Spring semester 2012 will see the University of Notre Dame join a world-wide examination of the legacy of the Swiss philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau (born in 1712). The Notre Dame events, titled “Rousseau 2012 / DIGNITY” explain why we should keep reading Rousseau today through the lens of key concepts on political justice, power relations, and religious liberty—concepts that run through all five photographic sections of DIGNITY.

The Amnesty International Dignity exhibit, on display at the Snite Museum of Art from January 15 to March 11, 2012, is a smaller version of an exhibition originally presented at the Hôtel de Ville, Paris, from May-July 2010. It is making its American début at Notre Dame before traveling around the USA in years ahead.

Guaranteed to deliver a jolt to audiences, this exhibit provides a heart-wrenching, honest portrayal of what poverty looks and feels like, as reported by people speaking their own stories from five countries: Egypt, India, Macedonia, Mexico, and Nigeria.

Contents

1. PREFACE: More Rights, Less Poverty
   by AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

3. PREFACE: Economics: A Tool in the Fight Against Injustice
   by ESTHER DUFLO

5. PREFACE: Images of Us
   by JULIA DOUTHWAITE

7. MEXICO
   by GUILLAUME HERBAUT

25. INDIA
    by JOHANN ROUSSELOT

45. EGYPT
    by PHILLIPE BRAULT

61. NIGERIA
    by MICHAËL ZUMSTEIN

79. MACEDONIA
    by JEAN-FRANÇOIS JOLY
More Rights, Less Poverty

“Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.”

NELSON MANDELA

Poverty: A Crisis for Human Rights

Today, more than 60 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approved (in December 1948), the notion of a world liberated from terror and misery still remains a dream for millions of people. Although the United Nations recognizes that human rights are universal and fundamental, for millions of people they remain out of reach. According to Article 22 of the Declaration, “Everyone...is entitled to realization, through and overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.”

NELSON MANDELA

The world-wide phenomenon of poverty incarnates a flagrant disregard for human rights. Even if its symptoms and consequences vary from continent to continent, poverty is a plague that touches all countries and which is worsening over time: countless analyses and statistics prove it. It is estimated that one billion people live on less than $1 a day and another billion live in ramshackle slums. 1.3 billion people have no access to even the most basic healthcare.

These “objective” data are visible in statistics such as low individual incomes, or percentages of a population having the least access to resources and services. Behind these facts, however, it is crucial to recognize that poverty is fed by human rights violations and, at the same time, it engenders new abuses, pulling whole sectors of the world population into the trap of extreme poverty. There is a real, complex, cause-and-effect relationship between the infringements of different rights; they are interdependent. A person who suffers discrimination because of her skin color, the place where she lives, or her status in a particular minority or community, is consequently more prone to find certain rights lacking, rights that are nevertheless guaranteed to the majority. The right to housing—and the denial of that right as regards the land of indigenous peoples—often affects people who already exist on the margins of society, and translates into forced evictions. Losing land or property thus deprives such people of the only means of subsistence that they had; they subsequently lose access to education and healthcare. The phenomena of ostracism and rights deprivation seem to reinforce each other mutually, making the situation seem, from the outside, inevitable. In actuality, however, such situations often result from public policies that can and should be fought. It is possible to end the cycles of violence that sustain exclusion and poverty.

The Wager: Human Rights

Fighting poverty by relying solely on financial means or by betting on potential growth is a short-sighted, insufficient, and precarious strategy. The recent meltdown in world markets has amply illustrated that point: an estimated 100 million people were brutally thrust into poverty at the end of 2008 by a financial crisis whose consequences are still not entirely clear.

Amnesty International is transforming the demand for concrete human rights into a powerful weapon against poverty. The buy-in of decision-makers (in economics or politics) is crucial to breaking the chain between societal exclusion, rights infringement, and the poverty that results. From their role as promoters and defenders of human rights, leaders are able to denounce the discrimination, exclusion, and lack of legal recourse that obtains among society’s most vulnerable members. These principles are at the heart of the international campaign launched by Amnesty International in May 2009 entitled “Demand Dignity” (see: http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/demand-dignity).
Politics goodwill is essential to wage a successful war against poverty, but it alone is not enough. Given the enormity of the challenge and the limited means at their disposal, even the most well intentioned authorities must make choices, choices about where to spend taxpayers’ dollars and which issues to invest in for the greatest impact.

Yet the rhetoric of development often simplifies the situation. Some writers claim that poverty could be eliminated in 20 years, if wealthy countries agreed to invest enough funds into poor economies to launch targeted actions, such as the wide-spread availability of fertilizer and mosquito netting, or the establishment of micro-lending operations and free schools. Others argue that foreign aid actually fosters existing problems and creates new ones, such as corruption and misdirection of state priorities. According to this school of economic thinking, the natural play of market forces and competition will eventually right wrongs, if left to themselves. These debates could go on indefinitely in the absence of real evidence of policy results. The poor will bear the brunt, no matter what.

Nevertheless a third current of economic thinking makes common cause with human rights activism to insist on humanitarian concerns and the dignity that is due to all people. Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate for Economics in 1998, was a pioneer in this development. He was one of the first to argue that equal rights will never exist as long as access to those rights is limited by poverty. For him, health and education are essential “capabilities” without which human life is stunted. Access to health and education must therefore lie at the heart of any plan for human development.

This attitude seems to be gaining ground, not only among funding agencies, but also among the governments of developing countries which receive such aid: universal education and healthcare are now considered essential rights. Three out of the eight Millennium Development Goals agreed upon by the United Nations for 2015 concern health: they include commitments to reduce infant mortality, improve maternal health, and to continue the fight against AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. Two of the objectives involve education, as in demands for universal primary education, and the promotion of gender equality especially in schools. Real advances are being made: more children are enrolled in primary schools, and improvements have been realized in some African nations as regards access to healthcare, particularly through the distribution of mosquito netting and measles vaccinations.

In spite of these advances, however, the state of public education and health in the developing world does not inspire optimism. In 2007, 9 million children died before the age of five from illnesses that could have been prevented or cured. Every year, 500,000 women die in childbirth. And even if more children are going to school, many do not learn much there. These failures, and the general slowness of progress, have been interpreted as proof by so-called “aid skeptics” of the idea that it is useless or even dangerous to try and intervene in such fields. In the absence of a real demand articulated by inhabitants of developing countries, spending more does not mean doing better.

A superficial yet seductive logic lies behind such reasoning: it seems to restore autonomy to people of developing countries, an autonomy stolen by international aid organizations. In the name of our respect for humanity and fundamental freedoms, we should abandon all efforts to help unless the people in question generate their own ideas by themselves. This analysis ignores the crucial teachings of Amartya Sen. He taught that freedom, which he understood as the absence of hindrances, is worth nothing if the individual does not have the wherewithal to act (this is what Sen calls “capability”).

It follows, then, that the peasants who did not survive the great famine in Bengal were free to buy food, but their buying power was so limited by inflation that they were incapable of doing so. Similarly, a mother who has received no education and whose neighbors are also illiterate will likely be unable to imagine a different future for her child, even though she is free to do so. By the same token, vaccinations are rarely requested, even though they are the most efficient means of saving lives.

The extension of such “capabilities” cannot be entirely left up to the requests of peoples whose freedom is already limited by countless obstacles, whether it is their inability to imagine another future or the impossibility of saving money for a child’s schooling. In the name of justice, Amartya Sen declares, education and health must remain societal obligations.

