

HNGR News

a publication of the human needs and global resources program at wheaton college



Guest speakers discuss partnership during the symposium panel, "Diets for an Urban Planet: The Challenges of Food Quality, Access and Cost." Pictured L to R: Dr. Paul McNamara (HNGR '82), Tony Escobar of Breakthrough Urban Ministries, and Applied Health Science Professor Susan Vendeland.

HNGR SYMPOSIUM

2011

Creativity and Active Response to Urban Poverty

With one in six people in the world living in slums, one might ask why it took so long for the riots in the Middle East and across the world to finally break out. And what are the rest of the world's slum dwellers waiting for? "When will the urban slum dwellers in Africa have their 'Egypt moment'?" Oya Hazel Gumedede asked. And what creative methods will they employ?

"Egyptians are quite used to expressing themselves through jokes and humor because that was often the only way to express ourselves [during Mubarak's rule]," one Egyptian reported to the New York Times, speaking about the recent revolution in his country. Egyptians used humor as a powerful weapon during February's riots. "There were placards: 'Go, because I need to study,' and 'I'm a dentist here to uproot Mubarak.'"

This year's 2011 HNGR Symposium funded by the John Deere Foundation coincided with historic revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa. Entitled "An Urban Majority: Responses to Deepening Hunger and Poverty in the World's Burgeoning Cities," the symposium gave us a sobering look at the realities of urban life and how those realities may have led to the

unrest we've seen in the news. As protests raged half way around the world, Oya Hazel Gumedede, LL.M., South African social entrepreneur and Director of Ashira Legal Advisors, challenged us to look at the world with fresh eyes from where we are. The title of her plenary speech, "A New Way of Seeing, A New Way of Being, A New Way of Doing," could adequately summarize the symposium events, which made it clear that we must be creative, as the Egyptians were, to help the urban poor.

"The greatest wrestles of human beings, particularly of conscious Christians, are those engaged with God," Oya Hazel stated in the chapel message that began the symposium. She went on to say that our goal is not to win these battles with God, but to lose—one of the many ways she encouraged us to see things in fresh light. With this paradigm, Oya Hazel dismissed questions of theodicy. "Questions about the justice of a so-called loving God in a poverty-stricken world

(Continued on page 2)



Oya Hazel Gumedede, LL.M., Plenary Speaker

April 2011 ed.

symposium 11

(*"Symposium" from previous page...*)



2010 HNGR
Intern Chapel

are completely misplaced and misdirected," she said as she shared stories of pain in her own life journey. "This is how we grow: By being defeated, decisively, by constantly greater things. [...] Christ is wrestling to truly incarnate himself fully within us."

Pastor Luis "Paco" Amador knows the struggles of Christians and the urban church firsthand from years of ministry in the Midwest's largest Mexican immigrant community in Little Village, Chicago. But he believes the Church, through Christ, has the imagination to see and create a better reality in a way that no other community can. In the symposium's first panel, "Urban Identities: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Finding Common Ground," Noah Toly, Director of Urban Studies at Wheaton, Sarah Bagge (HNGR '08 Cambodia), and Dr. Mwenda Ntarangwi, Director of Global Studies at Indiana Wesleyan joined Paco to discuss the paradox of identity found in the city today. "We think of the city as a model of modernity, but it is also a place of pain, unemployment, hunger, and broken networks," said Mwenda. With so much brokenness, it is hard work to imagine healthy communities, much less build them. But Sarah Baggé shared a story of a Cambodian church acting counter-culturally to wash and feed a dying Cambodian man in their community. Together, the panel emphasized that the Church holds power to solve problems in our cities that would otherwise be left unaddressed or, in the case of the Cambodian man, uncared for.

Our second panel on Friday dealt with one of the most basic needs of the urban dwellers—food. The

panel "Diets for an Urban Planet: The Challenges of Food Quality, Access, and Cost," included Associate Professor of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, Paul McNamara (HNGR '83), and Director of Community Relations at Breakthrough Urban Ministries in Chicago, Tony Escobar. The two men mentioned that the riots in Egypt and elsewhere around the world are, on some level, linked to the basic need for affordable, nutritious food. "A hungry man is an angry man," said Paul McNamara, explaining how a lack of resources leads to a survival mindset and drives people to despairing situations. Tony, who manages Breakthrough's Fresh Market food pantry for Chicago residents, explained the quandary of urban food deserts. Those living in food deserts lack the money or the resources to get to a grocery store even two to three miles away.

While these and other problems are feeding the cycle of poverty, there are new projects coming to urban areas where we see creativity at work. Urban community gardens are bringing produce to places that would otherwise have no access to fresh food, and places like Breakthrough Urban Ministries are working hard to change eating habits one mouth at a time. Paul added that, on a larger scale, fair trade among the nations "way dwarfs" aid, and can be used to feed the hungry by creating the jobs they need to pull themselves out of poverty.

