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REVIEW ARTICLE

NELSON MANDELA: LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

Nelson Mandela: Özgürlüğe Giden Uzun Yol

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to study Nelson Mandela as a silenced/speaking colonial subject who despite his imprisonment speaks out against imperialism and apartheid, which leads to a shattering of the S/subject relationship within the oppressed society of South Africa. South Africa has travelled a long way to freedom, suffering a lot through colonialism and segregation. It is due to the hegemony of racism that the native becomes subject to poverty and illiteracy and consequently experiences 'subalternity' and 'marginalization' in their own land. The discourse is applied to the indigenous by preventing them from recognizing and retaining their collective identity. For example, by giving natives a new colonial subjectivity through religion, schooling, and the economy, the West asserts its position as the 'Subject' thereby assigning the non-Western the role of the 'subject,' or in other words, the 'mute' native. To smash such S/subject relationships or to attain a 'voice' the 'silenced' need to challenge the hegemony of the oppressor by reclaiming his/her collective identity. This reclamation is not possible through the knowledge discourse provided by the oppressor since it is never innocent, but rather can be achieved through his/her own indigenous understanding of the local as well as the subjectivity and the culture which have been stolen. It is by this transformation that the oppressed indigenous will be 'heard' since by this shift, he/she gets emancipated from the 'subalternity' imposed by apartheid.

Key Words: Subalternity, Segregation, Marginalization, Psychological Emancipation

ÖZET

Bu çalışma ile Nelson Mandela'nın, -mahkumiyetine rağmen- emperyalizme ve ırkçılığa karşı sesini çıkaran ve Güney Afrika'nın ezilen halkı içerisinde Özne/nesne ilişkisinde bir sarsıntıya yol açan 'susturulmuş/susturulmamış' bir sömürge bireyi olarak incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Güney Afrika özgürlük yolunda, sömürgecilik ve ayrımcılıktan büyük acıların yaşandığı uzun bir yoldan kat etmiştir. Bu durum, yerli halkın cahilliğe ve yoksulluğa itilmesi, sonunda da kendi öz vatanında ötekileştirilmesi ve ezilmesine yol açan ırkçılık hegemonyasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu söylem, Güney Afrika yerli halkının kolektif kimliklerini tanımları ve muhafaza etmeleri engellenmek suretiyle tatbik edilmiştir. Örneğin Batı, yerli halka ekonomi, din ve eğitim yoluyla yeni bir sömürge kimliği aşılacak suretiyle, kendi 'Özne' pozisyonunu sağlamlaştırma, batılı olmayanlara ise 'nesne' rolünü başka bir deyişle susturulmuş yerli rolünü verme yoluna gitmiştir. Böylesi bir 'Özne/nesne' ilişkisini yok etmek-ya da 'söz hakkına' sahip olmak için 'susturulanlar' kendi kolektif kimliklerini geri kazanarak zulmedenlerin hegemonyasına meydan okumalıdır. Bunu yapmak ezen güç tarafından sağlanan ve asla masum olmayan bilgi söylemiyle mümkün değildir, bu ancak çalınmış bir tarihi ve kişiliği reddedip, yerli halkın kendi özgün anlayışına sahip olmasıyla mümkün olabilir. Ezilenlerin ve susturulanların sesleri bu dönüşümle 'duyulabilecek' bu kişiler yine ancak böylesi bir dönüşümle ırkçılık tarafından kendilerine empoze edilen ezilmişlikten ve mağduriyetten kurtulabileceklerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Maduniyet, Ayrışma, Marjinalleştirme, Psikolojik Özgürleşme

1.INTRODUCTION

The oppression and marginalization of South Africans in their own land can be considered through different historical and political layers; nonetheless, it is widely agreed there are the two main stages of domination over the land and subjectivity of the people: colonization and apartheid. In *South Africa, A State of Apartheid*, Robert C. Cottrell provides useful historical background and a summary of noteworthy events and developments that assist in understanding, some of which are included below South Africa:

1. In 1487, Portuguese sailors led by Bartolomeu Dias, who was seeking a passage to India, reportedly became the first Europeans to encounter South Africa. Ten years later, Vasco da Gama guided another

Portuguese expedition around the Cape on the way to India. During the next century, more Portuguese ships undertook the odyssey, as Portugal conducted a slave trade to the Western Hemisphere but only skirted into South Africa. Subsequently, Dutch, French, English, and Scandinavian crewmen also sailed past the Cape to Asia (Cottrell,2005:13).

