Return on Love: How Social Enterprises Heal After Tragedy

By Trevor Greene

Dedicated to the innocent citizens of Gaza, who are dying in droves because of the evil amorality of the Islamic terrorist group Hamas

Rwanda; Healing Horrific Wounds with Essential Oil

Despite our lofty perch at the apex of the food chain and possession of the most sophisticated brain in the animal kingdom, we humans have persisted since we walked out of Africa on our hind legs in tearing each other's throats out in the name of our gods, our causes, our treasure. This has caused profoundly tragic events to occur in many countries with such violence that they have cleaved the national narrative into the 'before' and 'after.' September 11th is one such date. One hundred days between April and July 1994 mark the end of the innocence in Rwanda. On April 7, 1994, the dominant Hutus of Rwanda started methodically slaughtering the Tutsi minority in a frenzy of violence in which close to a million people were brutally butchered in the most intense genocide in history. Tensions had been high between the two tribes since the Belgian colonial era, when the ruling Belgians empowered the Tutsi aristocracy, and humiliated the Hutus by relegating them to second-class status. The Belgians believed that the minority Tutsis were racially superior to the Hutus because the Tutsis had "more European" features. Rwanda gained independence in 1962 but not before the Belgians, with breathtaking colonial arrogance, reversed their favoritism, encouraging the Hutu to rise up in the name of democracy, causing widespread violence. In 1990, civil war began with the invasion of the Tutsi-led rebel force, Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a paramilitary unit of Tutsis who had been exiled in Uganda. A ceasefire was negotiated in early 1991 and the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), under the command of Canadian Brigadier General Romeo Dallaire, was established on October 5th, 1993 to monitor the ceasefire. A scathing 1999 report by Human Rights Watch chronicled the bureaucratic incompetence that doomed the mission from the start; "Administrative bungling and reluctance to spend money had left the force ill-prepared to deal with any crisis. It had food for less than two weeks, drinking water in some posts for only one or two days, and fuel for two to three days. It was critically short of ammunition and

medical supplies. Its few armoured personnel carriers, inherited from peacekeeping operations elsewhere, were in such poor condition that often only one or two were functioning at any given time." The timing of the genocide couldn't have been worse for international enthusiasm to participate in peacekeeping operations in Africa. In October 1993, an American special operations team launched an ill-fated raid on Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, to capture or kill the ruthless military dictator, Muhammad Siad Barre. Two Black Hawk helicopters were shot down and 18 Americans, two UN peacekeepers and hundreds of Somali citizens were killed. President Bill Clinton was in office at the time and weathered heavy criticism for the incident. In 1998, Clinton visited Rwanda and met genocide survivors in Kigali and admitted, "we did not act quickly enough after the killing began."

An experienced but disheartened Canadian UN peacekeeper explained to a journalist why UN missions go so wrong; "No clear sense of purpose, muddled and contradictory goals and objectives crafted by amateurs, implemented by incompetents and defended by bureaucrats whose sole purpose in life is to move up the food chain." In addition to lacking supplies and competent senior civilian leaders who actually gave a shit, UNAMIR was short on experienced troops, a troubling shortfall that Dallaire pointed out constantly to New York to no avail. The mainstay of the force in Kigali was the 440-man Belgian contingent of elite paratroopers. On January 11th, Dallaire got a bone-chilling tip from an informant he'd been cultivating. Jean-Pierre Abubakar Turatsinze, a top-level trainer for a Hutu militia group, told him of a plan drawn up by the Hutu regime to provoke a civil war and, as part of that plan, Belgian troops, who formed the backbone of the U.N. force, "were to be provoked and if Belgian soldiers resorted to force a number of them were to be killed and thus guarantee Belgian withdrawal from Rwanda." On April 6th 1994, a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana was shot down, creating a pretext for the Hutu militia to seize control of the state and begin the slaughter

they had so meticulously planned. Dallaire feared Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, a Hutu moderate, was in danger. He gave orders at 2 a.m. on April 7th to a 10-man Belgian patrol under the command of 29-year old Lieutenant Thierry Lotin to escort Uwilingiyimana to the radio station to deliver an address calling for calm. But when the Belgians arrived, they faced a large force of Hutu militia who disarmed them and took the soldiers to a base nearby and started beating them. Lotin frantically contacted his battalion commander, Lt. Col. Jo Dewez. "We've been disarmed and taken I don't know where. Two of my men are being beaten. Colonel, they're going to lynch us!"

Dewez responded by asking if he "wasn't overreacting."

Lotin somehow got beyond the casual disdain of the response from his immediate superior and came to grips with the realization that the man who had ordered him and his troops out to the sharp end in the middle of the night wasn't grabbing his weapon, spooling up the Quick Reaction Force and leading them to their rescue. Lotin led his surviving soldiers to a nearby building, where they barricaded themselves in a room. A Rwandan soldier tried to break into the room but Lotin killed him with a pistol he had kept hidden and grabbed the soldier's AK-47 rifle. The Belgians held out with those two weapons for three hours, when grenades dropped into the room through the roof wiped out the paratroopers, whose bodies were brutally mutilated. Two weeks later, Belgium called its troops home, triggering the collapse of the U.N. mission.

