

Kensuke Regenerates Crusoe's Utopia in Micheal Morpurgo's Kensuke's Kingdom (2012)

كنسوكي يُعيد إحياء يوتوبيا روبنسون كروزو في رواية مايكل موربورجو
"مملكة كينسوكي" 2012

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Abstract: For ages, the discourse between the West and the Rest has been one of superiority and dominance of the former over the latter. Recently, this discourse has been challenged; the Other is gaining a new status vis a vis the Self. The present paper, through the analysis of Michael Morpurgo's Kensuke's Kingdom (2012), investigates the ways in which contemporary writers and thinkers envisage the relation between the Self and the Other. Basing my analysis on Stuart Hall's theory which implies that meaning is always in a continuous change, I argue in the present paper that the representation of the Self and the Other has acquired a new meaning by the beginning of the twenty-first century. Hence, I intend to show that Michael this novel can be read within the context of the twenty-first century's prevailing ideology that advocates tolerance and acceptance of the Other.

Keywords: Discourse; Self; Other; West; Rest;

ملخص:

لطوال العصور، كان الخطاب بين الغرب والآخرين، خطاباً قائماً على التفوق والهيمنة للأول على الآخر. في الآونة الأخيرة، تم تحدي هذا الخطاب؛ حيث اكتسب الآخر وضعاً جديداً فيما يتعلق بالذات. تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية، من خلال تحليل رواية مايكل موربورجو "مملكة كينسوكي" (2012)، إلى دراسة الطرق التي

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يتصور بها الكتاب والمفكرون المعاصرون العلاقة بين الذات والآخر. وبناءً على نظرية ستيوارت هول التي تفترض أن المعنى دائم التغير، فإنني أجادل في هذه الورقة البحثية بأن تمثيل الذات والآخر قد اكتسب معنى جديداً مع بداية القرن الحادي والعشرين. ومن ثم، أعتزم إظهار أن رواية مايكل هذه يمكن قراءتها في سياق الأيديولوجيا السائدة في القرن الحادي والعشرين والتي تدعو إلى التسامح وقبول الآخر. الكلمات المفتاحية : الخطاب ; الذات ; الآخر ; الغرب ; الباقي

1. Introduction:

Recently, there has been a shift in power relations between the Self and the Other. These two concepts have acquired new meanings by the turn of the millennium. The natives nowadays have equal rights and freedom as the Whites; a situation that pushes the 'Self' to conform to a new condition according to which the Western man no longer holds the supreme power. The claim put forward in this paper, thus, is that the native in Michael Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom* is portrayed in accordance with the notions of recent cultural studies which represent the 'Other' as good and noble. The work under study signposts that a cultural re-examination of the 'civilized Self' has occurred in the West. *Kensuke's Kingdom* proclaims a change in the modern dominant discourse.

Rupert Sheldrake, an English philosopher, argues that the process of human consciousness is in fact a natural evolutionary process. He considers that man continuously develops a modern conception of himself which is in accordance with his actual scientific knowledge that would lead to a new philosophy of life. To achieve this purpose, man should be aware and then abandon the limitations and deficiencies of his previous life and step forward into a wider scope of human progress. By the turn of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, a new era of globalization and multiculturalism ensued; an era that resulted in the correction of man's previous understanding of himself his world. For their part, in their *Dreams of Peace and Freedom*, Jay and Winter assert that the political scene has known dramatic changes by the late twentieth century (Jay and Winter 169).

The turn of the twenty-first century has witnessed the end of cultural monopoly and, thus, nowadays there are several cultures instead of one. This leads to the conviction that, ultimately, there is always an "Other" in the eyes of others. (Giddens 1990: 1) David Chaney, for instance, is a thinker who maintains that among the central targets of tolerance are that difference should be respected, and that alternatives to what we consider normality should be accepted (Chaney 1994: 90). In his *The Cultural Turn: Scene-setting Essays on*

Contemporary Cultural History, Chaney argues that tolerance has become a dominant value in public culture (ibid: 88). Moreover, Stuart Hall further asserts that the postcolonial 'does not mean that we have passed from a regime of power-knowledge into some powerless and conflict-free time zone. Nevertheless, it does also stake its claim in terms of the fact that some other, related but as yet "emergent" new configurations of power-knowledge relations are beginning to exert their distinctive and specific effects' (1996: 254). Michael Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom* that is the main concern of this paper persuasively contributes to the imagination of the new 'power-knowledge relations' which reflect social and cultural change in Britain's twenty-first century.