What can we do to make these social responsibilities carry meaningful weight in poor countries? To the extent that a society encourages education and healthcare beyond the minimum, it is solely responsible for providing those services. We cannot legitimately claim to support the people’s right to health and education, then, unless we are willing to investigate the practical organization of such services.

It is crucial to keep such issues in the public eye; access to health and education must not be left to circumstance or improvisational techniques, even if aid is meant to be generous. Because when failures happen, they threaten the whole structure of efforts behind such aid. The fight against poverty requires bold solutions and systematic experimentation: we must continue coming up with new approaches, recognize errors as they arise, and learn from them to design better policies going forward. Experimentation must be conducted under rigorous, scientific methods.

Economists often make themselves unpopular when they force people to make choices. But making choices based on experimental methods, and using the most efficient results, is the only practical means we have to start making respect for human rights a world-wide reality.
Images of Us

Remember those connect-the-dots coloring books we used to get as kids? When I was 10 or so, my brother Charlie gave me a set of connect-the-dots sewing cards. Each one was made of stiff cardboard, and you were supposed to use the thick needle and yarn to sew from dot to dot. The concept was the same as the coloring books: from an assortment of apparently random dots on a blank page, the outline of a familiar object would emerge.

My most indelible memory of this gift, however, is the outrage I felt when I opened it. I can’t remember why it made me so mad. Looking back on that Christmas day from the vantage of my present self, I think I know. At age 10, every kid thinks she knows how to connect the dots. No stupid coloring book or sewing kit can do it half as well as a fifth grader. Except that it is actually really hard.

Connecting the dots is what I’ve spent my life trying to do, as a teacher and scholar and more recently as a mentor of kids from the west side of South Bend. The payoff is great when you start to see how dots—people, events, ideas, economics and even the past—hook up to make meaning.

It can also be painful. Living in the United States these days is to hear stories of violence every day. Just the other night in South Bend a woman was badly beaten by a robber apparently frustrated that she had no cash on hand. Her two young daughters watched and screamed and cried, and were taken in by the neighborhood women who are keeping mum. The silence swaddling that violence makes sense, I think, if you connect the dots. It crystallizes several factors that exist in certain neighborhoods of South Bend or any U.S. city: poverty, hopelessness, unemployment, drug abuse, gangs, under-resourced police and, especially, the growing number of armed people roaming city streets.

The fact that a single victim might happen to be a woman may be incidental, a random dot in the tapestry of urban blight. The fact that her fearful neighbor is a woman is less random.

Women have for centuries stood witness to violence and have long been afraid to speak up for fear of reprisals. It’s not because we’re meek or accepting but because we have other people to think of, mainly our children. We know that those women who have spoken up have not always fared so well, nor have their families.

Just connect the dots as you think about all the nameless woman who spoke out against abuse and who lived to regret it, in Chile, Rwanda or Sudan, in the Middle East, Afghanistan or East Asia. Go further back in time and remember the suffragists, many of whom were shame into silence or starved into submission.

As a professor of French, I think about the activists of the 19th century, such as the so-called Vésuviennes (known for wearing culottes) or the Petroleuses of the Paris Commune, whose outrage over the French government’s refusal to honor republican principles materialized in social movements with an outrageously high number of civilian dead. Many of the dead were women, and their kids were orphaned as a result.

I think about Marie-Jeanne Roland, the wife of a high-ranking 18th century government minister and an outspoken politician, who may well have regretted her involvement with the revolutionary cause of 1789-92 when, from the foot of the guillotine during the Reign of Terror, she realized her daughter and sole survivor would pay the price.

Speaking up is hard to do. Compassion is fleeting, and in the end you’re all alone. You only have to connect the dots to see this.

I connected other dots this past summer, working on the Amnesty International exhibit “DIGNITY: Poverty and Human Rights.” The exhibit, making its U.S. debut at Notre Dame’s Snite Museum of Art now through March, is the visual centerpiece of our contribution to a worldwide commemoration of the 18th century Swiss philosopher and writer Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). We at Notre Dame are focusing on Rousseau’s role as a pioneer of humanitarian thought.

The DIGNITY exhibit, unveiled in Paris in 2010, delivers a jolt to viewers in its portraits of what poverty looks and feels like from five countries: Egypt, India, Mexico, Nigeria and Macedonia. The stories take on different forms depending on the people’s situations. The portraits of Me’phaa people from Mexico frame the most basic human wish: an end to the ethnic persecution and murders that have devastated their numbers. Two photos show a woman and a small girl holding photos of their dead menfolk—a husband, a father. Two other women speak out from portraits of despair, telling of the nightmares they still see in their mind’s eye of the soldiers who repeatedly raped them. They said they were afraid to speak for a long time, and they’re still afraid now. But the risk is worth it, they say, if it will end the violence.

By bringing this exhibit to the United States, people like me—academics and art museum professionals with a political conscience—hope to raise awareness about such atrocities. Each haunting section calls for observers to respond through words and support. It feels good to be involved in a cause like this. It feels good to help mobilize some action that may make an impact. Yet the images and histories give me pause. Although I admire the women who spoke out from Mexico or Macedonia, I now worry about them. I wonder if they regretted bringing attention to themselves. I wonder if they are still alive, still able to work, to care for their families.

I also keep thinking about that nameless woman robbed and beaten in South Bend, her neighbors and the many others who’ve entered my mind during the planning for DIGNITY at Notre Dame. The dots seem to be converging. Human rights abuses that I once thought were far away are drawing near.

JULIA DOUTHWAITE | JANUARY 2012
Notre Dame Magazine
The State of Guerrero, in southern Mexico, is one of the most remote regions in the country. Its mountainous area, la Montaña, houses mainly indigenous communities. This cut-off region is plagued by endemic violence and the people, caught in a stranglehold between army, paramilitaries, guerrillas and drug traffickers, try to maintain a traditional way of life. Since the uprising in neighboring Chiapas in the 1990s, the government has increased military presence in Guerrero considerably, especially to fight the guerilla movements. The army has been charged with brutally repressing these movements. But in reality, the repression has been mainly against the civilian indigenous populations who have been subject to forced abductions, arbitrary arrests, acts of torture, and assassinations. As for the non-indigenous landowners, they maintain paramilitary militias in order to protect and expand their property while the drug traffickers—who also claim to control a part of the region—arm their own men. It is not unusual for landowners to have relationships with drug cartels or even be members of them.

In such a violent environment, the indigenous populations attempt to survive in villages that are quite far from urban areas. The region’s isolated position makes access to a certain number of basic services (e.g., healthcare and education) very difficult. Those who do not emigrate to the northern part of the country or to the United States often have no choice but to join the guerillas or to seek work on one of the plantations controlled by traffickers. Out of fear that the region might fall permanently under the control of drug traffickers, the government has increased repression of the locals. Far from taking measures to guarantee people’s access to essential services, the authorities abuse the legal system. This hinders the work of activists who fight on behalf of the communities and who dare to denounce breaches of human rights. Threats, intimidation and even murders frequently go unpunished.

The members of the OPIM (Organization of the Indigenous Me’phaa People), an association founded in 2002 to defend and promote the rights of the natives of Guerrero, regularly bear the brunt of this violence. A number of them have been placed under surveillance and one of their leaders, Lorenzo Fernández Ortega, was assassinated in 2008. Yet defending and asserting the social and environmental rights of indigenous populations remains crucial. Recent investment projects have sparked worries, protests, and increased reprisals against those who dare express reservations.

