمبريالية. وفي الوقت ذاته، فإن العملين السريديين يفضحان مشاكل التعامل مع الآخر وكيفية التعامل معه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مناهضة الاستعمار، الاستعمار، دانيال ديفو، اتش. ج. ويلز، الآخر، روبنسون كروزو، بلد العميان، الرواية

1. Introduction

During the late 19th century, European empires were engaged in a further expansion of colonialism, annexing or establishing control over vast territories in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. In most cases, the takeover was justified with the notion of a civilizing mission, a duty to introduce modern Western culture, that is, social,

political and economic systems, philosophy or religion, to “backward” nations. Imperial subjugation was often accompanied by the undermining or eradication of indigenous cultures, histories, and identities. Although colonialism as a movement appeared during the 19th century, it had its roots centuries before. Some writers associated the movement with imperialism as if they were two faces for the same coin. According to Doyle (1986), imperialism represents a power that imposes its domination on other nations economically, culturally, and socially. It is a way of expansion of this power or state. Edward Said (1994) attributed the rise of the word colonialism and its motives to that of imperialism. The difference between colonialism and imperialism is that the former does not only mean to expand power but also to live, settle, and rule (Jech, 2023). Tyson (2015) claims that colonialism had been in practice between “the late fifteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, through the direct, overt administration of governors and educators from the colonizing country” (425). As a response, the late 19th century saw the emergence of anticolonial thought and activism, of intellectual and political movements countering attempts at imperial domination. Raenee & Mahesh Kumar (2013) defined anticolonialism “as the politics or an ideology aimed at ending European colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth century in Asian and African countries” (21). Although it started in India in 1870s, the movement became popular during the 20th century after the end of World War II. Some colonized nations sought independence especially after the war that damaged and weakened the colonial powers. Despite their various goals and means, most anticolonial movements shared a desire to reconstruct or give new meaning to pre-colonial cultural or historical narratives, ways of life, and self-perceptions. The significance of these questions was accentuated by the rise of colonialism, given the unprecedented reconfiguration of cultural, economic, and political horizons globally (Munslow Ong, 2019). Part of the practices of colonial power is how to deal with the colonized who portrayed as savages and indigenous. These practices paved the way for writers and thinkers to either adhere them or stood against them. Basma Harbi (2017) argues that “the colonial writers describe the colonized people in a way that establishes a difference from the assumed center of the Western culture” (235). Tyson (2015) argues that some literary works “reinforce colonialist ideology through positive portrayals of the colonizers, negative portrayals of the colonized, or the uncritical representation of the benefits of colonialism for the colonized” (444). On the contrary, there are other works that “resist colonialist ideology by depicting the misdeeds of the colonizers, the suffering of the colonized, or the detrimental effects of colonialism on the colonized” (Tyson, 2015, 444).

2. Colonialism in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe elucidates an implicit discourse on colonialism, addressing themes such as race, the formation of power identities, and related issues from a colonial perspective. Wayne (2018) cited Edward Said's perspective on Defoe's novel, characterizing it as a narrative illustrating how a European establishes a dominion on a remote, non-European island. The novel illustrates a European man's gradual acquisition of dominion over an expansive, perilous landscape. The story ultimately serves as a mirror of 18th-century European thought, exposing the inconsistencies inherent in colonial endeavors where imperial aims, and acknowledgment of shared humanity exist in tension (Zannat, 2023). The main character represents a colonial archetype as he attempts to create a new colony, culture, and community on an isolated island far away from his native home. By creating a character who seizes an island and establishes his own colony, Defoe explicitly satirizes colonialism. The relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, as well as the master-slave relationship, are clear illustrations of colonialism as shown in *Robinson Crusoe*.

The novel, then, allows readers to assess the novel's cultural significance by highlighting the dangers of empire, fanaticism, and individualism. At the heart of Defoe's novel is a compelling case for a colonialist ethnocentrism. Crusoe's voyage and shipwreck place him upon an "ideal" island, seemingly untouched by European incursions. Yet even in solitude, Crusoe harbors imperial desires, as his actions demonstrate by turning the island into a plantation, ignoring its tenanted state. Beneath the postures of self-sufficiency is a man forever plagued by anxiety. He seeks to control the land and its inhabitants. Defoe's novel continues to address the concerns of colonialism and the non-European “Other.” It serves both liberating and subjugating visions for new peoples. Crusoe's colonial endeavor reveals the complexities of modernity: the contradiction of an age suffused with freedom yet seeking to bind the world in chains (G Macy, 2011).

