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**Hayy Ibn Yaqzan and Robinson
Crusoe, Re-Reading Two Classic
Survival Narratives**

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Hayy Ibn Yaqzan and Robinson Crusoe, Re-Reading Two Classic Survival Narratives

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Abstract

'Islamophobia', has recently replaced the Soviet or 'Red Threat.' Many intellectuals are devoting their time and efforts to attack Arab Muslims. This paper was triggered by an essay by David Cook, entitled 'The Muslim Man's Burden: Muslim Intellectuals Confront their Imperialist Past' which appeared in *Israeli Affairs*, 2007. The aim of this paper is to react to Cook's essay, by assessing Ibn Tufayl Al-Andalusi's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, not as self-contained texts, but as cultural products that have not dropped from nowhere. The two novels are examined in relation to several concepts of the cultures that produced them and some features of post-colonialism and neocolonialism. *Yaqzan* is not less colonial than *Crusoe*, since it was written in the 12th century when Arab Muslims still reigned in Andalusia, their last stronghold where they stood their grounds against the attacks of the Christian forces fighting to regain supremacy over Spain. Several writers investigated these novels either separately or in relation to each other. These studies, however, were locked in disputes that belonged to the past. The present paper attempts to relocate both novels to the present with reference to global issues. Modern people live as isolated islands behind impenetrable sieges of beliefs and interests. What they need to survive is their stubbornness and prejudice. To ensure safety, they need to eradicate, not build, fences and tunnel their way to mutual understanding.

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'Islamophobia', 'The Green Threat' has recently replaced the Soviet or 'Red Threat.' A huge number of intellectuals are devoting their time and efforts to attack Arab Muslims. In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington claims that Europe is 'the unique source' of the 'ideas of individual liberty, human rights and cultural adoption- These are European ideas, not Asian, not Middle Eastern ideas, except by adoption' (311). This paper was triggered by an essay by David Cook, entitled 'The Muslim Man's Burden: Muslim Intellectuals Confront their Imperialist Past' which appeared in *Israeli Affairs*, 2007.

The aim of this paper is to react to Cook's controversial essay, by assessing Ibn Tufayl Al-Andalusi's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, not as self-contained texts, but as cultural products that have not dropped from nowhere. The two novels will be examined in relation to several concepts and aspects of the cultures that produced them and also to some features of post-colonialism and neocolonialism. *Yaqzan* is not less colonial than *Crusoe*, since it was written in the 12th century when Arab Muslims still reigned in Andalusia, their last stronghold where they stood their grounds against the attacks of the Christian forces fighting to regain supremacy over Spain. Quest for identity, marginalization, racism and stereotyping are features of colonialism that wrap the events of both texts. Lois Tyson writes: 'a good deal of postcolonial criticism addresses the problem of cultural identity as it is represented in postcolonial literature' (419). This could shed light on the views and attitudes of these cultures to investigate the accusations they are facing. Several writers investigated these novels in terms of historical, philosophical, or political significance either separately or in relation to each other. In 'Inevitable Politics: Rulership and Identity in Robinson Crusoe', Edith W. Clowes highlights *Crusoe* as an embodiment of the imperialistic mission. Ian Watt maintains that it is '[a] defiant assertion of the primacy of individual experience' (151). Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel discussed *Crusoe* as either a utopia or a dystopia and Michael Miller investigated *Yaqzan* as an example of Islamic philosophy revealing the Islamic method of gaining knowledge. Samar Attar and Thomas A. Lamont tackle the novels in relation to each other. In her book, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment*, 2007, Attar cites *Yaqzan* to negate the idea that 'the enlightenment was a purely Western development', while in his article, 'Mutual Abuse', Lamont employs the novels to explore different theories of translation. The writer of 'Solitude and Understanding' gives a comprehensive comparison of the two novels relying extensively on the binary oppositions 'East' and 'West.' All these studies, however, were locked in disputes that belonged to the past. The present paper attempts to relocate both novels to the present. Similarities and differences are examined in terms of relevance to global issues. In one respect, both texts represent the cultures that fathered them, in another, these cultures have considerably changed ever since they were published.

