



From Captivity to Liberty: A Study on the Prison Writings of Martin L. King, Ngugi and Soyinka

Esaretten Özgürlüğe: Martin L. King, Ngugi ve Soyinka'nın Hapishane Yazıları Üzerine Bir Çalışma

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Abstract

Prisons, like other disciplining apparatuses of the state, are used to reform the prisoners so that they can be re-conditioned back to a set of pre-ordained roles designed in the system. These are places hostile to individuality, freedom, and creativity. They function like rehabilitating institutes to suppress the reactionary or rebellious voices of the prisoners by effacing their individuality under harsh conditions so that they can make them docile bodies. However, this objective fails when the prisoner-intellectuals are of concern. For them, prisons become their shrines where they are overwhelmed by the transformative power of imprisonment. The experience of confinement shapes their perspectives, deepens

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their commitment to social justice, and fuels their advocacy for change. Although the physical conditions of the prisons hamper their urge to write, they never give up writing. Some write on the prison walls and some on toilet papers. Despite such horrible conditions, they manage to produce their most influential works which can be classified in prison literature. The writings of these prisoner-writers have paved the way for the liberation of colonized/discriminated people in their own countries and in diverse diasporas. Martin L. King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (2018), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981) and Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: The Prison Notes* (1988) are three significant works to be featured in this genre. Through an interdisciplinary approach, this article identifies the distinctive elements and commonalities in the prison writings of King, Ngugi, and Soyinka. This study explores the universal concepts of incarceration, resistance to oppressive systems, and the struggle for freedom as portrayed in the works of these writers, and aims to examine how these writers have transformed their works into tools of resistance.

Keywords: *prison literature, oppression, liberty, disobedience, resilience*

Öz

Devletin diğer disiplin aygıtları gibi hapisaneler de mahkûmları ıslah etmek için kullanılır, böylece mahkûmlar sistemde önceden tasarlanmış bir dizi role yeniden koşullandırılabilirler. Buralar bireysellik, özgürlük ve yaratıcılıkla bağdaşmayan yerlerdir. Gerçek şu ki, hapisaneler, mahkûmların tepkisel ya da isyankâr seslerini bastırmak, bireyselliklerini sert koşullar altında ortadan kaldırmak ve böylece onları topluma uyum sağlayan bireyler olarak geri kazandırmak üzere hareket eden ıslah kurumları gibi işlev görmektedir. Ancak, mahkûm-aydınlar söz konusu olduğunda cezaevlerinin bu hedefi başarısızlığa uğramaktadır. Çünkü düşünürlerin fikirlerini dört duvar ile kontrol altına alacak hiçbir sistem mevcut değildir. Onlar için hapisaneler, hapsedilmenin dönüştürücü gücü sayesinde hareket ettikleri mabetleri haline gelmiştir. Hapsedilme deneyimi bakış açılarını şekillendirmiş, sosyal adalete olan bağlılıklarını derinleştirmiş ve değişim savunuculuklarını körüklemiştir. Hapisanelerin fiziki koşulları onların yazma isteğini bir nebze olsun engellese de yazmaktan asla vazgeçmemişlerdir. Kimi zaman hapisane duvarlarına yazmışlar, kimi zaman ise tuvalet kâğıtlarını kullanmışlardır. Bu korkunç koşullara rağmen, hapisane edebiyatı içinde sınıflandırılabilir en etkili eserlerini üretmeyi başarmışlardır. Bu mahkûm-yazarların özgür ruhları ve düşünceleri ile yazılan çok sayıda yazı, kendi ülkelerinde ve farklı diasporalarda sömürgeleştirilmiş/ayrımcılığa maruz kalmış insanların özgürleşmesinin yolunu açmıştır. Martin L. King'in *Birmingham Hapishanesinden Mektup* (1981), Ngugi wa Thiong'o'nun *Tutuklu: Bir Yazarın Hapis Günlüğü* (1981) ve Wole Soyinka'nın *Adam Öldü: Hapishane Notları* (1988) adlı çalışmaları bu kategoride ele alınabilecek eserlerdendir. Bu araştırma, disiplinlerarası bir yaklaşımla King, Ngugi ve Soyinka'nın hapisane yazılarındaki ayırt edici unsurları ve ortak noktaları incelemektedir.

