

The Investigation of Post-Colonial Theory In Daniel Defoe's Novel "Robinson Crusoe"

Al-Maliki Malik Oufi Jasim
malikalmaliky@yahoo.com
Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)
Dr. Seriaznita Haji Mat Said

Introduction

The Post- colonial theory is one of the important literary theories that can be applied to many branches of knowledge. It is appeared after the colonial theory, because it analyses successfully the literary works during and after colonialism. The main goal of this approach is to give space to the silent voices who were inactive during the domination of the colonizers. Most of its founders are fully and deeply influenced by colonialism. It deals with themes which were well-known during and after that time. Danial Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, revised edition, 2008, Oxford University press, contains many themes that are dealt with according to the previous approach.

The Post-colonial approach was established after colonialism in the middle of the twentieth century, and it criticizes the literary works after this period. It criticizes the western (colonailisers' culture which was dominant during that period, because they used to impose their culture upon the colonized people and ignore the indigenous culture. Its main themes are identity, hybridity, ethnicity, and cultural location.

There are many post-colonial critics gave rise to the post-colonial theory, but the most prominent ones are Edward Said, Franz Fanon, and Gayatri Chokrarcly Spirak who made great efforts to establish free voices set from the effected writers, as well as, the writers who belong to the colonizers 'countries. Siad's most important book was *'Orientalism'* which was the cornerstone to the rise of this theory, because its criticize the Western thinkers' views on the Asian and Middle East thinkers and cultures. Also, Fanon wrote his famous book '*The wretched*

in the earth ' which gave basis to this approach. Then, Spirak introduces introduced terms such as essentialism and epistemic violence. "Postcolonial critics problematize 'objective' perception, pointing out the unbalanced power relations that typically shape the production of knowledge". (Leitch, Vincent, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, p27)

I decided to write this paper, because I want to examine the main themes of post-colonial theory and to analyze *Robinson Crusoe* from post-colonial critics' perspectives. As a result, I will write first about the post- colonial theory; its rise, its founders, and themes. Then, I will discuss the post-colonial themes in this novel, such as, identity, hybridity, ethnicity, and cultural location.

Post-colonial Theory

The Post-colonial theory is one of the most important and modern theories, that analyses the literary works after colonialism period when many European countries colonialize many weak nations or territories for the sake of control, expansion, and superiority, as well as establish cultural identity that serve their interests and derived the colonized nations from their cultural identity. The main goal of this theory is to reform the effect of colonialism on people culture and identity, by revealing its negative attitudes towards homogenous culture. Most of

its thinkers practice their practical experience during that period in their literary criticism. The main theme of this theory is hybridity, ethnicity, and location.

This theory can be considered as a reaction fight against colonialism and Imperialism intellectually. "Post colonialism is an intellectual direction (sometimes also called on 'era' or the post-colonial theory ") that exists since around the middle of the 20th century. It developed

And mainly refers to the time after colonialism." (Die 'Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF), *Post-colonialism: Definition, Development and Examples* ,Niles Ole .net, downloaded:2 August,2008,3:12). Thus, it clarified the cultural legacy and the relationship between the western nations and the colonized nations. It can be applied in different fields of study, such as, history, politics, literature, but also in approach to culture and identity. It deals with the time of colonialism as well as, the time after colonialism

The main goal of this theory is to give the space for different voices to analyze or criticize the situation freely, because these voices were inactive by the dominant ideologies-subalterns. In other word, the thinkers of this theory tend to give a vivid picture of the 'other' who must be accepted and not being marginalized by the superiority of the colonizer' culture". [Edward Said](#), in his book [Orientalism](#), provides a clear picture of how the scholars who studied what used to be called the *Orient* (mostly Asia) disregarded the views of those they actually studied – preferring instead to rely on the intellectual superiority of themselves and their peers. This attitude was forged by European [imperialism](#)." (Wikipedia, *post-colonial Literature: post colonialism*. page modified on 15, december.2011,16:08). In this regard, Said said:

“ To the extent that Western scholars were aware of contemporary Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be

animated by the Orientalist, brought into reality by them, or as a kind of cultural and international proletariat useful for the Orientalist's grander interpretive activity". (Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, Random house (1978), p 208)

The second established thinker of this theory was Franz Fanon who was black French psychiatric. This thinker suffered a lot from the racism of the white French soldiers who colonized Algeria during his period. At that time, he resigned to participate the Algerians in the struggle to get independence. As a result of his practical experience with colonialism and racism,

He begins to search for the Black identity, the struggle against colonialism, and the process of decolonization. He adopted the idea that colonizer try to dominate a sense of cultural superiority in the part of the colonizers and inferiority to the part of colonized people; thus, the colonizers tried to spread their culture and customs as well as replace the indigenous local culture and customs. In other words, the colonizers try to disappear the local identity. In this regard, he write his famous work ‘ the wretched in the earth’ which can be considered as the basis of post- colonial theory so he remarks “...to fight for national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible”. (Fanon,Franz, *The wretched of the earth*,in Aschroft,B Griffiths,G.Toffin H, the post-colonial studies reader op cit.p.154)

Though there were other theorists, participating the rise of this theory, but the third important one, was Gayatri Chokracly Spirak, who introduced terms such as essentialism, and epistemic violence which refers to the smashing the non- western ways of knowledge and lead to the control of western ways of understanding. “ She criticizes the westerners who ignore the ‘cultural others’,

and she has offered constructive theories for allowing the west to go beyond its current position through self-criticism of west methods of ideas of understand and exploring the alternatives offered by post colonialism” (Sharp, J, *Can the Subaltern speak* ?, Geographies of post colonialism, SAGE publication,2008,chapter 6)

This theory has dealt with many themes as well as identity and representation; hybridity, ethnicity, and cultural location. Hybridity concerns with the idea of mixed identities that resulted from colonialism which lead to the migration of many people and nations from their own homes and cultures, so they have mixed identities, but post- colonial critics established this theme to appear their real identity though they have acquired a new one. Ethnicity emphasized upon the Idea of race or the origin that leads to the superiority and inferiority which were dominant ideas after colonialism . In contrary, the cultural location themes concerned with the analysis of particular geographical area and its connection with identity.

In short Post –colonial theory is a modern one; though, it was established after the colonialism period. It deals with ideas resulted from this process, and it criticizes colonialism results , and its effects on the colonized people. Most of its makers are fully experienced during this period, so they dig deeply to establish reforms to its effects, and regain identity.

Post-colonial themes in Robinson Crusoe

Daniel Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* in the eighteenth century, and he derived its plot and story from the colonizers history and notes during that period, so he revealed the colonizers’ vivid picture which was dominant the whole world; the colonizers tried to control and expand their power over the territories and slaved

people first. Then, they began to impose their identity over colonized nations, and they showed their cultural superiority. Also, the writer tends to show the racism ideas which were famous during that century. This novel can be considered as a stereo-type post colonialism novel, because it includes many ideas that happen during colonialism and after this period; though it was written before the rise of the post- colonial theory.

Identity

Identity can be considered as the most dominant theme in *Robinson Crusoe*, because its writer 'Defoe' tries to describe clearly the real nature of colonialism; so he made the hero of this novel as the narrator of the events that happen in it, and he participated attentional in its current events. In this regard, the author tried to give identity to the British colonial which was well-known by its authority, superiority, individuality, and racism.

Authority was one of the dominant ideas that distinguishes the British Colonial, so Defoe presents this idea through the main character of the play 'Robinson Crusoe', who gave himself authority upon all the people who met during his journeys and isolations in one of the Caribbean islands. In this regard, Crusoe began to imagine himself as a lord, king, then the governor of this island as he said: "Lord of the whole Manner, or if I pleased, I might call my self-king, or Emperor over the whole country which I had possession of. There were no Rivals, I had no Competition, none to dispute Sovereignty of Command with me." (Defoe, Daniel, *Robinson Crusoe, Revised Edition, 2008*, p 128.).

