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Seeing the Pain of Others: Understanding Human Rights Abuses Through Journalistic Writings, Films, Documentaries and Photography

Ötekilerin Acısını Görmek: Seyahat Yazıları, Filmler, Belgeseller ve Fotoğraf Yoluyla İnsan Hakları İhlallerini Anlamak

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the understanding of the pain of others and scrutinizes human rights violations committed against colonial subjects and vulnerable groups by colonial and nation-state actors. It employs an interdisciplinary perspective analysing journalistic writings, films, documentaries and photography that cover human rights abuses committed against oppressed people. It elaborates on some human rights abuses rooted in the colonialism of European expansionism and other imperial policies that have destroyed the cultural distinctiveness of indigenous people. Exploitation, violence, exclusion are the main elements of colonialism and they are deeply connected with imperialism, the nation-state and the free market. Human rights abuses are discussed here in the context of critiques of colonialism and violence in the works of scholars such as Aime Cesaire, Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanon and Michael Taussig. This article shows that films, documentaries, journalistic writings and photography are significant genres that can expose crimes committed against colonized subjects by colonial powers and vulnerable society by modern nation-states. It also indicates that instead of whitewashing the oppressors these genres can challenge and prevent further crimes and human rights abuses by inviting the spectator to face past crimes; form solidarity with victims; be vigilant about state crimes; take action against injustice.

Anahtar Kelimeler
Human rights abuses, seeing the pain of others, cinema, photography

ÖZET

Bu makale, ötekinin acılarının anlaşılmasını analiz etmekte, kolonyal özneye ve savunmasız gruplara karşı kolonyal ve ulus-devlet aktörleri tarafından işlenen insan hakları ihlallerini incelemektedir. Bu çalışma disiplinler arası bir perspektif kullanarak ezilen toplumlara karşı işlenen insan hakları ihlallerini konu alan seyahatnameleri, filmleri, belgeselleri ve fotoğrafları incelemiştir. Avrupa yayılmacılığının sömürgeciliğinden kaynaklı bazı insan hakları ihlalleri ve diğer emperyalist politikalardan kaynaklı yerli halkların kültürel farklılığını yok eden ihlaller etraflıca incelenmiştir. Sömürü, şiddet, dışlama, sömürgeciliğin ana unsurlarıdır ve bunlar emperyalizm, ulus-devlet ve serbest piyasa ile yakından bağlantılıdırlar. Buradaki insan hakları ihlalleri, Aime Cesaire, Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanon ve Michael Taussig gibi yazarların eserlerindeki sömürgecilik ve şiddet eleştirileri bağlamında tartışılıyor. Bu makale, filmlerin, belgesellerin, seyahat yazılarının ve fotoğrafçılığın, sömürgeci güçler tarafından sömürgeleştirilmiş öznelere ve modern ulus devletler tarafından savunmasız toplumlara karşı işlenen suçları ifşa edebilecek önemli türler olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca bu çalışama, söz konusu janraların ezenleri aklamak yerine izleyiciyi geçmiş suçlarla yüzleşmeye; mağdurlarla dayanışmaya, ulus devlet suçları konusunda ihtiyatlı olmaya; adaletsizliğe karşı eyleme davet ederek izleyicinin suç ve insan hakları ihlallerine meydan okuyabileceğini ve önleyebileceğini belirtmektedir.

Keywords
İnsan hakları ihlalleri, ötekinin acısını görmek, sinema, fotoğrafçılık

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1. Reconceptualizing human rights

The first article of the United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) announces that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." This article implies that one has to be treated equally and respectfully regardless of their religion, ethnicity, colour, language and sex. As Carey et al. (2010) state: even though the concept of human rights is institutionalized in modern times the notions and principles of human rights have existed throughout history in different cultures, religions as well as regions. The concept of human rights is rooted in the ideas to protect human beings from the cruelty, oppression and violence of other human beings and the state. Philosopher Michael Perry encapsulates the spirit of human rights by suggesting that "there are certain things that ought never to be done to people and certain other things that should be done" (Ibid.,8). Across time, space and place human beings have resisted and challenged oppression and exploitation coming from monarchs, colonizers and oppressors. Smeulers & Grünfeld (2011) argue that the Magna Carta, announced by King John of England in 1215, is one of the first documents that limited the power of the King and accomplished some human rights. Following this change, these news rights were preserved and later extended by the United States Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Men (1789), both of which radically formed the Eurocentric rights of citizens. These triumphs secured the right to life, the right to assemble, the right to be free from torture as well as the right to equality, freedom and free speech.