Bu çalışma, bu yazarların eserlerinde tasvir edildiği şekliyle, hapsedilme, baskıcı sisteme karşı direnç ve özgürlük mücadelesi gibi evrensel kavramların üzerinde durmakta ve bu yazarların eserlerini nasıl birer direniş aracına dönüştürdüklerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *hapishane edebiyatı, baskı, özgürlük, itaatsizlik, direniş*

Introduction

With their concrete walls and iron bars, prisons have long served as places that imprison the human spirit and body challenging the concept of freedom. Within these austere confines, a unique form of literary expression emerges: prison writing. It is a genre that captures the raw emotions, the longing for liberation, and the transformative power of words within the darkest corners of incarceration. As a testament to the indomitable resilience of the human soul, prison writing weaves narratives that transcend physical boundaries, giving voice to the silenced, and offering glimpses into the profound depths of human experience. High in spirit even in darkest times, the intellectual writers have penned their masterpieces on pieces of clothes, toilet papers, and walls. Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Wilde's *De Profundis* (1905), Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1948) and many more masterpieces were created by writers who were physically imprisoned yet spiritually free in prison. As Rymhs (2009) exemplifies, "From the fiction of Victor Hugo, Honore' de Balzac, and Daniel Defoe, to the autobiographically inflected accounts of Oscar Wilde, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Jean Genet, the prison figures prominently in our literary and cultural imaginations" (p. 314). The writings of these writers in or about prison are handled under the genre of prison literature/writing. In its strict sense, as Claire Westall (2021) defines, "Prison writing is most often the kind of writing that emerges within prisons and rarely makes it beyond the prison walls or prison-linked education and journalism activities" (p. 4). The prison is frequently the venue for literary criticism of the world beyond the prison walls by prison-writers or their fictitious voiceovers (Rymhs, 2009, p. 314).

The atmosphere of a prison provides a stimulating setting for a distinct literary style where the lines between fact and fancy are blurred. Prison authors and their fictional narration create deep critical analysis under these restrictions, remarking not just on their current situation but also on the larger world outside of their cells. These writings that emerge from imprisonment serve as entryways to a greater comprehension of human nature and an appraisal of social mores. The prison illustrates the complicated nature of power dynamics, societal inequalities, and the universal desire for freedom as it transforms into a microcosm of society. Even if the conditions inside are extremely severe and painful for the prisoners, it is impossible to entirely confine thoughts and freedoms of individuals in this micro society. Huey Newton (2003) also shares similar ideas and points out that the principles that may and must fuel the struggle for complete human freedom and dignity cannot be held captive because they are present in every single human being, no matter where they may be. There cannot be a prison that can impede democratic movement as

long as they uphold the values of liberty and decency (p. 81). Intellectuals exposed to racial discrimination and dominated by the colonialists are among these people who continue their struggles within the four walls and do not give up their struggle for freedom and dignity. There have been several works penned by the free souls of the prisoner-writers that help to pave the way for the emancipation of the colonized people either in their native countries or in divergent diasporas. Best works to be featured in this context can be Martin L. King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (2018), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's diary-like work, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981) and Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: The Prison Notes* (1988). Across diverse cultural and social geographies, these literary works breathe life into the suppressed souls of the subjugated and colonized, becoming a part of a resistance that reverberates in remote corners of the world. King, Ngugi and Soyinka, using their pens as weapons, have undertaken a common mission: to be the voice of the oppressed and to awaken the lethargic consciousness within these people through their works. Via the power of their words, these writers transcend the physical walls of the prison, igniting a live flame of freedom within the collective psyche, opening pathways to liberation and offering solace in the darkest hours.

The Power of Words Behind Bars: Exploring the Prison Writings of Martin L. King, Ngugi, and Soyinka

I have a dream that one day right there in Alabama little black boys and little black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

Martin L. King

Prisons, one of the most powerful control mechanisms of the state, are places designed to eliminate the misbehavior of prisoners and to make them better individuals. Within the complex tapestry of society, they function, on the surface, as rehabilitating institutes of the state that aim to reform the prisoners with regard to the certain norms of the society. They usually operate in the triangulation of panopticism: supervision, control, and correction (Foucault, 2002, p. 70). Through the tripartite approach, prisons exert a kind of power over inmates, enabling them to exempt themselves from certain individual actions that are supposedly pernicious to the state. Prisoners are forcibly relieved of their unwanted individuality through discipline and punishment. Thanks to this, they become 'docile bodies' that can accord with the normative system under state control. Hence, Foucault has a fair share in his argument that prisons are utilized "in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property" (1977, p. 11) since the state is, in a sense, a machine that requires the full efficiency of the functioning parts. Like other ideological apparatuses under the surveillance of the state, such as hospitals, schools and the family, prisons function as the guardians of the state, seeking to maintain total control over subjects. Davis similarly asserts, "the prison is a key component of the state's coercive apparatus, the overriding function of which is to ensure social control" (2003:

69). To function more effectively in this role, prisons, as Carnochan states, “restrict the free movement of body or mind” (1995: 427). In other words, prisons are closed systems that seek to suppress the individuality and creativity of prisoners, confining their minds and bodies in order to maintain total control over them. Although prisons as the spaces of enclosure seem to be effective in restricting and re-modeling the mediocre prisoners to some extent, they ironically heighten the creativity of the intellectual prisoners. Contrary to what is expected, these prisoner-writers become more creative and more sensational in their physical confinement. The notes that they have written in the harsh conditions of the prisons exceptionally transcend the borders of the prison walls. As Shabazz notes, even in their incarceration, they “work against the carceral spatial practice of containment, surveillance, and isolation that the geography of prisons fosters” (2015: 582).

What prison writers have in common is that they are political activists whose rebellious voices against racial, religious, sexual and economic oppression pose a potential threat to the system. Regardless of the variety of oppressions, Joy James wisely categorizes the political prisoners into two groups. The first group is ‘those engaged in civil disobedience’ to better the conditions for a more democratic community (2003: 5). The latter is the revolutionary group “so alienated by state violence and government betrayals of humanitarian and democratic ideals [...]” (2003: 5). Both parties, whether reactionary or revolutionary, influence the masses greatly through their prison writings. Although it is possible to find the prison notes of the either category on different kinds of oppression in different parts of the world, to throw more light on the subtle differences/affinities of the prison writings of either party and better show their impacts on the people living under oppressive regimes, this study will deliberately narrow its focus on the selected prison writings of the black revolutionaries in various nations. Centering on the works of black prisoner-writers, this study explores a particular intersection of race, colonialism, and incarceration, and also sheds light on the disparate challenges faced by individuals in these marginalized communities. Scrutinizing the prison experiences of black writers provides a critical lens through which to understand the pervasive nature of racism and its lasting effects on individuals and communities, as in King’s case. On the other hand, it will also enable us to comprehend how African people have historically been subjected to slavery, colonialism, and ongoing systemic discrimination, and how those who have rebelled against these oppressions have been suppressed through imprisonment as portrayed in the works of Ngugi and Soyinka.

Black people’s existential crisis both in their native countries (like Kenya and Nigeria) and in divergent diasporas (like America) can be rooted in colonialism and racism, the destructive impacts of which have resulted in their alienation and oppression. African people have faced a range of challenges and problems stemming from colonialism, systematic racism and economic exploitation in their own lands. While these problems vary across countries and regions, they share a common framework. Colonialism, in particular, has disrupted their traditional systems, exploited natural resources and fostered divisions between ethnic groups, leading to ongoing social and political tensions. With

persistent economic problems, many African children have not received education, while many young people have been unable to find work due to a lack of employment opportunities. In addition, political instability such as military coups, civil wars and corruption, which almost all African countries have experienced, have also had a negative impact on the people of the region. Inequalities and governmental biases have made life unbearable for indigenous people. Writers and intellectuals like Ngugi and Soyinka, who cannot remain silent about the corruption and decay in their countries, have been punished with imprisonment for their dissenter opinions. Black people have had to endure lots of calamities not only in their own colonized homelands, but also in other regions where they continue their lives. For instance, black people in America have encountered a multitude of challenges rooted in a history of systemic racism and racial inequality that still resonate today. In particular, systemic racism has profoundly affected the lives of black people in education, health, housing and employment. Further, black people have been attacked and discriminated against because of their race and color. In addition, the policy of assimilation and stereotyping against black people has pushed them into the margins. Activists and thinkers like King have made great efforts to address these issues, to eradicate systemic racism, to promote racial equality and inclusive policies. However, most of them have been imprisoned for their struggle and reactive manners. As Dorothy Cotton (2011) accentuates: “the more they demanded their rights as citizens, the more hatred and violence they encountered from segregationist public officials” (p. ix). This increasing racial segregation has induced some protests with the participation of civil-rights advocate and activist Martin Luther King, “a public intellectual who channeled his religious and philosophical convictions into actionable measures toward justice, among many other responsibilities and distinctions” (Gist & Whitehead, 2013, p. 8). King can be labelled as one of the milestones of black movements fighting for equality and civil rights. The most iconic landmark protest led by King took place in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. This protest has been of great significance for black Americans and stands as a defining moment for them to gain their rights and for King to be remembered as a prominent leader. The purpose of the widespread demonstration is to oppose the deeply ingrained racial segregation and discriminatory policies in the city. King has always believed that “segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation” (2018: 10). To overcome this dire situation, King and other civil rights activists have organized nonviolent protests and acts of civil disobedience to draw attention to the discrimination faced by African Americans. During the Birmingham protest, King has emphasized the cruciality of direct action and peaceful resistance to violent opposition. Accordingly, exploring the nonviolent notion and its effectiveness as a tool for social change is crucial to understanding King’s and other writer’s dedication to nonviolent resistance.