Robinson Crusoe is a prime example of the imperialist mindset of a European person hoping to have a commanding authority to rule or dominate others: “It came now very warmly upon my Thoughts, and indeed, quite powerfully, that now was the Time to get me a Servant,” Crusoe says, internally recognizing

his need for a servant, so highlighting the master-slave dynamic underlying colonial relationships. Hence, Friday is symbolically likened to the “other” or “colonized,” whereas Crusoe symbolizes the “colonizer.” Upon observing the footprint of another man, Crusoe articulates his anxieties and interest. Crusoe “was exceedingly surprised with the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the shore...I slept non that Night; ... but I was so ashamed with my own frightful Ideas of the Thing, that I form'd nothing but gloomy Imaginations to myself” (153-154).

Crusoe is depicted as a hero who rescues Friday, the indigenous inhabitant of the island. After rescuing him from cannibals, Crusoe names this inhabitant “Friday”. Furthermore, Crusoe advocates for English as the principal language of instruction and education on the island, believing that the efficient use of language has a very great power. The imposition of language and civilized society by colonists on other societies is a crucial element illustrated when Crusoe instructs Friday in the English language. Imposing the language, culture, and religion of the colonizers upon the colonized can swiftly diminish their sense of individuality through an excessive perception of superiority (Zannat, 2023). Frantz Fanon (1967) asserts in *Black Skin White Masks* that the consciousness of the colonized is influenced by the “economic power” and language of the colonizer.

While Crusoe saves Friday from the cannibals, Hulme (1999) contends that “Defoe has Friday offer lifetime subjugation” (116). According to Lois Tyson (2015), the conviction of the colonizers—that they are better than the colonized people—drives their continuous sense of superiority. Their predecessors were probably more culturally sophisticated than others, which made them classify the indigenous people as savages and uncivilized (416). In this regard, Crusoe orders Friday to be referred to as “Master” and to teach him English terminology so that Friday can become a civilized Christian servant. He tells him just in terms that support the master-slave dynamic and encourage dependency rather than dissent. When Friday addresses him as “Master,” he embraces his position as a colonial icon and symbol of racial slavery. Though they occupy same roles, white men are always shown as the “Governor,” while others—especially black men—are seen as subordinates (Saeed, 2013).

Crusoe's transformation from “survivor” to “master” exemplifies a power dynamic where one is deemed “superior” and the other “inferior.” This illustrates the complete ethos of colonial ties between Crusoe and Friday. Their Master-Slave relationship starkly illustrates the disparity between civilized and uncivilized nations. Crusoe, as a cultured Englishman, considers Friday's cannibalistic conduct abhorrent.

Despite the cannibals’ different, terrifying, and bizarre appearance, Crusoe recognizes that there is no reason to fear them, as Friday has already proven himself to be a loyal, obedient, and genuine “Servant”. Crusoe immediately observed that he possesses physical superiority over the “ugly skin” native and significantly differentiates from this cannibal due to his fair complexion. Friday, meanwhile, epitomizes the quintessential “loyal European-style servant” due to his remarkable ferocity, which Crusoe employs to differentiate him from the indigenous cannibals (Saeed, 2013).

At last, he lays his Head flat upon the Ground, close to my Foot, and sets my other Foot upon his head, as he had done before; after this, made all the Signs to me of Subjection, Servitude, and Submission imaginable, to let me know, how he would serve me as long as he liv'd... (206).

This statement clearly indicates that Friday is satisfied with his new identity. Crusoe's intangible powers subtly influenced Friday's perceptions and thoughts to instill covert beliefs without employing physical force.