2. Dutch arrivals to South Africa began in 1652 with Jan Van Riebeeck, the take over the land, and the formation of 'Afrikaners', as well as 'Boers' from among the Dutch, British, Germans and French, and the emergence of arbitrary cultural and racial barriers separating four groups of settlers: Native Africans, Afrikaners, Europeans, and the imported slaves from Madagascar, Indonesia, India and Ceylon.

3. In 1795, the British, through an expedition led by General Sir James Craig and Admiral Lord George Keith Elphinstone, took control of the Cape and a broad swath of largely uninhabited territory, reaching west of the Fish River and south of the Gariep. As war with Napoleon Bonaparte appeared increasingly likely, the British government was troubled by the fact that French ships increasingly stopped at the Cape before heading to India. With the Dutch East India Company suffering liquidation, the British decided to temporarily hold the colony for the beleaguered Dutch monarchy of the Prince of Orange (Cottrell,2005:19).

4. In 1814, the Dutch formally ceded the colony, solidifying arbitrary borders in southern Africa of an imperial nature. Moreover, like the Dutch, the British were determined to maintain white dominance in the region (Cottrell,2005:20); consequently, the definition of new borders like Natal, Cape colony, Orange Free State and Boers Republic emerged.

5. The discovery of diamond mines and their attendant labor conditions evoke Mandela's statement on Gold and Diamond mining: "Gold mining in Witwatersrand was costly because the ore was low grade and deep under the earth. Only the presence of cheap labor in the form of thousands of Africans working long hours for little pay with no rights made gold mining profitable for the mining houses-white owned companies that became wealthy beyond the dreams of Croesus on the backs of the African people" (Mandela, 1994:85).

6. Boer Wars

7. The Unification of South African colonies and the formation of the Union of South Africa with a new constitution on May 31,1910 which resulted in the drawing of new and often arbitrary political, racial, and economic borders. The establishment of the unitary state, clearly stronger than the separate colonies, appeared to benefit Great Britain (Cottrell,2005: 66).

8. From the time of its establishment in 1910 through the end of World War II, the Union of South Africa confronted internal divisions regarding both domestic policies and its status within the British Empire. Afrikaners dominated national politics, with all agreeing on the need for stronger racial segregation. Following World War II, Afrikaners almost without exception hoped that the South African government would act to solidify white supremacy. Farmers and commercial operators foresaw unrestricted access to African labor (Cottrell,2005:83).

9. The general election (only white) of May 26, 1948, took place: the Nationalists triumphed, setting the stage for the construction of an apartheid state (Cottrell,2005: 85).

10. The South African government, which on May 31, 1961 proclaimed a republic through a whites-only referendum, was separated from the domination of British policy; apartheid became even more severe.

It is important to note that during all these imperialistic adventures by Westerners they had to suppress and kill the opposing native dwellers.

2. IN THE PENAL COLONY

Reading through Mandela's autobiography about the suffering endured by the South Africans in their walk toward freedom, one may recall Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*. The short story introduces two kinds of colonization: traditional and modern. The story depicts an old officer who is 'unusually tired, breathing with his mouth wide open' (Kafka, 1988: 3). This officer, along with his traditional torture machine, belongs to the 'old commandant' or, in a more precise sense, the older colonial system. When the old commandant dies, his officer and apparatus are not welcomed by the new commandant because the kind and style of oppression and colonization have changed. However, contrary to the claims of the traveler, these changes have not improved the lives of the people as they are still poor and oppressed.

Mandela's autobiography reveals a similar transformation of colonial and racial issues in South Africa. The racism had changed in forms and norms through history and politics but nonetheless persisted. So, it is possible to make an analogy between Kafka's *Penal Colony* and colonized South African society. As cited from *South Africa, A State of Apartheid*, segregation through colonization had started with the first settlements of Europeans, though this racism subsequently passed through different phases. More traditional segregation was accomplished through conflict with the indigenous, the formation of Afrikaners and Boers, the adoption of the classic racist discourse of Britain, and operating in a more conventional British war and battle imperialistic style. These techniques were all transformed into a more sophisticated and different system called apartheid which narrativized its hegemony through its parliamentary, educational, and religious discourses. As Mandela describes when referring to the Group Areas Act (which required 'separate urban areas for each racial group'), "In the past whites took land by force, now they secured it by legislation" (Mandela, 1994:155). In other words, the apartheid system used more subtle ways to mute the subjectivity of the native people. One of the ways this was accomplished was through parliamentary legislation that dictated the superiority of whites. This resulted in the internalization of the S/subject discourse by non-whites. Non-white natives were deprived not only of their involvement in politics but also of their ability to meet their basic needs of ownership and education. Consequently, they were driven into corners of illiteracy and poverty, thereby further enforcing the internalization of their 'subalternity.'