The next morning, April 7th 1994, roadblocks were set up around the capital, Kigali. Hutu militia took over radio stations and newspapers to disseminate hate propaganda, urging people to "weed out the cockroaches"—code for "kill the Tutsis." Opposition leaders were murdered and soldiers and militia were sent throughout the country to carry out waves of killings. Thousands of ordinary people—shopkeepers, teachers and farmers—were encouraged or harassed into joining the killing. Machetes, abundant in the

nation of farmers, were the favoured weapon. In some places, the Hutu militia were transported in from other regions and, working from carefully prepared lists, swept through neighbourhoods butchering Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

The Tutsi rebel group Rwandan Patriotic Front [RPF] finally ended the genocide by taking the capital on July 21st 1994. The country was devastated; survivors were physically and psychologically shattered. Families were decimated, their homes and communities destroyed and a million people were displaced within the country. A tragic saying soon went viral as the stunned survivors confronted their new normal; condemned to live. The RPF was commanded by Paul Kagame, a Tutsi who had grown up in exile in Uganda and held many senior positions in the Ugandan army. He was elected president of Rwanda in 2003 in a landslide and again in 2010 with 93 percent of the vote. Under Kagame's leadership, there have been an astounding number of reforms that have made Rwanda the envy of developing nations around the world. In 2008, Rwanda became the first nation in the world to elect a majority of women MPs, who make up half the cabinet in Rwanda's parliament. Since 1990, life expectancy has risen from 48 years to 66 and greater access to health services has drastically reduced deaths from malaria. And, according to the 2019 World Bank Doing Business index, Rwanda is the 29th easiest place to do business in the world—the only low-income country in the top 30.

Justice for the unbelievable atrocities committed in the genocide has been meted out with agonizing sluggishness. The UN set up a tribunal to try the most savage perpetrators such as Jean-Paul Akayesu, the first person ever convicted of genocide. In October 1998, he was found guilty of nine counts of crimes again humanity, including the first-ever conviction for rape as a war crime, and will spend the rest of his life rotting in a jail in Mali. Army chief of staff, Theoneste Bagosora, effectively in charge of the soldiers who took part in the massacres, was seen as a key organiser of the genocide and was

sentenced to life in prison. Colonel Aloys Simba was convicted in 2005 of genocide and crimes against humanity and given 25 years for leading Hutu militia in an attack on hundreds of Tutsi taking refuge at Kaduha parish in rural Rwanda, forcing the condemned to dig their own graves. Dominique Ntawukulilyayo, a district administrator, was tried for luring 25,000 Tutsis to a hilltop in the city of Kabuye in western Rwanda with a promise of safety before having them slaughtered. He got 25 years. Hassan Ngeze, publisher of a hateful propagandist newspaper, *Kangura*, which many Rwandans still see as the prime instigator of the genocide, got a life sentence. Incredibly, two Roman Catholic nuns were convicted of collaborating with Hutu militia who slaughtered 7,000 Tutsi refugees hiding at a convent. Sister Gertrude was given a 15-year sentence, while Sister Maria was sentenced to 12 years.

The UN tribunal was based in Tanzania, over 700 kilometres from Rwanda. As a result, its convictions of 93 of the most heinous perpetrators were well out of the public eye in Rwanda. Rwandan courts prosecuted 6,000 lower-echelon thugs, leaving at least 120,000 Rwandans awaiting trial, which would take decades to prosecute. So, a 300-year old justice system known as gacaca, or "justice amongst the grass" was revived. In a gacaca trial, the accused stands outside before a table of elders who act as judges surrounded by the whole village. Gacaca compels the accused to admit and apologise for their crimes, identify their accomplices and show where the bodies are buried. In return, the survivors were expected to offer forgiveness and the courts to impose lesser sentences. The insidious evil being perpetuated all over Rwanda spawned heroism on a grand scale by brave soldiers as well as ordinary people. The Rwanda mission was General Dallaire's first UN peacekeeping command and he was optimistic at the beginning about a relatively straightforward mission. But Dallaire returned from Rwanda deeply scarred and suicidal. When he got the tip on January 11th, 1994 warning of the anti-Tutsi extermination plot, the informant also gave the location of a cache of weapons stockpiled

for a massacre. Dallaire immediately faxed a cable to UN headquarters about his intent to raid the cache. Dallaire was shocked to receive a dismissive response from the then-Head of UN Peacekeeping Operations, Kofi Annan, denying permission to raid the arms cache and to refrain from taking any "course of action that might lead to the use of force and unanticipated repercussions." On April 7th 1994, when the 10 Belgian paratroopers were massacred and Belgium pulled out of the mission, the Security Council responded by slashing General Dallaire's already-understrength force of some 2,500 lightly armed troops to a pitiful, symbolic 270. But after his command was gutted, Dallaire used his remaining forces to defend specific areas where he knew Tutsis would be hiding, directly saving the lives of 32,000 Rwandans.