According to Richard King, separating religion from the sociocultural and political aspects of life 'would be a form of cultural reductionism' since 'the cultural and the religious... [are] mutually imbricated dimensions of human existence (61). The extent to which these texts represent the religions of their writers is debatable and beside the point, since 'there are...a number of

heterogeneous facets to...religions' (4). In 'Secular Criticism' (1983), Said writes:

My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. (4)

A basic resemblance between the two novels is the encounter between the inhabitant of the island and an intruder. Several critics emphasize these encounters to indicate that Hayy is more tolerant than Crusoe, i.e., a Muslim is more tolerant than a western imperialist. Lamont refers to these encounters as confrontations between 'the self on the island and the other who arrives' (172). Unlike Friday, Asaal is not marginalized or eclipsed in Hayy's presence. However, Hayy's reaction to Asaal, cannot be compared to Crusoe's reaction to Friday. That might have been relevant in the context of the past. Within the context of the present, Hayy and Crusoe are equally formidable in their rejection of the other. For Hayy, Asaal is not the other, but rather a replicate of the self and his reaction to him is equivalent to Crusoe's reaction to the English intruders, not to Friday. What, for Hayy, represents the other is Slaman's community who differ from him in thought and views, if not colour.

Hayy and Crusoe represent two types of neocolonialism. 'Today' indicates Tyson, 'the same kind of political, economic, and cultural subjugation of vulnerable nations occurs at the hands of international corporations from such world powers as the United States, Germany, and Japan' (425). Cultural colonialism which both protagonists embody describes 'the desire ...to control other nations' values and perceptions through cultural means, such as...language, education and religion' (Wikipedia). 'Paternalistic neocolonialism' refers to the infantilization of nations by inculcating in them the belief that they even 'benefit from...occupation' (Wikipedia). Crusoe teaches Friday and Xury his language and religion before he uses them as cheap labour while Hayy learns Asaal's language and uses it to recruit Asaal's people to his thought and philosophy and when this intellectual imperialism fails he deems them unworthy of his company and similar to 'unreasoning beasts or even worse' (Forqan, verse 44). Citing verses from *Qur'an* in a definitely wrong context rings a bell. It is a tactical weapon used by fundamentalists to intimidate people into believing that contradicting a certain person is a religious dissent. Asaal, Friday and Xury position themselves as subjects because they are less endowed with epistemological knowledge, supposedly less religious and, in the case of Friday, less powerful. Apart from USA that still reverts to military action, we have countries that act as super religious or economic powers and strive to influence other nations. Instead of deploying troops, they deploy a certain religion or a certain religious thought thereby launching deadly combats against a country's cultural and intellectual defenses. Like military occupation, cultural occupation is destructive to a nation's identity since it calls for a uniformity of all the nations that adopt a particular thought.

Critics of neocolonialism argue that the neocolonizers exploit ‘the cheap labour available in developing countries, often at the expense of those countries’ own struggling businesses, cultural traditions, and ecological well-being’ (Tyson, 425). They only enrich few in Third World countries, causing humanitarian and ecological devastation to the majority of the neocolonies’ populations. This statement applies to what Crusoe inflicts on the island. Only one member from each community is singled by Crusoe’s favours. Manual work is preserved for Xury and Friday who could stand for third world countries; they are never permitted to participate in sophisticated economic issues or learn the rationale underlying Crusoe’s dealings or investments. Similar to what multinational corporations do in third world countries, Crusoe uses Friday and Xury as cheap labour helping in all his anti- environmental procedures. He keeps hoarding vegetables and fruits that quickly rotten, kills animals and birds for sport and practices environmental cleansing and sabotages the biological diversity of the island. The life of other creatures has no value in itself, only in how far it serves Crusoe’s purposes. After so many years, readers discover that even while physically absent from the world of commerce, Crusoe’s money was active in the capitalist world. During his absence his Brazilian plantation, using slave labour, has been prospering. In cold blood, Crusoe, the capitalist, makes more money the moment he is rescued by selling into slavery loyal Xury whom he instinctively takes to be a slave being an Arab Muslim. The boy’s instant acceptance of the condition about changing his religion without caring to learn the new one he agrees to embrace gives credit to Graham Huggan’s statement on ‘how structural conditions of underdevelopment produce reliance on the very outside sources that reinforce cultural, as well as economic dependency’ (118). Underdeveloped nations are persuaded that ‘cultural value, as well as economic power, is located and arbitrated elsewhere’ (118).

Crusoe’s attitude towards ‘others’ and the environment parodies the West’s excessive fear of enemies, especially from the East and their extreme obsession with fortifying themselves against possible terroristic attacks. Building himself castles in different places on the island terribly resembles the feverish American strive to establish military basis in strategic sites all over the globe. It parodies the military race and the desperate attempts of several countries to possess atomic bombs as a preventive weapon. His feverish hoarding of food and ammunitions resembles the superpower’s unflinching insistence on manipulating world resources and military supremacy. Crusoe launches a protective war against possible attacks and recruits agents, Xury and Friday, from presumably hostile nations to have eyes, allies or colonial subjects everywhere in the world. Eventually, he becomes a lonely person haunted most of all by his own fears, blindly striking the wrong places and dispersing with one hand the allies he has been recruiting with the other.