The Mexican authorities are, however, committed—especially with the backing of the United Nations Human Rights Council—to protecting the life and the physical integrity of human rights defenders. It is imperative for the international community to remind the authorities of their responsibilities and to hold them accountable.
La Montaña

“Here, everybody distrusts everybody. Everybody is afraid of dying.”

“Here” is the region of la Montaña in the state of Guerrero, less than 190 miles from Acapulco and its luxury hotels, yachts, and tourists. The person who told me this in his small office had just hidden a revolver under a newspaper. He’s the local journalist. He has received death threats. This is “normal,” he says, because elections are coming up.

It’s a violent, wild, and desperate region. Homicide is the number one cause of death. It is not recommended to go out at night, and you have to be careful of gangs that might rob you. “Yesterday near the village of Ayutla, an armed masked man stopped a bus. He made the driver get out and shot him with a bullet to the head.” A police inspector who seemed really nice told me this. I later learned that he is strongly suspected of having tortured a young woman, simply to obtain information about a murder witness.

Maria. Her father was assassinated in El Charco on June 7, 1998, in a military massacre in the village school during a meeting of activists on behalf of local indigenous communities.
La Montaña landscape.
La Montaña is a region with a large indigenous population. The state of Guerrero has the highest rate in the country of human rights violations. For example, one death in every three is a violent one.
Testimony of Teresa Jesús Caterina
December 2008

“My name is Teresa Jesús Caterina. I am a Me’phaa.

Today I am old, but I still suffer from the rapes I endured. They were in 1993.

My daughter and I were on our way to work in the fields. We stopped by a stream to catch crabs. Some soldiers came by and ordered us in Spanish to give them some water. I answered in my native language, Me’phaa: ‘You have hands, get it yourselves!’ Then they forced us to follow them to their camp in the hills. Two women from my community were already there.

My daughter and I were kept without food or drink and raped for two days by the soldiers.

Then we all left the camp and started walking. On the road we passed my husband, who was drunk, and who asked them to let us go. They replied: ‘Here we are the boss, you are nothing,’ before tying him to a tree and beating him.

We continued our march, taking my husband with us. The women were raped at regular intervals, about every four hours. And because I tried to defend myself, I was roped by the neck and dragged along.

We arrived in our village, where they tied up and beat my husband again. Then, they offered to release me and my daughter in exchange for a meal that I had to make for them. ‘If you don’t serve us, if you don’t keep quiet, we’ll come back and get you, now we know where to find you!’ Then they left.

It’s very hard for me to tell you all this. My husband is dead. He didn’t want me to tell my story because he was afraid of how the community would react. Today, I want to bear witness.”
Detail of a kitchen in an indigenous dwelling.
Testimony of Raúl Lucas Lucía
December 2008

“My name is Raúl Lucas Lucía, I belong to the El Charco community.

In November 2003, soldiers came to my home. It was 7 in the morning. I was having a coffee in front of my house before going to work. I heard the click of their rifles, and I could see they wanted to beat me right away. ‘Not in front of my family,’ I said.

So we went into the hills. When we were alone there, they undressed me. I was left in just my underpants, and they forced me to crouch down. Then they beat me with their rifles. ‘Where did you hide the weapons?’ they asked me. ‘I haven’t hidden anything, I have no weapons.’ They insulted me, humiliated me.

At last, in the afternoon, they let me go. There had been rumors that I belonged to the guerrilla. Each year I would gather with others at the site of the El Charco massacre, as it is called. My brother-in-law was in fact one of the eleven people killed by the Mexican army on June 7, 1998, during a break after a meeting of indigenous communities in the village schoolhouse. When the soldiers left, they threatened to kill me and my family if I told anyone what had happened. They were from the 48th regiment of Cruz Grande. I later denounced the soldiers at the Human Rights Commission, but the law didn’t do anything.”

On February 22, 2009, the body of Raúl Lucas Lucía was found at Ayutla de los Libres, together with the body of another human rights defender, Manuel Ponce Rosas. They were, respectively, president and secretary of the Organization for the Future of the Mixtec People (OFPM). The two activists had been abducted by armed men posing as policemen during a public demonstration on February 13. A short time before, Raúl Lucas Lucía had met a delegation from Amnesty International.
A soldier from the Mexican army’s 48th battalion at a roadblock in Guerrero. This battalion is suspected by human rights groups of committing rape, torture and summary executions against indigenous peoples.

Modesta Cruz Victoriano, 42, is the widow of Lorenzo Fernández Ortega. An activist with OPIRM (Organization of the Indigenous Me’phaa People), Lorenzo was campaigning on behalf of fourteen male members of the Me’phaa indigenous community who claimed to have been forcibly sterilized in 1998. He also sought justice for his sister, Inés, who had been raped by soldiers in 2002. He was assassinated on February 9, 2008 at the age of 39. He was taken and tortured before being killed. Modesta Cruz Victoriano is holding a photograph of her husband’s body. Village of El Camalote, La Montaña, Guerrero.
A police checkpoint at Ayutla de los Libres. The municipal police force is widely suspected of corruption.

The municipal prison at Ayutla de los Libres. Five activists with OPIM—Natalio Ortega Cruz, Romualdo Santiago Eredina, Raúl Hernández Abundio, Orlando Manzanarez Lorenzo and Manuel Cruz Victoriano—are accused of murder. They were arrested on April 18, 2008. They are part of a group of 15 members of OPIM whose arrests were ordered April 11, 2008. This group has been defending the rights of the indigenous communities of Ayutla de los Libres and Acatepec since its creation in 2002.
Testimony of Inés Fernández Ortega

December 2008

“On March 22, 2002, the soldiers arrived here at my house.

I try not to remember the rape, it’s too hard.

The soldiers came in through the back of the house. It was between noon and two in the afternoon. They greeted me. Then three of them grabbed me and took me into the kitchen. I had meat drying there. They took it and said: “Where did you steal this meat?” I told them: “It’s my cow.” Then one of the soldiers pointed his gun at me. “You must stop stealing.” Then they seized me and my children ran to their grandparents’ house 275 yards away.

I was raped by three soldiers. Nine others stood guard around the kitchen. It all seemed very organized.

Ever since I denounced this crime, the community has looked at me differently. So has my husband. He has become violent. I don’t trust him anymore. He doesn’t want me to tell my story. Every day I argue with him and he keeps saying: “You were touched by soldiers, you might as well go off with them!” He insults me in front of our five children, kicks me in the stomach, slaps my face, and pulls my hair.

Then I run off and hide in the hills, standing behind the trees. At night, I would like to be able to dream, but every time I fall asleep I relive the rape in nightmares. Today I’m constantly afraid for my children, afraid something will happen to them. I’m afraid to go out and be raped again.

The government and the local authorities have never helped me find the men who did that to me. In any case, they have never done anything for us, for the indigenous people.

My brother, Lorenzo Fernández Ortega, was assassinated in February 1998. He was abducted and tortured by the paramilitary so that I would keep quiet and withdraw my complaints.

My name is Inés Fernández Ortega. I am a Me’phaa from the Tecuani community.”
While India’s economic boom has been fostered by new technologies, the central-eastern state of Orissa is experiencing an industrial revolution based on the exploitation of its rich mining resources by Indian and foreign companies. Since 2000, the Orissa state government has signed 50-some agreements with industrial and mining outfits to allow for new factories and drilling operations to be built. The priority given to investors has unforeseen consequences.

