AN ANALYSIS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND THE BLACK AWAKENING: AMERICAN SOUTH AND SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

Belief and religion are interconnected terms for the purposes of defining discrimination and segregation inside societies. Particularly, during the white dominated regime years in the American South and South Africa, two main religions; Christianity and Islam were essence of key weapons in order to assemble and to collaborate for black people against black segregation. Moreover, religion played a vital role in the Black Power movement which paved the way for researchers and historians to conclusively ascertain answers to why religion should be considered as one of the vital dynamics of political resistance.

This research will attempt to investigate the impact of the religions to the process of the black resistances as the mass movements both 'the Black Consciousness Movement' in South Africa and 'Civil Rights Movement' in the American South basically between the years 1960 and 1975. Besides, in order to achieve the arguments with comparisons and similarities, Islam in the American South and Christianity in South Africa will be examined specifically.

Additionally, the image that specific religious leaders' ideals and thoughts shaped on the followers will be annexed to the research. Steve Biko and Malcolm X's analysis will be the key terms in order to reflect the religion in the black awakening as a mass movement.

Basically, there will be an attempt to evaluate the historical period of racism and its implication for the black segregation. After defining the black resistance movements linked by the religious thoughts and also by the leaders, eventually, the similarities, compassions and the links between them will be reached as a conclusion.

Keywords: Black Power Movement, Steve Biko, religion, Malcolm X, civil rights

Din ve Siyahi Uyanış ilişkisi üzerine bir analiz: Amerika'nın güneyi ve Güney Afrika örneği
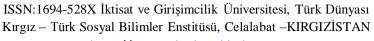
Özet

Toplumların içindeki ırk aşırıcılık ve ayrımcılığını tanımlayabilmek için inanç ve din birbirine bağlı iki terimdir. Özellikle Amerika'nın güney bölgesi ile Güney Afrika'da beyazların egemen olduğu rejim yıllarında, iki temel din; Hristiyanlık ve İslam siyahilerin ayrımcılığa karşı birleştikleri ve güç birliği yaptıkları en temel iki silah olmuştur. Dinin Siyahi Güç Hareketi'nde böyle bir hayati bir role sahip olması, tarihçilerin ve araştırmacıların dinin neden politik direncin dinamiklerinden biri olduğuna dair argümanlarını her gecen gün daha da arttırmıştır.

Bu çalışma, 1960 ve 1975 yıllarında gerçeklesen Güney Afrika'daki 'Siyahi Bilinç Hareketi' ile Amerika'nın güneyinde gerçeklesen 'İnsan Hakları Hareketi'ni inceleyerek dinin siyah özgürlük hareketi sürecindeki etkilerini analiz edecektir. Karşılaştırma ve benzerlikler ışığında Amerika'nın güneyindeki İslam düşüncesi ve Güney Afrika'daki Hristiyanlığın etkileri özellikle araştırılmıştır. Bunların yani sıra, öne çıkan dini liderlerin idealleri ve düşüncelerinin kitleler üzerinde yarattığı imaj çalışmaya eklenecektir. Steve Biko ve Malcolm X'in analizleri bu temelleri oluşturacak ve kitlelerin uyanışında dinin yerini yansıtacaktır.

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Introduction

During the 20th century, racism was at its highest level which can be directly linked to the religious principles. However, racism could be defined by various meanings; it included more than one component to identify. Thus, white racists implemented the ideological, philosophical, spiritual and religious principles in order to determine their argument about the racism. By showing consistent elements both in cases, the sources of this study are contemporary secondary sources and quoted passages from civil right movement's leaders' original speeches in American South and Southern Africa. Additionally, there will be a comparative analysis between these both cases. Methodology of this research is to emphasize social scientists' arguments on how Christianity and Islam were a motivating between the segregated societies in spite of white supremacists' opposed thoughts.