And there were local heroes waiting in the wings to heal and rebuild their shattered country. Nicholas Hitimana and his wife Elsie fled their village in Southern Rwanda, going into hiding in Kenya for two months with their four-month old son, Jonathan, then making a grueling two-day journey to the southwest border with the Democratic Republic of Congo. The fact that Nicholas was Hutu and Elsie was Tutsi made the journey all that more dangerous. Hitimana earned his bachelor's degree in agronomy in 1989 at the University of Rwanda**.** The next year, he began work on a World Bank agricultural project in south Rwanda. He was heading the project in 1994 when the slaughter started. Elsie and Nicolas had befriended a Scottish woman, Lesley Bilinda, whose husband, a Tutsi, was killed during the genocide. Bilinda had set up an education trust fund in her husband's memory, the Charles Bilinda Trust which helped the family escape and funded Hitimana's education at the University of Edinburgh where he pursued a master's in agriculture development and earned a Ph.D. in 2001. The Hitimana's returned to Rwanda that year to be part of the effort to rebuild and reconcile the violence of the past. Nicholas was working on a USAID agricultural consultancy project in 2002 when he spotted the market potential of essential oils and natural plant products and

began a pilot project which became Ikirezi Natural Products. Ikirezi, which means “precious pearl” in the local dialect, is devoted to maximizing farmers’ profits, improving their livelihoods and empowering them to transform their communities. "Essential oil crops especially geranium and patchouli are very labour intensive and provide well-paid farming jobs to many poor farmers in our production sites," Hitimana says. "They also generate a higher return than the more commonly grown colonial cash crops of tea and coffee. Oils are high-value, non-perishable, export products that bring very high returns from our land." Hitimana explains that a hectare of beans is worth about $2,000 a year, "whereas on the same land, if we grow geranium, the income can reach $6,000 or even $8,000." In 2003, the company began working with genocide victims growing lucrative geranium for essential oil extraction. "At the heart of Ikirezi; there are widows, orphans and very poor people who need an enabling environment to heal, rebuild their lives and break free from the vicious cycle of poverty," says Hitimana. It hasn’t taken long for some of Ikirezi’s farmers to do just that. "Since I've been working here, I've been able to build a house with a tin roof, I can pay for my son's schooling and buy everything I need," says 55-year-old Aysi Chahine, a geranium farmer. Aysi is a 67-year old widow. Tragically, only four of her five children survived the genocide. She has been working at her farm in Southeastern Rwanda for 10 years. She was maimed during the genocide and has the use of only one arm. With the money earned working with Ikirezi, she was able to build a three-room house with a solar energy system as well as buy two plots of farmland. Baako Obote, 45, is a mother of six who joined Ikirezi after losing her teaching job. When Baako and her family arrived at Ikerizi, they were so poor that the company had to give them plastic sheeting for a shelter. She was a hard worker and could soon afford to build a US$700 house also with a solar energy system. When Hitimana discovered in 2006 that some of his farmers’ homes had been destroyed during the genocide, Ikirezi

partnered with an Australian NGO to build a village of 30 homes called Village of Hope for the neediest of the widows and orphans.

Izekiri pioneered the essential oil industry in Rwanda and commands an 85% market share at home, where eucalyptus is the most popular oil. On 25 hectares of plantations Izekiri produces 1,000 kilograms of essential oils derived from patchouli, tagetes, lemon grass, eucalyptus and geraniums. All the oils are certified organic. Hitimana says most buyers value not only the high quality of the oils the Izekiri farmers produce but also appreciate the social dimension of the business that "always seeks to pay top wages to the farmers so that they can regain their lost dignity, value and humanity." Hitimana says faith is at the heart of Ikirezi. "It's my personal Christian faith that pushed me to start a social business to empower widows, orphans and poor people." He says that faith has sustained him through all the challenges of starting and running a business. "I have hope that there is something unique, very special in each person and I have, in a small way, been trying to support the most vulnerable people to become who their Creator meant them to be." Hitimana says the best thing about his job is to witness the joy, the pride, dignity and change that takes place in the lives of widows and adult orphans after earning money farming for Ikirezi. They can finally afford to build their own houses, buy more land, pay their health insurance and send their children to school. "More importantly, they change their status from “needy” people in their community to respected, capable, self-sustaining, hopeful community members who are contributing to the overall development of their villages and their country," he says. "Rwandans are determined to live together as one nation and "not be defined by their tragic past but committed to rebuild a nation where everyone is valued, accepted and lives a dignified life**.**"