Also, Defoe presents superiority through Crusoe who is the hero of this fiction that includes this attribute which recognizes the British colonial as compared to other colonizers. Crusoe said in this reference:

When I show'd myself to the two Hostages, it was with
the Captain whom told them, I was the Person the

Governor had ordered to look after them. And that it governor's pleasure they should not stir anywhere, but by my Direction; that if they did. They should be fetched into the Castle, and be lay's in irons; so that as we never suffered them to see meas Governor, so I now appeared. So I now appeared another person , and spoke of the Governor, the Garrison, the Castle, and the like, upon all the occasions (Crusoe, p.271).

Furthermore, Defoe describes his main character in the novel 'Crusoe', as a superior man that he Shows superiority to the all who join him in the novel, as well as, the superiority of Englishmen. In this regard, he remarked to the English prisoners when he decided to leave them:

Upon this I seemed a little angry with the captain, and told him, That They were my prisoners, not his; and that seeing I had offered them so Much favoir, I would be as good as my word. (Crusoe, p276)

Individuality is one of the most peculiar features that distinguishes this novel as a stereo-type Post- colonial one, so we can see that the writer tends to show the British Colonial individuality through presentation the hero of the novel who has individual attitudes and thinking. Also, he tries to appear the British power as a different one from other colonial powers. Which used to invest the colonized nations humanly and economically, so he tries to give the British a national identity through colonialism; that they expand territories to exchange trading and commerce with other nations which contrary the fact, that they over control the nations and invest their people and wealth for their interest, as well as, they tend

to change people identity. "I assessing the influence of colonialism on Crusoe's individualism, we should acknowledge that we are dealing with an imagined colonialism." (McInelly, Brett C. *Expanding Empires, Expanding Slaves; Colonialism, The novel And Robinson Crusoe*, Studies in the novel, Volume 35, nr1, Spring, 2003)

Also, Racism is clearly indicated in this novel through the treatment and thoughts of Robinson Crusoe, who used to prefer his nation upon other nations, though they practice the same rules and system on the colonized people, and they used to enslave people for their interests. Moreover, the writer tends to reveal religious racism; though, they belong to the same main religion, so the main character 'Crusoe', shows hatred towards Catholic. "Crusoe's religious views are especially crucial if we see him as a British Protestant competing for territory with Catholic " (McInelly. P7)

To sum up, this novel consists of practical elements that attributes colonialism during the eighteen century, so Defoe tries to criticize these features through this novel, and he tends to reform certain colonial conventions that effect the colonized people identity, so he allegorically try to say that colonizers should adopt hybridity and ignore oppressing identity, which can be considered a post-colonial theme that can be seen clearly in *Robinson Crusoe*.

Ethnicity

The idea of ethnicity can be obviously indicated in this novel through characters' nationality which distinguishes them from each other socially and culturally, so all of them express their nationality through cultures, ways of thinking, and belief. Also, the author tends exports the colonizers' convention and culture through this fiction, but it reveals the actual face of colonialism; though, he decorated it in a manner to increase the readers' suspense.

Defoe always tend to emphasis upon the British nationality as a peculiar nation that they can expand their power through colonialism, so they have many territories or islands where they can enlarge their possession overseas. "Imperialism began to influence English national identity as early as the mid-seventeen century, and the English continued to associate their national prominence with their colonial activities." (Mcinelly, p 6). Furthermore, the author tend to show the Spanish colonialism as an opposite one to the British, so he emphasized upon their conventions in colonialism and how they deal with colonized nations, as well as, they are different religiously.

Moreover , Defoe presented the negroes trading process which was famous at that time between south America an Africa, so he tried to reveal that colonial powers use to trade the negroes and bring them as slaves in their territories. In addition, he showed the idea of cannbalisiam which was well-known in some of the Caribbean islands at that time, and he tried to originate them to the negroes who were brought from Africa.

In short, ethnicity theme can be seen vividly in *Robinson Crusoe*, because it deals with people who are differently originated. Also their ethnicity represents their own national and cultural identity. Moreover, we can see many

ethnicities in this novel such as the British, the Spanish, Africans, South Americans, Negroes, and Cannibals.