In an essay titled *A New Religion for the Negro*, Gordon argues that 'religion among blacks acted as a "workable tool for others," charging that Christianity teaches black to be "meek," "humble," and "to turn the other cheek when (they) should retaliate in kind." (Harris, 1994: 43) Furthermore, Gordon characterizes blacks as "religiously enslaved", their minds neglecting "the very real and very present now for the delirious pleasure of wandering in a vague, remote and uncertain hereafter." (Harris, 1994: 43)

White supremacy attained its fullest ideological and institutional development in the southern United States between the 1890s and the 1950s, and in South Africa between the 1910s and the 1980s, but especially after 1948. (Fredrickson, 2002: 99) However, the implementations of the regimes were different from each other; basically they all based on black segregation from the societies. Besides, the 20th century was a scene for most of the racist implementations in the world history, the black segregation in the Southern States had unique features both in implementation of the whites' and in the resistance blacks' aftermath. Unlike racist regimes in the American South of the Jim Crow era and during South Africa's transition from "native segregation" to Apartheid, 'the Nazi version did not evolve out of a pre-existing racial order based on slavery or colonial- style domination.' (Fredrickson, 2002: 125)

Beside some of the white supremacists' vision of seeing the racism as a religion, they also had some tools for the imposition. The white supremacists used religion as the vital and the science researches as the materialistic evidence in order to justify their implementations and the impositions to the society. Herein, the importance of Christianity and the biological science were the key players as a combination. 'Scientific racism and Christianity Nazi example of synthesizing volkisch nationalism and biological racism, the defenders of apartheid who responded to international criticism between the 1950s and the 1970s eschewed biological arguments in favour of what' Saul Dubow has defined as "cultural essentialism." (Fredrickson, 2002: 135) Moreover, he states that, 'in constructing an intellectually coherent

justification for apartheid, Christian national ideologues frequently chose to infer to suggest biological theories for racial superiority, rather than to assert these openly.' (Dubow, 1995: 246)

The emergence of the black churches in the first half of the 19th century, were characterized by a 'dynamic of the white church's racism and the black church's resistance.' (Unsworth, 1997) Moreover, Meeks annexes that, 'it was the white control of the worship [on slave-holding plantations], the inability to accept blacks as equals, and the negation of black personhood that led to the separation of the black church from the white church and to the emergence of a black religious community.' (Unsworth, 1997)

However, the whites used the religion as a separation tool like the language, culture and sociological imposition, in the sight of the blacks' religion was considered more than a thought. Furthermore, some researches like Marx Garvey argues that religion could have never seen as 'an instigative tool' for the black people. He recognizes religion as a potential force of radicalization among African Americans and acknowledges that 'many religious people are nevertheless militant,' but concludes nonetheless that until religion 'looses its hold over these people, or comes to embody to a greater extent the belief that man as well as God can bring about secular change, focuses more on the here and now,' African-American religion 'would seem to be an important factor working against the widespread radicalization of the Negro public.' (Harris, 1994: 44)

Black Power, therefore, means black freedom, black self-determination, where in black people no longer view themselves 'as animals devoid of human dignity but as men, human beings with the ability to carve out their own destiny.' (Cone, 1999: 4) With this conscience of the black people, additionally with the education and the religious leaders, religion became to use as a tool for the blacks' movement attractions. They defined racism and religion and annexed them with their own assertion for equality, freedom and desegregation.