Following his instruction in language, and due to depicting him as a “blinded ignorant pagan,” Crusoe endeavored to redeem Friday's “savage soul” by imparting the tenets of religion and Christian faith. Crusoe imposed his culture on Friday in an attempt to convert him into a cultured European akin to himself (Han, 2017). Providing Friday with facts about religion has a lasting influence on him. His solitary desire for him was:

The Soul of a Poor Savage, and bring him to the True Knowledge of Religion and Christian Doctrine, that he might know Jesus Christ, to know Whom is Eternal Life. I say that while I thought about all of these things, a secret joy permeated every part of my soul, and I frequently thanked God for bringing me to this location. (220)

This process of converting Friday from ignorance to knowledge is a recognized method of subjugating others. European scholars articulate the cultural and political ramifications on subjugated societies. Friday

epitomizes "the white man's burden," reflecting Europeans' conviction that they possess the authority to transform "the uncivilized savages" into "the civilized savages" (Saeed, 2013). Moreover, Crusoe enhances the behavior of Friday, his religious beliefs, his clothes, and his culture. By instructing Friday to consume animal flesh instead of that of human, Crusoe progressively alters Friday's dietary preferences and assimilates him into humanity.

3. Colonialism and Anticolonialism in H. G. Wells' "The Country of the Blind"

As an eminent English social commentator and novelist, Herbert George Wells (1866–1946) was the most important figure who developed the science fiction genre and wrote about various literary works analyzing society concerns and human experience. Wells's particular background as a middle-class person with a formal education in science and journalism offered him a different vision on the future, which he skillfully portrayed in his writing (Prišć, 2018). Along with his perceptive sociological studies, including "The Open Conspiracy" (1928) and "The Rights of Man" (1940), he is most remembered for his pioneering contribution to science fiction with works like "The Time Machine" (1895), "The Invisible Man" (1897), and "The War of the Worlds" (1897).

Wells' *The Country of the Blind* can be interpreted from colonial and anticolonial perspectives. Like Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Wells' story deals with an outsider who finds himself either in an island alone or in a valley where he seeks for domination. Alex Boulton (1995) argues that such stories were dominant in the "European literary tradition" (5).

In addition of being a novelist, H.G. Wells was a reformer with strong social and political sensible. Though his books and stories dominated his reputation, his political and social activity was equally well-known. Among the several reform groups of his day, including socialism, liberalism, and pacifism, he was closely involved with or linked to many. Some of these he joined fervently; others he came to see as passing fads to be thrown aside. Wells was also famous for his opposition to imperialism (Partington, 2008). Though he was known for his attribution in the politics of big and sweeping change, he often found the enclaves and squabbles of party politics trivial and ridiculous, even if he believed in their politics. Deeply and passionately engaged in the fate of mankind and the earth, he most fervently believed in education, reason, and progress (Vinson, 2011). Wells was a man steeped in the future of mankind and of society. His books and stories were harsh indictments of capitalism, imperialism, and the meaner social consequences of the Industrial Revolution and associated urban expansion.

From this political perspective, Wells' "The Country of the Blind" can be regarded as an anti-colonial narrative that opposes the detrimental practices of imperialism and colonialism. Examining the problems of cultural superiority, otherness, and significant effects of imperialist ideas, H.G. Wells' story offers a strong critique of colonialism. Situated amid a community of blind people in a remote valley, the story questions the underlying presumptions of ethnic and cultural superiority usually connected with colonial activities. The protagonist, Nuñez, arrives at this unique society that believes that his sight gives him an intrinsic advantage, personifying the colonial mentality that often considers that foreign civilizations are lower and need lighting (Sankar, 2024).

The obvious contrast between the sightful and the blind defines Wells' story in its core. Reaching the namesake nation with a negative attitude towards the people, whom he first regards as "wild creatures without a concept of progress" (Wells, 1904). Nuñez represents Western imperialism. His contempt is reminiscent of what the colonial powers said—that non-Western nations are inferior and that their culture is undeveloped. This perception reflects the feelings expressed by Whittle (2015), who points out the condescending attitude of the colonizers towards colonized persons, seeing them through the lower and depravity lens. Yet Nuñez finds his cultural richness and sophistication as he fits into blind culture, therefore highlighting Wells' point of view that superiority is sometimes a constructed myth. The protagonist sees the valley a new discovered land or a territory that has been or could be developed and is thus seen helpful to the explorer and the nation from which he has come, or territory that seems to the white man as some kind of obligation or a land that he must dominate (Boulton 1995):

The valley, he said, had in it all that the heart of man could desire—sweet water, pasture, and even climate, slopes of rich brown soil with tangles of shrub that bore an excellent fruit, and on one side great hanging forests of pine ... rich green pasture, that irrigation would spread over all the valley space (403).