3. CREATING SUBALTERN SUBJECTIVITY

Abrams notes that 'subaltern' has become a standard way to designate the colonial subject that has been constructed by European discourse and internalized by the colonial people who employ this discourse. 'Subaltern' is a British word for someone of inferior military rank and combines the Latin terms for 'under' (sub) and 'other' (alter) (Abrams, 1999: 278). In the discourse of the colonizer, the colonized becomes marginalized. However, the marginalization of Africans because of their skin color gets more intensified due to the historical and cultural background. Moreover, domination over the rich mineral resources and the need for a cheap labor force cannot be excluded from the context of cultural justification for colonization. Undoubtedly, to attain such an aim, non-white natives must be 'silenced,' deprived of having a 'voice' that bears their national collective identity. This was achieved by exerting power through violent apartheid legislation. In addition, to avoid the unification of native tribes, the policy of divide and rule was implanted. Thus, the identity of the natives became a discourse narrativized by the 'Subject' of apartheid power and its hegemony was internalized by the people via biased and intentional education and religion.

As Mandela asserts in his autobiography, it was through schooling that he was given an English name as it was the "custom among the Africans in those days." It was through the panopticon of education and schooling that imperialism and apartheid in South Africa expanded its power, excluding and marginalizing the reality of any 'other' identity. As Foucault observes regarding the relationship between power/knowledge, "in order for something to be established as a fact, or as true other equally

valid statements have to be discredited and denied” (Foucault, 1980:67). So, education is not always innocent; it can implant the interests of its providers, like a product imported for determined aims. Therefore, the colonizers, the imperialists, and apartheid in South Africa attempted to construct a new identity for the indigenous through church and school, thereby erasing the existence of any resistance by the native culture. It was by Christianizing the natives, westernizing religion, educating schoolchildren, and erasing cultural memory that South Africans were made ‘silent.’ Mandela recalls that while he was a student, even he considered the English, and generally the whites, as superiors: “The educated Englishman was our model; what we were aspired to be were ‘Black Englishmen,’ as we were sometimes derisively called. We were taught and believed that the best ideas were English ideas, the best government was English government, and the best men were English men” (Mandela, 1994:50). Through this education and practice of power, the young generation of oppressed South African society saw the whites as the supporters and sponsors of their community. As Mandela notes, “I looked on the white man not as an oppressor but as a benefactor” (Mandela, 1994:41).

By the end of English domination, segregation took on a more severe form with the Afrikaner apartheid victory over the land, which was supported by Dutch Church propaganda as well. It was claimed at times that this support from the church had a more archaic background, referring to the *Canaan Curse* or the *Curse of Ham* from Genesis, which, according to some interpretations, justifies slavery (Gomez, 2005:21). Mandela asserts that:

The often-haphazard segregation of the past three hundred was to be consolidated into a monolithic system that was diabolical in its detail, inescapable in its reach, and overwhelming in its power. The premise of apartheid was that whites were superior to Africans, Coloureds and Indians, and the function of it was to entrench white supremacy forever. As the Nationalists put it, “*Die wit man moet altyd baas wees*” (The white man must always remain boss). Their platform rested on the term *baasakap*, literally boss-ship, a freighted word that stood for white supremacy in all its harshness. The policy was supported by the Dutch Reform Church, which furnished apartheid with its religious underpinnings by suggesting that Afrikaners were God’s chosen people and that blacks were a subservient species. In the Afrikaner’s world view, apartheid and the church went hand in hand” (Mandela, 1994:152).