The lives and rights of thousands of people have been and continue to be seriously affected by these changes. Aboriginal communities are obliged to relocate—often by force—from land that they have occupied for thousands of years and which they consider sacred. The populations suddenly find themselves deprived of their means of subsistence. Promises of employment and rehousing linked to the setting up of new factories are slow to materialize. Excluded from the decisions that are turning their lives upside-down, these men and women have abruptly seen their status reduced to long-term poverty and marginalization.

Future generations are also being affected by this race for profit. Although it contains remarkable biodiversity, the remote province is already being scarred by evidence of industrial over-exploitation.

Looking ahead, the scenario seems to promise a smooth and immutable order of things: the inhabitants will helplessly stand by while the region is devastated through pollution and deforestation; they will lose their homes and their lands while new industrial projects flourish.

However, resistance is in the air. The inhabitants have learned lessons the hard way, from earlier scenes of devastation, and they are increasingly speaking up to demand justice and transparency. They want to teach others about their rights, and to ensure that no new projects will be allowed to infringe on those rights. These movements, which are sometimes violently repressed by the authorities, find vital support from international groups. The international community can play a major role by demanding that Indian authorities and multinational corporations provide fair compensation, and by requiring that statutes be enforced to protect the people from future projects that may violate their rights. Respect for the law is the best means to ensure sustainable economic development.
The War over the Earth
The state of Orissa, the motherlode of the country.

This article addresses six individual contexts in detail. A system of cross-referencing inscribed in the photo captions allows readers to place each image in its context.

KEONJHAR. The wooded Keonjhar district is primarily inhabited by aboriginal peoples and those belonging to the lower castes. The land contains colossal stretches of metallic mineral deposits which are attracting interest among numerous mining and industrial companies. KIRDTI, a local NGO, has undertaken a campaign to raise awareness and to promote education among the local indigenous peoples who were, until recently, completely unaware of their most basic rights and the destructive consequences of the mining industry. KIRDTI has been especially focused on teaching the locals to see for themselves the damages that have already been caused by over-exploitation in the Joda region. Since Keonjhar is near Joda, this should warn them to what may lie ahead.

KASHIPUR. Three people from an indigenous group were killed here in December 2000. They were part of a demonstration protesting plans by UAIL (Utkal Alumina International Ltd.) to install a bauxite industry on-site. Since then, the situation has been labeled “the social conflict of Kashipur.” UAIL’s plans are still advancing, thanks to sporadic waves of police brutality to keep the population calm. The village of Kucheipadar remains undaunted, however. They exemplify the force of resistance.

VEDANTA. Vedanta, a British company, plans to develop the mining of bauxite deposits that are buried under the Niyamgiri mountain range. This area is a haven of biodiversity and is sacred for the Dongria Kondh tribe that lives there and subsists on hunting, gathering, and slash-and-burn cultivation. They worship Mother Earth and Niyam Raja, the patron god of these hills. The development of bauxite mining will bring an end to this unique community. At Lanjigarh, a village in the foothills, Vedanta built a large aluminium refinery before receiving authorization for its mining enterprise. Vedanta took this measure in complete disregard for the law, but with implicit support by the powers that be, and has confronted the population with a fait accompli. According to D. Sarangi, an anti-mining organizer, this is the latest example of the impunity with which mining companies work in the state of Orissa.
POSCO. Thousands of peasants living in 10 different villages are opposed to the construction of an ironworks proposed by the Korean company POSCO (Pohang Iron and Steel Company), which is the 3rd leading iron producer in the world. POSCO’s project would bring $12 million to India: this would make it the largest foreign investment in India’s history. Like many other industrial corporations (e.g. Tata Steel and Arcelor Mittal), POSCO is drawn by the presence of enormous iron deposits that lie in the district of Keonjhar. Fearing the loss of their lands, the peasants and fishermen of the coastal region have successfully blocked access to the site for more than two years. It is one of the rare sites in the state of Orissa where agriculture flourishes, thanks to the farming of betel leaf. Confrontations between pro-POSCO and anti-POSCO forces have already broken out on several occasions and many people have been wounded as a result. Suspicions surround those peasants who are in favor of the project; people fear they have been bought out by POSCO. By exploiting individual lust for profit, the industrialists’ method of Divide and Conquer seems to be stirring up ill-feeling in the resistance.

KALINGA NAGAR. The Indian industrial giant Tata Steel wants to build a factory for iron and steel metallurgy in Kalinga Nagar. The site is envisioned as a vast center for expanding the industry and transforming metallurgical processes. On January 2, 2006, the police opened fire on a group of peasants who were demonstrating against this project and killed 14 people all of whom were adivasi (indigenous peoples). Hundreds of Adivasi had risen up in protest that day to denounce Tata Steel for the insufficient indemnities it offers to displaced peoples, or simply to voice their refusal to leave. Since that day and the national media attention brought to the massacre, a battle continues to pit small-scale indigenous farmers against the monolithic forces of Tata Steel. The violence continues.

JODA. The region of Joda is in the heart of the iron mining region of Orissa. It is part of a geological deposit that contains the biggest iron ore reserves in Asia. 50-some companies are situated here alongside local mafias, and several multinational metallurgy corporations are campaigning the local government to get their slice of the pie. The vast majority of workers in the mine are members of the lower castes and indigenous communities. They constitute a mass of laborers who may be exploited at will, for whom employment is extremely precarious, education is virtually non-existent, and whose housing and sanitation conditions are deplorable. The pollution in this area is everywhere: air, rivers, and arable lands. The region is regularly bathed in a cloud of red, poisonous dust, except during the two months of the monsoon season which partly transforms that dust into thick mud.
Living in traditionally cooperative, self-sufficient and effectively ecological societies, the Adivasi are indigenous Indian peoples and account for about 8% of the country’s population. They represent an India that is simple, endearing, and peaceful. To ensure the preservation of their cultures and their socio-economic well-being, Appendix 5 of the Indian Constitution declares as illegal the transfer of lands classified as tribal to a non-tribal entity. By doing so, it grants these communities special rights to ensure that they are not dispossessed of their only wealth: their land. However, most of these people are unaware that these rights exist. And their lack of access to education makes recourse to the law very difficult. Deprived of land for farming and without the means to retrain for other kinds of work, they often fall prey to poverty and alcoholism, and join the ranks of the disadvantaged.
Abhay Sahoo, an activist and member of the Indian communist party, coordinates resistance against the POSCO project. Fearing an escalation of violence, the authorities have restrained access to the region and declared it “special security zone.” On this day, the demonstration went off without incident. Jagatsinghpur district, Orissa, 2008. POSCO.

Denial of the most elementary rights has persisted for decades without meeting any real resistance or protest. Unaware of the social and economic consequences, people have seen the big industrial projects as emblems of progress and patriotic pride. In addition, the caste system naturally precludes the idea of rebellion and legitimizes a “natural” contempt for tribal communities and lower castes. However, an activist movement supported by various NGOs has been growing in strength over the past few years and it is making itself heard. The inhabitants of Orissa are learning more and more from the past and from the social disasters generated by this type of industrialization. The task of activists today is to build awareness and mobilize these fragile, ill-informed populations, give them legal assistance, unite them in their struggle, and hopefully win new battles. It is a combat between David and Goliath. And a race against time.
Jogendra Jamuda (an activist opposed to the Tata Steel project), was injured in an assassination attempt. According to Rabindra Jarika (leader of the opposition movement), the attack was undertaken by henchmen hired by Tata Steel. Jajpur district, Orissa, 2008.