2. Literature Review

Since its emergence in 2012, Michael Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom* has been the concern of few critical studies. These include Demon Wise's 'Kensuke's Kingdom Review: Michael Morpurgo's Novel Becomes A Timeless Castaway Fantasy', Maggie Ferguson's *Michael Morpurgo: War Child to War Horse* and Clare Morpurgo and Mark Morpurgo's *Such Stuff: A Story Maker's Inspiration*. Wise's review describes Kensuke as follows: "The other human on the island is Kensuke who furtively greets Michael with bowls of water and fruit before making his appearance. He is an elderly Japanese man who speaks no English, but his exquisite watercolor paintings help him to communicate." This quote indicates that, for Wise, Morpurgo does not consider Kensuke an Other; on the contrary, he provides the native with a positive description. Moreover, in her *Michael Morpurgo: War Child to War Horse*, a biography of Michael Morpurgo, Maggie Fergusson states that *Kensuke's Kingdom* has been recognised as Morpurgo's 's greatest achievement yet. In addition, in *Michael Morpurgo, Clare Morpurgo and Mark Morpurgo's Such Stuff: A Story Maker's Inspiration*, Morpurgo confessed that Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* were an essential source of inspiration for writing *Kensuke's Kingdom*. He declared that he read those novels and he was fascinated by the landscape of the islands (61).

It is, in part, this tendency to celebrate modern racial mutual relationships which this paper aims to account for. More specifically, the current study is premised on the assumption that Morpurgo's choice of Michael, a British boy, and Kensuke, a Japanese man, as heroes for his story falls within the mainstream interest of modern writers who give much emphasis to

the experience of the Self and the Other. Morpurgo, as I will hopefully argue, challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions on which most traditional theories about race had been constructed. This paper attempts to shed a new light on Michael Morpurgo's novel by approaching it from a postcolonial standpoint. The main objective is to bring into focus the novelist's subversion of stereotypical racial relations. After placing the novel within its historical frame, first, I will discuss how Morpurgo corrects the old image of the Other which considers the Western man as superior and the Other as inferior and, second, how he subverts the image of the Self by representing the Western man as barbarian.

1. Theory

Basing my analysis of Michael Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom* on Stuart Hall's theory which implies that meaning is always in a continuous change, I argue in the present paper that the representation of the Self and the Other has acquired a new meaning by the beginning of the twenty-first century. Stuart Hall was a highly influential cultural theorist whose works revolved around the analysis of culture, representation, identity and power dynamics. Indeed, as postcolonial critics, Hall is responding to new material and cultural contexts or the 'New World Order'. Many of the central themes (diaspora, hybridity, migrancy, mimicry, identity, colonized/colonizer relations) have been theorized by postcolonial scholars. For instance, Stuart Hall's "New Ethnicities" suggests that positive black cultural representations of the 1970s and early 1980s played an important role in contesting the dominant regimes of white racist representation. Britain's African, Caribbean and Asian writers hold the burden to speak for the entire black community in order to create an imagined unity to face the forces of white racism.

Stuart Hall argues against the idea that cultural identities are innate, stable, and unified. He challenges the essentialist view that sees cultural identities as inherent properties that individuals are born with and that remain the same throughout history. He emphasizes that identities use the resources of history, language and culture not to cement fixed identities, but to produce new, hybrid ones through meeting points of different subjects or ethnicities. Thus, identities are dynamic, decentered, and always in process. Stuart Hall rejects the notion of cultural identity as a fixed category. He sees cultural identities as constantly being produced within the vectors of history, culture, and power.

Hall considers cultural identities as dynamic, fluid, and shaped by representations. In this vein, he declares that meaning is the result of social, cultural and linguistic conventions

which means that meaning can never be fixed (Hall 1997: p. 23). Accordingly, the Western dominant discourse, which rehearsed that the only means through which Eden on Earth can be recovered is the Western civilization, has faded away. The long standing power relation which lay at the heart of such discourse, i. e. the supposed superiority of Western culture over nature (wild and exotic land) and the dominance of the civilized man over the barbarian native has been subverted. By rejecting the essentialist notion, Hall opened up cultural identities to plurality, differences, constant renegotiation and political contestation over meaning and representation in a globalized, postcolonial world. Hence, I intend, in this paper, to show that Michael Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom* can be read within the context of the twenty-first century's leading ideology which promotes tolerance and acceptance of the Other.

