



Letter from inside

Zeki

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ABSTRACT

Zeki Bayhan's letter from Prison.

KEYWORDS

Political prisoners, solitary confinement, isolation, Turkey, letters, everyday life



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LETTER FROM INSIDE - ZEKİ

Hello,

I would like to extend my love and respect to everyone and salute your sensibility in dealing with such a secluded social problem as isolation under the oppressive political regime that has turned the country into a prison. I know that you are not free either and I am worried that if your sensibility persists, your isolation may deepen as well. Isn't it true that today, anyone who isn't pro-government could encounter prison at any moment? A young friend who was arrested a few years ago, after dozens of prisoned friends shouted slogans together, just said "oh! I am freer here, if I shouted these slogans outside, I would be arrested".

I wonder what connotations the concept of isolation creates in the perception of people outside. When I was asked to write something about isolation, the first thing that came to my mind was what can be said. Not because there's nothing to say, but rather because there are so many things and devastating consequences that one doesn't know how to describe them. And, of course, one is haunted by the doubt of how much of what is told will be understood. When considered deeply, isolation and its practices are so inhuman that they are beyond the perception and experience of a normal human being. It is therefore not easy to understand. Because of that I feel as I am addressing you from a distant window.

Isolation is to be windowless indeed. In isolation, all the windows look inwards. Into oneself of human being ... This is kind of being forced to self-destruction. It is a terrible torture to be forced to see, hear and feel only yourself wherever you look. As if you are caught in a whirlpool, keep pulled by down and down, feel like crumbling and collapsing on yourself. Yes, isolation has no windows to the outside, but people who resist find ways to create small holes in the walls of isolation itself. You know when you put your eye to a small hole and look in, the hole grows and turns into a window. Here, I will try to open a few windows through which you can see inside, inside the isolation. I know it is difficult to see the darkness inside from the brightness of outside, but if you put your eyes closer to the windows, maybe a little bit... Let's talk about the windows...

Window 1.

Isolation is the act of isolating someone physically by incarcerating. It is usually analyzed, criticized, etc. within this framework. However, this is only the factual aspect of isolation. Space and architectural features are related to the application area of isolation, not the isolation itself.

In reality, isolation is not limited to the incarceration of people within walls. The purpose of isolation is to imprison the human mind in the body. This is what's destructive. That's the purpose of physical isolation, the control and surveillance technologies and all those practices of the prison regime.

With isolation, all the attention, sensitivity, anxiety, and fear of the prisoner are prompted to direct towards himself, towards his own body. The moment the prisoner falls into this trap, he begins to carve and consume himself. Isolation is the politics of pushing one into self-destruction by one's own hand. It is physical, ideological, political, spiritual, but necessarily destruction...

Window 2.

From the darkest forms of isolation to the relatively gray ones, the aim is the same: to break people down psychologically, emotionally and intellectually.

In isolation, of course, it makes a difference whether you are alone or with one

or two other people. It is comforting to hear a voice other than one's own, but in the conditions of isolation, spread over time, people who stay together gradually lose their distinctiveness and vitality for each other. Being constantly intertwined with the same people in a space of a few square meters leads to people memorizing each other's every behavior and reflex.

And to the extent that those who stay together lose their distinctiveness for each other, they become part of the isolation system. Isolation of one turn into isolation of three. And sometimes the isolation of three can and does become even more difficult.

Window 3.

Isolation is a system of destruction in which people are punished both by being with and by being without other people. Solitary confinement punishes people by not letting them to be with others. You long to hear a different voice. On the other hand, in three or five-person isolation you are punished by being with the same people continuously. I don't know if you can understand what a terrible torment it is not to have a single moment to yourself, not to have a place to be alone for years and years. I'm talking about situations like not being able to walk away when you're frustrated, not being able to retreat to a room and close the door when you're overwhelmed by those around you, and not being able to find a quiet corner to rest when you're suffering from headaches.

Window 4.

Life in isolation is based on endless repetition. Every day is the same as every other day. Imagine living on the same day for ten years, twenty years, thirty years. You feel as if you are suspended in time; you feel that your sense of time has been erased.

A small social experiment: ask someone who has served in the army or studied at university about their memories at the military or university. They would give you long narrations. Ask someone who has been imprisoned for twenty or thirty years... They would be more silent. Because they've lived the same day for 20 or 30 years.