In 1967 Martin Luther King made the following statement about racism:

"Racism is a philosophy based on contempt for life. It is the arrogant assentation that one race is the centre of value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in submission. It is the absurd that one race is responsible for all the progress of history and alone can assure the progress of the future. Racism is total estrangement. It seperates not only bodies but minds and spirits. Inevitably, it descends to inflicting spiritual or physcial homicide out of group." (Roberts, 2005, p. 44)

As the leading leader of the black people, his definition for racism was through black churches which aimed to impose the religious conscience to the blacks. 'Without exception, blacks used the same articles of faith and polity for their churches as the white denominations from which they separated. Separation, for blacks, meant that . . . they were rejecting racism that was based on the assumption that God created blacks inferior to whites.' (Unsworth, 1997)

While, there had been an awakening about Christianity and the desire to reach the original and pure Christianity, there had also been a tending to the other religions, especially for Islam. The World's Parliament of Religions underlined the potential of global Islam for the African-American struggle for freedom and it revealed the political and cultural links between the anti-imperialist modernist reformers of the Muslim world and African-American nationalists who opposed the racism of white Christian civilization. (Turner, 1997: 66)

However, Islam was not an essential term for the white supremacist; it was an aim as a way of freedom by the black leaders who tried to reveal the blacks' Islam's effectuality against the whites. Both the patterns like 'the fight for black liberation by Martin Luther King Jr. and Frederick Douglass and the rely of Kharijis on Qur'an and Sunnah in the history of African-American Islamic thought, where alternate definitions of dominant universalisms (like Christianity and American revolutionary ideals) are combined with foreign forms of universalism (like Islam).' (Curtis, 2002: 12)

I.   Black Muslims and Civil Rights Movement in the American South

"*We are never aggressors. We will not attack anyone. We strive for peaceful relationships with everyone. But, (we teach our people that) if anyone attacks you, lay down your life! Every Muslim taught never (initiate a) fight. Respect another man's rights whether he is white, black, brown, yellow or what not! Respect him as a man. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you!" Never be the aggressor, never look for trouble. But if any man molests you, may Allah bless you!"* (Lilcoln, 1994 : 3)

Malcolm X, "*The Truth about the Black Muslims*", May. 24, 1960

Due to the distinction from Christianity and its 'abuse' in order to justify the white supremacy, literally Islam became a freedom and getaway for the black people. Particularly, in the United States the religion Islam became an aim for the resistance against the white supremacy and began to spread gradually amongst the black people. In the United States, however, 'African Muslims practiced more subtle forms of resistance to slavery; some of them kept their African names, wrote in Arabic, and continued to practice their religion; some of them used the American Colonization Society to gain their freedom and return to Africa.' (Turner, 1997: 24)

However, some of the Sunni Muslims rejected to recognize the Black Muslims as Muslim, the black Muslims tried to continue their claim, 'the resistance against the white supremacist'. As C. E. Lilcoln has noted, 'the Muslims provided no more opportunity and even less incentive for black participation in the religion of Islam than the counterpart white church provided for a meaningful black involvement in Christianity.' (Turner, 1997: 24) Besides, the black Muslims learned much from Marcus Garvey and Noble Drew Ali and like those earlier prophets of Black Nationalism, they use to great effect on the lower-class Black man's weakness and anger about the white man, and they have developed 'black consciousness into a confession faith.' (Lilcoln, 1997: 69)

While, the struggle for the Islam amongst the blacks was proceeding since the eighteenth century, the twentieth century occurred as the climax for this spread with the

AKADEMİK BAKIŞ DERGİSİ
Sayı: 69   Eylül – Ekim 2018
Uluslararası Hakemli Sosyal Bilimler E-Dergisi
ISSN:1694-528X İktisat ve Girişimcilik Üniversitesi, Türk Dünyası
Kırgız – Türk Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Celalabat –KIRGIZİSTAN
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power of the resistance against the whites for the black people. Noble Drew Ali, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq, W.D, Fard, Elijah Muhammad and other Muslim leaders were all struggling to extend the political and cultural boundaries of white Protestant Christian America to include American Islam. (Turner, 1997: 73)