In spite of human rights claim of being universal, the indigenous communities, people of color, slaves as well as colonized communities were disenfranchised from most basic rights such as the right to life and the right to be free from torture, and they have fought for their rights across the globe. The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) of the slaves of African descendants ended the French colonial rule and established the independent state of Haiti, putting an end to exploitation, violence and cruelty carried by the European colonizers against the non-Whites and slaves. Unlike the French and American Revolutions, the Haitian Revolution delivered human rights universally and unconditionally and pursued European unfulfilled promises of freedom, equality and justice for all, turning these abstract notions and promises into concrete (James, 2001). *The Black Jacobins*, the former slaves and new rulers, liberated all oppressed people rather than selectively liberating White male property owners as in the European context and became a beacon of struggle against imperial and colonial oppression (Idem.). Although this paper is not solely about mulling over the issue of decolonizing human rights and the issue of whether the notion of human rights is a European concept or not, one must admit that race is central to the nature of human rights discussion and implementation. The colonizer often positions himself as superior, rational and civilized while constructing native people as inferior, abject, primitive and backward (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 2001; Said, 2003; Spivak, 1988). In this regard, Mercer highlights the mind of English colonizers: "To grasp the discursive figure of the 'freeborn Englishman,' for instance, as a product of this historical moment is to agree that such an identity depended on his difference from colonial and enslaved others who were excluded from any 'natural rights.'" (in Hall, 2017:6). Thus, one can fathom as to why Eurocentric human rights are not universally inclusive and as has been ignoring the pain of others as equal subjects.

Even though we know some are more equal than others and some are being treated better than others, in a theoretical sense, the UDHR of 1948 might be the most comprehensive, widened and advanced document to secure the rights of every human equally. The document in an abstract sense secures all political, cultural and social rights of individuals, institutions and collective

entities. Yet these rights frequently have been abused particularly in the colonial-era of the 19th and 20th centuries by the very founders of them. The European expansion from Latin America to Africa, Australia and Artic has destroyed the culture and values of indigenous people, and then "civilized" White men colonized native lands; forced natives with his cruel torture to bring raw materials for his industry; abducted natives' wives and raped their women; exploited their labour and finally burnt indigenous people alive with atrocious torture (Taussig, 1987). The natives have been perpetually victimized and dehumanized by colonial fantasies of White occupiers.

The idea of 'enlightenment and 'civilization' has been used against colonized and enabled the production of pseudo terms like 'negro' or 'state of negritude' (Césaire, 2000) as instruments to subjugate native people continuously. The European culture of violence imposed on natives throughout colonial periods has been internalized and employed by European nations against one another. Especially British colonial violence of the 19th century became an inspiration for fascist regimes to bring violence home to Europe. Hannah Arendt indicated that there was a connection between colonialism and the climax of fascism and genocide on European soil, and more clearly, Gordon (2015) suggests that the British colonial violent methods of dehumanizing and killing the "enemy", including mass starvation, during the war in Sudan 1896-99 is central to understanding the Holocaust. The European tradition of warfare in the twentieth century and its link with the Holocaust is explained eloquently by Aimé Césaire below:

> "{T}hey tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western, Christian civilization in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack (Césaire, 2000: 36)"

Césaire points out how Europeans remained silent to Nazism and were accomplices of its crime before becoming victims of it. As a result of this, during the period of World War II, Nazi Germany established concentration camps in the heart of Europe and exterminated millions of Jews, Gypsies, communists and dissidents. The tradition of state violence in many forms continued to haunt civilians today around the globe. The invasion of Iraq revealed how the US became the "state of exception" and treated prisoners with viciously sophisticated methods, whose pictures and videos, leaked to the press, revealing the level of extreme suffering. The violations of human rights by the US government were on the rise, particularly after the 9/11 terror attack, as Danner (2009) suggests, the US announcement of the "War on Terror" caused numerous abuses of human rights such as torture of prisoners in many US-controlled prisons and bases. Thus, human rights were and are under constant attack of sovereign powers, who, if not criticized and constrained, are attempting to restrict the right to freedom of expression as in the case of Julian Assange's WikiLeaks, which uncovered numerous human rights violations, including war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