KALINGA NAGAR.

A memorial in honor of the 14 peasants killed by police during a demonstration against the Tata Steel project in Kalinga Nagar. Jajpur District, Orissa, 2008. KALINGA NAGAR.
A meeting of villagers opposed to the Tata Steel project. Jajpur district, Orissa, 2008.
KALINGA NAGAR.
An open-case mine in Joda, at the heart of the iron-mining region of Keonjhar, Orissa.

A man pushing a tire through the mud in the iron-rich region of Joda, in the hamlet of Juruli, Keonjhar District, Orissa, 2008. JODA.
Trilachan Mohanta, age 30, has had tuberculosis for a year and a half. He is fortunate to be in a doctor’s care, thanks to a collective fund in his neighborhood. He was born in the hamlet of Juruli, has never been able to find work since his disease broke out, and belongs to an “OBC” (Other Backward Classes), a label that covers the lower castes who are habitually neglected and held in contempt. Keonjhar district, Orissa, 2008. JDDA.
The question of housing is explosive in the Egyptian capital, which continues to attract new residents every year. It is estimated that around half of the city’s 18 million residents live in “informal” settlements. Cairo today is an aggregate of districts, remnants of successive policies of urban planning. The inhabitants of these more or less peripheral zones generally exist outside of all legal framework: most do not have deeds to their property and many do not legally exist, not having the means to pay for a birth certificate. Marginalized, they are reduced to a life of uncertainty.

Generally without water and electricity, they have very limited access to healthcare, education, or jobs outside the shantytowns. The land on which they live is generally unhealthy and dangerous. In September 2008, the landslide in Al-Duwayqa demonstrated the danger of this area and the authorities’ lack of consideration for its inhabitants.

Regularly called to order—particularly by the United Nations—since 1990, the Egyptian authorities have launched many initiatives to tackle housing problems. The political motivation for this is not surprising, since the shantytowns are considered the breeding ground for radical Islamists. In 2008 the Minister of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Development unveiled the major points of an urban development called “Cairo 2050” which consists of the demolition of many informal settlements and the relocation of their inhabitants. Bolstered by reports drawn up year after year, national and international NGOs have identified the real risk: that these men and women without a legal identity or the right to vote, who have no voice on the issue, will continue to have their rights abused. Putting this population further at risk, urban development plans rarely include adequate thought to relocation for those who are unaware of their rights. Local and international pressure is essential in reminding the authorities of their national and international obligations. It is not a matter of questioning the need to manage the demographic pressure in Cairo, but of emphasizing that any sustainable plan must keep the rights of each person at its heart.
The buildings tower up from the sand on the outskirts of the Sinai Peninsula. Ezbet el-Haggana was previously a military camp installed on the border. Today it is one of the biggest shantytowns just northeast of Cairo, with supposedly a million inhabitants. I saw hallways leading towards tiny rooms of bare brick with plastic tarps for ceilings. Despite the high-voltage cables that run above the roofs, Ezbet el-Haggana does not have electricity. At night, one can see almost nothing. One walks blindly, bumps into things, and listens. And when it is time to light up Ihaab, the young bride, the men climb the length of the massive pylons to tap a bit of current for electricity.

Dominating the city-center, at the top of the Mokattam Hill, are lines of bare concrete, empty lots as far as the eye can see: a settlement that people just call Mokattam. During the earthquake of 1993 it was the hope and refuge of thousands of displaced persons. Today these hastily constructed buildings have become concrete hovels. Now it’s permanent. Mokattam is crammed with outcasts, the unemployed, and victims of the landslide of September 2008.

At the foot of the same hill lays another group of hovels: Manshiyet Nasser. Jumbled alleys and buildings squeeze against each other. Piles of garbage on the porches, on the terraces, and even on the roofs. In the middle of congested alleys, children play barefoot among the debris.

Since the 1940s Coptic migrants originally from provinces in the south of Egypt have settled in the neighborhood situated along Mokattam Hill. The Zabaleen have taken care of the city’s refuse for decades; Cairo does not have a garbage disposal system. Nevertheless, over the last several years, the Egyptian government has contracted foreign and local companies to undertake the collection of garbage produced by the Cairo’s residents.
In 2003 the establishment of these contracts brought about a crisis. Threatened by the loss of their only source of income, the Zabaleen mobilized against privatization and began negotiations with the government.

The settlement is also jeopardized by Mokattam Hill. On September 6, 2008, 60-ton blocks of rock fell on the Duwayqa settlement which is next to Manshiet Nasser, killing over 100 people. Many landslides of this type had already taken place, notably in 1993. Faced with the inaction of the Egyptian government, the inhabitants still live with the threat of catastrophe.

The Zabaleen (garbage collectors) of Manshiyet Nasser salvage, sort, treat, and recycle the city’s garbage. This has been their life for decades. War does not mark the landscape of Manshiyet Nasser, rather, years of survival and labor. As it is said, one man’s garbage is another man’s treasure.

A stone’s throw away is the City of the Dead, a gorge of ochre streets and walls devoured by dust. Coming from Upper-Egypt or the Suez region, chased out by the advance of the desert or by wars, thousands of people “cohabit” with the dead of ancient noble families, sometimes for many generations. Certain occupants are given responsibility for upkeep of the place. It is a sort of agreement between them and the families of the dead: they can settle here on the condition that they maintain the tomb. Others have found refuge in caves or in adjacent small, basic constructions. Sometimes a simple straw mat serves as bed and table.

Here, the living have colonized the cemetery; without a doubt, this is the most spectacular consequence of the crisis that is eating away at the country.

In Cairo, 40% of the population lives in hovels. Ezbet el-Haggana, Manshiyet Nasser, Mokattam, and the City are what they call “informal zones” where the poorest of the poor have found refuge. Of the million or more residents of el-Haggana, only 1,200 people have a voting card because in Egypt a birth certificate is not free; most of the residents in these hovels have neither papers nor the right to vote.

PHILLIPE BRAULT
MOQATTAM AREA
The victims of the earthquake of 1993—along with some victims of the landslide of Mokattam Hill in 2008—have been relocated to this area perched on the same Mokattam Hill. Today, these hastily constructed buildings have become concrete hovels.
Despite the high-voltage cables that run over the roofs of these homes in the Ezbet Al-Haggana district of Cairo, the inhabitants do not have electricity. A woman sitting on a bed who hides her face. Two men planted at the foot of a half-collapsed building. Houses without roofs. One lone room for a family of seven as well as their chickens, goat, and dog.

November is not the worst part of the year, far from it. It is neither hot nor cold. Visiting in this season, one can only imagine what life must be like in the summer: living under the burning sun without running water. Looking for water is a primary, daily concern for most people in this northeastern shantytown of close to a million inhabitants. Many suffer from nervous disorders provoked by the high-voltage cables that run above the roofs.
It was dark, completely dark, in the alleys of el-Haggana. The men set up the light. Ihaab, the bride, was at the hairdresser. I could not take any pictures. I only brought a 4x5 inch view camera. It was like a flashback to the early days of photography. I posed the tripod while shaking the dozens of hands held out to me. I took in the groom’s eyes, proud and full of emotion. They posed for four seconds. Click. I savored the privilege to be there among them.