In her plenary address Friday evening, symposium guests heard from Oya Hazel for a second time. She outlined reasons we often have trouble finding new paradigms for urban poverty. "We need something dramatic and different," Oya Hazel said. But, she did not lay the blame of these issues with the government or the private sector, academicians or theologians; she put the crisis with the populous. Poverty of bravery (and, I add, poverty of creativity) in people is what leads to the poverty of a society.

Saturday's morning session, "Poverty of Voice, Power of Expression: Creativity as Active Response" gave symposium guests and participants a chance to talk directly about how creativity relates to the situation of the poor. A discussion led by Professor Sharon Coolidge from Wheaton's English department covered both the challenges and the necessity of sharing stories of the poor. Authors Tim Bascom (HNGR '83 Philippines) and Christine Jeske, and returned

(Continued on page 5)

intern insight

We asked the 2011 HNGR interns who lived in an urban or peri-urban environments to reflect creatively on their 6 months living in a city of the Global South. This is what they said:

A city is when taxi drivers provide daily entertainment, conversation, and wisdom. A city is when I have 20 million neighbors. A city is when one can commute by taxi, bus, subway, or on foot--all of which encounter heavy traffic. –Chris Kohlbrenner ♦

A city is when your alarm clock becomes the drum-like beating of a stick on a gas can as the gas-truck drives by your apartment. A city is when the voices of newspaper-hawkers, street vendors, car horns, revving engines, and the whistles of potential public transportation passengers harmonize into the background music of your life. A city is when you hear screams on the street at night, and the last thing you think of doing is leaving the safety of your second-storey apartment to see what the problem is. A city is when you see men high on glue looking through dumpsters for food, recyclables, and more glue. A city is when a 15-year old girl with 3 knife scars on her face, a mom strung out on drugs and a 1-year old baby in need of diapers asking you for money. A city is when the only breath of fresh air within walking distance is the plaza principal, where overly-manicured lawns and gardens provide a tiny bit more oxygen than usual. –Amy Betts ♦

A city is when your snot is black from breathing in pollution. A city is when you're alone in a crowd of people. A city is when you walk fast and act like you know where you're going. A city is when the woman on the street selling apples and oranges out of a grocery cart calls you "Sister" because you wave and say hello every morning even though you look nothing alike. –Hilary Mulhern ♦

A city is when more jobs are available. A city is when everything is convenient. A city is when the food doesn't taste as good because it doesn't come from your own cow or garden and it isn't cooked in a wood-burning stove. –Allison Engel ♦

A city is the sharp juxtaposition of wealth and poverty. A city is when the 'haves' ignore effectively ignore the growing neighborhoods of 'have-nots' around them, while the 'have-nots' do not have the luxury of doing the same to the 'haves.' A city is when you follow aggressive pedestrians, not street signs, if you ever want to cross a street. A city is opportunity, met and unmet. A city is walking in fear of violence and your neighbor. A city is high-end malls next to sprawling slums. A city is when seven year-old street vendors obligatorily sell candies. –Abby Anderson ♦

A city is when you fall asleep to Hindu worship music and wake up to Muslim calls to prayer. –Heather Grose ♦

A city is when an hour commute is considered short. A city is when the rich and the poor are neighbors, but have never interacted. A city is when everyone has moved there for jobs, but there are none available. A city is when people escape violence to violence. A city is when everyone comes from somewhere else. A city is when it's sunny but you can't see the sun. –Catherine Queen ♦

A city is when the pungent scents of garlic and fried fish mix and blend together in the early morning hours. A city is when you search for quiet and find it in the unlikeliest of places. A city is where modernity meets post-colonialism. A city is riddled with pain, aching and groaning for restoration. A city is when a trip to immigration turns into a round the world adventure. A city is when you understand far less than you think you do or sense you should. A city is walking down the street hand in hand, kicking up dust with your sandals. –Sarah Gossman ♦

A city is when compacted colors of painted cement become your daily palette. A city is when your lungs learn to breathe smog and car exhaust. A city is when the sky is the limit yet the shanty slums fall to the ground. –Christine Williams ♦

A city is when...



Lake Ohrid
Pogradec, Albania

HNGR in the Balkans

A Reflection on Radicalism and Imagination from a Host Trip to Albania

Thanks to a long-time supporter of the HNGR Program, I had an opportunity to visit a new HNGR partner organization in Albania called the NEHEMIA Foundation, which has recently been confirmed for a 2011 HNGR placement. NEHEMIA is a well-run organization focusing on education, community and health development, and spiritual renewal in a country that is recovering from 40 years of strictly enforced communist atheism.

After sending our first intern to the Balkan region last year (Kosovo), I was most interested to explore the context's coherence with HNGR's mission, vision, and values. More personally, the trip was also a return to the roots of my own journey through the complex forces and issues that shape our world and our social imaginations. My rather naïve participation in a short-term missions trip in 1999—delivering relief supplies to refugees of the Bosnian war—left me with many questions about the region's complexities: How could so-called Serbian Orthodox Christians massacre Bosnian Muslims? Why did Bosnians love Americans,

especially President Clinton and his foreign policy? How can the scars of history and identity penetrate so deeply that one ethnic group appealed to aggression in the 1990's, another to abuses in 1912, and then another to atrocities in the 16th century? Who is in the right? What is justice? Where is healing and reconciliation?