Nonviolence is a philosophy of social change that denies the use of physical violence. It is predicated on the notion that all people are equal and no circumstance justifies using violence. The eradication of segregation in America is just one example of the many social

and political goals that have been attained effectively through the application of nonviolent protests. Nonviolent resistance practitioners question the veracity of the authority that enacts the legislation by breaching it. Before organizing the protest campaigns, King is certain that nonviolent resistance is a potent tool for social change. It has the capacity to drastically change the course of history. King's perspective is supported by the research done by Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth. They have concluded that campaigns of nonviolent resistance have been more effective than those of violent resistance in accomplishing their goals (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). They also claim that "a nonviolent campaign is 70 percent likelier to receive diplomatic support through sanctions than a violent campaign" (2011: 53). They justify their premise by means of their data. They allege that "the most striking finding is that between 1900 and 2006, nonviolent resistance campaigns were nearly twice as likely to achieve full or partial success as their violent counterparts" (2011:7). However, they also note that "among the 323 campaigns, in the case of antiregime resistance campaigns, the use of a nonviolent strategy has greatly enhanced the likelihood of success counterparts" (2011: 7). Chenoweth and Stephan's study provides evidence that nonviolent resistance can be an effective tool for social change.

Expanding upon the notion of nonviolence, in her *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (2020) American philosopher and writer Judith Butler portrays a more nuanced understanding of nonviolence, arguing that it is not simply the absence of violence, but rather a complex and active practice that can be used to resist injustice and create change. Butler (2020) argues that nonviolence is not simply about doing nothing or lack of aggression. She regards nonviolence as "an ethical stylization of embodiment, replete with gestures and modes of non-action, ways of becoming an obstacle, of using the solidity of the body and its proprioceptive object field to block or derail a further exercise of violence" (2020: 1) For Butler, the belief that nonviolence is passive and useless is a sexist/gendered stereotype (2020: 201). She further contends that "no transvaluation of those values will defeat the falsehood of that binary opposition. Indeed, the power of nonviolence, its force, is found in the modes of resistance to a form of violence that regularly hides its true name" (2020: 201). With this encompassing insight, Butler encourages a reevaluation of our assumptions about nonviolence and urges us to recognize its forceful potential in encountering systemic injustices.

On the other hand, contrary to Butler's comprehensive understanding of nonviolence and its powerful capacity, it becomes evident that the nonviolent aspect of the Birmingham demonstrations, despite their practical approaches to addressing current issues, has failed to prevent severe reactions by the police. The security forces have found such demonstrations unacceptable and used some excessive force on the protestors. Although the protestors are nonviolent, they have faced brutal repression from law-enforcement officers, including the use of dogs and pressurized water. Not only the protestors are humiliated, detained, and imprisoned but also their families and their friends are harassed, their houses are torched; however, they have persevered. Many people including Martin L. King were arrested in Birmingham Protest in 1963. While in prison, Martin L. King penned *The Letter from*

