

Seeing Clearly Under Occupation

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No one can escape the suffocation of occupation. It denies innate human freedoms and imposes a state of unnatural uncertainty in the unconscious self. Each citizen of an occupied society suffers the same deprivations and dependence on the caprice of the occupier; yet each frets and reacts with her own patterns of frustration which affect her self-consciousness and her perceptions.

Blindness imposes similar restrictions on basic freedoms and self-consciousness. One wants to go places, to see and to understand the wider world from which one is barred, but cannot without assistance. One is dependant on others and therefore lost in a world of uncertainty where most decisions are in the hands of others. This is contrary to the natural instincts and feelings of one's unconscious birthright – just as one might will, as of one's nature, to walk, and find one is paralyzed.

The world is threatening to everyone – except perhaps to an ignorant Buddha in the artificial shelter of his palace grounds. Men are obliged to participate in the uncertainties and vagaries of this world with as much autonomy as each can establish among themselves. But women are very much at the mercy of men's respect or disrespect, assistance and co-operation or abuse. Women have to

accustom themselves to a world more dangerous than that of men, one which sets greater real and psychological limits. Women's psychosocial identity and situation is different from that of men. A woman grows up under a formalized occupation in which greater informal and random threats and limitations to instinctive impulses of personal freedom lurk among the uncertainties of limited autonomy. How much more perplexing and difficult life is for a blind woman living in a society under occupation by an alien and unfriendly nation.

Evolving consciousness in the blind world of my youth was fraught with uncertainties, fears, bogies and self-doubts. Poor and painful feelings about myself seemed to have had no limit. But when there seem to be no visible means of support, so to say, one is definitely thrown back on one's own resources. I was forced to take a conscious decision to work on what strengths I had to develop my self, a self that could handle its uncontrolled feelings and, therefore, face the world. Only when I took this step was I able to feel like a whole, albeit faltering, person. I think I would describe the worst feelings as ranging between being intimidated and angry.

With occupation I went through similar stages of uncer-

tainty and frustration, acutely. I felt like a resentful victim not missing an opportunity to pick a fight with occupation soldiers at every encounter. But even this thundercloud had its silver lining. The realization of the true self comes with spontaneous feelings and the experiences into which they throw the blind traveler on this dark journey. "Know thyself" as the Temple at Delphi told the world. That is the goal of life, the completeness which gives courage, the understanding of one's limitations, and one's strengths that open the understanding of experience.

With a new interest and confidence I began to benefit from social contact and particularly from encounters with the occupation authorities. From the time of my taking stock of my situation I also gained accumulated revelations about others. They were encounters of the real kind, at the existential human level. Do you wonder that I have made a career as a therapist and educator?

As you may know, the blind have an acute sense of hearing. They are obliged to focus simply and directly on the heart of every situation without distractions. They develop perception of the subtle nuances of voice and sound. Have you ever consciously decided to ignore the meaning of words spoken and focused entirely on the emotions? Voices send clear emotional messages: "I am lonely... no one hears me... you will do what I tell you..." They send messages of affection, indifference, content, despair, concern, in a never ending sub-dialogue of sentient humanity. Can't you hear? Can't you hear your sister and your brother calling you?

I have learned to listen to the voices of humanity around me and they are not saying what their words say. Between the imperatives and the emotional truth of

everyday human contact life is perverted by political considerations that have absurd and artificial importance of their own. As a blind person I am not distracted by the cosmology of these political and, dare I say it, religious and social constructs. Although I have lots of time to collate information that comes to me about them they are only sandcastles over which children fight their imaginary wars while I, like their parents, see only the reality of the children themselves. I fancy myself as a military doctor bound by his Hippocratic Oath and the imperative of his life and death world, who would order soldiers that have come for his patient out of the tent of his field hospital.

Alone in my flat at night I am afraid when shooting breaks out nearby. I am worried about disrespect at checkpoints. Although blind I am aware of the randomness of the layout of checkpoints, the boredom and capriciousness of the occupiers manning them, the real and the simply vexatious delays, the formal and the emotional exchanges between occupier and occupied, and the rancor and bad feelings, the blighted life felt by each in every encounter. I am aware of roles imposed by the accident of birth, the vanities of tribes, the evil inventions of religious and political doctrine and the puppets thereof who ridiculously claim monopoly of God, power and truth, alien to the true nature and personalities of humanity.

Yes, occupation forces greater care and concern for the ordinary hopes of humanity in the real world. At times I despair, but it is a great joy to take part in life with whatever troubles it brings and sometimes because of them.

As a blind woman existing under occupation I am obliged to see.

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