According to Boulton, the protagonist's behavior presents him as a figure ready to adapt and improvise, one who maybe has even a young, open or at least flexible mind. This character portrayal is expressed in a particular description: "He was a mountaineer from the country near Quito, a man who had been down to the sea and had seen the world, a reader of books in an original way, an acute and enterprising man" (405).

The idea of otherness in the text is clear. Originally seen as "another" by Nuñez, blind civilization is shown as a harmonic and self-sufficient culture that lives without the need to sight and runs in quite distinct ideas of those of the Western Imperialist. Wells suggests that the idea of vision—often accompanied with knowledge, power, and lighting—does not intrinsically confers supremacy. Rather, it exposes the ghostly character of cultural variations, which are sometimes rife with misunderstandings and preconceptions (Chattopadhyay, 2017). The book challenges the reader to reinterpret his conception of what defines progress and civilization by turning the blind community of "the other" into a paradigm of a unique civilization with own value system: "It seemed they knew nothing of sight. Well, all in good time he would teach them" (411). Moreover, Nuñez "thanked God from the bottom of his heart that the power of sight had been given him (413). Nuñez realizes that the blind people are not aware of the greatness of their valley as "they little know they've been insulting their heaven-sent kind and master. I see I must bring them to reason" (413).

The physical and symbolic blindness of the residents forces the reader to consider the ideas of visibility and insight in the framework of society differently. Nuñez changes and starts to see the great depth of the life of the blind people while confronting the limits of his own perspective. Wells places non-western civilizations as worthy of respect and autonomy, unlike the European imperialist narratives that celebrate the colonization and conquest (Ndille, 2021). Underlining the need of mutual respect and understanding across cultural constraints, the seeming blindness of the residents becomes a prism through which the perils of cultural arrogance and ethnocentrism are shown.

The blindness of the characters in *The Country of the Blind* serves as a metaphor for social and cultural myopia; it reflects how colonizers often cannot see the strength and value of cultures that seek to dominate (Sethi, 2018). Wells criticism serves as a call for the recognition of the intrinsic value present in all societies, regardless of their structural differences.

The voyage of the protagonist is typical of conceit sometimes connected with colonial sentiments. Believing he can impart to the blind residents the importance of the view, Nuñez sees himself as their Savior. This concept captures a larger problem in colonial literature whereby the colonizer is seen as a transmitter of civilization (Polsgrove, 2017). Wells challenges this expectation, though, when the community at last turned away Nuñez trying to raise him. Emphasizing that cultural imposition causes estrangement instead of illumination, this argument functions as a compelling critique of imperialism. For his dismay, Nuñez discovers that his viewpoint is not generally applicable and that his once-great vision isolates him. Drawing this analogy, Wells shows the craziness of colonial dominance, in which the supposed civilizers can finish underprivileged (Bhattacharjee (2018).

Consequently, the book reveals the effects of imperialist attitudes: alienation, misinterpretation and cultural eradication. Emphasizing that the effects are not just historical but still ongoing, Wells draw a connection between modern opinions on colonialism. Two key elements are involved in human alienation: the individual who is alienated ("the alienator") and the element triggering the estrangement (C. Coulter, 2000). Accordingly, Nuñez, the protagonist, is the alienator cut off from the Country of the Blind. The valley's blinded society is the element driving his isolation. Nuñez, an outsider, deals with several kinds and terrible degrees of estrangement. Nuñez is apart from the social constructions of the valley's blind community and questions them. Eventually he does not join them; when he does, his individuality is lost and he is no longer himself: "It seemed to him that before this splendour he, and this blind world in the valley, and his love, after all, were no more than a pit of sin" (145). Boulton argues that Núñez provides an "inverted picture of the gifts of western civilisation being not only violently rejected but rejected with complete impunity" (17).

In addition, the resolution of the narrative highlights the dangers of denying the agency and the intellectual amplitude of the other. Nuñez's eventual destiny symbolizes the self-destructive nature of colonial ambition, stating that it tries to impose a culture to another result other than elevation, but in disintegration and chaos (Peake, 2017). It is a clear accusation of the mentality that refuses to recognize the

validity of alternative ways of being and knowing, which finally leads to a cycle of domination and subjugation that is both morally and socially unsustainable.