Birmingham Jail (2018). “Personally addressed to eight white Birmingham clergy, the letter captured the essence of the struggle for racial equality and provided a blistering critique of the gradualist approach to racial justice” (Bass, 2001: 1). In his letter written during his eight-day incarceration, King has articulated the injustices done to the black people participating in the protests. He might have the idea in mind that the protests can change the status of the oppressed people all around the world if they have been successful. Drew Hansen also stresses on this point saying “a victory in Birmingham, King thought, would show that segregation could be defeated anywhere in the country” (2003: 11). However, this letter has gone beyond its purpose and had a worldwide impact although the protests could not meet the expected outcomes. “Widely published in a multitude of press outlets in the months following the Birmingham movement, the document’s prominence soared” (Bass, 2001: 3). The images of violence and injustice have captured the attention of the globe and sparked a movement for black citizens in their fight for civil rights. “The national media attention helped to spread ... Birmingham Campaign well beyond the city’s borders... These actions convinced a reluctant Kennedy administration to propose sweeping reforms that Congress ultimately passed as the Civil Rights Act of 1964” (Eskew, 2007). King’s triumph in Birmingham has illustrated the power of grassroots activism, nonviolent resistance and strategic organizing to affect social change and to create further advances in the struggle for civil rights. King strongly attaches credence to “the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood” (2018: 6).

King’s struggle has had a massive influence because he has stood up not only for himself but also all oppressed black people in a nonviolent way. He has also proceeded to argue this point in court, focusing in particular on how the law is manipulated unfairly against black people. King has reiterated how completely coercive and intimidating the court decisions are toward them in the guise of the law. King’s upright/decisive stance is fired by years of subjugation, oppression and discrimination. As King asserts: “Negroes have been limited by and large because of the lack of educational opportunities and because of the denial of apprenticeship training to unskilled and semiskilled labor” (1965: 23). For King, it is undeniable that racial inequality permeates in his society and the city of Birmingham is often regarded as one of the most racially divided in the entire nation. It has a long history of police brutality against Black people and unfair treatment in the courts. Birmingham stands out for the alarmingly high incidence of unaddressed assaults targeting Black homes and churches. These are the unpleasant, unbelievable, and awful realities (2018, p. 3). For the black people, “there are some instances when a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, King was arrested on a charge of parading without a permit” (p. 11). Black people are sort of relegated to the status of foreigners in their own country, but according to King, “anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider” (p. 3).

In the opening lines of his letter, King conveys his dissatisfaction with the unfairness he has endured: "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here" (p. 2). He further claims, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (p. 2). There is an overt call to action for the black people in America since, as King claims, they have had no other choice but to rally and rebel against the current oppressive order (p. 3). Through their nonviolent action, King reiterates the fact that the conditions faced by the black people can no longer be ignored and the authorities must take an immediate action. For King, "a type of constructive nonviolent tension is necessary for growth" (p. 6) because he doubts the credibility of the authorities for providing the black people with the equal rights they deserve; therefore, those who suffer such repression and injustice must demand their freedom and take nonviolent actions having a certain degree of tension. He further claims that "there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience" (p. 12) and without persistence, "privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily" (p. 7). King also believes that freedom must be claimed by the oppressed since it is never readily granted by the oppressor (p. 7). Having the aforementioned notion, King is unable to accept the centuries-long usurpation of their rights, which are bestowed upon them by God and ought to be protected by the law. He believes that their rights should be demanded by civil disobedience rather than through the use of force. Accordingly, he cannot tolerate being ordered to 'wait' by their own people or state officials. For him, it is difficult to stay inactive or silent when you have witnessed ferocious crowds slay your parents at their whim and drown your siblings; when you have witnessed baleful officers' profanity, beat, torture, and even kill your black family members with impunity. He believes that "oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself" (p. 18). King ends his epistle with an overtly sanguine disposition, unambiguously articulating his conviction in the imminent eradication of racial prejudice and the triumph of love and fraternity across the expanse of the nation (pp. 29-30). Although many black revolutionists like Malcolm X find King's passive resistance delusional, King's valiant efforts are not in vain; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1964 for this non-violent reaction and advocacy. This enormous triumph best manifests King's just cause.

The optimistic aura in Martin L. King's letter penned during his captivity has aroused a glimmer of hope in the oppressed communities. Like King, postcolonial writers, born and grown in colonized nations and interacted with the West, have spawned a similar aura in order to decolonize the Western codes imposed on the people during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a prominent postcolonial writer from East African Kenya, is one of these writers who voices out the terrible hardships through which his people have passed during and after colonialism. Sharing the same destination with King, Ngugi is also imprisoned for standing against injustices, oppressions, and marginalization of his own people. Despite their different social contexts, King and Ngugi have one thing in common: they both attempt to redeem their people from injustice and degeneration. Both have been imprisoned because of their unorthodox views. It is worthwhile to note that they have to write their revolutionary thoughts on toilet paper since they are not allowed to use paper in