Ihaab and her husband were both born in el-Haggana. Like most of the young people here, they do not intend to leave after getting married because one does not leave one’s own like that. In el-Haggana, people stick together in order to survive. That night, Ihaab’s father used all of his savings to rent the garlands. The young men risked their lives to climb the massive pylons to light the party. The women filled the jerry-cans with water.
Ahmed Ali Abdou, tomb keeper in the City of the Dead.

Ramadan, son of Ahmed Ali Abdou, is a worker in marble. He receives orders from foreigners in the City. He gives the money to his father for electricity and food.

THE CITY OF THE DEAD
The City of the Dead is a vast “district” in the center of Cairo. It is one of the oldest Muslim cemeteries in the city. Over the centuries, settlements have grown up among sepulchers. The tombs shelter the poorest city dwellers and new arrivals from the country.

Originally from the South of the country, Ahmed Ali Abdou lives in the City of the Dead with his wife and their four children. For the last four years, Ahmed has maintained the tombs of a Cairo family in exchange for a single room in which to live, at most 160 square feet. Ahmed talks about the insecurity of his situation: the other family can at any time change its mind and demand that they leave. Housing outside the City would cost 300 Egyptian pounds (about $50), which he and his family cannot afford.
ARAB ABU SAEDA
About 25 miles from the city-center lies Arab Abu Saeda and its dozens of brick factories where 5,200 children work 12-hour days. They come mostly from Cairo’s shantytowns, and sometimes from the countryside.

The majority of them are barely 10 years old. At night, they sleep in dormitories among the adult workers. It is just a few steps from the City of the Dead. The residents, all originally from the surrounding shantytowns, work in this traditional tile manufacturing plant.

Abdel, age 12, is one of over 5,000 children from Cairo’s shantytowns who put in 12-hour days as workers in the brick factories of Arab Abu Saeda. He earns $14 a week to provide for his family who lives in one of Cairo’s shantytowns.
Nigeria is one of the main oil producers in Africa. This fossil fuel attracts a number of foreign investors—petroleum companies, banks, and telecommunication firms—whose presence in the country, and in particular in Lagos, has heightened tensions and increased real estate speculation. Today the megalopolis has more than 10 million inhabitants and its population increases each year as people come from the rest of the country or from bordering countries in the hope of finding work. They pack themselves in, mainly in the shantytowns, condemned to live in terrible conditions and to be permanently marginalized.

As the greed of the real estate developers leads to a constant search for even the tiniest piece of land or house to seize, the shantytowns have become the prime target of speculators who evict the inhabitants, renovate and resell the buildings to businesses which open in Lagos. They exploit the inefficient legislation and policies as well as the people’s ignorance of their rights. In the last few years, several large-scale operations, sometimes presented as “clean-up operations,” have led to massive evictions. In 2005, a three-day operation led to the eviction of nearly 3,000 residents of Makoko, one of the largest slums in Lagos. To this day, no plan for relocation has been proposed to those who have left and who are overwhelming the surrounding neighborhoods. These large-scale evictions are frequent; in one estimate, around 1.2 million people have been subjected to this type of operation in Nigeria in the last century.

Now that the poor have been forced out, it is one of the most elite areas for realtors and a symbol of the city’s expansion. The luxury hotel being constructed here will accommodate foreigners working in the thriving oil sector. Most of these undertakings occur without regard for the law and are accompanied by excessive force. In particular, the victimized populations are rarely offered fair compensation or housing, both of which they have the right to demand from the authorities. Trapped in this vicious cycle, the populations of some slums are expelled, relocated, and expelled again. However, the mobilization of NGOs in the area can be effective. Organizations such as SERAC (Social and Economic Rights Action Center), allow people access to the law. Supported by the international community, NGOs are the people’s only possible recourse and defense today. Requiring authorities to respect national and international responsibilities is a priority in fighting these evictions and in ensuring compensation. It is essential for the authorities to take sustainable, long-term measures to protect and guarantee the people’s right to housing.
The evicted people of Lagos
This house is not for sale!

The alley is vile. The odor is unbearable. The spongy ground is made of feces and trash that have washed up from everyone living in the lagoon. Thousands of families cram in and live on their own waste, between chronic illness and unemployment.

We’re in Makoko, the largest slum in Lagos, constructed between land and sea on one of the capital’s peninsulas. This daily violence, sometimes more difficult to accept than that of an open conflict, is the consequence of a harsh economic reality, corruption, and indifference.

And yet this hell on earth is worth gold: twenty years ago, a couple miles away, a similar shantytown, Maroko, was destroyed and evacuated, forcing thousands of people to flee without anywhere to go. Today at the site of that former slum, there is a mall, some banks, a go-kart track, the headquarters of several foreign companies attracted by Nigerian oil, and the frameworks of the many luxury hotels being constructed for businessmen.

In this big city where demographic tensions run high, the presence of a shantytown like Makoko that covers dozens of square miles represents economic non-sense for real estate developers. The double digit economic growth of these past few years thinly veils a social disaster. The millions of people who dwell in the slums are outcasts from developmental policies, and harbor resentment against the state. Their anger explodes when the state evicts them from their makeshift lodgings in order to seize the land.

For many years, Maroko was one of the biggest slums of Lagos. In the 1990s the authorities allowed a massive expulsion of the majority of its inhabitants, disregarding their rights, in order to make room for enormous construction projects. Today it’s one of the most elite areas for realtors and a symbol of the city’s expansion that only benefits a few.

The Ocean Wind Project is being built on the land of a shantytown which was evacuated in order to make room for the luxury hotel complex that the city needs to accommodate foreigners who work in the oil sector.
Without offering alternate housing, without considering the people living in poverty, and by disregarding the most basic rights of the shantytown residents, the Nigerian government is endangering the country’s future. Living in Lagos today is to witness the beginning and the end of a civilization. One comes across vestiges of a once utopian place where freedoms have been replaced by inequalities. One is sickened by the economic turmoil of a society that becomes more selfish and hostile with each passing day.

Driving in Lagos, one passes by slums like Makoko and then ends up at Festac Town. It’s hardly six miles from the city-center, but three hours by public transportation. This model city, constructed in the beginning of the 1970s during the height of a dramatic Pan-African movement, has not had electricity or running water for a long time. The city has been allowed to fall into disrepair. While the state tries to collect the rent that the inhabitants refuse to pay, the inhabitants criticize the state for its lack of involvement and the lack of upkeep. Isolated from the city center, without help, the denizens of Festac Town are forced to be self-sufficient.

Surviving in Lagos could also mean living in Jakonde. There is water everywhere. The water is stagnant, green, and foul smelling. It inundates the city every rainy season, making the latrines overflow and forcing the residents to wear plastic boots or to construct footbridges. Jakonde is where the inhabitants of Maroko ended up twenty years ago, after having been evicted from their own shantytown.

On this nonviable land that was abandoned by a real estate developer who went bankrupt, the former residents of Maroko formed an association where they continued in vain their battle for decent housing. But today, Jakonde is surrounded by guarded housing developments that are reserved for the Nigerian middle class. The land went up in value.

Soon, they will have to construct a mall, some banks, and a go-kart track.
Residential neighborhood, Makoko, Lagos.

