THE Round Table

Summer-Fall
2000

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin

Africa:

Cry, The Beloved Continent

Why This Issue?

This issue of *The Round Table* is a wonderful example of one of the tenets of Catholic Worker philosophy, clarification of thought. Scholars and students of the continent of Africa have written volumes; and yet, to many of us in the United States, Africa is a sound byte on the news or a few columns or pages in newspapers or magazines. Africa is a beautiful land that has been beset by apartheid government, civil strife, famine, and, more recently, AIDS. To clarify our understanding of the varied histories, cultures, and crises of African countries is truly a daunting task, as Cathy Hartrich notes. Nevertheless, she shares her hopes for her trip to Ghana and her desire that all of us can work alongside the African people to "bring about a new earth as it is in heaven, wherein justice dwells."

Obi Nwakanma, a Nigerian poet and journalist, discusses "Africa and the Ethnic Crisis." He is well aware of the human tragedy that results from ethnic rivalries, but he does not stop there as many in the Northern Hemisphere find it simpler to do. It is easier to lay the blame for Africa's current problems on ethnic warfare. He notes, however, "Many of these wars are inspired by fears of domination and have been engendered by a history of political divisions and manipulation by larger historical interests."

Sharmarke Hashi discusses the difficulties of Somalian refugees in the United States and the reasons for the civil war that caused many Somalis to leave their country. He points out that American intervention in 1991 was not as helpful as hoped for because the United States did not know enough about the situation in Somalia before going there.

Annjie Schiefelbein, a Karen House community member and nurse, is in Angola working with Jesuit Refugee Services. She discusses her work with the people in refugee camps. She also tells of Raul, a twelve-year-old boy who has seen many of his friends forcibly recruited to fight the war in Angola. This Northerner looks forward to learning more about Annjie's work there and her friendship with Raul.

We have chosen to focus this issue on some of the tremendous struggles that Africa faces, but we realize that this is just a small part of its story. May the perspectives offered in these articles help us to continue clarifying our understanding and encourage us to work with our African sisters and brothers, there and in the United States. ✚

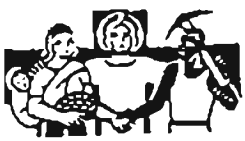
--Carol Giles

Front cover photo by Ann Appelbaum

The centerfold graphic design is by Nathan Sprehe. The information presented there was compiled by Teka Childress who wants to thank to the following sources: *The New York Times*, The American Friends Service Committee's *Fact Sheet on Angola*, Oxfam America's *Viewpoint*, *The St. Louis Post Dispatch*, The U.S. Committee For Refugees' book on Sudan, the Jan. 17, 2000 issue of *Newsweek*, *Africana Encyclopedia, 2000*, Obi Nwakanma, Tom Greene, S.J., Sr. Elizabeth Kolmer, A.S.C., and Tim Rakel.

the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community

Karen House
1840 Hogan
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-621-4052



Ella Dixon House
1540 N. 17th St.
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-231-2039

Facing Africa's Harsh Realities

by Cathy Hartrich

Lately, you can open a newspaper almost any day of the week, and you will find some article on Africa. With the AIDS epidemic spinning out of control, political revolution fueled by "dirty diamonds," and natural disasters of flood and famine, the news is usually big and bad. From a distance, many Americans at their laptops monitoring "major" domestic crises, such as the Justice Department's setback to the Microsoft monopoly, find harsh African realities impossibly tragic. As members of a powerful world elite, they negotiate frenzied transfers of titillating NASDAQ stock, yet fail to draw a connection between the resulting excess for a select few and the devastating poverty of the "Two Thirds World." They seem unmoved by the groaning of a continent on the far side of the earth. The news, in fact, barely evokes a yawn.

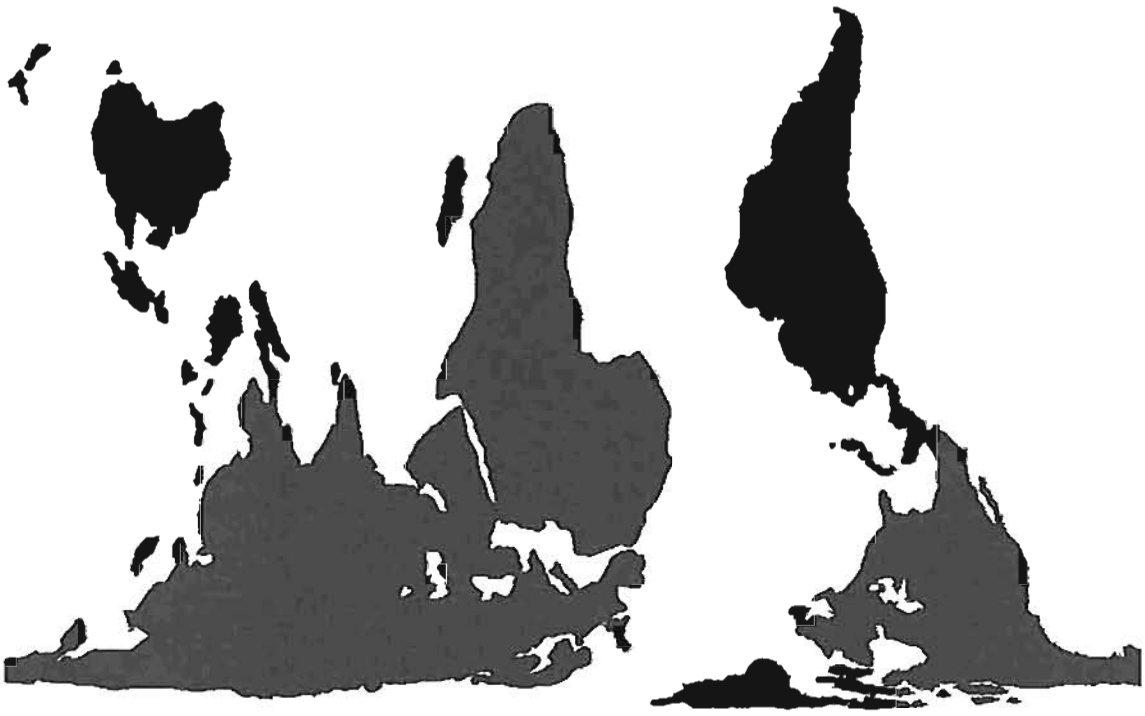
Even for those whose consciences are working well, news out of Africa can have an almost numbing effect. Haven't we heard it before? Ethnic tension in Rwanda, civil unrest in Ethiopia, child soldiers in Sierra Leone, political strife in Zimbabwe, and most of the African continent mired in debt enslavement to First World financial institutions. The list appears endless.

It is easy to become paralyzed both by the enormity of Africa's problems as well as by the attitude of the yawning elite. Immersed here in a culture "riding high" on an economic boom, persons of conscience feel overwhelmed by the daunting task of ringing a sentinel bell to an apathetic audience. Even the moral prerogative to beckon a response can feel pointless. After all, we, too, have seen that the CARE packages sent and the so-called international relief efforts have proven to be only a drop in the bucket. We now know that the problems facing Africa are so much bigger, perpetuated by underlying systems requiring major structural overhauls. Nevertheless, we find ourselves obliged to seek solutions.

The attitude of corporate America (and Europe) is deeply entrenched. The underlying rationale is really nothing new. Though today it would never be named as shamelessly as in the past, the game of the victors over the vanquished is basically the same. The plundering of Africa that began 500 years ago, with Dutch and Portuguese ships carrying mineral-rich bounty from her belly to European mother lands, has continued up to the present (though much more discreetly). The name of the game, "might makes right," is justified today much as it was with the first white invasion of the "Dark Continent" with the three C's of Commerce, Christianity and Civilization. The rules of the game are simple: those who have superior power, technology (both industrial and military) and know-how to rule should do so.

Most of us know the story of Shell Oil Company's buy-off of corrupt dictators in oil-rich Nigeria at the expense of the indigenous Ogoni farmers, whose land has been permanently polluted. We've also heard of London-based De Beers Diamonds which, through its monopoly in southern Africa, has carefully manipulated diamond scarcity in order to keep its status as the most powerful cartel in the annals of modern commerce. We are aware that these stories repeat themselves many times over, as the wealth of a continent gets siphoned off to pad the stock portfolios of investors far removed from its origin. Added to the corporate pillage have been the devastating effects of the debt repayment by African nations, enslaving vital domestic programs to dictates imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. Their policies in the name of "aid," designed to acquire resources, are shrewd. Clothed in paternalistic language that speaks of assisting unstable governments in their transition into full-fledged democracy, they continue to stack the deck favoring the few on the outside over the many on the in-

Cathy Hartrich teaches Ethics and Social Justice at Nerinx Hall, where she directs the Community Service Program.



The earth is round. Maps are flat. Unlike maps that are adjusted to support navigation, this map more accurately shows the relative size of the earth's land masses.

side.

On the one hand, the yawning elite accepts as a mere matter of fact the "inevitable" forces and "benefits" of a globalized economy. On the other hand, this same group fails to acknowledge the downside of this economy's boom-bust nature for the "have-nots." As corporate stocks in the U.S. and Europe soar, none dares question how their purses fill so quickly to excess, nor at whose expense. Until it does so, the "third place" world is destined to remain dependent and destitute, lacking development of and control over its own resources. 80% of the world's most "heavily-indebted poor countries" are African.

In the "global village" that truly exists today, Christians need to establish links whenever and wherever possible with brothers and sisters affected by the stacked deck of neo-colonialism. We need to understand that 100 years of European occupation in Africa left former colonies unprepared for instant self-sufficiency. We also need to analyze and illumine the current burden of the unpayable debt upon already destitute peoples. And we must realize that today's failures are no coincidence.

We know now that "works of social action" are crucial in assisting African empowerment. We need to join others in grassroots movements, such as Jubilee 2000, calling for international debt forgiveness, and Amnesty International supporting local quests for basic human rights. In doing so, we can collectively call multinationals and governments to accountability for the role they play in perpetuating Africa's woes. Indirectly, we can assist Africans in solving their own problems and achieving genuine economic and political independence.