jail. Both writers are imprisoned in an environment where they have no access to traditional writing materials and are not allowed to write. Writing has become an important means of self-expression in a restrictive and dehumanizing prison environment where personal possessions and freedoms are severely restricted. Therefore, both writers have used toilet paper as a writing and record-keeping tool. These writings have become a tangible record of their lives and the conditions they have endured, and by sharing them with the outside world, advocacy groups or legal organizations, they have been able to shed light on the realities of incarceration and advocate for change. Despite dire circumstances and oppressions, nothing has prevented them from speaking out against the victimization of their people exposed to unfair treatments.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o has turned out to be a pivotal figure in the nonviolent campaign for the rights of the oppressed African people because he has fought and become the voice of the colonized people through his works. Ngugi has severely criticized not only colonialism, but also the neocolonial government's ongoing mentality after colonialism ended in his native land, Kenya. He was arrested in 1977 for co-writing the drama *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, which was written in his own language, Gikuyu, and spent nearly a year in prison. Despite being detained, Ngugi is never arraigned in court and spent a considerable amount of time behind bars without ever being charged with a crime. In his book *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981), Ngugi reveals all of his troubles in prison with all their severity. In his book dedicated to all those who strive for democracy, Ngugi questions the absurdity of his detainment just because of writing a work in his native language. His interpretation is quite noteworthy. He states, "the British jailed an innocent Kenyatta. Thus Kenyatta learned to jail innocent Kenyans" (1981: 4). Arrested for political reasons, Ngugi is released by Daniel Mori, the head of the country, following the death of Jomo Kenyatta. However, his release does not mean that he was completely free: "Where Kenyatta had imprisoned him for his writing, Moi sent three truckloads of armed policemen to raze to the ground the community theater where he worked, eventually forcing him – and many others – into exile" (Granta, 2017). Ngugi's imprisonment and his exile are the implications of the government's fear of the patriotic aspect of the writers like Ngugi. He argues that "like their colonial counterparts, they had become mortally afraid of the slightest manifestation of a people's culture of patriotic heroism and outspoken indomitable courage" (1981: 71). His argument indicates the apprehension that authoritarian regimes frequently harbor toward criticism and opposition. By silencing the voices of those who confront their authority, these governments hope to maintain their power and control. However, as Ngugi's own story shows, the human spirit cannot be easily suppressed. Even in the face of intimidation, people will continue to speak out for what they believe in.

Ngugi describes the harsh conditions of his imprisonment in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison in Kenya. He writes about the lack of basic necessities, the overcrowding, the violence, and the psychological torture. His experience of imprisonment in Kenya displays a harrowing account of the dehumanizing conditions that prisoners are forced to endure. The lack of basic medical care, the cruel treatment by guards, and the monotony of prison

life all contribute to a profoundly dehumanizing experience. Ngugi and the other inmates are forced to live in terrible conditions without having any access to basic medical care. When prisoners fall ill, the guards often remain indifferent, saying they are pretending. Even when they are transferred to the hospital, they are cruelly transported there in chains (pp. 101-102). The prisoners have to make their toilet needs on the potty and have to eat wormy food prepared with rotten vegetables for the meals they were given (p. 20). Prison life is essentially boring, routine, repetitive, tedious, and cruel in its basic primal cycle of feeding, urinating, and napping, eating, urinating, and sleeping. However, it is similar to the routine of animals abiding to be butchered or escaping from being butchered at a time that is not set by them (p. 116). The prisoners' miserable predicament can only end in death or freedom because the prison environment in which they have to continue their lives until they regain their freedom is not at a level that anyone could live in (p. 146). The government is the root of all of this mistreatment and brutality in the prison. They seek to expand their power by ruthlessly punishing people who are against the government. Consequently, when they do not witness any renunciation from the prisoners, they aggravate the systematic physical and psychological harassment (p. 144). Regardless of their dolorous condition, they maintain optimism for freedom and strive to remain humane. Despite the fact that Ngugi and his companions never lose hope that they will be released, prison life is not easy for them. He stresses that "his novel written with blood, sweat and toil on toilet-paper had been seized!" (p. 164). To Ngugi, it is a writer's responsibility to his own country to continue writing at all costs even in these turbulent conditions. Similar to King, Ngugi's altruistic and patriotic feelings for his own people help him grow hope in his captivity. Having parallel ideas with King, Ngugi refers to King and his combative attitude in his work. He states that: "As Martin Luther once said: 'On this I stand, I can do no other.' The same applies for us writers in the Third World" (p. 172). He believes in nonviolent struggle, as King did, and something must be done for the oppressed. That is why "this generation of Kenyan writers must do for their languages, their literature, their culture what others have done for theirs!" (p. 196). According to Ngugi, "Kenyan writers have no alternative, they must return to their roots and fight nonviolently to win their freedom struggle" (p. 196).