2. Journalistic writings and Terra Nullius

Some journalistic writings show another dark side of history, and with their creative and genuine writing styles, they raise awareness in societies to understand the violation of the rights of others. The journalistic author, Sven Lindqvist, with his book called *Terra Nullius,* reveals the suppression of settler colonizers over Aborigines in Australia. For White colonialists' the concept of "Terra Nullius" meant "no one's land," empty and uninhabited land, which was considered to be occupied by heathen savages and inferior races about to extinct (Lindqvist, 2007). The British orchestrated Darwin's Evolution Theory as a tool for legitimizing their position as a superior race

over Aborigines and used the Terra Nullius to justify British invasion, dispossession and eradication of natives in Australia (Ibid.) Ousting and massacring native communities in North and South America, Australia and Central Asia, European settlers assumed "it was only natural that the technically and militarily more advanced civilization had beaten the technically inferior one" (Lindqvist, 2007:4). This "beating" was also deploying cultural colonialism.

Colonization does not only work through conquering or military coercion, it is often achieved through imposing Western culture or the "Enlightenment" on colonized communities by missionaries, aid workers, teachers and social workers (Ife, 2009). The violence carried out on the culture and worldview of natives have destructed the soul and shattered the spirit of Aboriginal communities. Erasing and silencing the culture and history of natives was a consistent practice of colonization. For instance, searching for a place called Moorundie by natives, Lindqvist writes that Australian official found no name of the place on the map as if Moorundie was "swallowed up by the ground" (Ibid.:3). To find the place and its name, somebody advised Lindqvist that they visit the South Australian Museum, where he did not find the name but stumbled across the real situation of the customs and lives of natives: "The indigenous population live in museum's exhibition in a continuous now, in eternally timeless, permanent present that has neither a future nor a history" (Ibid.:4). Eventually, Lindqvist found Moorundie, where thousands of natives were wiped out on the map, and divulged that its violent history remaining untold and the name, Moorundie, was almost erased. Erasing the memory and heritage of natives and renaming and remapping places became a useful tool of the colonizer to annihilate what was left of the colonized.

Speaking about concealed crimes of the past and exposing colonial atrocities are significant actions to face and condemn human rights abuses of past and present. Lindqvist's journalistic writings about Moorundie eloquently illustrate the case in point. The native Ngaiawong people inhabited the abundant region of Moorundie for more than five thousand years until 1839 when the colonial settler, Johy Eyre, purchased 1,411 acres of this land from the colonial government, which assumed the land was unoccupied and uninhabited. And later he became the District Chief in Moorundie, where he imposed draconian laws on natives to eradicate them. Then, the cultural and physical destruction of Black (natives) took place overtly in camps:

> "The black people succumbed to white diseases, and the cramped conditions in the camps where they received their rations encouraged the rapid spread of infection. White men without women chased after black women and passed on sexually transmitted diseases. In 1841 these were still unknown in Moorundie; three years later, many were dying from them (Lindqvisit, 2007:8)."

After a few decades, the entire population of this place were obliterated and there was nobody to speak their language and save their holy places that were desecrated by colonial settlers. The journalist's writings disclose some horrendous details of how the dignity and integrity of natives were destroyed by White men, who eventually developed a policy to take 'half-caste'[54] or 'light-coloured piccaninnies,' the children from White fathers and Black mothers, to avoid the third race. The aim was to purify and homogenize the population. These children were taken into custody and into white society to further police and wipe out Aborigines and to provide cheap domestic labour for White settlers. These policies forced some mothers to adopt the inhumanity of colonizers against their own children as Lindqvist gives an account of a mother, Bludja:

[54] "half-caste" or "half-breed", as a significant concept, refers to children with parents from different races. It specifically indicates that mother is Aboriginal and father is white and colonizer.

> "if anyone gives birth to such a child and doesn't kill it, the police can come and take it away, Bludja says. 'We do not understand why they should take our piccaninies away from us and never let us see them again. They tell us it is the white man's law. We do not like our children being taken away from us, so sometimes we hide and sometimes we kill them (2007:62)."

The abduction of children of native communities, which lasted until the 1970s as I explained further in this chapter, endangered the mere existence of Aborigines, and their culture and language.

There are similar cases of colonization of non-Western communities to dwell on through journalistic writings. The writings of anthropologist Michael Taussig, which may be considered partly journalistic writings, reveal how the free market created terror and dehumanized indigenous people in the nineteenth century in Peru and Colombia for the rubber industry. In his seminal book *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (1987) Taussig writes that while White men exploited native labour and took their women for their harems, they at the same time tortured them because of natives' alleged cannibalism and barbarity. Here Taussig depicts how the native communities were treated by the colonizer: "they also tortured Indians with fire, water, and upside-down crucifixion. [European] Company employees cut the Indians to pieces with machetes and dashed out the brains of small children by hurling them against trees and walls" (Taussing, 1987:34). The European rubber industry, which makes "human things and things human" (Idem:34), was the source of pain, exploitation and irrecoverable destruction of spirit, nature and environment of Indian communities.