Cultural location

Location or the geographical places of the nation's represent their culture; though, it is approved nowadays that culture can be considered an important feature to people identity, because you can recognize people through their culture, and culture can be moved from one location to another through certain operation such as Colonialism that influenced people culture in certain location as we can see in *Robinson Crusoe* when Crusoe learns his companion 'Friday' a new culture; religion and language in one of the Caribbean island (location). Also, the author tries to show the Cannibals' culture, who use to eat people flesh and they are survival upon each other's. In other words, this novel can be considered an ideal type of post-colonial theory work, because it contained cultural location theme which were dealt with in this theory; though, it was written before the rise of this theory.

It is clear, that post-colonial theory, is dealing with themes that were appeared during and after colonial period, but *Robinson Crusoe* was a stereo-type post-colonial fiction, though it was written before this period, because it dealt with themes that were prominent in this theory such as hybridity, ethnicity, and cultural location .

Conclusion

There are many literary theories that can be applied to historical, economical, and scientific works, as well as literary one, but I deal with post colonialism theory, because it dealt with themes that have influences upon people's cultural identity. Also, this theory analyzed the colonizers' features during that period; The colonizers tried to change people's identity and imposes them to wear their new cultures without giving them the opportunity of hybridity, so they used peoples' defects in understanding the new world negatively, and they tend to show authority and superiority, as well as, their individuality. As a result of colonialism, many theorists gave rise to it, because they were influenced deeply during that period.

The Post- colonial theory was established in the middle of twentieth century, as a result of colonialism period which ended at that time, but its effects still have great influences upon colonized people culture and future, because their legacy on identity was an effective one. The theorists of this approach were greatly experienced and deeply hit to reconstruct colonialism, such as Fanon who tends to appear the real face of the colonizers during his life. Also, Said writes his famous literary works 'Orientalism' to show colonizers' superior views upon eastern peoples culture and identity. Then Gayatri added terms to this theory such as, essentialism, and epistemic violence to criticize the western culture that ignores the indigenous one.

Robinson Crusoe was written by Daniel Defoe during the eighteen century to reveal the actual face of the colonizers who used to control over the nations' wealth, interests, culture, and identity, so he criticized them allegorically in this literary work. It contained themes that are dealt with by the post colonialism theory such as hybridity, ethnicity, and cultural location,

Which are clearly seen in the events of this novel through its main character Robinson Crusoe and his follower; Friday, Xury, the British mutineers, and the Spanish Captain, thus, the fiction can be considered proto-type post-colonial literary work.

Works Cited

- Daniel, Defoe, *"Robinson Crusoe"*, Revised Edition 2008, Oxford University Press
- Die 'Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF), *Post-colonialism: Definition, Development and Examples*, Niles Ole .net, downloaded:2 August,2008,3:12
- Donoghues, Frank," *Inevitable Politics: Ruler ship And Identity In Robinson Crusoe*",2002 EBSCO Publishing
- Dowdall, Coby, "A *Living Law to Himself and Others* ", Eighteen –Century Fiction, 22, no3 (spring 2010)
- Fanon, Franz, *The wretched of the earth*, in Ashcroft, B Griffiths, G. Toffin H, the post-colonial studies reader op cit.p.1
- H. Daniel Peck, "*Robinson Crusoe "The moral Geography of Limitation*, The Journal of Narrative Technique, Vol. 3, No.1 (Jan.,1973) ,pp20–31
- Leitch, Vincent B., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Second Edition:2010, W . W. Norton &Company. New York. London
- McInelly, Brett C.,' *Empires, Expansion, Expanding Selves, Colonialism. The novel and Robinson Crusoe, studies in the novel* , (SNNTC) 2003 Spring;35(1):
- Sharp, *Can the Subaltern speak ?*, Geographies of post colonialism, SAGE publication,2008,chapter 6
- Said,Edward, *Orientalism*, Random house (1978), p 208
- Wikipedia, *post-colonial Literature: post colonialism*. Page modified on 15, december.2011,16:08