With his nonviolent perception, like Ngugi and King, Nigerian dramatist and novelist Wole Soyinka has also challenged the draconian regime established by the government and reflected all his prison experience in his *The Man Died: The Prison Notes* (1988). "The prison memoir represents a powerful personal testimony of his traumatic confrontation with the Gowon military regime, but it is also a narrative of resistance to it" (Whitehead, 2008: 20). Highlighting the corruption and domination, he confronts and decries dictatorial and autocratic authorities in his country along with other tyrants in the region via his prodigious works. Soyinka also campaigned to end the civil war in his country and was arrested in 1967, on the grounds that he helped the rebels, and remained in prison for about two years. Soyinka has not remained indifferent to the turmoil in his country and the state's atrocity against his people because he presumes that "under a dictatorship, a nation ceases

to exist” (1997: 139) and “the man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny” (1988: 13). He calls it as a tyranny because the extent of disregard for human life has dipped to its lowest point, and the institutionalization of cruelty is so great that even regional police agencies have their distinct gulags (p. xxiii). He names several people who were murdered by the soldiers:

Mr Dennis Okparaku Edim of Okanga who in 1968, was shot in his house for no cause whatsoever, Mr Ajom Agvor who was killed at Nkum, in 1969, for refusing to allow his school- daughter to be raped and Mrs Aggie Ntue, who was stabbed to death. Recently, a third year student of Ikom Secondary School, Master Agbor Nohor, was beaten to death when the School was besieged by a group of armed soldiers. (p. 294)

Witnessing all this naked brutality, he is “against any government which permits, under the guise of an emergency, the persecution of innocent men” (p. 59) because, for him, the basic requirement of humanity is justice (p. 96). Soyinka is consequently detained since he has attempted to gather Nigerian scholars from both inside and outside the country for a protest that could operate for a ceasefire on the provision of weapons including all regions of Nigeria. He has also denounced the war in the Nigerian newspapers (p. 19). The reason for Soyinka’s arrest, like the other two authors, is for petty offenses that have no logical justification. He “suffers a capricious and arbitrary punishment which he has done nothing to merit and to which he has been consigned without any form of trial” (Whitehead, 2008: 19).

After being wrongfully imprisoned, Soyinka has strived to adapt to the atmosphere under bad conditions. In prison, “filth and bad smells, treachery between the prisoners, callousness among the warders” are among the challenging conditions (Soyinka, 1988: 130). Prisoners are sometimes unable to wash their laundry for a long time, have to defecate in buckets, and remain in their cells, where a strong odor is dominant because they are not opened for a long time (p. 98). As Soyinka illustrates, the physical atmosphere of the prison is unbearable. “They slept on the bare floor... Some of them had no blankets and some cells were occupied by up to eight people. The cells were designed for only one man apiece, at the most two” (p. 98). Within the walls of the prison, cruelty manifested in both the oppressive atmosphere and the guards’ actions, crushing the inmates’ hope and will. The guards talk to them as they are giving orders to a dog (p. 115). Soyinka alleges in his writing that numerous prisoners are cruelly murdered. In other words, in addition to hunger and deprivation, inmates have to endure torture and executions (pp. 121-122). In time, his mind has adapted to its environment, caught up with the prison’s cadence, embraced and internalized the heartbeat, noises, sensation of things, and taste of food (p. 130). No matter he tries to adapt his periphery, Soyinka’s allegations of cruelty and torture are deeply disturbing, and they raise serious questions about the human rights problem in Nigeria. His account of how his mind adapted to prison is also intriguing, and it offers a glimpse into the psychological toll that imprisonment can take.