Particularly, the rise and spread of the Islam as a movement between the blacks in America gained acceleration with the Nation of Islam with the leadership Elijah Muhammad [Elijah Poole (1897 – 1975)]. Once released from jail in 1946, Elijah Muhammad began building an Islamic movement that would cement itself in American historical memory as a Black Nationalist organization committed to 'racial separatism and ethnic pride.' (Curtis, 2006: 2) 'It is very mythology', James Baldwin argues, that 'Elijah Muhammad offers to the rejected and the despised: his version of Islam has made God black, the devil white, and black Muslims are loved by their black God.' (Conyers, 2006: 203) Malcolm X, whose life story was famously enshrined in the Autobiography of Malcolm X, became Elijah Muhammad's chief missionary and a national symbol of black resistance and black anger. (Curtis, 2006: 3)

Basically, different from Christianity, Islam brought new perceptions for black civil rights movement in the light of verses of the Quran. While the Muslims do not really want the white man's justice and instead, they want separation from the white man so they may live under their own laws and administer justice to themselves according to the teachings of Islam. (Lilcoln, 1997: 274) However, there had been different kind of organizations and Islamic groups existed in order to defend and declare the Black Muslim's rights, basically Malcolm X expressed the general thought of the Black Muslim's contribution to the civil rights movement. Subsequently, he argued that equal rights for blacks could only be achieved by transforming the black civil rights movement to a human rights movement. (Conyers, 2006, p. 235) Moreover, Malcolm believed that 'all Americans possess constitutional rights by virtue of being born in America.' (Conyers, 2006: 235)

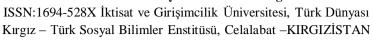## II.   *Christianity and the Black Consciousness Movement*

"The time has come for our own theologians to take up the cudgels of the fight by restoring a meaning and direction in the black man's understanding of God. No nation can win a battle without faith, and if our faith in our God is spoilt by our having to see Him through the eyes of the same people we are fighting against then there obviously begins to be something wrong in that relationship." (Stubbs, 1988: 74)

Steve Biko, "The Church as seen by a Young Layman", May., 1972

Christianity, according to the dominant theme of Black Theology, was indoctrinated about 'the legacy of Jesus' identification with the oppressed as well as Jesus' condemnation of the powers.' (Fatton, 1986: 107-8) It can be argued that Christianity 'had gone through rigorous cultural adaptation from ancient Judea through Rome, through London, through Brussels and Lisbon, somehow when it landed in the Cape, it was made to look fairly rigid.' (Stubbs, 1988, p. 70) The resurgence of African nationalism, usually described as the black consciousness movement, can be traced in an organizational sense to the formation of the

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anti-apartheid and multi-racial University Christian Movement (UCM) in 1966. (Walshe, 1983: 149) The formation of the University Christian Movement (UCM) in 1967 gave blacks a greater chance of coming together. (Stubbs, 1988: 16)

At the heart of Black Theology is the understanding that 'Jesus belonged historically in a situation of oppression, that he was a member of oppressed people in an oppressed society.' (Stubbs, 1988: 234) Indeed, Black Theology 'painfully came to the conclusion that in South Africa, the victims of oppression had only two options: either to suffer institutionalized violence of white supremacy, or resist in justice with minimal but effective violance.' (Fatton, 1986: 117)

Apart from Islam and civil rights movement in America, there were strong links together with Christianity and the Black Consciousness Movement. Moreover, these links consolidated by the Black Church's powerty, the students and with the leading leaders. Particulary, Steve Biko was in the centre of the movement who also tried to awake the consciousness of Christianity. In Biko's thoughts, African religion was not radically different from Christianity. (Stubbs, 1988: 109-10) The acceptance of the colonialist-tainted version of Christianity marked the turning point in the resistance of African people. (Stubbs, 1988, p. 70) Furthermore, the Black Christians did not have a claim to revolt Christianity, itself. Biko stated for the churches that 'Going hand in hand with the bureaucratisation and institutionalization of the Church is a special brand of a problem which also makes the Church extremely irrelevant-the concentration of that bureaucracy and institutionalization in the hands of white people.' (Stubbs, 1988: 72)