The European colonizers and agricultural settlers continued to dispossess and torture natives not just in Africa, Latin America and Australia but in the most isolated and remote regions such as the Arctic and subarctic, where, according to (Brody, 2001), colonizers relocated hunter-gatherer people who have been there at least for 8.000 years. Broady's nuanced work, *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-Gatherers, Farmers and the Shaping of the World* (2001), indicates that Inuit people in Canadian Arctic and Beavers Indians are fishers, hunters and trappers who have deeply adapted this lifestyle to their territories, however, the European settlers and the Canadian government have remapped their geography and relocated the native people into modern Canada. This forced displacement and radical transformation, according to Brody (2001), pushed natives, such as Inuit people, to change their 'ways of life', which caused the losing independence of these native societies. Similarly, settlers and colonial authorities insisted to alter truthful beliefs, values and ways of life of indigenous communities as the colonial agencies considered these practices unnatural and non-universal (Samson, 2020). Thus, Samson (2020) indicates that indigenous culture becomes the object of transformation that causes pain and destruction of cultural distinctiveness. The intervention, destruction and assimilation process in alliance with White men's belief system continues to haunt natives and their way of life, across time and place. Journalistic writings alongside literature, cinema and photography maintain to broaden our horizon and understanding of the pain of others.

3. Films and Documentaries: visual texts

Documenting truth through fictional and real narratives by camera lenses makes it possible to reach a wider audience to challenge abuses of human rights. Visual representation, as in the case of cinema, enlightens the spectators of the pain of others in detail and encourages them to challenge human rights violations across the globe. Goldberg suggests that "cinematic narratives present explicit material that enters viewers' consciousness through two power senses: sight and sound" (1996:45) and this "cinematic world" takes the spectator closer to the reality, which they

may “feel, smell, taste and hear” (Ibid.). Whilst films and documentaries can be used for entertainment, they might also be instrumentalized for witnessing history and recording human rights so that people become conscious about the violations to prevent further crimes committed against vulnerable groups.

The cinematic narrative does not only depict the violence imposed upon subjugated communities but also records the counter-violence employed by these groups to overthrow the intruder, colonizer and oppressor. The Battle of Algiers (1966), directed by Gillo Pontecorvo, is a film vividly recreating the French’s brutal suppression of the Algerian revolution of the 1950s determined to end France’s colonial rule of 130 years. The film starts with the scene of torturing, the systematic method for French troops to elicit information, of an Algerian man who was forced to confess the hideout of Ali La Pointe, one of the protagonists, and other guerilla forces. Pontecorvo presented various torture scenes and brutal methods of the colonizer without appealing to the sympathy of spectators by using a realist approach that only aimed to depict the naked facts on the ground, devoid of dramatizing and humanizing the war. The film as a historical narrative explicitly showing the counter-violence of Algerian anti-colonial society; “Children shoot soldiers at point-blank range. Woman plant bombs in cafes. Soon entire Arab population builds a mad fervor” (Harries, 2007:210). The violence became normal and part of the practices of the daily life of both sides as countless Algerians, including women and children, were executed as well as twenty thousand Frenchmen dying from 1954 to 1962 (Ibid.). Even though in the film, the French army killed La Pointe and destroyed the urban-guerrilla network of the resistance in 1957, in reality, the Algerian revolution maintained to hold popular support that ended with the establishment of an independent country in 1962 (Kaufman, 2003). No matter how hard the French violence sought to suppress, Algerian forces resisted and liberated themselves regardless of the major loss of their human and economic resources.

The French’s ruthless methods of torture, punishment and killings of Algerians, including La Pointe, caused political turmoil and traumatized the politics in France and motivated Algerians and anti-colonial movements around the world to support the Algerian cause (Ibid.). Pontecorvo’s film meticulously narrated the dynamics of this war through anti-colonial aspects and reached an international audience and brought a significant sympathy for Algerians as well as the success of the director himself. This popularity ultimately had the film banned in France for years. France denied facing past crimes of the colonial era, during which, Go (2013) states, Algerians experienced methodical exclusion, assimilations and exploitation under the guise of French civilization mission. This mission of civilization was exercised through severely traumatizing and dehumanizing cruelties over vulnerable civilians and women. Fanon attests that “the Algerian woman is at the heart of the combat. Arrested, tortured, raped, shot down, she testifies to the violence of occupier and to his inhumanity.” (1959:66). As the film followed historical events, it significantly emphasized the role of women as resisting subjects actively engaging in skirmishes and conflicts, planting bombs and delivering weapons (Amrane Minne & Clarke, 2007) under their veils that shielded them from the eyes of colonizer. Thus, Algerian women were not victims alone, but determined resistance militias.