Apart from structural change, what hope is there for all those AIDS orphans today? Though not the sole solution, according to Dorothy Day, "works of mercy" are indispensable to our call as Christians to help others: ". . .feeding, clothing, and sheltering our brothers, we must indoctrinate. . . Otherwise our religion is an opiate, for ourselves alone. . . The vision is this. We are working for 'a new heaven and a new earth, wherein justice dwelleth.' We are trying to say with action, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'"

(p. 91, *Little by Little*)

Dorothy's words call us to do what little we can in a direct way to bring about a Christian social order. This may mean sending dollars to reliable relief organizations providing direct aid to those in need. Or selling some stock and investing instead in the future of children on the other side of the world. *Sojourners* magazine suggests developing a program modeled on the Peace Corps, providing assistance through community-based efforts to the countries most ravaged by AIDS. Whatever the response to such a complex situation, it is clear that we need to do something.

A few days ago I met a young woman, Lisa Loeb, who graduated from Nerinx, where I teach. Lisa has been volunteering for the past two years with an independent organization providing an educational service to AIDS orphans in Zimbabwe (where the current rate of HIV infection is at 45%!). Lisa expressed thanks to students from Nerinx and the College School who together had raised several thousand dollars toward the feeding, clothing and education of about a hundred children orphaned due to AIDS. I found Lisa to be a complete inspiration. Somewhere in her early years a seed had been planted, and she has been moved to commit to particular works of mercy that are now reaping quite a harvest. And now she as a model to other young persons plants even more seeds. Who knows what those who follow in her footsteps may do working alongside of Africans for a better future?!

I had the good fortune of participating in a two-week tour of Ghana in July hosted by Catholic Relief Services' "Frontiers of Justice" program for educators.

During my visit I learned more specific causes and effects of neocolonialism in West Africa. I learned what Ghanaians perceive to be the answer to their social and economic problems. In addition, I acquainted myself with the beauty and the vitality of West African culture and the gifts it has to offer to the world. I was pleasantly surprised to encounter a culture and a Church rich with a bounty that we generally do not hear much about.

In my preparation to go to Ghana in West Africa I crossed paths with so many young people who are concerned about the plight of Africans. They feel urged to do something concrete and direct. For example, I took with me 45 letters from Nerinx students who wish to begin a correspondence with young women the same age (but completely different economic backround) at Prince of Peace school in Kumasi, Ghana. We may initiate a "sister school" relationship. Certainly, small lessons in solidarity can teach us all something.

To me these are signs of a growing assurance that there is more good in this world than greed. In the post-Apartheid era with many international partnerships forming, the vision of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, shared with the United Nations in 1961 is bound to be fulfilled: The days of "imperialism, exploitation, and degradation. . . are gone forever and now I . . . speak with the voice of freedom proclaiming to the world the dawn of a new era."

In spite of the present obstacles faced by Africa, there is reason for hope that with time and patience, little by little, together we can bring about a new earth as it is in heaven, wherein justice dwells.

If you'd like to make a "no-strings attached" gift to directly feed and educate AIDS orphans in Zimbabwe make a check payable to Lisa Loeb for the benefit of Tsungirirai Orphan Centre and send to Kathy Loeb, 611 Robinson, St. Louis, MO 63119.

✚

Dreadful and Beautiful

by Annjie Schiefelbein

"I used to be a sailor—sail across the sea. Now I'm just an island since they took my boat away from me. Oh no."

—Tracy Chapman

He waits for me every day, even though I only come two or three times a week. Usually I find him by the side of the path, next to our Jesuit Refugee Service health post. Sometimes he'll come rushing up the hill seconds after I arrive, breathless and smiling. He already knows I'll ask if he's left school. Some days he'll lie and tell me there are no classes that day. Other days he'll just give me his beautiful, sheepish grin. Every time he gives the same protest and I the same response, both of us knowing it will end in him returning to school. But sometimes when there truly is no school, I invite him to come with me. These are the days for which he waits, the days that make the disappointing days bearable. It doesn't matter where I'm going or what I'll be doing—he wants to go. It's not important how much work I ask him to help me with or how tedious the tasks or how long he inevitably has to wait for me—he wants to go. And when I tell him he can, his face lights up in amazing ways. We'll walk and I'll throw my arm around his shoulders. We talk about everything. He talks to me about things I could never understand: the village 150 kilometers away where he lived before the fighting got too severe, the threat of him being taken away to fight got too certain. He is twelve

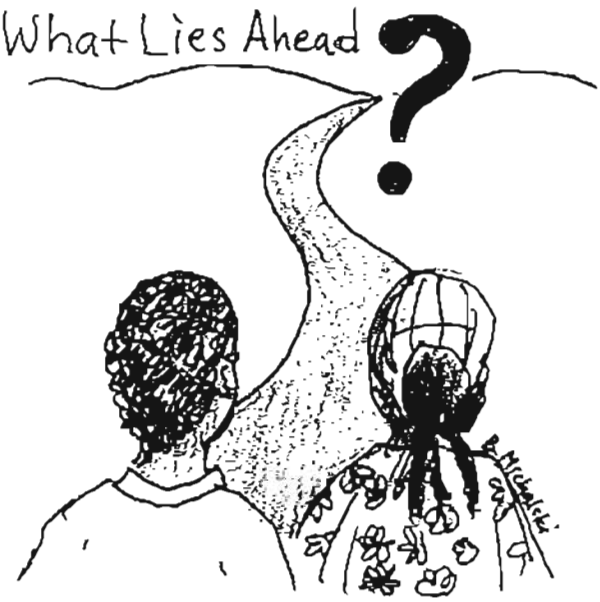
Annjie Schiefelbein, affectionately known as "Annjie Schiefelbuddha!" by her Karen House Community, has just completed six months of a two year commitment in Angola with the JRS and will soon become a jedi.

years old and has seen many of his friends forcibly recruited to fight in the war. I, in turn, talk about things equally as baffling to him: snow, ice cream, Michael Jordan and hope. My days with this boy bring me joy and education beyond what I deserve or expect or sometimes, can handle. He is Raul, one of the 80,000 internally displaced people living in and around the city of Luena, province of Moxico, country of Angola, continent of Africa. The people of Luena share the common trait of all having come from somewhere else. Their stories differ only slightly in form and variety and severity, and all start with the words, "We left the day we knew it would be death to stay."

People my age here (seventeen years older than Raul) have only known war and hunger much like I have only known peace and self-indulgence. In 1974 Angola broke ties (forcibly) with their "mother country" of Portugal. Shortly after, several groups vied for control. The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) eventually won the power, yet have continued to be challenged by other political parties. The MPLA has most consistently been challenged by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which, in 1974, swapped positions of opposing minority party and guerilla rebel group. The fighting took on a new ferocity at the end of 1998 after a short lived peace treaty "truce" gave both sides time enough to rebuild their arsenals. The government consistently makes the claim of near victory, however the casualties and continued flow of refugees from destroyed areas into Luena contradicts its assertion. The war long ago, long before Raul's time and understanding, seemed to be a battle in which representatives of the people challenged a system bent on greed. Now it seems only a fight (like so many others) based on controlling wealth—abundant in Angola in the form of diamonds and oil. The *povre* (normal, poor Angolans) lost ideals and alliance long ago. Now they are just tired. In Luena they hope for a governmental victory; not for any illusion that the government is better or more just that UNITA (clearly not the case), but because Luena is currently under governmental control and the people will suffer less in the case of a governmental victory. Also, the people just want someone—anyone—to win, so that this war will end. The government seems a bit closer to victory, so the people wearily root for the winning side.

Luena is surreal—a testimony to what used to be. I visit weekly a group of 100 people who have made their homes in an abandoned theatre. Every locale here has a name that begins with, "the former. . ." I visit the poorest who are living in the former theatre, the former train station, the former swimming pool, etc. We (JRS) have bought huts for a few of them, but only a few. The rest live in spaces only big enough to lie down in, surrounded by the stench of humanity (a nice way to say sweat, feces and human misery). The city is packed densely with people. The lucky ones live in the city itself, with the benefits of proximity and concrete (deteriorating as it may be, it still prevents the laying of land mines).

LAND MINES



The city population is made up of 30,000 of the 80,000 people. The rest live in grass or mud huts in the IDP (internally displaced people) camps around the outskirts of town. Each camp bears the name of things past as well. The former Sangondo, for example, is the name of the camp where Raul lives, called so because that is the name of the town where most of them come from, a town, I understand, now empty and burned. The camps are strange, wonderful, and horrible places. The small huts are used for only sleeping. Among every four to five huts there is a large trench dug in the ground for garbage and waste. When the holes fill up, they bury the refuse and start again. An ecological nightmare, but the camps were only supposed to be short term.

A walk through the camps is a joyful event for me. I am received with love, laughter, affection and tremendous interest. It is true that the reception is in part due to the fact that the people have learned that white skin equals resources. It is one of the primary lessons in a refugee's life here in Luena, (which is full of NGOs as it is refugees), that a visit from a *chindele* (Chokwe tribe's word for white person), can mean food, blankets or any other number of gifts. But it is also true that just my presence causes smiles and joy to them. They welcome me when I have nothing to offer as fervently as they welcome me when I come bearing gifts.

Before I even heard one story of a refugee in the camps, the faces told me volumes. The faces of even the young are lined not only by the sun but also by resignation, the principal characteristic of everyone I meet here. Even when people ask me for things, it is in a distracted, hopeless way. They are asking, but their look says, "give

or don't give; listen or don't listen. Either way it doesn't really matter and at any rate I have learned to expect nothing." It is disconcerting to see such utter resignation. Hope as I know it does not exist here. I am baffled, then, at the overwhelming presence of laughter and joy. It is beyond contradiction. It seems a paradox to me: happiness without peace. It almost confuses me when I see the face set in the resignation burst into a transcending look of joy. I don't see how it's possible, and I wonder if these people have, out of necessity, mastered the Buddhist practice of presence to the moment. What I need conscious effort and meditation to achieve is natural to them, their only means of emotional survival. So they take joy and passion and laughter if it is presented to them in a moment, almost ferociously grabbing onto it. Sadly, the moments do not come often to the life of a refugee. And maybe that is one of the reasons I take Raul with me whenever I can. His moments of joy carry me through the day as much as they do him.