Presenting Arabs as pirates ambushing mariners is so degrading, especially while white ships roaming the ocean to kidnap and enslave blacks seem quite natural and legal. At present, whenever a terroristic attack happens, the first reaction is to search for a Muslim perpetrator. This agrees with Peter Barry’s statement that the ‘East tends to be seen as homogeneous, the people there being anonymous masses, rather than individuals, their actions

determined by instinctive emotions ... rather than by conscious choices or decisions' (193, 194). Crusoe gets Xury to swear by Mohammed and the 'beard of his father' which shows a scandalous lack of knowledge of true Islam. A Muslim should avoid giving oaths, which is against the dignity of the one who falls in the habit. If necessary, an oath should be by Allah, not Mohammed and not even the *Qur'an*. It is regrettable that Donoghue calls it a 'heathen oath' (7). The negative view of Islam still needs to be reconsidered. This double dealing is phenomenal in the present and was particularly outrageous during the Egyptian Uprisings when President Obama, 'a sitting president of a country which is occupying two Middle East countries with a view to militarily bring democracy and justice to these countries - Iraq and Afghanistan - to talk of non-violence as the way to justice' (Wafawarova). This double dealing pertains heavily to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Even cannibals seem to have materialized from Crusoe's active imagination. He seems to have willed them into being by insisting on their being there and their coming to the island as a matter of time. This fear of cannibals resembles Europe's fear of Islam. It embodies the belief still embraced by many 'white Westerners [that] the peoples of Africa, the Americas and Asia were heathens...How one treats [them] does not really matter...because all races other than white were inferior or subhuman.' They end up as the 'evil' others, a philosophical concept called 'alterity' whereby those 'others' are viewed as different and inferior and therefore justifiably excluded from the position of power (Bressler, 236).

Friday is a materialization of all the misconceptions that Europeans have been hoarding about the 'Other' as 'exotic and immoral' (Barry, 194). Homi Bhabha declares that 'Racist stereotypical discourse... inscribes a form of governmentality ...Some of its practices...institutionalize a range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudicial, discriminatory...mythical' (25). But 'stereotypical knowledges should be recognized for what they are, 'a means of practical control' and a 'justification of the colonial mission' (25).

Finally, Crusoe's experience on the island endows him with a divided sense of identity. Peter Hulme indicates that Crusoe should be conceived of as two characters: a 'benevolent ruler ... and, at the same time, an enterprising ...owner in the world market' (222). This technique of 'divided selves' constitutes the 'colonial alibi' (222). He argues that it is also a way for 'negating the inseparable-and eventually uncloseable- gap between ... violence ...and the notion of a moral economy' (222). Defoe justifies Crusoe's imperialist actions insisting that they are vital for his and his subjects' survival and for keeping peace on the island. Clowes thinks that there is 'a new social ethic-legitimization of the self through possession and enlightened management of territory' (149). The same logic is used to justify the contradictory behavior of the super powers that adopt the fallacious slogans introduced by George Orwell in *1984*, 1949, particularly that 'war is peace' (3). Wars on Iraq and Afghanistan are allegedly launched to prevent war. The condescending neocolonial powers are also, allegedly, civilizers and teachers of democracy. The last part of the novel evokes the murky atmosphere of politics that smacks of mutual mistrust. Crusoe is making pacts, sending delegates, considering his options, balancing powers and practicing political deception. Eventually, he decides that his best interests reside with his country

people, other super powers, and Friday, third world, is even further marginalized. His status dwindles from servant to royal fool till he becomes a silly, childish person, suddenly so dwarfed in stature.

Yaqzan's attitude towards the environment is admirable and in line with Islamic teachings that are particularly neglected in the Islamic world. 'Should the Day of Judgment strike while you are planting a tree', says Prophet Mohammed, 'just carry on' (Bokhary). *Yaqzan* highlights the idea of the unity of the universe that successfully guides his quest for identity. He concludes that 'all bodies, whether animate or inanimate, are one thing' (84). This could be the reason why Hayy not only respects all forms of life, but also thinks of everything as endowed with valuable life since he sees the whole universe as 'one great being' (85). Through careful observation and employment of reason, Hayy defines himself, worlds of animals, plants, things, nature of heavens and God Almighty. He harmoniously connects with them and classifies himself amongst them. Accordingly, Hayy is a strict preserver of the physical environment while Crusoe is a prodigious consumer. He behaves as a guard of the things that the latter takes for granted to be his. The novel introduces regulations and principles which ensure that the environment should be cherished and preserved for future generations. Hayy makes it his duty to God to help everything reach its full potential. He neither holds enmity against nor expects it from the environment, but perceiving harmony on the whole universe, he strives to be part of it.