Needless to say, the answers are slow in coming. Albania is a bridge between West and East, North and South. Although it is part of a region where the fusion of religious and national identities has led to intractable conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Albania stands out as a place of generally peaceful coexistence between Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics, and now Evangelicals. Proud Albanians recount the fact that, after Nazi control during World War II, Albania was the only country in Europe that had a larger Jewish population after the war than before it. However, maintaining such coexistence may be one of its greatest challenges in a context of increasing radicalism and an influx of financing from the Muslim East and the secular West.

Another challenge Albania faces might be summed up like this: during communism everyone was equally poor and destitute, but now during capitalism there is increasing disparity and social division. I heard some version of this account several times during my visit. Many of the Albanians I met were both proud of being Albanian and yet very dissatisfied with the state of their country and politics. Many young and educated Albanians migrate for work elsewhere because the country's future is uncertain.

(Continued on page 5)



Ryan Juskus,
HNGR Assistant
Director with
Herolinda
Shkullaku,
Director of
Nehemia National
Center

("Balkans" continued from page 4)

In this context, NEHEMIA stands out as a hopeful, forward-oriented organization with a vision for social transformation through strengthening Albanian leadership and values. For instance, they recently inaugurated a university whose first degree is in socially conscious business administration. When I asked my host from NEHEMIA about the fall of communism and her experience of it, she contrasted two narratives: the official communist narrative that portrayed little Albania as a beacon of light to the world versus her Christian narrative that opened up new and fresh interpretations of her role as an ambassador of the Kingdom of God in the world. For instance, Albanians take pride in their unique language and their levels of education

among women, two victories claimed by the communist regime. However, she said, the untold story is that it was Christians who first legitimated Albanian language in schools and educated women as an outgrowth of their faithfulness to God's transformative work in the world. This happened long before the era of communism.

This contrast between the "official story" and the "fuller story" is a reminder to me that imaginative engagement with our world, shaped by the narrative of God's reconciling and redemptive work, is more radical than any political ideology. In the end, my visit to Albania solidified that this is exactly the sort of context where HNGR should be involved. ♦

--by Ryan Juskus, HNGR Assistant Director

("Symposium" continued from page 2)



Gumede for our final symposium panel, "What Lies Ahead: Innovative Solutions for 21st Century Cities." The panelists spent the hour discussing many under-utilized tools for poverty-alleviation, including technology, business, human assets, and banking, and left symposium guests hopeful that there are methods of development

"What Lies Ahead" symposium panel. L to R: Oya Hazel Gumede, LL.M., Kyle Dechant (HNGR '08), Professor Norm Ewert, Annsley Scruton-Wilson (HNGR '04), Professor Noah Toly, Director of Urban Studies.

HNGR intern Hilary Mulhern (South Africa '10) spoke about the "behind the scenes" work that goes into sharing the stories they write and doing justice to the people whose stories they tell. The panel emphasized the healing effects of writing both for themselves and those they write about, and encouraged others to find more ways to speak about poverty and exhort our communities through the creative arts.

Bill Emerson Hunger Fellow Kyle Dechant (HNGR '08), Wheaton Associate Professor of Economics Norm Ewert, and Opportunity International Program Manager Annsley Scruton-Wilson (HNGR '04), joined Oya Hazel

that have yet to be fully explored.

Now, more than a month following the symposium, many of the riots in the Middle East and North Africa have died down, and, in places such as Egypt, humor has waned. The wearisome work of government reform and social change has begun. "No one is joking," the Times quotes a Cairo taxi driver saying. In these times when even the bravest citizens can no longer respond creatively, it is the church that can and must continue to imagine healthier communities and build a better life for the urban poor. ♦

--by Christy Schweigert, Research & Program Asst.

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HNGR Work & Study Directory

As part of our HNGR "Next Steps" Project, we are working to compile a list of organizations, companies, fellowships, and graduate programs for graduating interns and alumni to reference. If you have not yet done so, please send us some information on any HNGR-congruent organizations, companies, fellowships, or graduate programs that you have been involved in since graduation. Our goal is to facilitate connections between you as alumni and the good projects, programs, and opportunities available around the world. Please send any recommendations and your contact information to [hngnr@wheaton.edu](mailto:hngr@wheaton.edu). ♦

Your submissions are greatly appreciated by the HNGR community!

HNGR Reunion at the HNGR Director's house during 2011 Symposium weekend.

Top row, L to R: Ryan Metcalf '07, Kate Johnson Metcalf HNGR '07, Katherine Jaeger HNGR '07, Ashley Bergh HNGR '07, Paul Robinson. Bottom row: Melissa Smigelsky HNGR '07, Dustin Choate HNGR '07, Laura Eppler '05 and guest Joel, Margie Robinson



HNGR class of '99 get-together in Washington, DC. L to R: Lacey (Johnson) Wrubel (Nicaragua), Rebecca Heidkamp (Honduras), Rachel (Tripp) Rodriguez (South Africa), and Kristalyn Omland (South Africa).