In regard to contribution to human rights cause, this film might “break the silence by speaking ‘unspeakable’, creating both a model and a space for conversation and healing” about this “dirty war” (Bisschoff and Van De Peer, 2013). Despite not being displayed until 1971 in France, the film managed to explain the resistance and traumas of Algerians to the world and prove that “the colonists as victim of their own system” (Malcolm, 2000) as Algerian employed methods of

violence of French against French themselves. From a Fanonian standpoint, colonialism corrupts and perverts both colonized and colonizer. Although it is not an entirely relevant discussion, one must bear in mind how Algerians, who have learned methods of colonization from the French, implemented colonial politics, including cultural assimilation and Arabization, against Amazigh people. (Moore, 2003:69) shares a similar point by emphasizing that Algeria becomes a nation-state employing homogenization politics by tolerating only one language, one race, one religion and one type of woman. Thus, as the films also attest, the colonized radically embrace violent methods of the colonizer to protect their mere existence. However, one must be aware that victims can be perpetrators easily if the decolonizing visions of the colonized come to an end with the physical departure of imperialist colonizers. The colonial powers eventually withdraw but their corrupted spirits frequently remain to poison newly liberated subjects, who might adopt tools of the former master to violate the right of other non-hegemonic ethnic and religious groups. The documentary film, *The Burden of Dreams* (1982), discussing the production of Werner Herzog's praised film *Fitzcarraldo,* argues that colonizers create their own victimhood and are trapped by their own mentality and imagination as they are obsessed with the power which finally disappoints. For either former or latter colonizers desire for holding a tight grip on power will fail their mission of civilization or emancipation as absolute power will corrupt both of them. This resonates with Kopenick's argument: "the colonial endeavors fail not because of a lack of will and energy, but rather because imperial uses of power inevitably go awry" (1993:137). The absolute power at the disposal of colonial agents perverts the mentality of both dominant and subjugated actors as both sides develop tendencies to resolve issues through means of violence rather than negotiations.

Documentary, like films, can make invisible visible and forgettable unforgettable. The documentary named *Route 181: Fragments of a journey in Israel-Palestine* directed by Israeli and Palestinian filmmakers is exemplary in tracing the violence and traumas embedded in the discursive practices of daily lives of Arabs and Jews. The documentary focuses on oral history, interviewing Arabs and Jews with different backgrounds living along the border drawn in 1947, and introduces to its audiences the landscape of emotional and psychical conflict as well as colonial practices. Palestinians experiencing a similar fate like native people who "have had their narrative denied, their material culture destroyed, and their history erased or reinvented" (Masalha, 2012:88). One concludes that the Israelis, many of whom were the victims of the Holocaust, following Europeans, practices colonial policies and becomes the perpetrators. While filmmakers travelling through Palestine their cameras display Zionists' discriminating policies and practices in political space and daily life. For instance, one Israeli interviewee refers to a Palestinian as a 'cancer' that must be rid of, another one says, "we always say that a good Arab is a dead Arab," both of whom revealing the hatred towards Arabs among Israelis (Murphy, 2004). While Arabs interviewees avoid hate speeches and consider Israel as the occupier, the Jewish interviewees employ a more hostile and discriminating narrative as one of them states that "I have no conscience," adding that he does not feel guilty concerning 'cleansing' Arabs from their lands and renaming and reconstituting the lands by Israel, mainly after 1967. This radical antagonistic discourse of Jews mostly originates from the biblical myth "proving" that the land belongs to Jews. In contrast to radical Jews, "stateless" Arabs are more moderate in terms of racial and religious differences. The documentary invites the audiences to empathize with the Palestinians, who, as Edward Said says, become the victims of the victims.