Window 5.

A life of isolation based on endless repetition eventually leads to the act of thought being replaced by habit. Living on the same day makes it unnecessary to rethink one's actions over again. Habits come from already being thought. Yet the mind has already thought once and coded what and how. After that it is endless repetition.

In isolation, habits mechanize life to such an extent that one often does things without thinking. Sometimes a hesitation appears, one wonders "if I did that or not". When you turn around and check, you see you've done it. Without thinking at all.

A person in prison seems to think a lot. However, this is often not real analytical thinking. It is more like diving in and out or moving back and forth among fragmented crumbs tinged with a bit of melancholy.

I mentioned that isolation imprisons the mind in the body. And the net in which the mind is imprisoned is habits.

Window 6.

It is misleading to think of isolation in terms of individual practices. Isolation is a system, a whole set of practices. Individual practices also find their meaning within this context. Therefore, the prisoner's perception of these practices may not be the same as the perception of people looking from the outside. Most of the time it is not the same at all.

For example, every day twice a time, there is a count. Prisoners are counted. If you ask the state, they say "I have to count them for security reasons". If you ask people outside, they say "it is understandable, there is no harm".

In the prisoner's perception, however, the count is a twice-daily reminder that the prisoner is a fixed asset, it is a practice done to keep the *consciousness of nothingness* alive.

Now let's think about whether the perception of the person outside about this practice is closer to the state or the one in isolation; 24 hours a day, prisoners are kept under observation and surveillance with all kinds of technological tools. Yet, I would like to draw your attention to how security-related it is to take a physical count to determine whether the prisoners are in their cells or not.

Window 7.

Isolation also damages the psychology of the guards. It's inconceivable for the enforcers of inhumane practices to remain normal. People gradually/step by step become guards. The system knows this as well. That's why the guards who interact with lawyers and families from outside are usually different from those who deal with the prisoners inside. The prison has a face both outward-facing and an inward-facing.

These windows are not the ones that carry light, they carry darkness to the outside. That's why this much might have been overwhelming. I've only just started, but I'm leaving it here.

I would like to finish by saying a few words about the flipside of the coin. Yes, isolation is deep darkness. It surrounds human beings with countless nets. The consciousness of an infinite nothingness gradually encompasses the mind, emotion, etc.

But despite all this, it is possible to resist. Even though it is difficult to resist isolation, you have to catch the light in the darkness and make it grow. Political prisoners succeed in this. Resistance is multifaceted. For a political prisoner who has been isolated for 10 or 20 years to write a publishable article on current politics, for example, is a great achievement against isolation. The intellectual content of the article is of course important, but more important and valuable than that is that despite years of isolation, he has not broken away from the agenda of the people's struggle and can articulate current politics. This is an example of resistance which shows that isolation can be overcome by human will.

Political prisoners are political subjects who struggle whether in prison or in isolation. The transition from the position of a struggling political subject to that of a victimized due to the conditions of imprisonment or isolation is the point where destruction begins for the political prisoner. This is a trap. It has been set up. Unfortunately, some of us fall into this trap. When political prisoners are isolated from their political identity and struggle, what is left is a victimized person. This is the purpose of the isolation regime.

The change of the prison and isolation regime is only possible through the change of the political system. This requires a long struggle and therefore time. This means that isolation will not be lifted immediately. In that case, small touches and contributions to the lives and resistance of political prisoners in prison can be considered. It should not be forgotten that a person in isolation needs people the most and the issue is not economic support.

Those who experience isolation in prison in its deepest form are political prisoners sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment. There are 9 of them in my prison, and around 20 in total in the 3 prisons on our campus. If each of the patriotic, revolutionary, democratic lawyers takes the power of attorney of one of these friends and even if they meet them for an hour of conversation every 3 months, that would be a breath of fresh air to those friends.

Again, if each of the caring people who are not lawyers becomes a pen pal with one of these friends and can send a couple of books every few months, it would also be a breath of fresh air for these friends. Are such touches so difficult? It's up to you. I suggested it.

We should take the isolation in its darkest place and start the struggle from there. Let's not forget that place!

Isolation may be cold, but the spirit of resistance is warm. With the warmth of those who resist, I greet you all with love and respect.

Zeki Bayhan

Prison