Makoko is one of the largest shantytowns in West Africa. Each year the number of inhabitants grows and the people cram themselves into unsanitary housing. However, because of its location and its condition, this land is coveted by realtors. Evictions are beginning, without guarantees of relocation.
Built in 1977 for the FESTAC (Festival for Black Arts and Culture), this area was at the time supposed to be a symbol of modernity. Today it’s a peripheral neighborhood—situated two hours from the city—that is crumbling before our eyes. The infrastructure is falling apart. Its many inhabitants—cast out of society—have had to resort to an economy of survival. Garbage is no longer picked up, a sign of the neighborhood’s deterioration and the neglect that the residents live in. The authorities are doing nothing to remedy the situation. In spite of its poor state and lack of services, this neighborhood houses a large population.
Ahmed, water-seller, serves the people of FESTAC town. This once “modern” neighborhood no longer has electricity or running water.

In order to avoid illegal—but nevertheless frequent—re-sales by their tenants, landlords write on the houses. This house is not for sale. Such measures are meant to deter real estate developers.
Everywhere in Lagos new real estate projects are flourishing on the sites of former shantytowns. Only the wealthy have access to these lodgings. The overwhelming majority of people are subjected to real estate speculation and are regularly evicted from the slums without compensation.

This juxtaposition of a working man holding a shovel in front of a large corporate building captures the growing disparity between rich and poor in Lagos. Behind him towers the headquarters of Mike Adenuga, a giant in the telecommunications and real estate business. The vitality of those sectors is directly linked to the oil business. Oil is the country’s wealth, but only a small part of the population profits from it.
JAKONDE
This neighborhood houses some of the former inhabitants of Maroko who found refuge here after the wave of evictions in the 1990s. The housing is not inhabitable because of the frequent floods. However, it’s also one of the areas that attract developers.
Boy with soccer ball in Jakonde.

Laundry on clothesline at a home in Jakonde.
Today, the Roma make up between 2 and 10% of the population of Macedonia, where they have been present since the sixteenth century. The obstacles that this minority faces in obtaining legal and administrative recognition make it difficult to estimate their numbers with precision. The Roma community has forever been stigmatized by the rest of society because of its lifestyle. Lacking legal status has in turn made the Roma vulnerable to violations of their fundamental rights. Until the authorities take adequate measures in their defence, and popular sentiments change, the Roma are condemned to remain second-class citizens.

Even if they seem to be better off than those who live in other countries of the former Yugoslavia, the Roma of Macedonia continue to be ostracized by society and the state. The attitude of the authorities, who do nothing to fight this discrimination, strongly reinforces their marginalization. The Roma today are among the poorest in the country and their economic uncertainty is reinforced by their absence of legal recognition. Obtaining nationality resembles an assault course. Most of the Roma struggle to get the birth certificates they need to get identity papers because they cost money. These papers, however, are essential for accessing numerous fundamental rights. Thus, it is particularly difficult for the Roma to send their children to school even though education is a key element of integration. Those who do manage to go to school often have a hard time getting diplomas because they do not have identity papers. Further, quitting after primary school is common: the children’s labor allows their families to survive.

Because the Roma community has a hard time organizing to assert its rights, international pressure is crucial. As a candidate for European integration, Macedonia has been criticized many times for its treatment of the Roma, as in the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and in several United Nations reports.

The few Macedonian initiatives taken in return, such as those which constitute the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” – an official campaign launched in 2005 which was supposed to attract attention to the problems of the Roma and their community – are of little consequence. Increasing mobilization in order to make people recognize the Roma’s right to be full citizens remains imperative.
Somewhere in the Outskirts of Skopje

Like every day since my arrival, I pick up Sarita1 at her house. Sitting in the back of a taxi, we travel three quarters of an hour under relentless rain.

The car finally stops. We are in the middle of a vegetable field. Up ahead, a path potholed by agricultural machinery. A little worse for the wear, we bump along through water-filled ruts.

Several hundred yards from us, I can make out through the curtain of rain a very small house next to the path. In another time and place, this could have seemed bucolic. Today, it is anything but.

After a few minutes’ walk under the torrential rain, we arrive drenched. Despite the mud covering our pants, Albert welcomes us with kindness and strong coffee. He lives in this little cinderblock house with a sheet metal roof with his wife Lola and their four young children. Although his wife considers them blessed because they live in what she calls, “a real house built by my husband,” their daily life is not really better than that of other families I have met since my arrival. Like many other Roma, they share with me their struggles to live in a society that rejects them.


In 1998, Mefail was in a bar where a wedding was taking place when a confrontation exploded outside between some guests and the authorities. A policeman accompanied by plain-clothes men appeared suddenly and beat up all of the guests. “I wanted to call the police, but I got hit really hard on the head. They kicked me, handcuffed me and then took me to the police station in a police car. Next, they beat me until I lost consciousness. They sprayed me with water so that I came to, then beat me again, more than 15 times in a row. When they thought I was dead, they called for a doctor. I heard him say, ‘This guy’s not for me, but for the hospital.’” I didn’t have any reflexes left. When the policeman who was hit at the bar arrived, he recognized that I wasn’t the one who hit him. He offered me a cup of coffee. Chëp’s hospital did not want to do an official medical exam for me. I had to go to Skopje to get one.

To this day, my back aches and often, so does my head. I received 3,000 Euros (about $4,250) from the European Court of Justice. This money is nothing compared to what I went through.”

1 Of Roma origin, Sarita directs a small local NGO, LIL, which provides aid to many needy Roma.
After the coffee ritual, interview and portrait, Sarita leaves me alone and launches into a lively chat with Lola. The rain is banging on the sheet metal above our heads. While left to myself, I think back over some of the testimonies I’ve heard since my arrival.

“Sometimes I would rather not open my eyes, so I could avoid seeing all the problems that I face day after day.”

“I am sad because I don’t see any possible future. I only think about buying food for my kids.”

“Too often, I go to bed on an empty stomach.”

“My husband is in prison. I am raising my four kids alone. They are not ‘registered.’”

“I can’t get any help. My life is a true catastrophe.”

“I am so afraid to return to Kosovo. Everybody took their families and ran away. I don’t know what became of my brother and sister.”

“The police beat me like a dog. I don’t want to stay in this country anymore. I only think of getting away from this hell. Every day, we are humiliated.”

“Our children don’t go to school. They need clothes and food to be like the others. We can’t afford that, so they don’t go.”

“Our husbands drink because they can’t dream of having a better life. It is true that alcohol makes them violent, but it’s this apartheid society that makes it that way!”

“We don’t have water or electricity. We live like animals. What good is it to live in these conditions?”

---


They are both Macedonians. Idzabi was born in this courtyard. Officially married for two years, they have three children. They receive 80 Euros (about $113) in social aid. By picking up plastic bottles and trash, Idzabi earns around 40 Euros (about $56) per month. They don’t want any more children because they are too poor to support them. Plastic, collected and resold, has become the primary financial resource of many Roma families in Macedonia. These families are worried at the prospect that government might demand a garbage sorting system for ecological reasons. If the system is put in place, what will they do to survive?
Facing me, there is a small, white-curtained sideboard next to a Formica cupboard. A mute TV is set on a small table covered with a large, light veil. Above the cupboard, beside a vase of yellow plastic flowers, there is a little red Formula 1 race car with a missing back wheel. To my left, the mother nurses her youngest child. Her oldest son plays on a rug on the floor. To my right, her husband and another man are sitting on a couch, chatting and sharing a beer from the same bottle. On the back of the couch I’m sitting on, there are three pairs of new, clear plastic sandals and dark-colored children’s clothes. Behind me there are new children’s clothes hanging from the wall. Above the TV, there is a big calendar with some scantily clad women, and some framed landscape pictures. Everything is very clean.