Representing and commemorating the pain of others through film might make spectators witness and open up space for spectators to empathize with the victims so as to prevent any possible

torture, dehumanization and massacre in the future. The *Rabbit-Proof Fence*[55] (2002), directed by Phillip Noyce, is one of the films that represent the pain of others, based on a real story of three Aborigine girls in Australia, through the visual narrative of cinema, enquiring audiences to bear witness to the brutal violence and forced assimilation Aborigines have endured for generations at the hand of the white settlers. The film narrates the story of three "half-cast" girls, Molly (14), Daisy (8) and Gracie (10), who were forcibly taken from their families to the Moore River Native Settlement, their escape from state-run boarding schools to Jigalong, where the families live. Three girls flee from the settlements in 1931 and their three-month journey home takes along a fence that separates rabbits from farmland. The "half-cast" or "half-breed", the children of Aboriginal mothers and unknown White men who "enjoyed" sex with natives and left, were forcibly taken by police from their mothers to boarding school to be trained as skillful manual works and servants for their White masters as the state's colonial policy, between 1905-1970, aimed to bring an end to the existence of Aborigines by means of assimilation and violence. The film explicitly undertakes a role to criticize the assimilation, colonization as well as issue of the Stolen Generation, which refers to Australian federal law removing children from their Aboriginal mothers between 1905-1970. The *Rabbit-proof Fence* successfully takes the issue of the Stolen Generations into the realm of politics, media and the public sphere, challenging the denialist policies (D'aeth, 2002). Whilst the film depicts Aboriginal life, such as hunting and socializing, with more positive aspects, it subtly implies that Western settlers are the ones who pose danger and destruction to the society (Hermannová, 2017). It highlights the strong connection with the native community that Molly, Gracie and Daisy have as their determined 1000-miles walk home symbolizes this connection, and this also unearths the destruction of denialist and suppressive Western politics (Ibid.). In the film, the chief protector of Aborigines, Mr Neville a delusional White supremacist dedicated to cultural genocide and forced assimilation, states that Aborigines are a danger to themselves and they must be protected against themselves. Mr Neville, also called Mr Devil by Aborigines, internalize the colonial mindset, stating that Aborigines are an inferior and uncivilized race that would eventually diminish and die out, yet he as the "White savior" attempts to assimilate the mixed-race children into White society as servants.

The director Philip Noyce hired Pilkington-Garimara, the author of the *Rabbit-proof Fence* book, as a guide for the adaptation of the movie to make sure the truth reached out to the world. That strategy alongside different modes of representations, such as visuality, orality and performance brought success and authenticity to the film which had a significant impact on the society in the Jigalong region that attracted tourists wishing to visit the fence (D'aeth, 2002). The fence preventing separations of rabbits is a symbolical allegory referring to two different worlds: on the one hand civilized, superior White settlers, on the other hand backward, subjugated Aborigines. Cain (2004:303) argues that the fence creates the binaries (Black/White, civilized/savage and European/Aboriginal) reinforcing and creating differences between whites and natives as the film "reproduces its own specifically post-colonial guilt that becomes another way of consuming an-other, as spectacle." Regardless of this critique, Cain (2004) agrees that the main objectives and successes of the film manage to tackle the issue of the Stolen Generations. The film explicitly takes the side of natives, visualizing the pain, cultural genocide, malicious body politics Aborigines were exposed to and conveys a message to the global audience to face genocides and atrocities of colonial settlers and prevent similar crimes. Concerning the liability of the audience; "the spectator is asked to recognize not only that something traumatic happened in the past, but that

[55] The film based on the novel called *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington-Nugi Garimara.

the only way in which to 'redeem' these flashes of the past is to recognize them as concerns of the present." (Collins & Davis, 2006: 53). Films, in general, offer the traumatic and undesirable facts of the past yet they haunt spectators to take their share of unspoken burdens in present, compelling audiences to be conscious of the toxic past in the present.

4. Photography: seeing the body in pain as a concrete form of human rights abuse

Photography is a significant way of seeing, reporting and challenging human rights violations. Prominent philosopher and activist Susan Sontag argues that "nonstop imagery (television, streaming video, movies) is surrounded, but when it comes to remembering, the photograph has the deeper bite" (2003: 19). Photographs provide sharp and quick insight regarding any documented instant through cameras, which function as eyes for shooters immortalizing objects and transcending them beyond space, place and time. Sontag perceives the photograph as "a quotation, or a maxim or proverb" (2003:19) that records and recalls history, particularly torture and pain, for people who are not there without a limit of time and space. Photographs record and spread inhuman and atrocious actions and wars, forcing beholders to empathize with victims as the photograph of Vietnamese children demonstrates below.

