

Colonialism ...

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How Did the People of the Congo Come to Know Their Rights?

Aristotle held that slavery was a natural phenomenon without which the life of mankind could not properly be ordered, and he held that nature had divided people into two kinds, one that commands and another that obeys. This view of Aristotle's was entirely suited to his own age and milieu; then modern civilization came, after many revolutions and after many kinds of development as well, and so it tolerated slavery for a time, then rejected it with the utmost rejection and grew utterly impatient of it, seeing it as utterly at odds with the dignity owed to a human being and with his right to enjoy that freedom which makes him master of his whole affair, and which protects him from being bought and sold as goods are bought and sold.

And those who manage the affairs of modern nations possessed of that superior, refined civilization the like of which humanity has never known in any age imagined that, in doing so, they had realized one of the very foundations of civilization in the most precise, broadest, and deepest sense of that word — namely, the realization of equality among people — forgetting only one thing: that, while they had abolished the buying and selling of individuals, they had not abolished slavery in itself, nor had they achieved equality in any sense whatever; for while they abolished the enslavement of individuals and abolished the slave markets in which individuals were bought and sold, they invented something else still more monstrous and still more hideous than the enslavement of individuals, namely the enslavement of nations and homelands.

For colonialism, in reality, is nothing but a hideous, abhorrent form of enslavement, one that allows the strong and skillful nation to possess the homelands of the weak and heedless nations, with everything and everyone in them. It possesses the land and monopolizes the good things within it, takes the people of this land as a means of exploitation, and treats this land and those within it in a manner no less abhorrent than the treatment of free men toward slaves in Aristotle's age, or indeed before that age and after it. For slaves used to find means of freeing themselves: they would buy themselves from their masters with little money or much, and a slave might sometimes find a way to please his master so well that the master would favor him with dignity and grant him, as a boon, his

freedom; and sometimes religions or laws required the freeing of a slave under certain circumstances.

Colonialism, however, is nothing of the sort at all; it is a slavery from which there is no escape save through the most violent force and through headlong revolutions, and what we witness in this age is precisely the struggle between the colonizers and their colonies; the colonizers wish to hold fast to their mastery over their colonies till the end of time, if that were granted to them, but it is not granted to them, because mankind advances from day to day, and because this advance is not confined to some superior race of people but is available to all people alike, and available to them thanks to that very modern civilization which invented colonialism and allowed a small number of people, living in a tiny portion of the earth, to possess the greater part of the earth and the greater part of its people. For modern civilization has spread education, invented the press, and devised the various forms of transport, and it has inclined the colonizers to carry over many of civilization's inventions to their colonies, so as to exploit them more effectively and take from them more than they could otherwise give. So they send some of their own sons to oversee the exploitation of the land and its people, and they teach the people of this land a meager portion of learning, enough to prepare them for work in whatever forms of exploitation they are made to serve. And by the colonizers' own will at times, and against their will far more often, the colonies come into contact with the outside world and come to sense the difference between themselves and their masters, and their people gradually become aware of themselves, and come into possession of various portions of knowledge that make them feel that they have certain rights and certain duties, and that the rights that are theirs have been wrested from them by force and injustice, and that the duties that are theirs ought not to be discharged toward the colonizers, but rather toward their own brothers and fellow countrymen who share with them in misery and humiliation, and who live, as they do, a life of wretchedness and degradation. And this sense of plundered rights, and of the duties people owe to themselves and to their fellow countrymen, spreads; and impatience with colonialism begins, and it is not long before it grows strong and spreads and its fire blazes up in people's hearts, and then passes from hearts to tongues, and then passes from tongues into the visible fabric of life and into the relation between the people and their colonizing masters, until the matter ends in revolution against these masters, and the recovery of plundered rights begins — foremost among them the right of a human being to be free, master of himself, and master

in his own homeland. And we know of no colony that was freed except against the will of its colonizers, and we must not be deceived by what we see of the freedom of some French colonies in the African continent, achieved without war or struggle since the establishment of the Fifth French Republic; for had France been able to say no to all these colonies demanding their independence, she would not have hesitated to say it, and had she been able to compel these colonies of hers into submission and obedience by force, she would not have hesitated to compel them; but she tried compulsion in Indochina and was herself compelled to recognize the independence of the states of Indochina, and she tried to compel the Far Maghreb and Tunisia and was herself compelled, against her will, to recognize their independence, and she is now spending whatever effort she spends, sending whatever troops she sends, and expending whatever money she expends, to compel Algeria into submission, and there is no doubt whatsoever that Algeria will compel her to recognize its independence, in a time that may be short or may be long.