Hayy holds the soul as superior to the body and achieves a solid sense of self by making 'his awareness of the Necessarily Existent, so continuous that nothing could distract him for an instant' (Solitude, 2) and also through mortifying the body and shutting his mind against sensory experience. Happiness overwhelms him for seconds while moving in wide circles in a reference to the mysterious whirling practice of Sufi dervishes. Finally, Hayy could do even without whirling by shutting off the senses in the seclusion of the 'cave' that becomes his dwelling place. For Hayy, these practices replace the quest for identity and render him void of worldly ambition. That might explain why many scientists from the East flourish only when they move to the West where technology and the practical aspect of knowledge are highly appreciated.

Crusoe's self-esteem depends on materialistic possessions; he is a realistic example of how to survive under extreme conditions. Defoe highlights 'the spiritual value of industry' and makes 'the industrious, God-fearing individual the legitimate agent for realizing wealth and power in the New World' (Clowes, 148). 'Cheerful labour' is essential for the conditioning of one's 'spiritual biceps' (Watt, 160). This balanced view of the physical and the spiritual initiates a constructive attitude towards life and maintains the equilibrium of a human being. It strikes a balance between communism which calls for 'The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people' (Karl Marx, 3) and Sufism that regards 'mystical experience' as 'the highest form of knowledge' (Goodman, 150) and advocates 'a total annihilation of ... selfhood' and 'all other subjectivities' (Miller, 477). In the underdeveloped countries, an enormous amount of time and energy is wasted over the belief that immersion in worldly issues equals dismissal from the vicinity of God.

Crusoe's experience generates enthusiasm for life and offers constructive outlets for energy.

Different attitudes towards the spiritual and the materialistic are always regarded as a point of divergence between different cultures and religions. These attitudes, however, could be thought of as complementary. Hayy and Crusoe value both aspects, the spiritual and the materialistic, but in ways that suit their circumstances and inclinations best. Crusoe never gives up spirituality, but given his conditions, the reader does not expect him to forget his ties with the world of reality and contemplate the horizon like Hayy who has never been involved in a rat race. Crusoe's realistic mission on the island works as a safe haven, a solace and a proof of God's existence and forgiveness. Given the circumstances, the untimely harvest that God bestows on him is the best way He could show love and render help. Hayy begins his route to spirituality by immersing himself in the rigid world of reality, by following the scientific approach dissecting animals to 'see' and 'touch' what they are made of till he is faced with the riddle of the soul that he cannot see no matter how deeply he looks. He finally decides that this intangible soul is the real identity of the human being. Hayy and Crusoe present various states that the human self may alternate between, provided that a person keeps balance by striking the right chord at the right time.

It is remarkable, however, that neither Islam nor any religion is mentioned in relation to Hayy's experience. Several critics, Miller included, argue that the 'true religion' that Hayy and Asaal discuss means Islam, but that cannot be true within the rationale of the novella. Hayy neither reads nor speaks and meeting Asaal is his first communication with a human being. Defining one religion in particular would refute the purpose of *Yaqzan*. The point is that it is within the capacity of man to reach God absolutely unguided and that this could best happen if man relies solely on his instincts. The true religion then that Hayy recommends is achieving this union with the 'Ultimate Reality.' The only conflict happens among people of the same religion, never among people of different religions, which proves that it is a matter of personal attitudes and views rather than beliefs or convictions. If readers agree with Miller, that Tufayl refers to Islam as the one true religion, they should also believe that it is Islam that he rejects after he gets acquainted with Muslims. He advocates a universal route to reach God Who is described rather than named thus advocating a democracy and an independence of thought free of the prescriptions even of prophets and religious books. In his conclusion, Tufayl states that if people do not seek this sacred union, he cannot see any difference between one scripture and another. This reflects a tolerant attitude that refutes Cook's condemnation of Muslims on the ground that they declare Islam to be 'a faith [that] abrogates all previous revelations, and is designed to be the faith of the entire world' (706). It should also be an eye opener to some Muslims who may adopt that misconception neglecting the verse 'There is no obligation in religion' (The Cow, verse, 256).