Soyinka’s efforts to adapt to his environment are evident in the changes that take place in his body and soul during his imprisonment. However, the situation is particularly difficult

for him as he is restricted from obtaining books and writing materials. On the other hand, writing has helped Soyinka to maintain his sanity in the face of the strident conditions of prison life. It has given him a sense of purpose and a way to cope with the stress and trauma of his imprisonment. As John Thomas (1997) conveys in his article, during the times of adversity, Soyinka unambiguously affirms that he survived by writing while incarcerated. For him, being able to write, which he believes to be crucial and valid for the majority of authors, has preserved his sanity and in some way helped him stay connected to life. Under challenging circumstances, Soyinka writes stealthily on toilet papers (as in the case of Ngugi), empty cigarette boxes, and books he has discreetly acquired, as well as inside the margins of books. He clarifies this in his work as follows: "I reached for a pencil from its hiding place and tore off some toilet paper. This was a scene for Shaky- Shaky" (1988: 102). While struggling to write, Soyinka has a notion about him and his nation. He strongly believes that the artist has always served as a chronicle of the traditions and memories of his community as well as a voice of his own time. It is now his turn to intervene with this essence (1997: 356). As books and all forms of writing are always sources of dread for those who strive to stifle facts, Soyinka has stuck to writing even while incarcerated (1988: 9). He believes that through writing, the world might be reminded of the hundreds of victims still being held captive by corrupt authorities, whose survival depends on self-inflicted atrocities (p. 26). Believing in the power of writing and secretly penning his thoughts at every opportunity, Soyinka does not hesitate to display his confrontational demeanor and upright stance in prison. When he is offered money for his family, he refuses and states that they will not starve to death. For him, it serves as recompense to remain silent or to make him feel sympathy for those who have mistreated him (p. 145). As a kind of reaction he has strongly verbalized that his work, his suspended life, his deprivations could not be measured in terms of cash (p. 146). By asserting his refusal to be reduced to a monetary transaction, He reinforces the depth and intangible value of his intellectual accomplishments as well as the unwavering determination that motivates his defiance. Through his resolute stance, Soyinka renders an indelible mark on the value of having personal integrity and placing morality before money when pursuing justice and artistic expression.

Conclusion

Until the twentieth century, the hardships that black people have endured in certain parts of the world have been invisible. It is an inevitable situation that black people, who are exposed to discrimination, oppression, injustice and marginalization both in their own countries and in the lands to which their destiny has dragged them, have no alternative but to develop a resistance and fight against the current plight. Leaders with awakened souls such as King, Ngugi and Soyinka are the intellectual minds that have pioneered for the rights of the black people. In spite of the changing dynamics of their contexts, all unequivocally repudiate the unacceptable conditions imposed on their societies. Notwithstanding the myriad obstacles they have confronted, these three literary figures have relentlessly opposed the manifestations of social disparity, bigotry, and dominance in their own societies at the risk of losing their freedom. As a consequence of their seditious attitudes and diligent endeavors to raise social

awareness, they have borne a substantial cost. For their critical thinking and protests, their governments have imprisoned all three writers. Their imprisonment has not only been a suppression of their individual freedoms but also a reflection of the threat they have posed to the oppressive systems and structures in their communities. Thus, their imprisonment serves as a testament to their unwavering dedication to the pursuit of justice.

King, Ngugi, and Soyinka have predominantly highlighted the inevitable situation faced by black people, necessitating their development of resistance against discrimination, oppression, and marginalization. Accordingly, their intellectual empowerment has been a critical factor in the development of resistance movements. Through their writings and activism, they have provided intellectual frameworks, analyses, and narratives that have challenged the status quo and inspired other black people to fight for their rights. Their campaigns and creative endeavors have questioned established conventions, raised awareness about systemic oppression, and catalyzed social change. Their influence has extended beyond their immediate contexts, inspiring and empowering individuals and communities far beyond their geographical boundaries. These iconic figures have peculiarly played a crucial role in decolonizing the minds of their people. Via their prison writings, they have contributed to a broader cultural and intellectual transformation. Their ideas and narratives have also disrupted hegemonic discourses, reconstructed subjectivities, and reconfigured the meaning of black experiences. They have offered alternative ways of understanding the world that have empowered black individuals to reclaim their own histories, cultures, and agency. Through their accounts of resilience, resistance, and exuberance, King, Ngugi, and Soyinka have become symbols of courage and inspiration, fostering an attitude of action and solidarity among various communities. King's letter has helped to galvanize the civil rights movement in the United States, while the works of Ngugi and Soyinka have helped to raise awareness of human rights abuses and neocolonial problems in Kenya and Nigeria.

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