She is thus too powerless to impose submission upon her colonies by force, and has no choice but to grant these colonies what they want, while contriving, as best she can, to retain for herself some privilege and influence in her colonies after they are freed. And Belgium did likewise in her African colonies: she subjected them to her authority for nearly a century, ruled them with a rule devoid of either gentleness or kindness, and degraded them with a degradation unknown to any other colony. She educated none of their people and prepared none of their people for any work of consequence; rather, she took the land and its people as a slavery as abhorrent as slavery can be, and as a bondage as hideous as bondage can be. She monopolized for herself the whole of the good that this colony produced, dominating it by military force, and sent her own colonizing sons to exploit the land and its people under the shadow of this hideous military authority, so that the enslaved among its people labored in the exploitation of the land, bound in chains and fetters.

And the fruits of this colony belonged to her alone, apart from these wretched laborers, and the principle on which she built her conduct in this colony was a very simple one, summed up in a few words: for obedience [thus in the original (perhaps "submission")], where there is no learning. The meaning of this is that she relied on absolute ignorance in her colony in order to compel the people of this colony to serve whatever she wanted, difficult or easy; and had she been able to prevent

missionaries from entering the colony to spread the Christian religion, she would have done so, but how could she, being herself a Christian state that would hate to have it known of her that she opposed the spread of religion in her colonies? Yet she organized the conduct of these missionaries in the colony so that they were permitted to teach only a tiny minority of the people, and how is religion to be spread without teaching? And she required of them that they teach this small minority, before anything else, obedience and submission to their Belgian masters, and that the people of the Congo live in fellowship with their masters on one hand and with the missionaries on the other. And this small amount of teaching which the missionaries made available to some of them, meager though it was, and mixed as it was with the requirement of obedience and submission to their masters — all of this produced its effects over the years, so that the people of the Congo came to know themselves and to feel that they had rights being lost to them, and that they owed duties to themselves and to their fellow countrymen that needed to be discharged, and so, too, hatred of their masters arose in their souls, and this hatred turned into impatience with these masters, and this impatience turned into revolution against them. And Belgium tried as best she could to extinguish this revolution, but the revolution proved stronger than she was and mightier in its force, so that she found herself compelled to follow the path of other European nations, and to recognize the independence of her colonies, after securing for herself some privilege and securing, through her own sons, the exploitation of the land and its people, just as had been the case before the recognition of independence — confident that matters would turn out well for her, because she had kept the people of the colony in absolute ignorance and had prepared them neither to govern themselves, nor to exploit their own land, nor to maintain order in their own country. And what do you make of the fact that she created an army out of the people of the Congo but did not educate a single one of them so that he might one day become an officer in that army? And what do you make of the fact that those of the Congo's people whom the missionaries taught are a minority small enough to be counted — indeed, small enough to be counted on one's fingers? And so, too, Belgium felt confident that she would go on toying with her colonies after independence just as she had toyed with them before independence, and imagined to herself that, once she had granted her colony this sweet word whose love had spread across the lands of the earth — the word "independence" — she would thereby deceive them about everything, giving them a word to satisfy their vanity and their pride, while retaining for herself everything she had retained before. But the people of the

colony were not deceived; rather, they took independence in earnest, and wished to be masters in their own homeland, and to be free in substance as well as in name, not merely in name alone, as Belgium had supposed. And here the problem appeared, and these were the troubles that readers have come to know from what is published for them in the newspapers every day.

And we saw, for the first time in the history of the liberation of nations from colonialism, the United Nations compelled to intervene between Belgium and her former colony, because the United Nations itself looked upon the independence of the Congo as a matter of earnest, not play, and since the Congo has become independent, there is no place left in it for Belgium, let alone any privilege for her, and let alone her monopolizing from its riches everything she might wish, and treating its people as slaves though they are free, or as free though they are slaves.

Nor is it strange that agents of colonialism should appear in the Congo as they have not appeared in any other liberated colony; for since its people were never educated, and since the small minority among them that was educated was taught obedience before anything else, it is only natural that among this small minority there should be some who regard obedience to the colonizers as a duty from whose discharge there is no excuse. The United Nations now bears, in the Congo, burdens the like of which it has never borne before; for it does not merely guarantee the Congo's independence and the removal of the Belgians from it, but it is also asked to give the Congo technical assistance in governing itself, in maintaining order on one hand, and in exploiting its own country on the other. And we shall see how the United Nations rises to meet these burdens.