It is remarkable, though, that Hayy does not revert to fundamentalism or seek the imposition of his beliefs upon others. He concludes that the majority of people need only a superficial understanding of religion as a set of rules and a code of ethics organizing their dealings and forming their sense of

morality. He finds it useless trying to drag them into his higher pinnacles of thought. All they need to regulate their lives is best contained in the instructions of prophets who all preached the same things. Average people should not try to tackle higher issues that do not concern them, but 'submissively...accept all the most problematical elements of the tradition and shun originality and innovation' (Solitude, 8).

Lamont criticizes Hayy for rejecting the world of human commerce and communities. 'His spirituality,' he adds, 'smacks of elitism and his continual fasting, a radical mortification of the flesh in which he eats only enough to keep his body alive, hints at a dark side' (174). It is remarkable here that Hayy's behaviour parodies that of Christian monks, especially that Islam is a practical religion that does not condone monasticism. It lays heavy focus on the value of people getting to know each other: 'Verily people, We have created you men and women and made you into peoples and tribes, so that you may get to know each other' (*Hojorat*, 13). However, Ibn Tufayl prescribes a negative role for the enlightened individual in society. He should keep his 'flame' to himself to enlighten and warm only the space of his 'cave.' The value of labour as a spiritually uplifting force that is liberating from the meaninglessness of life is nonexistent in *Yaqzan*. The possibility of establishing a family with all the beautiful trivialities of mundane life is nil. Hayy launches no war against what he calls ignorance. Apart from preserving the environment there is no practical aspect to his philosophy and his principle of 'pouring love on the universe' does not stand the test of experience. It does not endow him with the power or patience to help Asaal's people improve their practical life. He diagnosis the illness but decides to leave it there and rejects mingling with people he overtly deems beneath him. If Crusoe advocates the superiority of the white race, Hayy advocates the 'aristocracy of thought' (17) which deems some people inferior to others because their minds are incapable of digesting the abstract. His apparent tolerance does not absolve him of 'othering' those who are different from him, not in colour, but in the way they approach religion and relate it to their lives. He ends aware of his inability to bridge the gap between self and others.

Literature is the other face of every coin. Both protagonists evoke the situation of modern people who live not in, but as isolated islands building fences and destroying bridges, especially the Arabic protagonist who only rambles in the oceans of thought. Cultural diversity should not generate a challenge in which each civilization strives to prove the other as close-minded as itself. Cultures should look forward not backward and equally value their similarities and differences. King insists that '[we] must pluralize and diversify our approaches: a basic move against either economic or philosophic hegemony is to diversify centers of resistance; avoid the error of reverse essentializing; Occidentalism is not a remedy for Orientalism' (5). If history actually repeats itself, at least it should be stopped from repeating the stupidities that have taken their toll on humanity. Living in seclusion is bad enough, but worse still is the mixing of cards between politics and religion, that has been phenomenal during the Arab Uprisings with some candidates equating voting for a party with adherence to a religious faith. The 'othering' of people on pretext of their being ignorant also flourished thanks to a group of

revolutionaries who positioned themselves as the elite who are entitled to prescribe how others should behave. Several 'recent commentators', contends Helen Tiffin, have argued that 'the colonial powers...created an elite (comprador) class to maintain aspects of colonial control on their behalf but without the cost or the opprobrium associated with the classic colonial models' (64). The previous instances indicate new policies for 'othering' people, the former on religious basis, the latter by equating nationalism with fascism.

Cultural exchange should be activated to filter out the misconceptions that hinder the advancement of the underdeveloped countries and retain the positive values that enhance mutual understanding. Powerful countries should give up the manipulation of less powerful countries especially in the Middle East or Latin America. The 'othering' of ideas out of prejudice against the cultures that generated them is another blocking stone. Ideas should be evaluated in terms of their relevance to the needs of a certain society. Middle Eastern countries should acknowledge the value of technology and the practical aspect of knowledge while also emphasizing the religious principles that could help eliminate basic problems like those associated with the environment and the acceptance of the other.

The story of a traumatized individual surviving in isolation is traceable much further back in the history of humanity. The first such survivors were Adam and Eve. If this indicates anything, it is the fact that man's struggle on earth is meant to be an integral part of his life. It is a struggle to understand and learn more about himself and the purpose of life. There could be as different opinions about life as there are people on earth. It is a nonstop dialogue between God and man, man and man, man and nation, nation and nation, etc., a dialogue meant to begin but not supposed to end since it is an ultimate goal of this life we are having.

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