Reconstructing a Despised Culture

Like the rest of the ethnic peoples of Southeast Asia, the Rohingya have a rich millennium-old history. Over the years, kingdoms rose and fell, wars were won and lost, and Allah became the one true God in the 4th century when Arab traders on the Silk Road brought Islam to the land which would become modern-day Myanmar, previously known as Burma. In 1824 the British conquered Burma and ruled until 1948. The Rohingya fought for the British in World War II for which they were promised an autonomous homeland while the Burmese majority were allied with the Japanese. For years, the Brits had been up to their old colonial tricks, playing the divide and rule game by favouring the minority Muslims and encouraging farmers from Muslim Bangladesh on the eastern border to settle in Burma, which enflamed tensions with the majority Buddhist population. The father of Burmese independence is a revered general named Aung San. His daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, won the Nobel peace prize in 1991 in the middle of a 15-year house arrest sentence for tirelessly championing democracy against the military dictatorship that had been ruling with an iron fist since 1962. A law was passed in 1982 that excluded the Rohingya from citizenship, even though they had enjoyed equal rights since Burma's independence in 1948. In 2012, the rape and murder of a young Buddhist woman sparked violence between Rohingya and the Myanmar Army which killed hundreds and forced about 140,000 people, mostly Rohingya, to flee their homes. The world looked to Suu Kyi, a staunch opponent of state-sponsored violence, to thunder her outrage at the unconscionable brutality of the regime.

Deafening silence.

Then in 2016 came a cynical Trump-esque defense of the regime, casting the violence as a product of "allegations and counter-allegations." Later in a press conference the Nobel laureate mewed "show me a country without human rights issues." Those "human rights

issues" have deeply shaken hardened war correspondents who have had to confirm reports of Rohingya children being beheaded, young girls gang-raped and civilians being herded into houses then burned alive. Tens of thousands of Rohingya have been slaughtered and close to a million forced to flee to nearby refugee camps in what the United Nations calls the fastest displacement of a people since the Rwanda genocide. These incidents led to the UN calling the Rohingya the most persecuted people in the world. The Myanmar army has made the astounding claim that the Rohingya are inventing the crisis; that they burnt down their own villages, faked massacres and left their own children for dead. Hundreds of villages have been destroyed and thousands killed. Some survivors gathered their meagre possessions and fled to neighbouring Bangladesh across many kilometres of monsoon-soaked land and over treacherously muddy hills. An endless stream of people following an endless stream of mud and water and rain. Some braved a treacherous weeklong journey across the Bay of Bengal to Malaysia in overloaded leaky boats with scant water and food. The boats were operated by merciless human smugglers who just threw the bodies of the dead overboard. A grim milestone was reached in 2018 when the explosive growth of the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh made it the largest in the world, with more than a million people, half of whom are children.

Because a citizenship law passed in 1982 did not include the Rohingya as a national ethnic group, they are not issued national identity cards, which must be carried at all times in Myanmar and are necessary to buy or sell anything, stay overnight with friends or relatives outside the home and apply for government jobs. Over the years, Rohingya refugees have been issued a colourful variety of identity documents which had been passed down through the generations like heirlooms even when they were no longer valid. Nurul Hoque lives in one of southern Bangladesh's sprawling Rohingya refugee camps. In March 2018 he showed the South Asian Post a tattered green card issued to his

grandfather over 50 years ago by the Burmese government. It is carefully preserved in plastic and Hoque sleeps with it under his pillow. Hasina Khatun, 40, reached Bangladesh in 2019 after soldiers burned her house down. The previous year as she watched tensions mounting, Hasina had the presence of mind to bury her fathers' identity card in the kitchen area and badly burned her hands retrieving it from the flames. "I lost my money, but at least I could save the ID cards," she says. "They are more important to us anyway. They show that we were once a part of Myanmar." Gradually through the years, Rohingya ID cards have been declared invalid or confiscated and each new iteration has granted fewer rights and carried more restrictions. An estimated three million Rohingya scattered around the world have no identity and as a result, no access to public services such as hospitals.

Muhammad Noor is a Rohingya refugee and computer genius who is trying to restore the Rohingya cultural identity using cutting-edge digital technology, public broadcasting and sports. Noor was born and raised in Saudi Arabia after his family fled Rakhine State in Myanmar in the 1970s. Noor settled in Malaysia in 2000 and earned an IT degree and became a systems analyst. He went on to earn an advanced diploma in computer science from Cambridge University.

Noor established the Rohingya Project, a grass-roots initiative to give his people a national identity by building a secure and transparent virtual community via blockchain. Blockchain, the technology behind the bitcoin currency, is a digital shared record of transactions maintained by a network of computers on the internet, without the need of a centralized authority.

Rohingya with a "digital ID" would be able to engage in financial transactions and, as important, connect them to the 3.5 million Rohingya scattered around the world. According to Noor, blockchain has the power to give the Rohingya and other stateless

peoples decentralized ownership of their identities, free from any traditional attempts to erase them. “For a lot of people, blockchain is sexy right now,” he says. “For us, it is about survival.” Noor designed the Rohingya Project to “use the ID as a key to empower the Rohingya wherever they may be in the world and create a virtual community that can encourage entrepreneurship and collaboration.” This network of Rohingya businesses would provide job opportunities around the world. “They (Rohingya) feel inferior all the time. Because of the way they’ve been treated. I want to give our community back their pride,” says Noor. “The vision is to make them back into a nation.”