This gift of presence of moment, as most gifts, has a serious down side. The future simply does not exist here. I tell Raul to go to school, but why should he? Assets such as reading and writing seem to him to offer little to a war society. But if the war stays, he will be a prouder and more confident person with these skills. If the war ends, educated people will be in incredible demand (as opposed to now, when the demand is for any relatively healthy ten to a thirty-year old male). So, either way, school is a good idea for him. Try to explain these concepts to Raul who, some days, doesn't eat if I don't wander by. They are cloudy concepts at best. Raul knows his fate. He will end up fighting. He is young and male. In this world there is no other way. Because of this, the majority of the population here is women and children. Oddly enough (or, actually, not) with this unbalanced ratio, the number of babies born is astronomically high.

My first days here, it was very easy to become enraged at the balance of power and work between men and women. On first glance, men pass the days in the camps—sitting, drinking and talking. Women pass the days caring for the children, collecting water, washing, cooking, and trekking into town. It is common to see women walking on the paths, babies strapped to their backs, toddlers hanging on in front, huge buckets of water or collections of firewood on their heads while the men walk behind them, empty handed, watching disinterestedly. The women laugh timidly when I offer them rides and refuse to let the men climb in. I'm not shy about explaining why. So much for my part of treading lightly on another culture! All of this, the first glance, is accurate. But it is far from complete. If you look for a second glance—and longer this time, you'll see more, as I did. I see a difference in the eyes of men and women here. In women's eyes I see a deep dignity; strong and silent. The dignity of one who knows the importance of her role, the vital nature of her actions, and understands her immense responsibility and knows she will somehow meet it. In her eyes is an immense unspoken power.

In the eyes of the men there is an absence, far and wandering— the absence of place. They look distracted in an uninterested way, almost void of life. Older men are a living analogy for the buildings of Luena—they all used to be something. The women have not changed in who they are or what they do in their fleeing. The men, however, lost all the things that make people feel self-realized. They used to hold jobs; now there are no jobs. They used to make decisions in or for their tribes. Now there are no decisions to be made, except by the government. The culture here lacks respect for women, but this war lacks a place of actualization for men. They are left idle and unimportant. It is so clear in their eyes that great things have been lost. War doesn't respect dignity any more than it respects life.

If God were to appear to starving people, [God] would not dare to appear in any other form but food.

--Mahatma Gandhi

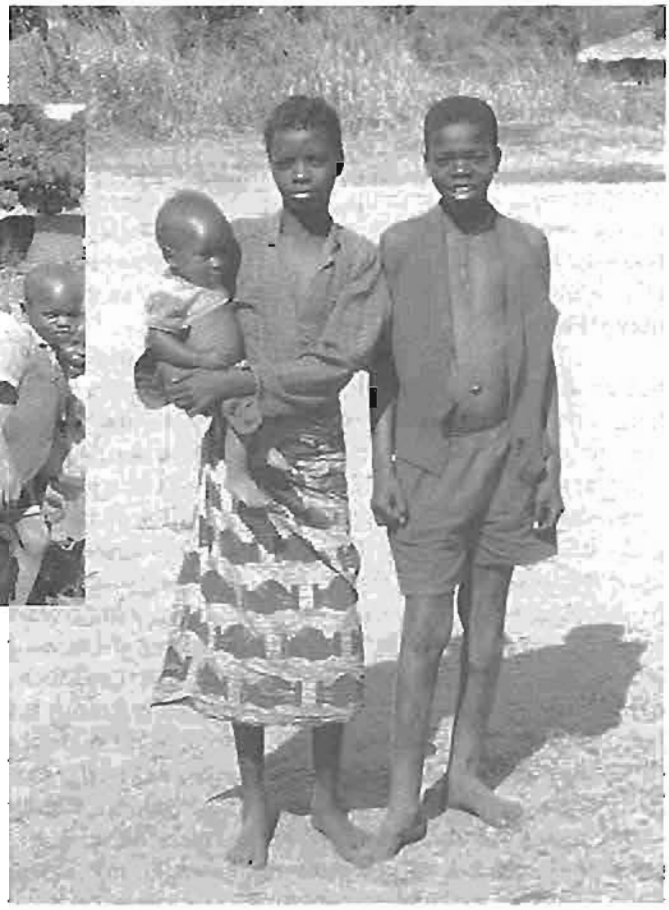
Today I saw Raul for the first time in two weeks. He asked if I brought him the soccer ball back from my vacation like I promised (I hadn't, actually, promised). I asked if he had been to school every day while I was gone like he promised (he also had promised nothing). We regarded each other—him pretending not to care I had no gift for him, me pretending not to care, after two weeks, that his first words to me were a request rather than a greeting. We walked on in silence, trying, I think, to love each other the best we can. I will never change his world, his reality. But maybe if I love him enough he will change these things on his own. He will never change my perception, my struggle here. But maybe if he loves me enough I will change these things on my own.

These are lofty thoughts, not often touching the harsh, dreadful, and beautiful day-to-day Raul and I live. Day-to-day what is real is that, for some reason in this moment, Raul and I need to find each other. So he continues to wait for me, and I continue to invite him along—despite all the ways we don't understand and disappoint one another. Somewhere in there we find love and are fed and find some dignity, grace, and divinity in this place of awful humanity—where those things are precious and rare.

Not bad for a bright twelve-year old Angolan boy and a fumbling (but trying) twenty-nine year old American woman.

✦

Annjie's Photos from Angola



Raul, his cousin Rosa and her sister

Annjie with children in Sangondo1

Africa and the Ethnic Crisis

by Obi Nwakanma

The news is not good at all: wars, disease, turmoil, economic decay wrack Africa. Reports of fresh fighting breaking out in Sierra Leone, where militias engage the government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah in battle, and an international peacekeeping force comes as regular fare. As a continent, Africa has witnessed the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, in which more than one million people died, from 1967-1970, the genocide in Rwanda in which the Hutus systematically eliminated the Tutsis with equally devastating Tutsi reprisals; the explosion of Somalia into a fragment of tribal fiefdoms ruled by militias and tribal war lords; and the decades long civil war in Sudan between the Moslem north and the Christian South that has caused the death and displacement of millions of people.

As a result of the conflict in the area, the *New York Times* describes the Great Lakes region of Africa as "one of the most grim and complicated places on earth. . ." The brutal wars: in Uganda between Museveni's army and the guerilla Lord's Resistance Army; the fighting in the Congo, which has engulfed most of the countries in Central Africa, between the Forces loyal to Laurent Kabila— whose own army fought and removed the corrupt government of the despotic dinosaur, Mobutu Seseseko, and an insurgent rebellion; and the aftermath of genocide in Rwanda and Burundi.

The Horn of Africa no less bristles with ethnic malevolence: the bizarre war between Eritrea and Ethiopia offers a good example of how the colonial boundaries in Africa obscure factors of conflict other than the sovereign. For years Eritrea was part of Ethiopia. The two current leaders of both countries, Meles Zenawi and Isaiah Afwerki, were allies who had fought on the same side in the civil war that had ousted the former Marxist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam. At the end of the war, Eritrea chose to opt out of Ethiopia as a new nation after a referendum. Things went well until conflict broke out between the two countries over ownership of 'a useless strip of brush land' in Badme. There is of course the colonial underbelly in Eritrea's war with Ethiopia: this insistence on obscure colonial boundaries demarcated by Italy. Africa's boundaries are often fluid patchworks, created and maintained by the hegemony of power and by the dubious "accidents of history" which make any critical re-evaluation seem almost inevitable.

Containing a third of the world's ethnic languages and groups, the African continent resonates with an interesting intensity and contradiction of peoples jostling for space in the newly globalized world. According to the London *Economist* magazine, "nearly a third of Sub-Saharan Africa's 42 countries are embroiled in international or civil wars, and more African rulers are seeking military solutions to political problems. . . ."

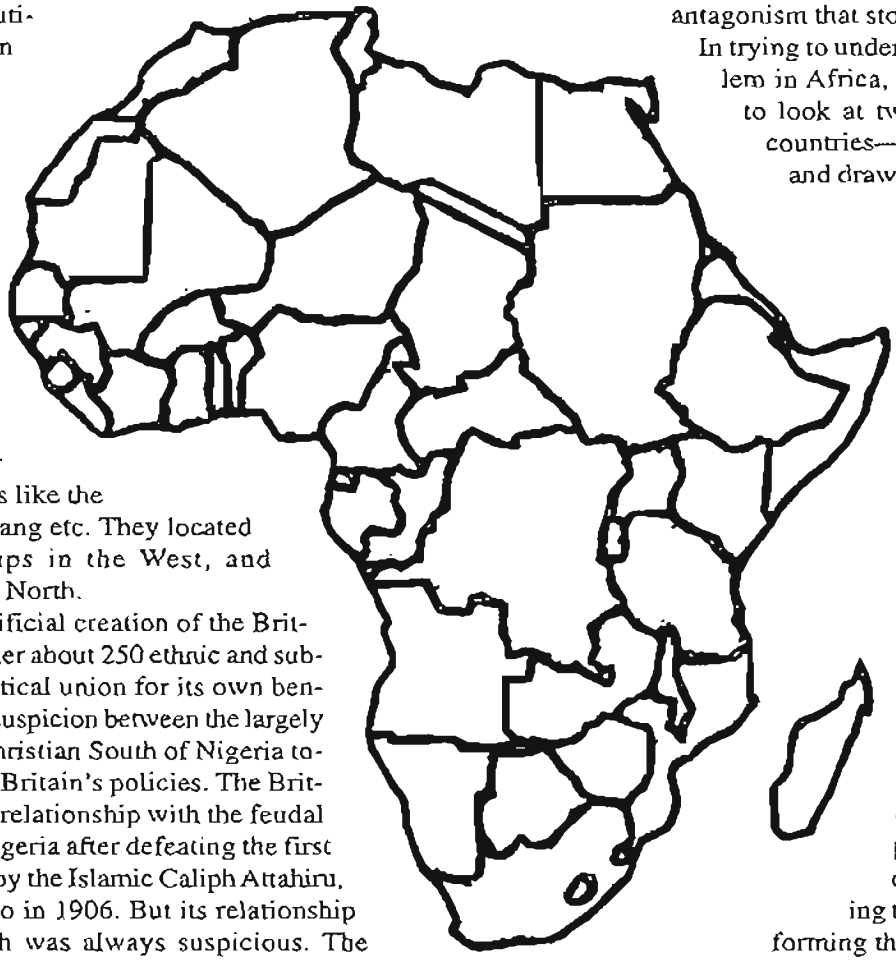
The inability of ethnic groups to create organic nation-states, and the balkanization of their identities by the colonial process is thus at the heart of the African crisis in the post-colony. Colonial Africa functioned within the paradigm of deterritorialization—that context in which erstwhile ethnic sovereignties became new nations under forced unions with other groups. For instance, the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 created a