Nonetheless, it was because of the materialistic goals and through religious justification that apartheid muted the ‘subjectivity’ of every non-white native, passing laws which targeted critical issues for an individual’s prosperity, including education, identity, and ownership. The acts passed by the Afrikaner government and parliament were all in favor of preventing the colonial subaltern from ‘speaking.’ Some of these referred to by Mandela include the following: The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, and Immorality Act making sexual relations between white and non-white illegal (Mandela, 1994:155); The Population Registration Act which labeled all South Africans by race, making color the single most important arbiter of individuals (Mandela, 1994:155); The Group Areas Act, requiring separate urban areas for each racial group: ‘in the past whites took land by force, now they secured it by legislation’ (Mandela, 1994:155); The Urban Areas Act, which did not permit non-whites to occupy business premises in the city (Mandela, 1994:208); The Extension of University Education Act which barred non-whites from racially open universities (Mandela, 1994:316) and The Bantu Education Act, about which Mandela asserts, “Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd, the minister of Bantu education explained that education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life. His meaning was that Africans did not, and would not have any opportunities, therefore why educate them?” (Mandela, 1994:230).

4. BIRTH OF A FREEDOM FIGHTER

To be from an oppressed society means to be politicized from the time of birth, because the oppressor or the colonizer sees every individual as a potential threat to the hegemony of the government, though the silent colonial subject might be unaware of this. Mandela writes, “An African child is born in an Africans Only hospital, taken home in an Africans Only bus, lives in an Africans Only area, and attends Africans Only schools, if he attends school at all” (Mandela, 1994:129). Mandela asserts that a number of ‘critical events’ shaped his political career and his struggle for freedom, in particular the mine workers’ strike of 1946 and its suppression (Mandela, 1994:138), the Asiatic Land Tenure Act (Mandela, 1994:140) and Malan’s platform known as *Apartheid* (Mandela, 1994:151). Here one could say that the prophecy of W.E.B. Dubois came true as he claimed that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line” (1968:3). Through its historical, economic, and cultural background, Dubois’s prophecy is applicable in South Africa as the natives became ‘colonial subjects’ in their own land and on their own continent due to their skin color. But, as claimed by Jenny Sharpe, the colonial subject is a contradictory figure who simultaneously reinforces colonial authority and disturbs it (Sharpe, 1999:99). Thus, every subject under oppression has a double-edge quality by which he/she can be a potential menace to the supremacy of the oppressor. Mandela, a colonial subject who carried an English name and once called the whites benefactors, was baptized and grew up under the powerful discourse of racism yet ultimately transformed into a resisting subject through his ‘psychological emancipation.’ The term ‘psychological emancipation’ is a term publicized by Steve Biko, a political prisoner who died at the hands of South African police in September 1977. Biko, a charismatic speaker who helped awaken the black consciousness, advocated “psychological emancipation” for blacks in South Africa (Cottrell, 2005:105).

Mandela’s membership and leading presence in the ANC party, in spite of the government’s pressure on him to resign, suggests his ‘psychological emancipation’ in Biko’s sense by reclaiming not only his land but also the suppressed African identity. Faced with more pressure and violence from the government, he was inspired to form MK or *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the militant branch of the ANC, which means ‘Spear of the Nation.’ The symbolic choice of the name suggests Mandela’s quest for the return to the collective cultural identity. He writes, “The symbol of the spear was chosen because with this simple weapon Africans had resisted the incursions of whites for centuries” (Mandela, 1994:376). By this quest, he indeed shatters the concept of being a ‘colonial subject’ since he does not consider himself a ‘subaltern’ anymore. However, through this quest, and his political activities he was arrested several times and finally sentenced to life imprisonment. As is generally known, the imprisoned is someone who has challenged the ‘discipline’ of society. Foucault claims that “discipline consists of a concern with control which is internalized by each individual” (1980: 43). While there can be many kinds of offences to the rules established by the powers of any society, Mandela’s resistance to the hegemony of apartheid was perceived as ‘high treason’ in the eyes of the government. The fact that he did not get sentenced to death indicates his meaningful and outstanding presence among people in their struggle toward freedom; in other words, this signifies his ‘voice’ and presence as a threat whose death would trigger greater upheavals and awaken more subjects of apartheid. On the other hand, sending him to prison in order to expose him to the gaze of power and other prisoners shows the government’s efforts to ‘mute’ his ‘voice’ or, in other words, to restore him to his position as a ‘silenced colonial subject’. Showing how far-reaching apartheid was, Mandela describes how “apartheid regulations extended even to clothing. All of us, except Kathy (Indian), received short trousers, a substantial jersey, and a canvas jacket. Short trousers for Africans were meant to remind us that we were ‘boys’” (Mandela, 1994:526). However, in prison not only did Mandela not become silent, he turned another page on his political activities, in spite of segregation in prison as well.