In 2017, Muslim-majority Malaysia welcomed the Rohingya as they fled the bloodbath back home but by 2020 attitudes had hardened towards the refugees. In April of that year, Malaysia formed the National Task Force to turn back the influx of foreigners, implementing immigration clampdowns resulting in the arrest of 2,000 people, including 98 children. Malaysian law prohibits refugees from working, and health services are often prohibitively expensive, forcing many to perform dangerous, back-breaking work for scant wages paid under the table. "They have no legal rights — no right to work, no opportunity for mainstream education, and are obliged to eke out a very difficult living in the grey market economy of the country," said Richard Towle, the UNHCR representative for Malaysia. In 2019, Noor responded by launching the ingenious R-Coin (short for refugee coin) which is used to "pay" refugees to volunteer for tasks such as teaching, counselling, soup kitchens, group cleanups and tree planting. Refugees earn one coin for each hour of community service which can be redeemed for different ‘prizes,’ from Starbucks cards to ATM cards and health insurance. The R-coin has less tangible but critical rewards like developing networks and, critically, building goodwill with Malaysian society.

Fighting Energy Poverty, One Hut at a Time

Most of the millions of rural residents of East Africa will light their homes tonight with dim kerosene lamps. Like last night, the burning fuel will lace the air with toxic particles, which will damage their eyes. Once again, they will inhale the equivalent of two packs of cigarettes and their children will run the risk of being badly burned. But there are a million or so houses and mud huts in the region that are adorned with cutting-edge solar power arrays that keep their living area smoke-free and brightly lit. They are customers of Zola Electric, the world's first pay-as-you-go solar energy provider to East Africa, where one in five people live without electricity. Subscribers simply buy power in allotments of 30 minutes using their mobile phones. Zola is taking advantage of Africa's massive upsurge in mobile phone subscribers; an astounding 1 billion of the continent's 1.2 billion people are now wireless. Zola had to create some innovative solutions to Africa's lack of infrastructure. To deal with the few roads in rural areas, the company puts its reps, known as light riders, on dirt bikes to install and service power systems for its far-flung customers. Zola was founded in 2012 in San Francisco by serial entrepreneurs Erica Mackey and Xavier Helgesen. Helgesen and three classmates cofounded Better World Books after graduating from Notre Dame in 2001 and selling their textbooks online. Their vision is to help fight global literacy by providing donations to non-profit literacy groups all over the world and protect the environment by collecting and reselling books. In 2007, Helgesen went walkabout after visiting a Better World Books literacy project in Malawi and wound up in a fishing village on the shores of Lake Malawi. He was invited to a local family's house for dinner. As he later walked through the dark city streets by the dim light of a kerosene lamp, he realized that the whole community was without electricity. He learned that his hosts relied on dirty, expensive kerosene to light their homes and resolved to do something about it. In 2010, Helgesen won a scholarship to Oxford's Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship for MBA

students seeking “entrepreneurial solutions for urgent social and environmental challenges.” At Oxford, he met Erica Mackey, another serial entrepreneur. Mackey graduated from UCLA with a degree in ecology and evolutionary biology and is fluent in Swahili from a stint with an aid agency in east Africa helping to set up mobile clinics. “Spending time rolling out mobile clinics and training rural health workers, I became curious about what these communities believed were their biggest challenges to development,” she says. Access to electricity topped their list. In 2001, she co-founded GRID Alternatives, the largest non-profit solar installer in the US. Mackey was recognized as a Forbes “30 Under 30” Social Entrepreneur in 2012. Mackey and Helgesen consulted with a renewable energy expert on a business plan that would allow customers to buy their own solar and storage power systems cheaply at their own pace. The founders moved to Tanzania in 2012 after working on the idea for a year at Oxford and raising seed money. They launched a company called Off Grid Electric, the world’s first pay-as-you-go solar energy provider to East Africa. By the end of March 2014, their systems were in use in over 10,000 households, supplying power to over 45,000 people. In 2018, the company was renamed Zola Electric, a play off the Swahili word for solar. Each new Zola customer keeps 140 kilograms of carbon dioxide and over one and a half kilograms of black carbon from being emitted into the atmosphere every year. Diesel generators in Nigeria alone produce millions of tons of carbon dioxide each year – equal to about 6.3 million passenger vehicles. These machines also produce huge amounts of hazardous particulate matter and air pollution on a massive scale. Customers put down about $13 to buy Zola’s cheapest starter kit: a panel, a battery, a few L.E.D. lights, a phone charger and a radio. Then they pay about eight dollars a month for three years, after which they own the system outright. It costs Zola about $100 to install a system. Shortly after beginning operations in Tanzania in 2012, Mackey launched the Zola Academy to recruit and train young East African professionals and place them in solar