Obi Nwakanma won the ANA/Cadbury Award for his collection of poetry, *The Roped Urn*.

huge unstable behemoth, which seems now more and more like a liability because of the continual interplay of ethnic identities within it. And according to the reports of Lord Lugard, the colonial agent who supervised the amalgamation, modern Nigeria was conceived purely for the purpose of colonial exploitation, rather than for the purest ideals of nation-building.

Additionally, there is the fluid mix in the boundaries as a result of colonialism, between the Hutus/Tutsis in Uganda, Burundi, the Congo and in Rwanda. Whereas the Hutus, for instance, are minoritized in Burundi, against the Tutsi majority, they are an overwhelming majority in Rwanda, where the Tutsis are in the minority. This fact would be an important factor in the genocide that occurred later on there.

This was all part of the strategy of divide-and-rule, which the colonial regimes in Africa utilized to stem opposition in their domains of influence. In Nigeria for instance, the British distributed the 'troublesome' Igbo ethnic group, which had opposed British rule, in all the three regions, making them an inexorable majority in the Eastern region where they were mostly located, over some other ethnic groups like the Ijaw, the Ibibio, the Annang etc. They located some other Igbo groups in the West, and minoritized others in the North.



Nigeria is an artificial creation of the British, which brought together about 250 ethnic and subethnic groups into a political union for its own benefits. The relationship of suspicion between the largely Islamic North and the Christian South of Nigeria today has links to colonial Britain's policies. The British established a mutual relationship with the feudal oligarchy of Northern Nigeria after defeating the first attempt of resistance led by the Islamic Caliph Attahiru, who was killed in Sokoto in 1906. But its relationship with the educated South was always suspicious. The South led the agitation for independence from colonial Britain. At independence, Britain manipulated its own succession by installing malleable politicians of the North, who feared domination by an "educated, Christian South," and would have preferred Northern independence. By 1966, six years after independence, young Southern officers planned a coup to install "a progressive regime." This event led to war. After encouragment by the British, Northern officers planned a coup exterminating mostly Igbo officers in the Army and launching a systematic pogrom of ethnic Igbo civilians. This event perhaps is the first recorded case of ethnic genocide in post-colonial Africa. The Igbo were forced to return to their home region in Eastern Nigeria and declare the state of Biafra, after series of fruitless meetings that could not guarantee their safety within the Nigerian state. After three years of resistance, however, the Biafran attempt at self-determination was crushed by Nigeria, aided by an unlikely alliance during the cold war of the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union. The Nigerian civil war was the first real sign in post-colonial Africa, of the instability of the post-colonial state.

The historical and political aspects of Africa's conflicts are usually obscured by the humanitarian dimension in the western mind. But the first condition yields the last. In all of post-colonial Africa, with declining spaces and natural resources, the fear of domination and the history of political division contribute to ethnic antagonism that stokes conflict in Africa. In trying to understand the ethnic problem in Africa, perhaps we will have to look at two of Africa's largest countries—Nigeria and Sudan—and draw some parallels.

Sudan is the largest country in Africa with a land mass of 2, 505, 813 square kilometers, approximately the size of Europe. It has a multi-ethnic population of twenty-seven million, made up of mostly Arabs, and including the Jamala, the Beja and the Nubian peoples in the North and mostly the black Africans in the South. Sudan historically is regarded as part of the ancient land of the Nubians, stretching through central Africa, forming the link of the Meroetic civilization. The Ottoman empire and the Arab invasion of Africa created a new Arab hegemony and colonization of Africa with the result that the Arab identity of Sudan dominates the power calculus. The Islamic resistance led by the Mahdist movement and the defeat of the British colonial Army led by Charles Gordon in 1885, and the second British expedition led by General Kitchener, which firmly established the British colony, are all important aspects of Sudan's colonial history.

Nigeria, on the other hand, contains the largest

scale of humanity in Africa, with a population of 120 million. The Islamic dominance of Northern Nigeria derives from the movement influenced by the Islamic revolution of the lower Sudan in the 17th century. The Mahdist movement in Sudan helped spawn the Islamic movement in Northern Nigeria, led by Uthman Dan Fodio. In the Sudan, the Mahdist campaign against the British ended with the defeat of Caliph Abdullah at Taisha in 1898. In Nigeria Uthman Dan Fodio's jihad against the Hausa kings of the North of Nigeria ended in the defeat of Attahiru's forces in Sokoto by Lord Lugard in 1906. Both established the British colonial powers in those areas.

Today, that split between north and south in both of these countries is widening. In Sudan, the civil war has raged between the Christian South and the Arab Islamic North over the imposition of the Sharia, the Islamic law, on the Christian South by the Arab ruling elite. After it came to power in 1989, in a coup which ousted the former president Jaffar El-Nimmiery, the national Islamic Front armed the Moslem ethnic Baggara to fight the Christian groups in the South. The South of Sudan is also where the huge oil deposits are.

No One is Free When Others are Oppressed.

In Nigeria, there is the brewing religious crisis between the Islamic North and the Christian South, over the declaration by many Northern states to impose Sharia law, in spite of Nigeria's secular status. This, Southerners are resisting, saying it is part of the avowed ambition of the North (whose generals have ruled Nigeria since the end of the civil war in 1970 to the recent transition to democracy) "to dip the Koran in the sea"— meaning the conquest of the South, especially the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta. This view has been reinforced by the massive corruption of military generals in Nigeria, mostly from the North, who have benefited most from the oil resources while the people of the oil producing region have been left extremely poor.

This is a very crucial aspect of the crisis in Africa: the pressure on overexploited natural resources provides the ultimate tension between ethnic, regional or political groups. Decline in prosperity, over population, economic stagnation and the struggle over depleting sustainable natural resources are important factors in explaining the ethnic conflicts in Africa. The economic condition of the African continent feeds conflict--because ultimately, the issues are usually around the need to control the depleting resources of Africa, left in their current state by years of exploitation, war, enslavement, colonialism, and subsequent political corruption of the post-colonial years.

Africa's predicament can be viewed on a tripod of causes, which has defined its relationship with the rest of the world: these three waves of history date from the Arab invasion of Africa since the Ottoman period, the slave trade, and the colonization of Africa since the late 19th century. Thus, the African peoples have had to deal with a history of the most ruthless form of buccaneering. It has been the scene, in fact, of the most devastating international political and economic intrigue even during the cold war, when newly emerging African states were played off against the super powers. This pattern of history has created a dynamic of events that perpetuates the internal instability of the continent.

For instance, in the Horn of Africa, where the Arab Islamic influence is prominent, there is a re-creation of the conditions of war and slavery in modern times, which dates back to the Arab conquest of Africa. Somalia, for example, is a good test case of this history of instability in the Horn of Africa. Arabs set up trading posts in the Gulf of Aden and founded the Sultanate of Adel in the 7th century. This was followed by resistance movements in the 14th and 15th centuries, until the final pacification by the armies of the sultanate of Adel.

The British occupation of Somalia was aimed as part of its possession of Aden, on the Arabian coast. Then followed a brief period of Egyptian occupation, which ended with the distractions on Egypt by the war with the Mahdist movement in Sudan, Somalia's neighbor at the Horn of Africa. But in 1887, Britain again reoccupied Somalia, mainly to keep open the route to India through the Suez canal, and proclaimed it a protectorate to be known as the British Somalia. In time, also, Italy got a foothold on Somalia, along the Indian Ocean coastline, by signing treaties with clan chieftains.

By 1936, at the height of Fascism, Italy merged all its territories in Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia into the colonial state of Italian Africa. It expelled the British in 1940 and took over the protectorate completely in 1941. At the end of World War I, Italy was forced to relinquish control of its African territories under the protocols of the 1947 peace treaty. The allied nations—the United States, the USSR, Great Britain and France—took over the responsibility for these countries, and Somalia became a UN trust after the war, administered by the British. In 1950, the British government was again replaced by Italy, which was mandated, having accepted the United Nations agreements, to run a provisional administration over Somalia.

However, by 1942, the Somali Youth League began to agitate for a complete restoration of cultural and political freedom. There were violent demonstrations in Somalia. Ethiopia, which had taken over the Haud and the reserved areas, banned the Somali Youth League, whose activities had spread especially among Somalis living in Ethiopia. There were political reprisals against the movement. Many fled, at such a scale that Britain and Italy were forced to accept them as refugees.

A GLANCE AT AFRICA'S TROUBLES

Chad:
Amidst opposition the World Bank recently approved 3.7 billion dollars for an oil pipeline in Chad.