4. Postcolonial point of view

Post colonialism is seen as a proactive and anticolonial theory emerging from the margins, challenging the dominant discourses of social and political justice (Mishra, V., & Hodge, 2005). Tyson (2015) puts the role of analyzing and studying cultures that promote colonialism as a very important aspect of the critical theory that is called postcolonial criticism:

Postcolonial criticism... the cultural analysis of colonialism has played an important role in anticolonial political movements everywhere and took its place as a field of intellectual inquiry.... Postcolonial criticism analyzes literature produced by cultures that developed in response to colonial domination, from the first point of colonial contact to the present (418).

Hence, the two works can be discussed from the postcolonial point of view. The postcolonial readings of *Robinson Crusoe* view Crusoe's story as confronting and exposing the complexities of colonial power and identity politics on a microcosmic level. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* serves as a complex site for the interaction between colonialism, economic motivations and cultural dynamics that deeply shape character development and relations within the narrative. The implications of this interaction not only reflect European attitudes towards the Empire, but also invite a critical reevaluation of how literature contributes or the challenges that discourses over colonialism and race prevail, particularly with opinion towards postcolonial studies (Al-Harshan, 2021). A colonial text such as *Robinson Crusoe* can be interpreted as both a product of colonial ideology and deconstruction of the same ideology (Han, 2017). Crusoe's isolation, his struggle against the elements, and the taming of his "savage" other are all deliberate and thought-provoking reflections on colonialist attitudes toward the "Other." On another level, Defoe's text meditates upon the implications of Crusoe's colonial domination over his "Other," whether wilderness or savage, and how such domination is never complete or settled (G Macy, 2011). Friday, for instance, serves as a moment of intensive reflection and critique of Euro-centric colonialism in Defoe's narrative. The "white man/black man" dialectic also evokes a series of considerations regarding the politics of difference, such as race, class, gender, and the savage/civilized binarism. While Defoe's work appears at first glance to be a simple historical narrative of domination and subjugation, there are also moments of tension and resistance that complicate the apparently simple narrative of domination.

The same can be applied on Wells' story. It is built on a very important saying that "in the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king" (Wells, 409). Buchana (2014) argues that "as Nuñez's vision fails to lead to his triumph, the story is generally read as a refutation of that saying" (20). Moreover, he believes "the title becomes a criticism of society for its failure to elevate the visionary" (20).

A postcolonial study of H.G. Wells' short story "The Country of the Blind" finds elements of cultural imperialism, otherness, and the collision of many points of view. As sighted mountaineer, Nuñez first makes him think that his sight will enable him to recuperate and enable him to govern the blind townspeople. Reflecting the colonial viewpoint, which maintained colonists were better than the colonized and aimed to impose their own institutions and values. But the founding of the blind society and their defiance of Nuñez's attempts to impose his will captures the colonial people's resistance to the dissemination of alien cultures as well as their claim of their own identities and way of life.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, both narratives can be discussed from postcolonial point of view in dealing with the "other" and how they look at them as indigenous people who can be easily subjugated. Both works discuss the term of colonialism and introduce different perspectives and attitudes toward it. Defoe deftly illustrates in *Robinson Crusoe* intricacy of colonization. On the one hand, it promotes the generosity of the colonizer, the possibility of cultural supremacy, and grounds for empire, therefore approving some aspects of colonialism. On the other hand, it highlights the vulnerability of the colonizer's position in a foreign nation. Although the novel was written in the early years of colonial businesses and cultural exchanges, it is still primarily emerging, can expect such dualism and complexity. Thus, knowledge of the historical background that generated and shaped the narrative discourse helps one to appreciate the conciliation between the critique and acceptance of colonialism in *Robinson Crusoe*.

"The Country of the Blind" of H.G. Wells expresses how he was obviously against colonialism by introducing the protagonist as an outsider who seeks to impose his culture and superiority in addition to show the serious consequences of imperialist attitudes. When presenting a society that lives in prosperity without having the ability to see, Wells dismantles the preconceived notions of Western superiority that supports colonial ideologies. Through the trip undertaken by Nuñez, the narrative illustrates the traps of ethnocentrism and the importance of recognizing the richness of diverse cultures. Ultimately, Wells gives a moral lesson for all nations to have a better understanding of cultural differences. Wells lesson is that any society, including the indigenous ones, deserve respect. This is to affirm that the real value of human experiences can transcend the superficial duality of vision and blindness. Hence, "The Country of the Blind" is considered a satire against colonial mentality, echoing the feelings of postcolonial literature and serving as a reminder of the importance of empathy and intercultural understanding.

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