jobs. Tanzania is a good example of so-called leapfrog technology; it would cost billions to build traditional energy infrastructure, so its rural citizens simply skip over such old-school solutions to cutting edge; pay-as-you-go solar power. But half the residents of Sub-Saharan Africa lack bank accounts or access to fair credit, which prevents them from borrowing to buy a home or grow their businesses, buy land or invest in their future. But a Zola innovation called the 'Pay-As-You-Go' model bypasses the lack of financial infrastructure; users pay a deposit; Zola installs the power system and the remaining cost is paid over a flexible term. Zola's model, which restores power autonomy to average citizens harkens back to simpler times in Africa, before colonialism encouraged the rise of murderous despots who slaughtered their people and plundered their country. According to historian Dr. Rebecca Shumway, "…during most of Africa's precolonial history, a significant portion of African people lived in small-scale, egalitarian societies in which government was more a matter of consensus among the entire adult population than rule by an elite few." Prior to European colonization, the hundreds of tribes of East Africa more or less got along. "The natives had very little to fight over, and they were more prone to cooperate with and protect each other, " says Africa expert Jonathan Musere. "Their primitive knives and spears were mainly for hunting and protection." In 1870, Europeans controlled less than 10% of Africa. By 1914, they had stolen almost 90%. This became known as the Scramble for Africa when ham-handed colonial administrators comfortably ensconced in the capitals of Europe arbitrarily drew borders on maps with utter disregard for tribal or religious boundaries. In their mad dash to plunder the natural and human resources of the continent, the colonial powers encouraged tribal jealousies as part of a divide-and-rule strategy, usually with tragic results. Inevitably, the colonialists became greedier and began indiscriminately plundering the land and people they'd seized, inciting bloody uprisings the length and breadth of the continent. These rebellions were, of course, brutally put down. In British-controlled

Kenya, the infamous Mau Mau uprising began in 1952 as a reaction to inequalities and injustices that began when British settlers seized fertile farmland in the Kenyan highlands, reducing the Kikuyu farmers to squatters on their own land. Crushing taxes were levied, racist policies enshrined and the people got poorer. Living conditions for Kenyan labourers were deplorable; they were denied proper food and beaten often. A student group called the Mau Mau tried in vain to use peaceful means to gain reforms and freedom. More militant members started to take over and the Mau Mau became a guerilla unit with the primary goal of overthrowing British rule and removing European settlers from the country. In 1952, they opened hostilities by shooting a chief who supported the British regime. The Mau Mau then adopted the tactics of asymmetric warfare; launching hit-and-run attacks at night in poorly defended areas. In 1953, Mau Mau fighters killed a white settler and his family and went on to commit widespread atrocities. Many ordinary Kenyans were rounded up and suffered terribly in concentration camps at the hands of British-led soldiers and were subjected to torture, malnutrition and beatings. Over 11,000 Mau Mau and other rebels were killed, while just 32 white settlers were killed in the eight years of emergency. Jomo Kenyatta, leader of the Kenyan independence movement, was an advocate of nonviolence and had only peripheral involvement with the Mau Mau but was sentenced to nine years of hard labour. After being released in 1961, Kenyatta led negotiations with the British which culminated with independence for Kenya in 1963. The next year, Kenyatta was elected president and went on to become a revered senior statesman for newly independent African nations.

In East Africa, as in many poor areas, women shoulder the huge burden of energy poverty. Women walk long distances every day to gather wood or buy kerosene. Kitchen smoke causes four million deaths per year and is the leading cause of death for women and children under five in the developing world. Zola invests in women entrepreneurs to reach out and empower local women to invest in home solar power systems. Esiankiki

Gift is a 50-year-old Maasai woman from a rural Tanzanian village without electricity. She never attended school, only selling milk, handmade jewelry, tea leaves, and sugar. Her husband abandoned her after their 10th child was born. Previously she used a kerosene lamp for lighting and had to walk three hours round trip each week to purchase fuel from the nearest shop. Since she had a solar array installed, she has been able to devote the three hours a week she had spent walking to buy kerosene to her jewelry business, which has doubled because the better lighting and air quality allows her to work longer. The time she spends milking her cows has also tripled, helping her rise from a break-even weekly income stream to a weekly profit of 15,000 Tanzanian shillings, equivalent to about US$7. Digna Mwanga runs a health clinic in Tanzania's capital, Arusha. She always had to close her doors in the evenings "…when people needed me the most." But getting a Zola system allowed her to keep her doors open longer and treat more patients. Elibarick Mollel is a vendor in the Masai Market, a must-see fixture in the heart of Arusha, that offers a wide range of African souvenirs. "The peak hours for selling art here at the Maasai market have always been early in the morning or at the end of the day," she says. "This used to be a real problem for me – and my fellow shopkeepers – without reliable light we're forced to shut down early. But with my Zola power system, that is no longer a problem." After four years of operation in Tanzania, Zola expanded into Rwanda, Nigeria, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire and is the leading pay-as-you-go provider of solar power to rural East Africa. Zola Electric now has over a million customers who enjoy reliable light and heat and no longer fear the night.