Nigeria:
The U.S. imported $222 million barrels of oil last year (14% of its oil import) from this impoverished country which has the highest population density of any country in Africa. For most of its history since independence, generals from the north have ruled over the ethnic minorities of the southern oil-rich delta regi

Sierra Leone:
In their fight against government forces in Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front has become notorious for chopping off limbs of its civilian victims. A accord was reached last year to bring the Front's leader, Foday Sankoh into the government, but fighting continued and Mr. Sankoh was captured in May of t year. The Clinton Administration plans to send hundreds of U.S. soldiers to Nigeria to train and equip the West African battalion that will go to Sierra Leone.

Liberia:
The oldest republic in Africa whose recent political foundations were established in the 1840's when free blacks from the United States settled there. Relations between the Americo-Liberians and Liberia's indigenous peoples have been difficult. It is estimated that perhaps ten percent of the population died from 1989-1995, when full-scale war broke out. It was during that time that five Precious Blood Sisters from Ruma, Illinois were killed.

Cote D'Ivoire
This country, long an economic crossroad as the richest nation in French-speaking Africa, has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS in the Region (nearly 11% of the adult population.) In 1999, 72,000 people died of AIDS.

Congo:
Talks on August 16th of this year ended without an accord between various factions fighting in Congo. In 1997, Laurent Kabila and his troops ended the decades-long dictatorial rule of Mobutu Sese Seko, yet fighting broke out in 1998 with fighters backed by Rwanda and Uganda who accused Mr. Kabila of corruption and harboring the Hutu Interahamwe. Allied with Mr. Kabila is Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia. Further fueling the conflict is Congo's rich supply of diamonds, gold and timber. The UN has proposed sending in a monitoring force of 5537 troops and observers to oversee an accord.

Angola:
This country is the new home to our community member, Annjie Schiefelbein. UNITA, long supported by the U.S., until 1993, has battled against the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the government currently in power. It was hoped that the 1994 Lusaka Accord would bring this fighting to an end, but unfortunately it has not. Diamonds are in abundance in Angola, as are, unfortunately, land mines and refugees.

South Africa:
Infamous for its long previous system of apartheid, it is now ruled by its second post-apartheid leader, Thabo Mbeki of the African National Congress. It is estimated that approximately 50 million people are infected with the AIDS virus there.

Sudan:
Geographically the largest country in Africa, Sudan has endured a long war predominantly between the government, controlled by the Muslim hard-line National Liberation Front from the north, and the black Christian/Animist Sudan People's Liberation Army from the south. Between the fighting which takes place mostly in the impoverished south and from government attacks and enslavement of the population, nearly 4 and 1/2 million people have had to flee their homes.

Kenya:
This country was just re-approved for a loan from the IMF and World Bank. St. Louis University graduate, Fr. John Kaiser was slain there at the end of August in suspicious circumstances after speaking out against the government's poor human rights record.

Rwanda:
A massive genocide took place in 1994 when Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed by extremist Hutu militias, known as the Interahamwe It took, it is estimated, at least a half million lives. This conflict has since spread to other parts of the Great Lakes region.

Tanzania:
This country has had a relatively peaceful post-independence history. Julius Nyerere, who became the leader in the early part of this period, opposed apartheid in South Africa and became a respected African leader. He attempted significant socialist reforms which met with limited success. The country needed and accepted loans from the IMF and World Bank, leaving them in debt and vulnerable to the world financial institutions' insistence that they accept the implementation of austerity measures.

Malawi:
Known as the "warm heart of Africa." It has opened its doors to refugees from all over Africa. It was rated as the seventh poorest country in Africa this year by UNICEF. Life expectancy is 39 years and approximately 70% of the population does not have access to potable water.

Zambia:
This country in Southern Africa lost 1300 teachers in the first ten months of 1998 to AIDS.

Mozambique:
At war with South Africa in the 1980's, supporting ANC's struggle against apartheid, this country was expected to have had one of the fastest growing economies this year. Instead, it was devastated by flooding that occurred in February 2000, that killed thousands, stranded tens of thousands and severely crippled the economy.

Zimbabwe:
Unemployment is at 50% in this country and nearly 75% live in poverty. Most recently there have been tensions between white farmers on the one side and black squatters and the government (who has refused to move the squatters) on the other.

Swaziland:
25% of the population of this country is infected with the AIDS virus.

In 1960, Somalia was granted independence. But when Somalia became independent, the colonial governments failed to clearly stipulate the relationship between the Ogaden region and the new republic of Somalia. The Ogaden region falls in the boundary between Somalia and Ethiopia and would become the center of one of the most violent political conflicts in post-colonial Africa. It would also be the scene of super-power manipulation of the crisis in Africa in the cold war era.

Somalia and Ethiopia had gone to war, by mid-1977, over the Ogaden region, when ethnic Somali in the area instigated an insurrection. When Siad Barre took over power in Somalia, he declared Somalia a socialist state. His foreign policy was basically pro-Soviet. And the Soviet Union initially provided military and political support. But one of the Soviet Union's strategic ambitions was a unification of the Socialist areas of Eritrea, Ethiopia and South Yemen to create a formidable satellite in the Arab coast. It was thus forced by the demands of policy to back Ethiopia in its war against Somalia in the Ogaden region. Somalia, on the other hand, allied more and more with its Arab and Islamic influences. That war of self-determination by ethnic Somalis in the Ogaden, region which began in 1977, stretched to 1988, when some form of peace agreement was reached. But its effect was singularly classic: an estimated dislocation of about two million Somalis, who came as refugees into Somalia, the disruption of the critical social balance which led to the final disruption of the post-colonial state.

By 1988, there were factions, including the Ogadeni Somali Patriotic Front, and hundreds of other clan-backed groups created by the conflict, which began an armed domestic opposition to Siad Barre's regime. Faced by famine, which had been caused by drought, and by a destroyed economy caused by fighting, Siad Barre fled into exile in Nigeria, where he died. But his country descended into dystopic disorder, in which the Somali state has virtually ceased to exist, replaced by hundreds of factions and clans, in contention for power. Today, over a million Somalis have fled to countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen, Sudan and Djibouti. Somalia merely illustrates the unending cycle of violence and instability that African societies have faced throughout history.

Now we must ask the question: why is it that Africa's greatest conflicts are in its richest spots: the Niger Delta, the Red Sea area of the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes area, the diamond fields of Sierra Leone—and who indeed can say what justifiably provokes these almost curious conflagrations? Aside, that is, from the overbearing burden of memory that reproduces and perpetuates old acrimonies, the result of years of exploitation and colonization. Ancient hatreds may exist, as some western intellectuals and writers insist, but these translate into forms that are fed by contemporary realities—mostly within the spheres of today's politics and economics. There is, thus, more than a patina of truth in the view by *New York Times* Ian Fisher: "In broad outline, the conflicts (in Africa) are quite like those in the Balkans. Ancient divisions, even animosities, exist, but it takes a political elite to seize on them and transform them into something far more violent. . ." And powerful western interests can account for the rise of Africa's political elite in the post-colony.

The abolition of the slave trade meant that a new form of trade and relationship would have to exist between Africa and the rest of the industrial world. The change from slave trade to the trade in produce in the African coast, for instance, created a new kind of interest: an interest in the raw materials that would feed the plants of the industrialized world. And with it came a new kind of relationship—the domination of those environments, and their exploitation, first by using local agents or middlemen, and finally by creating protectorates, when the natural greed of mercantilism set in. Africa is again the battlefield for new multinational interests, and for new foreign powers, intent once again on initiating the cycle of exploitation and blood. Today, the same cycle is recreating itself and feeding upon the conflict in Africa. It is vital to understand the growing nature of transnational or multinational influence in the conflicts in Africa—the impact of globalization, investments, etc., those things referred to as the conditions of post-modernity, and how they account for the crisis in Africa. It is important to see their realities today and their use of old methods of conquest. Reports of the growing use of mercenaries and pri-

vate armies in Africa's growing conflicts bears out this assumption. For example, De Beers, the South African mining giant, has links with Executive Outcomes, a mercenary group comprising soldiers in Apartheid South Africa's defense forces, whose sister company, Branch Energy, also has mining concerns in war-torn Sierra Leone.

Today, international multinationals and foreign governments with huge interests in Africa have armed and supported African dictators, who have suppressed the civil liberties of their people, created conditions of internal conflict, and exploited the natural resources of their people in partnership with these international interests. Many of the African rulers today are playing the exact roles of the middlemen of the slave trading era. And there is a deliberate subversion of the nation states in Africa to create anomie and provide an excuse for the re-colonization of Africa. Various insurgent groups are armed to undermine existing governments, to create chaos, and establish their own areas of dominance. For many years in many African countries, military coups funded and supported from abroad have acted with that purpose of subversion. The hint of re-colonization comes through clearly in some statements, like the one credited to Crispin Blunt, conservative member of the British parliament, who was arguing forcefully for Sandline, a mercenary group operating in Sierra-Leone. "The British government" he said, "has made it clear, their distaste for the private sector military company, but if such companies had been used in Sierra Leone and they would have secured the country's wealth-creation area—the diamond mines—which could have been handed over to a major mining corporation. . ." And as part of the neocolonial adventure, the *World Socialist Journal* notes, the British government has virtually taken over the administration of its former colony—a move to secure its own "strategic interest."

Meanwhile, the various movements and sporadic inter-penetration of peoples across boundaries, the displacement of local populations that spill over into new areas and create new boundaries, are bound to ignite a condition of stateless warfare. Africa is already in a state of flux: Eritreans, crossing the Sudan to escape two years of war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, Rwandan Hutu refugees crossing into the Makivele refugees camp in the Mbabara district of Southern Uganda, Sudanese refugees crossing into the borders to camps in the Ugandan Northwestern districts of Moyo and Adjumani, Sierra Leonean refugees crossing into Liberia—creating new boundaries, new ethnic mixes, and future scenarios for massive conflicts in the coming centuries. It is, as the Nigerian poet Christopher says, like "a going and coming that goes on for ever. . ." because in Africa peace is not good business. And so war dominates. ✚

A Somalian's Story

by Barbara Prosser and Obi Nwakanma

Interview with Shanmarke Hashi, a Somalian refugee living in the United States.