Black Theology and Black Consciousness Movement integrated together and as Fatton argues, they 'expressed the radical thrust of a struggle for the abolition of material and moral deprivations, and the establishment of more humane relationships.' (Fatton, 1986: 119) As Biko underlines that: 'The time has come for our own theologians to take up the cudgels of the fight by restoring a meaning and direction in the black man's understanding of God.' (Stubbs, 1988: 74) The purposes of the Black Consciousness Movement which linked to the Black Theology and Christianity offered cultural, religious and basically social challenges for the black people to awake. 'While the degradation and dehumanization of the black person by white racism generated a reactive African consciousness', Fatton argues, 'which asserted the intrinsic worth of black people and black culture, the social gospel of Christianity -a theology of liberation- encouraged the tradition of American communalism while identifying with the poor against the exploitative of structure of apartheid.' (Fatton, 1986: 4)

Illustrating Steve Biko's impression from his mother's philosophical attitude to the daily struggle, Stubbs points out that making 'ends meet and her total commitment to offer what help she could, not only to her children but to those who called upon her in times of need.' (Stubbs, 1988: 4) According to Pityana (Stubbs, 1988: 5-7), as a leading leader, Biko had three characteristics which were directly linked to his political activities; his capacity to work, capacity to love and his capacity for feeling. In his vision, he saw himself, the 'selfless revolutionary', fighting for the 'liberation not only of the oppressed but also of the oppressor.' (Stubbs, 1988: 236)

Together with the National Party and the Broederbond, the church in the 1940s and 1950s played a key role in winning general acceptance among its members for the view that there is no fundamental contradiction between Christian principles and the apartheid programme. (Gilimoee and Adam, 1979: 240) Therefore, it seems logical that regulative phase of religion was optimal for encouraging groups and individuals to share same political goals. (Harris, 1994: 45) Thus, the church can be defined as 'an indigenous organization could provide a leadership base, social interaction, and communication networks required for the collective action.' (Harris, 1994: 45) National consciousness and its spread in South Africa had to work against a number of factors; 'the traditional complexes, the emptiness of the native's past and the question of black-white dependency.' (Stubbs, 1988: 83) It shall be therefore understood that 'all black priests and ministers of religion to save Christianity by adopting Black Theology's approach and thereby once more uniting the black man with his God.' (Stubbs, 1988: 110)

This understanding and scheme of conduct was reinforced by Black Consciousness, naturally in underdeveloped countries. The special role of Black Consciousness is to urge black people who were more cognizant in the society who also put themselves in a particular place different from white community. Black Consciousness, as Stubbs defines, 'is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time.' (Stubbs, 1988:108) Furthering this argument, Fatton assesses the movement as an 'initial vehicle of a black philosophy of pride and self-affirmation invigorated by an ethic of 'Christian Liberation' by eschewing violence and emphasizing black cultural and psychological emancipation from white hegemony- to the relative neglect of economic issues.' (Fatton, 1986: 56)

The purpose within the same analogy for Christianity and Black Consciousness Movement was to challenge for the white missionaries' impositions and develop the movement between the blacks. Whilst, for that purpose, education (especially for black children) and the rhetorical power of language were the best tools to influence and persuade the black community in order to rewrite the Black History. Biko's consideration as to black culture and societal aspects was about further implications of Black Consciousness which 'are to do with correcting false images of ourselves in terms of culture, education, religion, economics.' (Stubbs, 1988: 66), According to Stubbs, therefore, 'Black Consciousness takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life.' (Stubbs, 1988: 63) It has been argued by many black churchmen that the Churches were the places which were an asset to White people in every conceivable place on Western lines which white populace know best. Biko, in this regard, explains how and why to change the Churches, 'we have first to gain ascendance over them in that white model, then thereafter turn that model into one we cherish, we love, we understand, and one that is relevant to us.' (Stubbs, 1988: 73)