How To Save Your Dying Island

This is a tale of two vastly different islands. One is the poorest country in the western hemisphere and the other a tiny prosperous speck in the north Atlantic. What they have in common is both are recovering from disaster led by a native son and daughter who are enriching the lives of hundreds of fellow islanders by supporting their environmental initiatives to empower them economically.

Saving His Island One Bottle At a Time

There are two places on Earth where the demarcation between countries is visible from space. On the Korean Peninsula, the sheen of prosperous democratic South Korea gives way to the Stygian gloom of the destitute, communist North. And on the Caribbean island of Hispianola, the lush green forest canopy of the Dominican Republic on the eastern half of the island abruptly turns into a blasted heath of dusty beige about three-quarters of the way across. Welcome to Haiti.

Haiti was born out of the only successful slave revolt in history when African slaves overthrew their French masters on the island's sugar plantations in 1804. The slave army was led by Toussaint Louverture, a freed slave who could read French and Latin and taught himself military strategy by reading Julius Caesar's military writings. Haiti's history seems to be a series of painful legacies starting with Louverture's unlikely rise to command a ragtag army of slaves who stunned the world by defeating one of the dominant superpowers of the day. Louverture should have lived out his days in the

country he founded as the world's first black elder statesman. Instead, he was betrayed and confined in a French mountain fortress where he died of pneumonia and starvation in 1803. At its peak in the 1780s, Haiti was known as the Pearl of the Antilles and exported 60% of the coffee and 40% of the sugar consumed in Europe. But over the next five centuries, the so-called "slave republic" would struggle with crippling debt from paying reparations to France, which is rich considering how those vicious colonial overlords mercilessly exploited both the human and the natural bounty of the land. The French overworked and abused hundreds of thousands of slaves brought from Africa to work their coffee and sugarcane plantations. And they destroyed the lush jungle by clearcutting the mountainsides and ruined the fertile soil by planting the same crops year after year. Haiti's proverbs evoke its exhausted legacy of hardship and hunger; "Behind mountains, there are more mountains" and "Hunger is misery; a full stomach is trouble." Haiti has been savaged by countless national disasters, environmental catastrophe, endemic violence and brutal corruption throughout its history. The first act of the modern Haitian national tragedy was the brutal 14-year reign of Francois 'Papa Doc' Duvalier from 1957 until his death in 1971. He established a secret police force called the Tontons Macoutes—a band of homicidal thugs that took its name from a folk bogeyman who devours misbehaving children. Duvalier handed the reins of terror to his chubby 19-year-old son Jean-Claude, who of course came to be known as 'Baby Doc,' who used the Tontons Macoutes to take up the family tradition of terrorizing his country where his father left off. The 29-year nightmare that was the Duvalier dynasty ended with the overthrow of Jean-Claude in 1986. It was rumoured that before they fled, Duvalier and his wife sacrificed two babies at the presidential palace to curse whoever tried to replace them.

Duvalier père et fils were too busy slaughtering their citizens—between 30,000 and 60,000—and looting the treasury to concern themselves with anything so prosaic as good

farming practices. Because wealthier farmers owned most of the land in the valleys, the peasant farmers were forced up the slopes, cutting down trees to clear plots for subsistence crops. As the population grew, the peasants have been steadily forced higher, hacking down the trees which anchor the soil, causing landslides in heavy rains. In 1987, the category 3 Hurricane Emily passed through without loss of life because the heavily forested mountains prevented landslides. But when tropical storm Jeanne struck in 2004, less than 4% of Haiti's forests remained and landslides and flooding killed 3,000.

Charcoal has been the chief source of energy in Haiti for decades, accounting for 85 percent of energy consumption and is one of the main drivers of deforestation. Charbonniers dig a pit in the wet, brown soil and set the trees or stumps ablaze. The burning pile is covered with mud, grass and leaves in a mound from which smoke rises. After about a week, warm, misshapen lumps of charcoal are dug up. Charbonnier Delius Alcius is acutely aware of the tragic irony he is perpetuating; "Cutting trees leads us to more misery. If we didn't have to cut the trees, the soil would be richer here," he says. "But to make money here, you have to take all the wood to make the charcoal." As young people crowded into urban slums, demand for fuel skyrocketed in Port-au-Prince and other large cities, but oil is too expensive for most. And so a vicious circle evolves; as more trees are harvested in rural areas to meet the demands of the cities, ever more young men and women leave the countryside for the city where they are forced to consume charcoal, escalating the nation's deforestation.