The policy against anti-racist prisoners is reminiscent of the discourse of ‘big brother’ and the hegemony of master/slave. Mandela asserts that “the warders were white and overwhelmingly

Afrikaans-speaking, and they demanded a master-servant relationship. They ordered us to call them 'baas' which we refused. The racial divide on Robben Island was absolute: there were no black warders, and no white prisoners" (Mandela, 1994:531). To persist in his resistance and to maintain his emancipation he continued his study of laws, conducted hunger strikes and formed an internal organization of ANC in prison, called 'High Command.' He even managed to smuggle messages inside and outside of prison to stay in touch with his comrades. Not only could apartheid not reduce him to subalternity, he made his voice heard inside *and* outside of the penal complex, in his society and also internationally, even becoming the president of the Students' Union of London University in absentia (Mandela, 1994: 511). Mandela even refers to Robben Island as a university since he and other political inmates managed to form a faculty of their own. This is significant because their secret faculty educated and provided the young non-white prisoners with knowledge far from the discourse dictated by the apartheid. Courses on Robben Island addressed issues of black identity and politics, the history of the Indian struggle, the history of colored people, Marxism, political economy, and the goals as well as history of ANC and the liberation struggle. Mandela writes,

"In the struggle, Robben Island was known as the University. This is not because of what we learned from books, or because prisoners studied English, Afrikaans, art, geography and mathematics, or because so many of our men, such as Billy Nair, Ahmed Kathrada, Mike Dingake, and Eddie Daniels earned multiple degrees. Robben Island was known as the university because of what we learned from each other. We became our own faculty, with our own professors, our own curriculum, and our own courses. We made a distinction between academic studies, which were official, and political studies, which were not" (Mandela, 1994:641).

Indeed, it is through his resistance, smart tactics, and leadership that Mandela manages to have his voice heard not only by the people of his society but also by the government as well as internationally; consequently, he forces representatives of apartheid to talk with him. He proves that it is by resistance against the hegemony of the oppressor, along with cultural and psychological emancipation, that the oppressor will not be able to suppress the subjectivity of the oppressed even if he/she has been imprisoned to be 'silenced'. The fact that the apartheid governments tried to talk to Mandela to reach an agreement proves that Mandela had attained a voice different from the voice of the government. At the same time, his freedom from the prison, clash with apartheid and the formation of an anti-racist political system signifies the restoration of black identity and native collective culture in South Africa. The book he started to write during imprisonment and its completion is emblematic of Mandela's speaking subjectivity and represents the struggle of a nation for freedom.

5. CONCLUSION

Describing his visit to the National Museum in Cairo, Mandela notes that it was 'important for African nationalists to be armed with evidence to refute the fictitious claims of whites that Africans are without a civilized past that compares with that of the West. In a single morning I discovered that Egyptians were creating great works of art and architecture when whites were still living in caves' (Mandela, 1994: 408). The current postcolonial debate over 'whether a colonial subject or a subaltern can have a voice' is palpable in Mandela's autobiography. Spivak, in her article 'Can the Subaltern Speak', questions the possibility of the voice of the marginalized. According to Spivak, not only has he/she internalized the hegemony of the oppressor but he/she is also being studied through the language and discourse of the oppressor, which is far from the subjectivity of the colonial subject. This could apply to the study of South African's struggle toward freedom, suggesting that while the native perceives him/her self as inferior and the western S/subject binary is internalized, possessing a 'voice of one's own' is not be possible. As Mandela asserts, to overcome this discourse Africans needed to be 'armed with evidence' to dispute the claims of apartheid that Africans are 'without a civilized past'. Thus, the colonized subject cannot 'speak' until he/she has emancipated him/herself from hegemony of the oppressor 'psychologically' and 'culturally' and consequently, even if

imprisoned physically, this subjectivity's voice would not be muted, as is the case with Mandela. Mandela's voice has been heard globally through his activities, not only outside prison but also through his imprisonment, as he did not give up his resistance and persevered to smash the discipline of the Colonizer/colonized. In fact, his book, *A Long Walk to Freedom* is not only his voice but also the voice of a black nation, a black cultural collectivity condemning the segregation and apartheid in the South Africa. Mandela's autobiography is not a narrative prepared by the non-black scholar about segregation and colonization of once oppressed nation by the whites, but is a text written by a black freedom fighter about his nation, his culture, and the quest for freedom. It is a voice narrating the poverty and the violence imposed on a nation by a different race for materialistic goals; it is also a narrative about families, mothers, wives, and children and his voice is heard globally whenever his autobiographical book is read.

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