2. The Other as a Civilized Man:

Dealing with the social history of his characters, Morpurgo points out some of the extraordinary features of the Other's mindedness. The Other is depicted as a well-educated person in *Kensuke's Kingdom*. Kensuke is a doctor who studies medicine in Japan and then in England. This level of education distances Kensuke from his ignorant predecessors (Caliban and Friday) and places him within the same rank of Robinson Crusoe who was a lawyer.

Concerning the physical appearance, Kensuke's appearance after being alone for a long time on an isolated island engenders no fear: he was not tall, an old man with little hair in his head (40). This description shows that Kensuke, in keeping his appearance well tied, exceeds Crusoe whose appearance is frightening.

Intellectually, Kensuke is a self-reliant, hard-working person. In this, he shares much with Robinson Crusoe the qualities of the hard worker which enable him to live securely during his isolation. Kensuke's cave is full of different utensils which step him a path far from the primitive life of the cave man. Thus, another sign of civilization with which Morpurgo arms Kensuke is the tools and utensils Kensuke uses to live on the island. Unlike his predecessors Caliban and Friday who are not inventive, Kensuke resembles Robinson Crusoe in his ability to invent and, thus, becomes 'master of all arts'.

Kensuke manages not only to secure his basic needs but even to reach self-actualization; a fact which places him steps ahead of the primitive life of the cave man. This idea has been well explained by A. H. Maslow in his article 'A Theory of Human Motivation'. In this work, Maslow elaborates his theory of the hierarchy of needs, explaining that human needs are classified into five patterns: physiological, safety, belonging and love, social needs or esteem, and self-actualization needs. Each time a person fulfils a need, his desire to accomplish the next increases and if the first need is not gratified the person cannot look for the next one. Moreover, reaching the final stage of this hierarchy necessitates that the person must not only succeed in the previous needs but master them. It also indicates that the person has finally attained happiness. In Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom*, unlike Michael who fails to defy his physiological needs, Kensuke succeeds in gratifying all his needs. Concerning the physiological ones, which include health, food, water, sleep, clothes, shelter, Michael helplessly tries to secure them. He uselessly starts by looking for food.

Michael's inability to fish obliges him to be dependent on Kensuke for securing his food. This dependence on the Other raises Michael to a state of rage. Holding the power of providing food enables Kensuke to control Michael. Contrary to this state of dependency which puts Michael in a subordinate position, Kensuke immediately manages to secure food and water. this within shelter his identityified by micheal'island is an outstanding marker of his independendecding a positive representatiJust after his landing on the island, he finds food, water and shelter. After securing his basic needs, Kensuke climbs a step on Maslow's pyramid of the hierarchy of needs and gratifies his safety needs which are personal, emotional, and financial security, health and well-being, and safety needs against accidents/illnesses and their adverse impacts. For instance, in case of danger, Kensuke takes measures to save himself and the inhabitants of the island. In order to do so, he cuts branches from the forest the aim of which is to disguise the entrance of the cave house. (84) By saving the animals, Kensuke creates the seeds of a happy community, gratifying thus the third need which is that of social belonging. Kensuke considers the orang-utans his family who unquestionably obey his orders. (5) He also satisfies his need of self-esteem. He goes back to his cave house singing carrying fish, and sometimes, fruit, coconuts or herbs, which he show me proudly. (57 italics mine) Kensuke's ability to afford food develops in him a sense of worth especially that it is gratified by Michael's respect and recognition.