RT: What are some of the difficulties of Somalian refugees in the United States?
SH: The biggest problem in the US is language. Our official language is not English. It is very difficult to get into the system. Most of the people here are women; they are struggling with education and the language barrier. We have traditional Muslim dress. It is hard to place people in the work environment at some jobs. Although they have English and can do the job good, they have problems with what they call "the dress code."

RT: Do you find people experiencing culture shock coming into the United States?
SH: Yes. Here it is much different from where we're from. Many were expecting a lot. It is not true. They might have been promised a lot of things while in camps. They think it will be much better, but somehow it is not. It is a struggle just to live a normal life. Many Somalians have a lot of children, so it can be difficult to care for children and work. In our communities, we are used to helping a lot, but here we find it harder because you want to help and there isn't enough time. They feel left out. That is why we established the Somalian Community in 1993. We can help with translation, doctors' appointments or with a social problem or whatever they

Barbara Prosser is enjoying the community of women that has formed on her block. (See Obi's article page 8.)

need. But, we are limited; it is not a lot of support. We want to expand our support.

RT: Why St. Louis?
SH: I think most resettled through a Federal program. Most did not choose St. Louis. I came because my mother and my family live here. They had been here four years; so I followed them.

RT: What were you doing in Somalia?
SH: I was an assistant teacher with computers. I taught in a private school.

RT: Can you describe life in Somalia for you before the crisis?
SH: I was very young. I was in school. I know there were a lot of problems. There were political problems, corruption, lack of jobs. But I was in school at the time.

RT: What is your perspective on what the US might learn from their intervention in 1991?
SH: In my opinion, the US should have learned the needs of people before they interfered in Somalia. They should have learned a little more about the problems in Somalia. We expected them to be helpful; but, unfortunately, it didn't happen like that. More problems were created, unfortunately. They were there to just solve the problem.

RT: What is the root of the problem?
SH: For twenty years, Somalia was under one rule, Siad Barre's regime. What happened was Somalia became tribal based. Actually, we are same language, same culture, and same religion. You can't tell who's who. But, somehow, they based it on tribes and that's how the civil war started. Siad was different and he showed favoritism for his tribe. And people expected to get better government when Siad was overthrown, but, unfortunately, they just wanted revenge.

RT: So when Siad Barre was disposed, there wasn't consensus among the positions, which could put the country together, to organize elections or organize cooperatives? Is that right?
SH: Right. There has never been an election. Siad was a dictator. There was not another candidate, no other parties. All the time it was, do it the way he wanted us to do it. He forced the people. The only chance they got was to fight in order to get rid of him. And when they did, somehow a bad thing happened. Thus, they just got revenge and killed others.

RT: So, the new regime that came in was no better. It was just retaliatory. Is that right?
SH: What happened was they came as a big clan. After awhile, they divided into sub-clans, and they kept dividing and dividing into sub-clans. It continues. There is no organized government. Everyone wants to get the power, which is not going to happen.

RT: It is amazing, I'm wondering what Somalian intellectuals and professionals could have done differently? What contributions have they made?
SH: We have many intellectuals, but what happens is, the people who get the power and control are gang men. They might be uneducated. No one gets a chance to talk to those people. The military just talks to its leaders, and they never get a chance to talk to others. Many intellectuals have been killed or they leave the country.

RT: Many educated leave the country?
SH: Right.

RT: Who is in power now?
SH: Actually, nobody. There is no central government. There is a big meeting going on now, in which reconciliation of Somalia is discussed and we hope, something will come out of it.

RT: With the peace process, there seems to be two perspectives. One is that there are too many guns, and another is that there is no will for reconciliation with warring factions. This presents a dilemma. Where are the guns coming from?
SH: I believe more or less they are getting help from the West, guns from the West. Countries with a personal interest interfere. We don't produce any kind of guns. Without the West, we could have solved the problem a long time ago.

RT: Do you think American intervention was wrong?
SH: Not wrong (pause) . . . the main idea was good -- to help the country. But the way it was done, it was incomplete. If they started something, they should complete it.

RT: You mention the drought. Talk of that.
SH: Somehow, the government officials saw it, but chose to ignore it. They knew it was going to happen. They should have done something to protect and get help before it got worse.

RT: So they didn't take any preventive protective measures? What could be done to respond? What should the world's response be to support and avoid further problems?
SH: They should supply more equipment and demonstrate how to use it. People want to be more independent. They know how to do it, but they need a little push.

RT: Do you agree that Africans need to deal with conflicts in an African context?
SH: I agree with that. Intervention should be from Africans first.

RT: So, would you support a continent-wide inter-

vention? A group like Ecomog, a military intervention group? Sometimes they do peace enforcement rather than peace keeping. In Somalia, there needs to be some group with which to negotiate.
SH: The Somalian situation is different. There aren't two parties to negotiate. There is confusion with over 30 groups, guerilla groups. It is confusing having outside intervention. I would suggest to let the Somalians work it out for themselves.

RT: What are the signs to watch out for in regard to the conflict?
SH: The solution is to educate more people. And, avoid the military rule. As long as they have the power, they will just rule the country and marginalize the people.

RT: Did European colonialists bring too many groups together?
SH: There is no doubt that the European colonialists began the problem. But what we should do is at least negotiate and come to the table to talk about what's going on. We can be different, but we must do something for the generation after us. We can't be selfish.

RT: Do you see the work that is going on with Nigeria and South Africa in modeling conflict resolution as a hopeful step? How could Somalia fit in with that possibility?
SH: That could be very helpful for a country like Somalia.

RT: Is that a model in existence?
SH: Not yet, but, it is being created and called Africa Renaissance.

RT: The cultural destruction over the years has had its toll on a generation. They have lost energy and confidence.
SH: In the 60's, there was a cross continental cultural movement and dialogue. People saw huge possibilities. With civil wars and corruption, it fell apart.

RT: As an intellectual, an African, and one of the new generation, what methods would you deploy to achieve peace?
SH: We need to give it more time. We need to be patient. We need to educate and prepare. We need careful preparation. The people need to organize.

RT: How are you tied into Somali, now that you are in St. Louis?
SH: Looking back is easier. Now we have all factions living in St. Louis.

RT: Did you fight in the war?
SH: No, I was 18 and graduating from high school. My father was killed in the war. I then moved to Kenya.

RT: Do you still see people in St. Louis from the tribe who killed your father?
SH: Actually, I'm not mad at the tribe who killed my father. I want to see reconciliation. We need to remember what happened, and we should be ready and start a new life.

RT: Have you ever tried to initiate talks among the refugees about what happened then?
SH: Yes, we have. But, unfortunately, most of the Somalians here are women and suburban. It is harder.

RT: What would you estimate the Somalian population in St. Louis to be?
SH: Maybe about 500 in St. Louis, mostly women and children. There are 25,000 in Minneapolis and maybe 400,000 in the United States. There is a large relocation group in London. In 1995, the census showed 7.5 million people living in Somalia.

RT: What is life in exile like?
SH: Life in exile is hard, it is tough. I wish Somalia could be safe to go back.

RT: I understand this. A friend of mine in Nigeria says, "the biggest connection for a human being is between me and the earth upon which I trod. I'm bound to this land by blood."
SH: Home is always best. I hope our generation can see what happened so it won't happen again.

RT: Thank you.

Sharmake Hashi is a job specialist at the International Institute. He works with people from all countries. In his spare time, he attends Forest Park Community College and is active with the Somalian Community in St. Louis. On August 29, 2000, a new president Abdulkasim Salad Hassam, was elected in Somolia. Sharmake feels it is a sign of hope for a new beginning. +

AIDS IN AFRICA

The following are excerpts from *AIDS Becoming Africa's Top Human Security Issue,* published by the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

AIDS is now the leading killer in sub-Saharan Africa, where 23.3 million people have HIV or AIDS; 90% of the world's 11 million AIDS orphans are in Africa; in 1998, 200,000 African died from war - but 2.2 million died from HIV/AIDS. Though it has just a tenth of the world's population, sub-Saharan Africa is home to two-thirds of the world's HIV-positive population. In Africa's most affected regions, as many as one person in four are estimated to carry HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

About half of HIV infections occur before the age of 25, and these young men and women typically die of AIDS before 35. The disease is killing people in their most productive years and destabilizing all walks of African life: health, education, industry, agriculture, transport. This dual devastation of debilitating disease and early death is turning back decades of development and reversing economic growth across the continent.

"Visibly, the epidemic is eroding the social fabric of many communities," said Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). "In its demographic, social and economic impact, the epidemic has become more devastating than war, in a continent where war and conflict appear to be endemic."

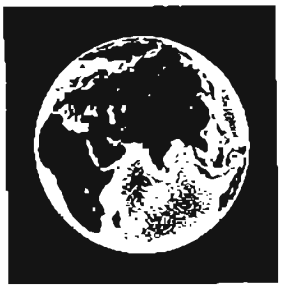
In Africa, the impact of the AIDS epidemic is magnified by the fragility and complexity of geo-political systems. Eleven of the world's 27 conflicts are in Africa; 15 sub-Saharan countries face food emergencies; drought in East Africa threatens to exacerbate food scarcity; a generation of orphans brought up in poverty may give rise to a generation of disaffected youth. These emergencies pose real threats to social and political stability in Africa. AIDS has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations such as displaced persons and refugees — women are six times more likely to get HIV in refugee camps than populations outside.

The epidemic is also affecting armed forces and the civilians who interact with them, either through commercial sex or rape as a weapon of war. The use of rape in war has already been documented. Soldiers involved in conflicts in the Great Lakes Region of Africa reportedly raped women of "the enemy side" with the stated intent of infecting them with HIV.

Despite the magnitude of the emergency, resources remain scarce. "The resources available to address HIV/AIDS are entirely disproportionate to the size of the problem," warned Dr Piot. In 1997, approximately US$165 million were spent on AIDS prevention in the worst affected countries, compared with the US$1-3 billion now required for effective prevention programmes across sub-Saharan Africa.

