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CAN I HELP YOU?

Can I help you? Why yes you may. Help with what? Well, first of all, I am hungry. But wait, before you give me a piece of bread, take the time to understand my hunger. I hunger not just for food; I have a hunger for knowledge and understanding. 'For knowledge and understanding?' you ask. Yes, but not just the bits and pieces found in books. I want to know why life has treated me like this; I want to know why things are the way that they are. I want you to tell me why. I want you to explain it to me for, perhaps you have the answers.

Tell me why I live on a trifle a day while you enjoy a feast of all imaginable opulence. I acknowledge that you have worked hard and long to have what you have today but I have worked long and hard to make much of what you have today. I have worked in sweat shops, dug in mines, ventured into perilous jungles, scaled towering trees and not to mention spent countless monotonous hours at a desk for all those fine luxuries of yours. For all this my only wages are pennies and scars. Scars on my skin and scars on my mind, scars that all your money can never erase.

Help me to understand why it is OK for you to invade my country, destroy its monuments, plunder its wealth, desecrate its shrines, eliminate its wildlife and demolish its infrastructure. How is it that you can come into my country and subjugate my people while I am not good enough to even visit yours? Show me what allows you to enter my country with guns and tanks, what allows you to turn our wheat fields, corn fields, cane fields and playfields into minefields. How can you roll tanks over our playground? How can your blast our school? So many are people are dead, dying, fatherless and childless. To you, they are all mere incidentals in your quest to

avenge some perceived wrong, your quest to assuage your wounded pride.

Show me what allows you to force your beliefs, your culture and your values on me. By what right do you tell me who I should be and what I should believe? You come and degrade my culture, laugh at my values and mock my beliefs. You tell me become 'civilized' but little do you recognize that you are destroying a civilization, my civilization, a civilization built tirelessly and sacrificially by generations of my people before me. What is it that makes my culture so much more barbaric than yours? Can you help me to understand why the ways and means that have allowed my forefathers to survive for generations are so vulgar and why they ought to be changed?

Help me to see what makes you so much better than I am. Why is it that I am good enough to work in your brothels, sweep your floors, clean your boots and take out your garbage but not good enough to move into your neighbourhood or marry your sons? I am good enough to keep your labour costs down but not good enough to share in the profits. Good enough to clean your homes but not to live in them. How can you treat me like this and then face your own wives, daughters, mothers and sisters/ why do you abuse my body and rob me of the little I can call my own?

Why does my dark skin or slanted eyes or broad nose devalue me? Why is it that your fair skin makes you superior? You see an abandoned or abused dog and you feed it, call the police for its owners and protest the inhumane treatment of animals. Are humans not of more value? Why do you not feed me when you see me starving, why do you not protest the inhuman treatment meted out to me? Or is it that only those who look like you and live like you were human. You chain yourself to a tree and are willing to die to prevent its destruction. What about my death? Why does a chainsaw against a tree trunk elicit more outrage than a gun to my head or shrapnel through my chest?

You sing, 'My country, 'Tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty'¹, what about my country? Help me to sing for I want to sing of my country too but what can I sing? I could sing of beautiful beaches,

¹ Samuel Frances Smith 'My Country 'Tis of Thee'

untamed jungles, and diverse wildlife. I could sing of ancient civilizations and historic artefacts and monuments. But that would only tell half the story. To tell the entire story I would have to sing of beautiful beaches made unusable by large warships, trees falling on every hand and side as you tramp through my forests in search of 'the enemy,' vast deserts now dotted with army posts and quickly dwindling wildlife poisoned by 'development.' I would have to sing of monuments now reduced to ruins by your ammunition and ancient civilizations whose culture has been trampled. I would have to sing of a country whose identity is being quickly erased. I would have to sing a song whose only accompaniment would be the thunder of gunshots. You will help me but on one condition? I must help you to detect terrorists in my country? 'Terrorists'? Is it not strange how that one little label can erase so many others; how dim 'invader' and 'occupier' grow when faced with 'terrorist'? Why is it that every 'terrorist' is guilty until proven innocent? Show me why your hunt for a 'terrorist' justifies a reign of terror in my country. Why does one of your dead soldiers equate the death of thousands of my civilians? What evidence do you have of terrorists but 'intelligence reports', information coerced out of other 'terrorists' and suspicions? "Oh, so you support terrorists!" you say. No, I do not support terrorism in any of its forms. I oppose it as suicide bombers detonating bombs in your country and as armies invading mine. I oppose the intimidation, rape and torture of my people as much as I oppose the death of yours.

'But what about all our development plans? Haven't they helped?' you ask. Development? What is your definition of development? Mine is the opportunity to an education, the chance to better myself, the assurance of justice and the freedom from prejudice. But what has your 'development' brought but greedy, multinational, environmentally disastrous companies and fast food chains. Your 'development' has done nothing for me and everything for you. How is it that all that your 'development' has done for me is to pollute my air, my water and my land? Why does your 'development' contribute to the betterment of you and your people and the further degradation of mine?

'I have problems of my own,' you protest, 'work to do, children, are they not the future of this world? Since you have children maybe you can help me. Help me to look my children in the eye and

smile, though I know that I have nothing to feed them with. Explain how I can educate them, take care of them and nourish them when I can barely get clean water to bathe them. How can I mould them into loving and just people when they are constantly the victims of hatred and injustice? You look at me askance and cover your children's eyes, afraid that people like me will steal your children's innocence. My children's innocence has been torn from them. Their innocence was lost when they witnessed the rape of their mother, when they saw their father shot dead, when they were forced to dodge bullets in their own homes, when they huddled under desks while bomb blasts shook their school how can I protect my children's innocence when strange men can stop them and search them at whim?

'Why ask for my help?' you question, 'What about your own government? Why can't you all help yourselves?' My government has been emasculated, living under your thumb, knowing that at the slightest whim you can remove the 'oppressor' and achieve your aim of 'the freedom of the ... people and the bringing of democracy²'. What can they do while shackled to unfair trade deals and advantageous contracts and treaties? Yes we want to help ourselves but how can we when at the slightest hint that your ideas and policies are being rejected you declare it an emergency and demand international intervention.

I have been asking you to help me and perhaps you have, perhaps you have helped more than you can ever understand for you have made me to see that I already know the answers. There is one cause, it is because I am 'third world' and you are first, it is because you are the colonizer and I am the colonized, it is because you are 'developed' and I am 'developing'. So now you can go, you can go with a clean conscience, go on your way knowing that you have helped to bring one more of the 'barbarians' out of ignorance and that soon an enlightened and empowered people will emerge. Thank you for your help.

² Hillary Clinton

<http://democracyinamericas.org/cubacentral/news-story/transcript-senate-confirmation-hearing-hillary-clinton>

Sources

Samuel Frances Smith 'My Country 'Tis of Thee'

Transcript: Senate Confirmation Hearing: Hillary Clinton

<http://democracyinamericas.org/cubacentral/news-story/transcript-senate-confirmation-hearing-hillary-clinton> 27 February 2009