Both Caliban and Friday, Kensuke's ancestors, lack this respect. Thus, Morpurgo inverts the old western discourse that identified the relation between the Self and the Other as one of domination of the former over the latter. The Other was depicted as an inferior (slave) who fears his superior (master). In Kensuke's Kingdom, the Other is not only respected, but he is also given the highest possible status, i. e. that of the artist; a status that even Prospero and Crusoe do not attain. Kensuke is happy and satisfied with his life on the island evidencing Maslow's statement 'What a man can be, he must be.' (Maslow 10) According to Maslow, '[w]e shall call people who are satisfied in these needs, basically satisfied people, and it is from these that we may expect the fullest (and healthiest) creativeness.' (Maslow 11) Kensuke is ultimately a real artist. Kensuke, as Morpurgo clearly declares, 'seem[s] to have found ways to satisfy his every need.' (62)

Most of Kensuke's needs are gratified thanks to the tools of civilization he has rescued from the ship. Robinson Crusoe rescues from the wreck of the ship many tools, such as razors, scissors and knives –artefacts of craftsmanship; in addition to pens, paper, compasses, mathematical instruments, dials, perspectives, books of navigation, three bibles and several other books –tokens of knowledge. These artefacts prove to be of great use to Crusoe. Similarly, Kensuke rescues from the wreck of the ship all the necessary tools that help him in his work. These tools include clothes, sheets, pots, bottles, a knife, binoculars and medicine. After collecting the tools, he found a cave where he hides them (67). These tools restore Kensuke, the 'Other', to a superior position that was seized by the western man, the 'Self'. They also make of Kensuke, as Morpurgo describes him, 'a considerable craftsman' who successfully imposes his rule over the island.

3. The Other as an Empire Builder

Kensuke's rule over the island is another tactic that Morpurgo uses to give a positive representation of the Other. In his 'Old and New Identities', Stuart Hall states that the Other has found for himself a new position: 'In that very struggle is a change of consciousness, a change of self-recognition, a new process of identification, the emergence into visibility of a new subject. A subject that was always there, but emerging, historically'. (54) This new subject refuses to be dominated. Indeed, Kensuke has authority and Knowledge that help him be a successful leader who has dominance over others. Thanks to this power, Kensuke,

by implementing law and order reinforces his ability for command and gives him an awesome power which is similar to the magic of Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which makes the newcomers both fear and respect him.

Since Kensuke studies medicine in England, the knowledge he has is exactly the same as that of the Western man. The Other is no longer that ignorant submissive, easy to dominate but a powerful, self-reliant, independent person. His power is mainly derived from knowledge. Kensuke deploys the power of knowledge to control Michael. In the following quotation, his knowledge of the danger of swimming in the sea places him in the position of a commander: "'No swim. Dameda! Abunai! No swim.'" Then he had me by the arm and was leading me forcibly out of the sea. No swim. Very bad. Abunai!" he was pointing out to sea. "No swim. Very bad. You understand?" he looked me hard in the eye. Leaving me in no doubt that this was not meant as advice, this was a command that I should obey." (51) Moreover, Kensuke's knowledge of every detail of the island gives him the right to dominate the animals, the members of his microcosm society which love and obey him.

Knowledge upgrades Kensuke into the status of a master. In fact, another point that Morpurgo inverses in his representation of the Other is the Master/Slave relationship. Compared to Plato's utopian work, *Republic*, which is based on classes, Morpurgo's utopian vision proposes a society which is based on classlessness. Morpurgo's belief in racial equality is manifested in the relation between Kensuke and Michael. Their relationship is based on equality, collaboration and mutual respect. Indeed, in Kensuke's Kingdom, the relationship between the Self and the Other is one of not only mutual help but even a relationship of shared love; it is a father/son relationship. Michael approves of this new relationship and is happy with his new family.

Like Robinson Crusoe, Kensuke evokes the prototype of an empire builder who leaves the civilized homeland society for the wild places where he inaugurates a microcosm city. The status of self-actualization he has attained provides him with the necessary power for control and dominance. Kensuke thus announces his ownership of the island: "No, I stay on my island. This is Kensuke's Kingdom. Emperor must stay in his Kingdom, look after his people. Emperor does not run away. Not honourable thing to do". (86) This quotation echoes clearly Prospero's and Crusoe's declaration of their ownership of their islands. It also demonstrates an inversion of the dominant western discourse: while Prospero and Crusoe are Westerners, Kensuke is an Orient, an Other. Here it is no longer the Western man who

possesses knowledge and power and hence civilizes the wild nature. On the contrary, it is the Other, once represented as savage, ignorant and barbarian (Caliban, Friday), who possesses knowledge and power and hence civilizes both himself and the wild nature around him.