Figure 1: Nine-year-old Kim Phuc, centre, flees Trang Bang following a napalm attack, Vietnam War on June 8, 1972 (AP Photo/Nick Ut)

This photograph was taken in 1972 and presented a naked South Vietnamese child sprayed by an American napalm bombardment attack, running on a street towards the photographer, her arms open, screaming and suffering from the attack. While the photograph revealed the ruthlessness of the war and the suffering of the victim, it has become one of the iconic photos against war and an unforgettable image in the collective memory of humanity. Such photography exposes crimes of war and war as a crime, and by doing so it voices an anti-war narrative to prevent further pain and loss. According to Sontag this photograph "probably did more to increase the public revulsion against the war than a hundred hours of televised barbarities" (2002:18). Here the photographic image provokes viewers as it encompasses the multidimensional world of senses and emotions into a shocking object to the eyes. Not everyone can read human rights

reports and listen to the radio for hours about the atrocities of American troops in Vietnam, but everyone has had a moment to see the brutality of the war in the photograph above.

John Berger, critic and novelist, underlines the importance of seeing: “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak…. [T]he specific vision of the image-maker was also recognized as part of the record. An image became a record of how X had seen Y." (Berger, 2008:7,10). One sees the world not only through eyes but also lenses that are socially and historically constructed by ideological and socioeconomic dynamics. Photographs, as Berger says for the art, are not directed representations or mirroring of the world, rather they are mediated representations of things that are produced or made based on certain interpretations. In this sense, photography is a subjective realm in which producers and viewers might have different perceptions and objectives regarding reality. Different from Sontag, Berger questions the significance and impact of photographic representation of the suffering of war victims in Vietnam in raising awareness to prevent war as Berger argues that American mainstream media covers shocking images because the media knows that they are not completely effective in motivating the public to confront or stop the warmonger political establishment (Berger, 2015). Berger in his essay *Photographs of Agony* questions the media’s coverage of photographs of bombarded and killed Vietnamese civilians by the US, claiming the photographs’ intended purpose is not about awakening the public rather discouraging, depoliticizing people to act accordingly (Robbins, 2016; Berger, 2015). According to Berger, these photographs of human suffering normalize wars and construct human suffering as a universal human condition for viewers, therefore, they accuse “nobody and everybody.” We can agree with some of the points Berger makes as an overdose of exposure to war photographs can make viewers numb, however, we also know that numerous photographs of human rights abuses and war have significant impacts on people across the globe to protest injustices and challenge wars. In contrast to Berger, Susan Sontag argues that “people may fail to respond to atrocity images, not because they have seen too many images but because they have not seen enough images, because they have seen wrong images” (in Bisschoff and Van de Peer, 2013:134) or they may have not “political consciousness” to assess images to respond them “morally”, otherwise right and enough images ‘haunt’ spectators. For instance, the shocking image of drowned three-year-old Kurdish refugee boy, Aylan Kurdi, in Mediterranean Sea in Turkey in September 2015, became the symbol of the struggle of Syrian refugees. This photograph hit headlines around the world; revealed the hypocrisy of the international community about migration; made the refugee crisis visible. More importantly, this image led to the discussion about refugees in a more humanized and moderated discourse.

Photography can change the perception of individuals of human rights violations of both past and present. Whilst it presents the past throughout the eternal present, it brings moral responsibility for individuals to face and genuinely engage with past crimes in order to eliminate the possibility of such crimes in future. For example, photographs of flogging natives as well as severed body parts of native children in Congo, which had been a colony for the European rubber industry for a long time, expose dehumanization of natives and atrocities committed by Belgian colonizers. Robert Casement documented the atrocities of King Leopold II of Belgium, who ruled Congo for 23 years (1885-1908), with details in the Casement Report (1904), which illustrates how the rubber companies forced and blackmailed indigenous men to bring the rubber by kidnapping their women and children. When indigenous men had not made their rubber quota for the day, Belgian company militias and forces chained men and forced them to flog other natives to deaths, then they raped their women, cut off hands and feet of their children, even cannibalized natives after severing their bodies. Although white men were not frequently photographed in the crime scenes,