The man who is talking to Albert stares at me. His gaze is clear and intense. Unable to talk, we look at each other. Time is suspended. He smiles at me, turns to Albert, and resumes his conversation.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS JOLY


The oldest of six siblings, Brenda was raped by a family friend. He is in prison. She fears that he will get out quickly and return for revenge. Originally from Kosovo, her family fled the country during the war of 1998 without a single document. As refugees they benefit from the aid of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees). “We are illiterate. We only speak Romani. It’s an obstacle to leaving this place. We will never return to Kosovo. We suffered too much there.” Her mother spends all of her time at the house with the children; they don’t go to school. Her father sometimes finds work in manual labor. Their living situation is extremely precarious. There is just a television and some floor rugs in this hovel; some of the windows don’t even have any glass. They live in Shutka, the biggest Roma district in Europe.

Mejrem lives alone with her two children. “I have been separated for a long time. I had problems with my husband (of an unregistered marriage). He was violent and went with other women. I left him.” She doesn’t receive any social aid. “My two children are in the process of getting registered. I’m waiting for their birth certificates; with them, I will be able to obtain social aid for the first time.” To survive, she collects and resells plastic.


Following an identity check, Subihan, who didn’t have his papers on him, was brought to the police station. “Beaten for 24 hours by five cops, I couldn’t think anymore, I was in such pain.” His father Bajlam continues: “From the police chief’s office, I heard my son yelling in the next room but I couldn’t do anything. Even dogs are treated better than that. Here we are nothing. Unlike Skopje, in this city there is only one Roma representative on the municipal council. What can we do? Nothing, absolutely nothing! I couldn’t even afford to pay a doctor to do a medical report.” For ten years, Bajlam has raised his four children alone. He receives around 25 Euros (about $35) per month from the social center, and he does odd jobs in order to buy food for his family.

Imerovska was born in Bitola. Her house burned down in December 2007. “Everything was destroyed. In a few hours, I had nothing left. Nothing remained but ashes. For six months, without a roof, I slept every night from pillar to post, with family.” Today, with the help of a Roma association and the support of the city council, she will be allowed to squat in an apartment, or at least what is left of it, for one year.

Makber is the mother of seven children, ages 4 to 21. Not one of them was able to finish school. The oldest works illegally for a metal recycling company. Her husband and other sons pick up plastic.

Her family lives in a difficult social situation, with 120 Euros (about $170) per month.


Not yet married, Vejsel lives alone, not far from his two brothers, and survives by picking up plastic, old papers and boxes.

"Here, everyone fends for himself. I earn about 60 Euros (about $85) per month. Sometimes, I go to bed on an empty stomach hoping that the next day, I will be able to earn enough to eat."

Born in Italy, Kes arrived in Macedonia at age 10 without a birth certificate. Since he has no nationality and no home, he sleeps in a tent with six members of his family. In the city-center of the Macedonian capital, he cleans windshields to survive.


Like Mefail Asanovski, Purmiseva endured violence from the Chisp police. "The police entered the bar. I had my oldest son in my arms. They took me by the hair and hit me with a club. They hit me in the stomach even though I was seven months pregnant. I feared for my baby. My water broke. Abdi was born with only two phalanges on three of his fingers. I'm convinced that it is a result of the beating. I am afraid to remember all of that violence." Purmiseva is one of five people who obtained 3,000 Euros (about $4,250) from bringing their issue to the European Court of Justice.
DIGNITY Bios

PHILIPPE BRAULT. Brault works on violence as it is involved in the civil and environmental consequences of political conflict. His exhibits include “La Mémoire serbe du Kosovo” (2008) and “Scènes de crimes à Guatemala City” (2008). He has published series in newspapers such as Le Monde, Libération, and Télérama in France, and English-language publications such as Time and Vanity Fair. In 2010, he created a documentary for the French channel Arte, “Prison Valley; L’industrie de la prison.”

GUILLAUME HERBAUT. Herbaut has received numerous awards for his work, including the Lauréat of the Fondation de France (1999), the Lucien Hervé prize (2004), and he took second place in the World Press Photo competition of 2009 (division « contemporary issue »). His work, “Tchernobylsty” won the Kodak prize for photographic criticism in 2001, and the Fuji prize of 2004. Other works include “Oswiecim” (2005) and a project on the consequences of the bombing in Nagasaki. His work has been exhibited in France, Spain, and the USA (Gallery Silverstein, NY).

JEAN-FRANÇOIS JOLY. Joly has won the Alpa prize from the city of Vevey and a fellowship from the Grand-duchy of Luxemburg for works such as “Naufragés” and “Roms,” both of which focus on people who live on the margins of society. He has published two books, Naufragés de la ville (1994) and Résonances (2005), and exhibits his work regularly in France and abroad.

JOHANN ROUSSELOT. A photojournalist and an author, Rousselot’s work is frequently published in newspapers such as Le Monde and Le Courrier International in France, El Pais (Spain) and Newsweek (USA). Some of his work has been published in books such as India Now (2007) and This Day of Change: Kodansha’s 100th Anniversary Photo Book Project (2009). He received the Kodak prize (2003) for a series entitled “Balkans: Les Belles, la bête.”

MICHAËL ZUMSTEIN. Zumstein works on conflicts in Africa and the relations between Africa and the West, with a special focus on human rights, ecology, and the consequences of the global economy. His work has exposed abusive situations endured by miners of the coltan mines (the Democratic Republic of the Congo), and the pollution caused by mining for the minerals used in manufacturing computer technology. He was hired by Le Monde in 2007 to cover the presidential campaign, and follows French news for several newspapers at present. He also holds photographic workshops in Africa for World Press Photo.

The DIGNITY team would like to thank Prof. Esther Duflo for her preface. 

ESTHER DUFLO is the Abdul Latif Jameel Professor of Poverty Alleviation and Development Economics in the Department of Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a founder and director of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), a research network specializing in randomized evaluations of social programs. Her research focuses on microeconomic issues in developing countries, including household behavior, education, access to finance, health and policy evaluation. Duflo has received numerous academic honors and prizes including the David N. Kershaw Award (2011), the CNRS Médaille de L’Innovation (2011), the John Bates Clark Medal (2010), and a MacArthur Fellowship (2009). In 2008-2009 she was the inaugural holder of the international chair “Knowledge Against Poverty” at the Collège de France. Duflo and fellow Professor Abhijit Banerjee released their book, Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty in the spring of 2011. Duflo currently serves as the founding editor of the journal AEJ: Applied Economics.

JULIA V. DOUTHWAITE is professor of French and Francophone studies at the University of Notre Dame. She is coordinating the launch of the Amnesty International DIGNITY exhibit touring the United States, beginning with its début this month at the Snite Museum of Art. Her most recent book is The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Lost Chapters from Revolutionary France (forthcoming, University of Chicago Press, 2012). Following the “Rousseau 2012 / DIGNITY” series of events, Douthwaite plans to edit a book entitled Art in the Service of Humanity: Rousseau and DIGNITY for the University of Notre Dame Press.