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that that religion had a deep influence on political activism. Gallup and Castelli however, reported from 'their longitudinal and cross-national surveys on religious beliefs and practices that African-American are "the most religious people in the (Western) world.' (Harris, 1994: 42) As a conclusion, this controversy about the thoughts gave this research an encouragement as a reference line in order to prove the influence of the religions: Christianity and Islam on the Black awakening. As Stubbs emphasizes, 'all societies and indeed all individuals, ancient or modern, young or old, identify themselves with a particular religion and when none is existent, they develop one.' (Stubbs, 1988, p. 69) It is clear that Biko saw a direct connection between spiritual beliefs as we defined the term 'religion' and people's lives. Whilst, it can adjust the societies, as the white missionaries' religious impositions, it has a catalytic mission for the black people in order to resist against the white supremacy. Moreover, Verba et al. find that 'organizing skills like giving speeches, arranging meetings, and writing letters are more likely to be performed in church organizations by blacks than by whites or Latinos.' (Harris, 1999: 47) In turn, they find that 'these church-based skills, independent of activity in other non-political institutions, are significant to political activity.' (Harris, 1999: 47)

The debate surrounding in this study highlighted the connection between the spiritual beliefs and the struggle in the political arena for black people's civil rights movement. The prominence of Martin Luther King and Steve Biko's speeches and inspiration were the power structures. On the other hand, the white supremacists tried to use religion and religious institutions for their own benefit, eventually religion transformed to the blacks' own attraction to resist against them. Additionally, 'racism' as a term was defined by blacks in order to present the challenges against it. The strongest indictment of the black religion as opiate came from sociologist Frazier who viewed the black church as 'having cast an entire shadow over the intellectual life of Negroes' as well as being responsible for the 'so-called backwardness' of black community. (Harris, 1999: 44)

Basically, Black Muslims had three challenges in their claim: against the white supremacy mainly, the Christianity-based blacks who rejected Islam and the Sunni Muslims who did not recognize Black Muslims inside the Muslim society. While Black Muslims tried to erase the white- Christian-based minds' thoughts, they tried to show the way under Islamic principles for the Black people. The Black Muslims that we called who transformed their thoughts and educated themselves theologically chose to be a Muslim and activated in that way. African Muslim slaves are the best examples who preserve their Islamic identities by refusing to internalize the Christian racist significations that justify the system of exploitation. (Turner, 1997: 24)

On the other hand, the Christian Blacks started to resist against the white supremacy by turning the mirror to them. In other words, they became aware of Christianity and the black leaders used it as a tool in order to regulate and orientate them. However, this movement established a kind of black Christian utopia in the blacks' believes and separated themselves from white Christians; there is no doubt that it encouraged the black awakening against the white supremacy.

The relationship of Jim Crow segregation in the American South to the highest stage of Western imperialism was 'less direct but nevertheless significant.' (Fredrickson, 2002: 110) Just like this relationship, black people from different religions: Christianity and Islam determined the same conclusion. The growth of awareness among South African blacks has often been ascribed to influence from the American 'Negro' movement. (Stubbs, 1988: 83) With this conscious regarding the power of the churches and Christianity in both South Africa and American South, Islam and its principles for freedom began to spread amongst the black people, especially in the American South. Different from Christianity, Islam had different challenges during the process of the establishment and proving its reality. Although Islam and Christianity did not collaborate with each other; they had the dual emancipation: Freedom and equality for Black people. What this study has been shown, although Islam and Christianity did not collaborate with each other; they had the dual emancipation: Freedom and equality for Black people. Without coercion, core values of Islam and Christianity, such as life, hope and truth determined the visionary of social activists and people's religious faith and helped to construct civil rights and black freedom movement.

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Uluslararası Hakemli Sosyal Bilimler E-Dergisi
ISSN:1694-528X İktisat ve Girişimcilik Üniversitesi, Türk Dünyası
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