

PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

Vol. 3, Issue 2
August 2010

Another Global Village

Author: Russell Vandembroucke
University of Louisville
E-mail: r.vandembroucke@louisville.edu

ANOTHER GLOBAL VILLAGE

“Hello” smiling children chime,
Tiny hands waving rhythmically to welcome
Chatty visitors disgorging from their vans.
Smiling children, naked siblings on their hips,
Scurry after us on bandy legs and flip-flopped feet,
Oblivious to open sewers,
Infants swaddled in cardboard cribs,
And lives that could be, should be, different.

Another continent, another country, another village
Pockmarked by poverty’s familiar signs:
Littered landscapes,
Unruly odors pursuing every stride,
Chickens scratching and mutts scrounging
As women tend kiddies at their doorsteps
While men watch football at corner cafes and nurse their beers.
All the while, smiling children amuse us and one another,
Oblivious of adults’ sad eyes.

Corner shops next door, next door, next door to one another
Scratch out pennies on cool drinks and petrol by the liter.
Waiting to be sold, fish wriggle in tubs, thwacking one another desperately
For what oxygen remains in blackened waters
As flies dodge butchers’ swats with aeronautical deftness,
And protein-hungry buyers ignore the stink.

Entrepreneurs mine main streets elsewhere;
Here, shops float on profits
Slim as maidens' waists.

"Briefing" complete, our delegation reclaims
Its sanctum sanctorum to escape while
Smiling children chime "Goodbye."
Their tiny hands wave rhythmically,
Shrink, then disappear in rearview mirrors
As reflective silence fills the van
Of "experts" slipping from the scene
Of so many crimes against humanity.
Down muddy rutted roads
That keep folk far from ready wages
And hide hamlets here from brokers
(Power brokers who could change this status quo),
The van lurches towards the city comforts
Of a-c and baths in chic hotels.

If socialism doesn't work well enough
And capitalism doesn't work well enough
And government doesn't work well enough
And NGOs don't work well enough,
What works well enough?
What, indeed, works at all?

"The horror, the horror," Mr. Kurtz?
No, the children, the smiling children.