many of his atrocities, massacres and crimes were adequately photographed and documented as in the case of the Casement Report (1904). Besides reports and legal documents, the photographs have become the visual evidence of massacres committed by Belgians, thus their existence is still there to remind us all how colonial greed and its ruthless political economy exploited and destroyed non-European communities. To maintain and legitimize their dominance over the natives, the "primitive races and exotic Others", European colonialists used photography as an instrument of proving their points, however, these photographs provide proofs of what happens to individuals lacking human rights and they "show how those without such rights look, and what the absence of such rights does to a person" (Swimelar, 2014: 416). Although these photographs created public sympathy in the world for Congo Reform and pushed European spectators, who are still benefiting from their ancestors' colonial heritage and accumulated wealth, to face these images genuinely and take action accordingly, photography sometimes, Peffer argues, "instrumentalized the black body as an exotic and abject for displaying anguished pleasure of looking" (2013:134). Although the tormented and tortured body of black and other natives in photographs exoticized, sexualized and fetishized by perverted White gaze, the photographs still remain to haunt colonizers.

Photography makes less-visible or invisible things visible; represents unrepresented; speaks unspeakable on behalf of the oppressed of the world. Throughout the Iraq War, the US military committed several human rights violations, including the notorious case of Abu Ghraib prison, where prisoners faced torture, rape, sexual and physical abuse and murder. In 2014, the photographs displaying torture, humiliation and degrading of the detainees of Abu Ghraib widely circulated by media, particularly, the infamous photo of a detainee, Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh, who had been hooded, electrocuted while standing in a crucifixion position, becomes the symbol of inhumane treatment of prisoners.

Figure 2: The Hooded Man 2003 by Sergeant Ivan Frederick

Along with other images, this hooded man photo attracted the attention of both US and international public and was condemned and criticized considerably by international human rights

organizations as well as people across the globe. Concerning other people's pain and public reaction to photographed pain, Sontag embraces a hopeful approach: "Photographs of an atrocity may give rise to opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen" (2003: 13). The strong evidence of human rights abuses provided by the photographs and public condemnation of the torture forced the US government to act and eventually the US Congress passed the Detainee Treatment Act, prohibiting "cruel, inhuman, or degrading" methods of torturing detainees. And eleven military staff were found guilty of numerous crimes, and to some extent, they have been held accountable for the Abu Ghraib case thanks to the publications of the photographs in the media. Although neither the perpetrators were executed satisfactorily nor survivors of the torture were served justice ideally, the photography of Abu Ghraib led viewers to question and challenge the US government dehumanizing politics. Swimelar (2014) contends that the body in pain and the human suffering documented through visual texts, photographic representations, become evidence of human rights violations as they reveal the consequence of the denial of human rights in concrete forms, thus, photographs can raise human rights consciousness at national and international levels. Unlike human rights reports, books and official documents, photography can easily and swiftly reach to a global audience with a concise and effective message to challenge human rights abuses.

5. Conclusion

The concept of human rights is about the protection of individuals rights such as the right to life, the right to equality and freedom from discrimination. The concept is an idea seeking to protect all human beings and their fundamental rights from the oppression and violence of other human beings. People have always struggled for their rights, fighting against despotism, colonialism and oppressive ruling, and they have managed to ensure their rights under different constitutions and laws, such as Magna Carta and UDHR. Whilst every human being deserves to be equal and benefit from these rights regardless of their race, religion, class and gender, human rights abuses have always existed throughout history as those rights remained Eurocentric and, particularly during the 19th and early 20th century, as they were not applied to non-White people. As discussed throughout this text, besides reports and official documents, journalistic writing, film, documentary and photography have significantly facilitated to expose human rights abuses as well as promoted ways to challenge and prevent further abuses by navigating attention of spectators to face past crimes, massacres as well as to form networks of solidarity to tackle the source of injustice. European great powers had committed countless crimes by colonizing, exploiting and destroying culture, wealth and the mere existence of native people in Australia, Canada, Africa and America until the second half of the twentieth-first century. The colonialists perceived indigenous people as subhuman, barbarians, backwards and irrationals to be enlightened and civilized by the white man who under the mission of civilizing acted to assimilate, massacre and annihilate them. Journalistic writing *Terra Nullius*, the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence,* the photograph of Vietnamese *Napalm Girl*, Phan Thi Kim Phuc, and similar genres of visual representations exposed human rights abuses of past and present and assisted audiences to face, challenge and prevent crimes committed against vulnerable individuals and communities. Photography, documentary and film, such as *The Battle of Algiers*, portrays the pain of others, their struggle for rights, and invites viewers to bear the burden of responsibility to raise wariness for human rights, establish empathy with victims rather than perpetrators, and challenge power and its root causes of systematic

oppression. All of this at least will defy silent approval of dehumanization and abuses of victims of oppression.

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