You may visit the UNAIDS Home Page for more information about the programme (http://www.unaids.org).

From Abroad



by Mark Sweetin

Few knew what to expect in the early Fall of 1997 when then President Kim Young-sam announced that South Korea's foreign exchange reserves had dropped to a dangerously low level, and that the country would have to seek emergency loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Although South Koreans had faced economic downturns and hardships before, the effects of this crisis were much more serious despite government reports declaring that the economy had "recovered." The unemployment and homelessness rates continue to increase.

What was not expected was the sight of so many businesses folding and of hundreds of thousands of people becoming jobless and/or homeless in the days, weeks, and months after the crisis. Daily reports on the evening news showed thousands of people gathering around the city's central train/subway station and in public parks. They spoke about who they were and how they had come to this point of living on the streets: some were businessmen whose small businesses went bankrupt or who had lost their jobs in the wake of the downsizing by many companies; some were women with children whose husbands were on the run from the law because of unpaid debt; and some were children whose parents had abandoned them because of their inability to support a family.

At face value, however, one would have gathered from the news reporting over the last two years that the issue of homelessness is new to Korea, and that thousands of people are sleeping on the street and in subway stations due to factors directly attributable to the crisis. But while it is true that 67% of the homeless had been on the streets for less than six months, according to a 1998 study done by the Korea Center for City and Environmental Research (KOCER), Rev. Su-hyon Kim, director of KOCER, also found that this was not a matter of people living relatively normal lives one day and then suddenly being turned out on the street the next. He points out in his study that many of the homeless had been experiencing familial and economic instability even before the crisis, and that single parent and lower income families have increasingly been unable to stay afloat in the midst of the country's continual modernization process due to various factors, including a shrinking market for unskilled labor. In the past, the extended family provided a safety net for many poor families, but this also is being negatively affected by modernization. In short, rather than a direct cause, Rev. Kim concluded that the crisis and IMF austerity measures simply broke open what was already a deteriorating safety net of the lower-middle and poorer classes of society.

This disintegration of families is most clearly evidenced by the thousands of children who have been abandoned or left to the care of public institutions since the crisis. Many times, it's a case of parents being unable to provide sufficient support, and so they leave their children with these facilities with the hope of some day becoming financially stable enough to take them back. According to one Korean daily, however, some orphanages and child welfare facilities since the crisis have stated a preference to remain unknown to the public because they are currently operating way past capacity. One official stated, "Every time the press featured a story on our facility, we were flooded with phone calls from parents wanting to leave their children under our care."

The government's response to the problem of homelessness has primarily been to shuffle the homeless off the streets and out of the subway stations to makeshift shelters that have been converted from dilapidated warehouses or factories, some housing as many as 400 people. Although they have a place to sleep and something to eat, these facilities cannot help these people regain a sense of dignity or help them restore their former lives. On the contrary, the first-come, first-serve system involving long lines for everything from meals to the dispensation of medicine, only seems to add to their feeling of social ostracization.

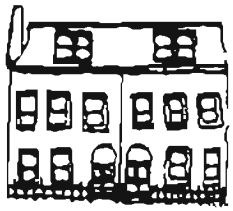
There are, however, several community shelters that are attempting to better understand the plight of the homeless and to provide them with a sense of hope.

Places such as the "House of Hope" and the "Dail Community" are part of a growing network of centers in Seoul and other cities around the country that provide a wide range of assistance to help both individuals and families get back on their feet, including free day care. Through this network and the solidarity that they have established, they not only provide strength to one another but have also established a community that welcomes those who have otherwise been left behind by the rest of society.

✚

Mark Sweetin, a former volunteer at Karen House, has made South Korea his home.

From Little House



by Mary Ann McGivern, SL

Globalization is essentially capitalism's domination of the world. We know this already, even if we don't have a framework in which we can place all the bits and pieces. The underlined words below are my first effort to build a framework on which you, gentle reader, can hang the portions of globalization you know and have rallied against.

It's all about profit. There are only three ways to create wealth: grow it, dig it, or make it--fishing and agriculture, mining, and value-added manufacturing. But the ways to transfer wealth are many: gambling, wages, gifts, sales, war, revolution, robbery, taxes, interest-bearing loans, insurance, manipulation of the interest rates, etcetera. Privatization is the transfer of public services paid for by the people's accumulated wealth (e.g. education, health care, rural electrification, water purification systems) to the private sector. Capitalism has honed to a fine art the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich.

Private property has become the norm--so much so that Bolivia has sold its water rights to a French company; Mexico has abrogated the *ejido*, communal indigenous land that was never to be sold; Chinese communes have withered away; and the United States has successfully promulgated the notion of "intellectual property rights." If I can prove that I thought of it first or understood how it works first, and if I have an application that will make money, I own it. Etcetera.

In capitalism, labor is not a valued resource that creates wealth but a commodity, bought and sold in the marketplace--sometimes by political leaders, sometimes by corporations. Assembly plants are dealt to the impoverished communities that offer the most. Farm workers can't afford to feed their families. Baseballs are sewn by small-fingered women and their children who never see or play the game. Etcetera.

Markets are no longer places where goods are exchanged for value. Corporations have introduced a "money economy" where the dollar drives out local currency, drives down the value of local labor, and gives the very rich access to luxuries; "free" trade buys raw material cheap and sells finished goods high. If it takes 30 workers to harvest and process 30 tons of wheat and 3 workers to process 30 tons of steel, why should the steel cost so much more?

Capitalist technology trumps human need. Pharmaceuticals are sold at high cost; seeds are hybrid so they won't breed true, are sterile, and will die without designer fertilizers; combustion engines, fossil fuels, and nuclear power rule, while the tools that would tap free energy source--sun, wind, tides--remain curious side shows. Etcetera.

Waste is profitable when chemicals can be dumped, not recycled; pumped oil is sold and a depletion allowance is claimed; somebody else foots the heating bill when the contractor omits insulation; the very earth bears the burden of capitalism, alongside the very poor.

Communication systems export the materialism embodied in American culture, (although the Internet could be the Achilles heel of capitalism).

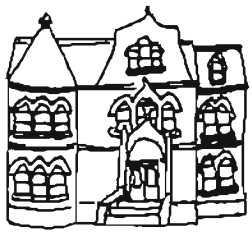
Military spending is $850 billion this year ($350 b in the US) because weapons sales are profitable; it is easier to rob another country than to create wealth, and the major powers see small wars as a means of maintaining the status quo, lessening the threat to capitalist hegemony.

Capitalism is the way the rich get richer, accumulating the wealth of the world while spreading the myth that globalization is progress. Dorothy Day called it a filthy rotten system and she was right.

✦

Mary Ann's garden won second place in *The Post Dispatch* contest, community garden division.

From Karen House



by Becky Hassler

When it was asked at a recent community meeting who wanted to do the next "From Karen House" article, I enthusiastically volunteered before I came to my senses—much to my and everyone else's surprise. Though it's been three years since grad school, the memory of writing papers is all too close to the painful surface for me—and for Teka, who had to encourage me literally every step of the way to get my final paper done. I have a diagnosis of MAJOR writer's block. Anyway, in spite of my better judgment, I enthusiastically volunteered to write this article because I had so much I wanted to say.

This summer, June 24th to be exact, marked the 8th anniversary of my being in the community at Karen House. It is a significant anniversary for me because it was eight years that I was in the Sisters of Mercy, before coming to the Worker. Those years in the Sisters of Mercy were and continue to be very important to me, words could never express my gratitude for my life with them. I literally moved out of the Sisters of Mercy Convent and into the old convent that houses Karen House on the same day. Virginia Druhe had a welcome note waiting on my pillow that said something about the Sisters of Mercy and the Catholic Worker being cousins. I know they are kindred spirits sharing the common bond of the Works of Mercy. I was taught them well by my sisters in mercy, and I am challenged daily to live them in this community of Catholic Workers.

Sixteen years of being in community—(Seventeen if you count my year in Up With People!). Thus my enthusiasm for writing this article. I love community. With all the quirks and personalities, there is something to be said about surrounding yourself with good people. I am amazed daily by the examples of goodness I am witness to. It makes me want to be so much better.

This past year we have been blessed with six new community members: Jenny, Rodney, Courtney, Colleen, Tony, and Fernando (who has since left to join the Dominicans)—all twenty-something!! Tim, Teka, Diane, and I are the aging community members—especially since dear Celestia, in her late 60's, left us to go spend time with her children and family. At 37, I have never before felt middle-aged! This new generation of community is not only a whole lot of fun, but their enthusiasm and love for the guests and for social justice are truly inspiring. Besides all that, I just love hanging out with them. One of my favorite moments each week is when I come home from a very busy day at the clinic, and in my living room sits my community waiting to start our community meeting—shouts of "Becky Lynn Houseshoe!!" (a resurrected nickname of my youth) greet me. I feel enveloped in love, in joy, in goodness.

I am realizing, I suppose it's because of my newly acquired mid-life status, with all too much painful awareness, my deficits, my shortcomings, my limitations, what I'm not good at. Not only my personality flaws, wishing I were sweeter, kinder, more patient, more loving, but also more intelligent, more skilled, more funny, more beautiful. This seems to be my time in life when all my shortcomings are staring me in the face. I am coming to the awareness that this person I am, this body, mind, face, personality, with these skills and lack thereof, is what I have to work with, what I have been given. The gift of community is in how we complement each other in building up the reign of God—what we at Karen House can give to our guests (or what my coworkers at Grace Hill and I can bring to our patients—I have these same feelings about my work as a Family Nurse Practitioner and am very fortunate to work with a few very amazing people).