In Kensuke's Kingdom, Kensuke gives much space of freedom to the newcomers to the island. His way of imposing his own rule differs from that of Crusoe. Without obliging the newcomers to engage in written or oral contracts, Kensuke is convinced that the newcomer's inability to survive without his help would guarantee their obedience. He does not oblige them to submit to his absolute rule. Michael knows that he has no choice but to accept Kensuke's rules because he provides both Michael and Stella with all the food and water they needed.

This section has shown that Morpurgo has taken a critical look at the Western man's claim for superiority, asserting a positive representation of the Other. Through this authentic representation, Morpurgo denounces the discursive construction of racial inequality and gives the other an existence and an identity of his own. Morpurgo manages to reconstruct the image of the Other by subverting the misguided version and providing a positive representation instead. In the following section, I will move to the discussion of the second strategy, i.e. portraying the Self in a negative way, which Morpurgo employs to announce a modern attitude towards the discourse between the West and the Rest.

6. Othering the Self

For centuries, the Western tradition, which highly praised the superiority of the white man and his civilization, remained unchecked. However, by the late twentieth century, a philosophical revolution began with thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas. The latter, inverting twenty-five hundred years of philosophy, shows that "man's relation to the other is prior to his ontological relation to himself (egology) or to the totality of things that we call the world (cosmology)." (Treanor 47) Instead of eliminating otherness by suppressing it in order to reduce it to a known quantity, Levinas's philosophy aims at preserving the Otherness of the Other and respecting the difference that distinguishes the Other from the Self (Treanor 5). Morpurgo, being part and parcel of this optimistic atmosphere, is for his part tolerant towards other races. He and his wife, Clare, "had adopted a seven-week-old baby, Ros, half Asian Indian, half Caucasian American" (Fergusson 113)

In his *Kensuke's Kingdom*, Morpurgo others the 'Self'. In the view of the Other, the Self is barbarian. The scene of the savages eating each other in *Robinson Crusoe* is substituted by a scene of the white men who are happy and feasting their killing of other human beings. The group of American sailors make fire on the beach feasting their victory in Nagazagi (67). This quotation is reminiscent of Crusoe's barbarians who left bones of human beings after their festival. Robinson Crusoe has also buried those bones. At this ceremony, the barbarians dance stark naked. They leave behind terrible scenes of horror: blood, bones, part of the flesh of human bodies, eaten and devoured by the cannibals. The brutality of these scenes and degeneracy of human nature terribly shock Crusoe. This makes him proud to belong to a civilized and enlightened world. In *Robinson Crusoe*, differences between Europeans and savages speak about a particular period of the colonial encounter when the Other was perceived as barbarian and uncivilized.

On the contrary, in *Kensuke's Kingdom*, it is the Self who is barbarian and thus stimulates fear and hatred, a bewildering sense which prevents Kensuke from going back home. For Kensuke, all men are enemies of their kinsmen. Therefore, Kensuke declares his hatred of people and disagrees to see them again. (68) After the horrors he witnessed during the war, Kensuke loses trust in man's good nature and decides to hide in the island forever. Kensuke, in fact, is afraid of going back home because he is aware that both he and the world outside have changed. He declares that he will be like a ghost because he will no longer be the same person +

(86) This statement evokes *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* where Gulliver's and Prendick's reaction after their return home is traumatic. Upon his return from his last voyage, Gulliver could not tolerate his fellow men because of their similarity with the Yahoos. Moreover, Prendick is also shocked by Moreau's experiments.

Conclusion

To conclude, the aim of the current study is to examine the modern representation of the discourse between the West and the Rest. In this paper, I have demonstrated that by the turn of the 21st century, "there were strong arguments in favour of an open global society" (Benmechiche 05). I have highlighted some of the strategies that Morpurgo uses to shed a new light on this discourse. I began my discussion by looking at the ways in which Morpurgo has repudiated the widely accepted and long standing assumption among Western scholars that the Other lacked mindedness. I have also considered how Morpurgo has subverted the

unquestioned superior status of the Self by representing the Western man as savage and barbarian. This subversion, I found, is part and parcel of the late twentieth century dominant ideology which celebrated tolerance towards the Other and acknowledged the flawed nature of the Self.

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