This transformation, this gift of complementing each other's efforts, occurs in the ordinariness of life. The ebb and flow of our lives and those of our guests occur in the day-to-day routines. The ordinary becomes extra-ordinary. My lack of patience with the kids at the house is transformed by Colleen's and Tony's and Tim's amazing love of children. They make me want to be more kind and loving. My busyness is inspired to slow down when I watch Courtney and Jenny just hanging out with the guests, not needing to be "doing" anything or getting anything accomplished. My self-righteousness is humbled when I hear how Rodney took the same guest to the hospital for the third time for her high blood pressure, even though I had stressed repeatedly to her how crucial it was for her to take her medicine. My seriousness is gently reminded to be playful when I repeatedly ran into

---

Becky Hassler intends to visit Annjie in Angola in 2001.

Fernando's cheerfulness. Diane's ever growing responsibilities to her mom as she is growing more ill with Alzeihmer's challenges me to be more patient and loving with our guests who suffer from mental illness. Teka's abiding love and faithfulness to the house, to the guests and former guests, inspires me to continue. Anjie's e-mails from war-torn Angola make me want to stop being so petty, to strive to live more simply, to be grateful for what is.

We recently had a very difficult decision to make about one of our guests. It was amazing to see that in the course of our discussion, most of us came to the opposite place of where we started. We all started with our own perspective of how the decision should be made, but in the end and after really listening to each other, as we went around to say how we felt, most of us were in opposite places of where we started. Though the decision was still very painful, we had come to see it from each other's perspective as well as our own.

Though going through this period of questioning in my life is a difficult time for me, I can say for certain, without a doubt, that I find God in community. I'd like to end with a quote that is attributed to Pedro Arrupe, S.J.:

"Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."

I have and I will. . .and I'm counting on it.

✦

Resources for Learning and Action

Suggested Reading:

Nigeria: Ake: *The Years of Childhood,* a novel by Wole Soyinka, Nobel Prize-winner; *A Forest of Flowers*, short stories by MOSOP leader, Ken Saro-Wiwa; *Things Fall Apart, No Longer At Ease*, *Arrow of God*, and *The Trouble with Nigeria*, all works by Chinua Achebe

Ghana: *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, by Ayi Kweh Armah

Kenya: *A Grain of Wheat*, and *Petals of Blood*, by Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Other authors of fiction: Emecheta Buch, a Nigerian woman and Meja Mwangi of Kenya

Poets:

Okot p'Bitek (Uganda) Dennis Brutus (South Africa) Christopher Olagbo, *Labyrinth* (collection of poems) Obi Nwakanma, *The Roped Urn* (collection of poems)

Non-fiction: *A Stifled Sneeze: a biography of Christopher Olagbo. Nri: An Igbo Civilization* by S. Angulu Onwuejiogwu and works by the following authors: Wole Soyinka Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Kenyan writer and former political prisoner Maina wa Kinyatti, Kenyan writer and former political prisoner Nwame Nkrumah, former president of Ghana Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania Ali Mazrui, Kenyan historian. *Burkina Faso: Women Demand Share of Debt Cancellation Benefits* at: http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/aug00/02_16_007.html

Resources for Action:

Oxfam America "seeks lasting solutions to poverty and social and economic injustice" by providing relief from hunger "in partnership with grassroots organizations promoting sustainable development." It is privately funded. Contributions can be made to: Oxfam America 26 West St. Boston, MA 02111

MOSOP, the Movement of the Survival of the Ogoni People, has been organized to struggle for justice and redress from the Nigerian government and Shell Oil Co. which has greatly polluted their homeland while drilling for this natural resource. This group has organized a Boycott of Shell Oil and had frequent leafletting on Saturdays outside various Shell Stations. For more information contact: Karen House (314) 621-4052

Jesuit Refugee Service offers support and accompaniment to refugees throughout the world and in numerous countries in Africa. To join them or to offer financial support you can contact them at: Jesuit Refugee Service 1616 P. St. NW, suite 400 Washington, D.C. 20036 (202) 462-5200/e-mail: jrs@jesuit.org

Jubilee 2000 USA: (202)783-3566, and **St. Louis Jubilee 2000 International Debt Cancellation Committee**: genroca@aol.com are working to cancel the international debt You can send a flyer with the faces of 19 children to represent the 19,000 who die daily from the effects of the debt by emailing: coord@j2000usa.org

African Refugee Service is working to help resettle African refugees in St. Louis contact: Zed Minale at: (314) 645-1406

Round Table Talk

by Ellen Rehg

In our backyard we have a gigantic oak tree, 150 or possibly 200 years old. This tree sits right in the middle of the property line between us and our neighbors to the west. A chain link fence runs up to its middle and begins again on the other side. On our side there are wood chips blanketing the ground directly underneath the oak, providing ground cover for a wooden swing set and sand box. Our neighbors have only dirt in their backyard. Needless to say, grass does not grow under that tree.

Our neighbors do not own their house, as we do. They live in the downstairs apartment of a two-family flat. Exactly how many people live there has never been possible (for me) to determine. What is certain is that the family is anchored by the grandmother, Ms. Moore, whose smile and southern friendliness are not only a constant feature of hers, but also grace the manner of many of her children and grandchildren. She grew up in Mississippi and had seventeen children, two sets of twins; fourteen are still living. She told me the story of how she delivered some of her children after picking cotton all day in the fields. She told me this when I was enduring a first pregnancy and couldn't imagine working nine to five in an air-conditioned office, let alone bending over cotton plants with a sack of cotton in a hot field through the 9th month.

Some things about living next to such a large brood have been hard: the noise that accompanies an extended family playing outdoors while I am trying to get my one-year-old to sleep at night, the inevitable horn blowing at all hours, but most noticeably when I am trying to get my one-year-old down for a nap. (There's a pattern here.) However, I have loved getting to know Ms. Moore's family, particularly her three grandchildren that regularly stay with her. I've learned from Darryl, the thirteen-year-old, how to play a game with a ball and two flattened soda cans, and how to play a version of basketball using a street sign. Watching him pass a football in the street with his cousins reminds me of my own brothers doing such things. He puts his heart and soul into sports; and he has taught me that if you have a ball and a little ingenuity, there's always a game.

Despite our differences I am very grateful that we are neighbors. I am grateful for the opportunity to share my resources with them, not that I always gladly jump up and offer service with a smile when Carla asks to use the phone, or when Boo comes to borrow a baseball bat. I have to admit that at times I respond to these requests with irritation at the interruption.

A more difficult giving occurred last fall with Ms. Moore's son. He was going to paint part of our basement wall, and I gave him 40 dollars to buy supplies. He had worked for us before and had always been very helpful. He knew how to get rid of the pigeons that were congregating by our gutters one time, for example. This time, he didn't come back with the money or the supplies. In fact, I didn't see him for months after that, which was very unusual, as I normally saw him daily.

At first, I was very angry about it. Although 40 dollars isn't much, it was a lot for us. I spent some time fuming about it, thinking that I would insist that he pay me back next time I saw him, and feeling very virtuous about holding him accountable. As we moved into the new year of 2000, I sat in church one Sunday and listened to a homily about the jubilee year, a year in which we are asked to forgive all debts; and I realized that I had a debt to forgive. Not long after that, I was walking in the neighborhood and I saw Ms. Moore's son heading toward me. As we recognized each other, we both began to stride toward the other purposefully, apparently both of us eager for this long delayed meeting.

"It's a jubilee year," I proclaimed to him, as we met up. "We are supposed to forgive all debts, so don't worry about the money!" At the same moment he burst out with, "I'm sorry, I've been in rehab, but I am going to make amends. I will get that money back to you!" We exchanged "no, no no's—forget the money--I'll pay it back." Why did I feel like I was living out a story in the gospels?

Perhaps this is what I am most grateful to them for, not that their poverty is something for me to use for my spiritual benefit. I am simply very grateful that they are who they are and that I have had this opportunity to get to know them. Isn't this what neighbors really are: those who are different from us and who need us, whether or not we realize how very much we need them?

✚

Ellen Rehg and family will soon be looking for a college and a kindergarten.

At Cycle's End

Here it is sprawled in time
the twentieth century--
Here, the witness that I might have been the silent exile
sullen in anguish.
The stars the flute the strange music;
The empty roads without joy or hate
Here it is, the incomprehensible thing,
The sunset calm atop marble ruins
The footfalls the thud of rain upon the corpses:
There is tenderness where the child lay,
wreathed in plantain leaves;
to the dust. . . to the dust. . . to the feast of fireflies--
Here it is, the shadow of eternity,
destinies weighed in the sober scale, full
like a measure of wheat:
And I go, carrying into the dark dwellings, the burden of
the ages,
the sublime infirmity of being unborn;
until struggling through ancient remorseless nights
through the cycle of timeless space; arrived,
and heard the music of noon:
the wind came flapping her wings, belching
as the rain lurched against the wall--
The rest is fragmental; the groping with sodden paws
IThe glint of candles on white faces,
The far-gathering, the brazier alive with flame
like the inward survival of an infant's memory--

(2)
Here it is, the bleached rain,
The floating of amber light--
The world stirred like the beast,
claws and fangs and an iron beak
The world stirred like the bear. . .
Until the unendurable hour struck the moment
of the future, limping in the horizon, of these things
unsolved and unsolvable
a petard of meaning, the act of dreaming
among the frayed places. . .
I am but a child.
Shuddering at the evil things that grip me,
The calm boots marching through the gates
clothed in darkness--
Spilling warm blood on the face of the moon.
I am but a child. . .
I am the night with a gust of wind preying the balcony
the scarlet shadow shuddering through a deeper gloom,
I carry the weight of the world sculpted inside me
inverted, mute, unchanging. This is drought!
The yearning after the uncertain safety
of cornfields;
It is April, the eyes of the earth still glisten with tears
We await the miracle of everything:
To shift the frontiers in the brave new world;
to create man anew, to close the boundaries--
to make purer mysteries out of the still mysterious.

Obi Nwakanma, September, 1999, Lagos.

House Needs:

- Tutors for children
- Housetakers

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*. 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Joe Angert, Teka Childress, Mark Chmiel. Mary Dutcher, Carol Giles, Bill Miller, Barbara Prosser, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table
Karen Catholic Worker House
1840 Hogan ■ St. Louis, MO. 63106

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Louis, MO
Permit No. 3087