Haiti is geologically cursed as a well. It straddles one of the world's most active geological zones, where the deep-water plates of three huge structures relentlessly rub against one another—the intersection of the North American, South American and Caribbean tectonic plates. The 80-million-year-old Caribbean Plate builds up enormous pressure as it grinds eastward at about two centimetres a year against the North American

Plate. On January 12th, 2010, at approximately 16:53 local time that pressure was released about 16 kilometres outside and 10 kilometres under Haiti's capital city, Port-au-Prince. Within hours, 300,000 people died, hundreds of thousands were injured and more than a million people became homeless. A total of $13 billion would pour in from all over the world. Government organizations and NGOs established field operations all over the country and shipped in millions of water bottles which wound up everywhere —in canals, on beaches and lining the streets so deeply that emergency volunteers struggled to find clean areas to place the wounded on the ground. Ordinary Haitians rushed to help, including a 23-year-old university student named Edouard Carrié. “It was terrifying, but the real tragedy was the aftermath,” says Carrié. “Once you realize the impact, you immediately start feeling that need to help others.” In the middle of the tragedy he had an epiphany; those discarded bottles could be transformed from trash into treasure by recycling them. Carrié graduated from the University of Tampa in 2010 with a bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship. He wrangled an internship from a classmate’s father who ran a recycling company in Florida. “There I would spend half the day with the plant manager learning how to run the operation, at the end of the day, I was with the owners networking and learning the in's and outs of the recycling market.” Carrié asked his professors to help create a business plan and founded Environmental Cleaning Solutions S.A (ECSSA) in 2010, with a mission to provide the best recycling product management service in Haiti. Carrié assembled an army of about 1,200 people to collect bottles, a staff of 43 employees as well as 75 “go getters” on contract who help him arrange the collection of plastic from all over Haiti. The bottles are dropped off at one of 100 independently owned collection centres. Collectors become owners by collecting a minimum of 2,500 pounds a month. Nadine Philippe is the mother of six and a collection centre owner in Les Cayes, southwestern Haiti. She lost her husband in the earthquake. Her collection centre supports two full-time employees and 30 bottle

collectors in her neighborhood. Her story is much more than recycled bottles, it's one of women's empowerment. "I am so grateful to what recycling has done in my life. I am an entrepreneur and a good one," she says. Rosette Altidor is a collection centre owner who also lost her husband in the earthquake and ended up living in a tent on the street with her five children. Now, Altidor says, "[This] work … helps me get my children to school and helps me pay for my home. It motivates me to motivate others to collect plastic as well. Everyone can benefit from clean-up work in Haiti." Carrié says collection centre owners Nadine and Rosette are the true heroes of his business, using the ECCSA collection model "to generate revenue that can go towards rent, education for their kids, daily necessities such as food, water, and clothing for the family," he says. "It's important to realize that those revenues are being invested back in the local economy." Some of Rosette and Nadine's plastic is getting new life as office supplies. Since 2017, electronics giant Hewlett Packard has used plastic bottles recycled from Haiti to manufacture ink cartridges. Over the past 19 years, the company has converted about 200 million pounds of plastic into 3.9 billion printer cartridges. HP is taking it a step further by providing the children who collect bottles with educational opportunities, including scholarships, as well as full access to medical care. And they have paid over $2 million for a new plastic washing line in Haiti that cuts out an extra step before the harvested plastic is sent to Montreal, where the ink cartridges are manufactured. The fashion industry is using the bottles gathered by Rosette and Nadine to make clothing, backpacks and sneakers. The bottles are shredded into flakes which are melted down into pellets and extruded into yarn. The yarn, which is 10 times stronger than normal fabric, is then knitted, cut, and sewn into clothing just like any other yarn. Outdoor-wear maker Timberland uses plastic bottles in the manufacture of a collection of footwear, bags, and T-shirts. It takes seven and a half bottles to make their new backpack, which looks like canvas. Using the bottles has allowed Timberland to produce less cotton fibre, reducing water consumption by 115

million litres, avoiding the use of nearly 7 tonnes of pesticides and recycling more than 765,000 plastic bottles. The Converse Chuck Taylor All Star is the original classic canvas basketball shoe that has crossed over into a universal streetwear staple. Converse released a new line of ‘Chucks’ made from 11 recycled plastic bottles in July 2020. In February 2020, Sportswear giant Puma launched a sportswear collection including shoes and apparel made from yarn that is manufactured from plastic bottles. The new line has been estimated to have diverted over 40 tonnes of plastic waste from landfills and oceans, which roughly translates into about 2 million plastic bottles being reused. On Earth Day 2019, well-known fashion house Ralph Lauren launched its ‘Earth Polo,’ a classic polo shirt made from 100 percent recycled plastic bottles. Since its establishment in 2010, Carrié’s ECSSA has removed over 60 million pounds of plastic from Haiti’s streets. Of his many successes, Carrié is proudest of the fact that, “at the age of 25 I had created thousands of indirect jobs.”

After Haiti won independence in 1804, the French demanded an "independence debt" of 150 million gold francs—ten times total annual revenues—to compensate French settlers for their lost plantations. Their nascent economy in tatters, the fledgling nation was forced to borrow heavily from the US to service the debt. When it was finally paid off in 1947, the current value of the loan was over $20 billion. When the French imposed the crippling penalty, Haiti had a large workforce of skilled laborers and thousands of hectares of coffee and sugarcane under cultivation which should have led to a lucrative trading relationship with the US, given the fact that Haiti lies only 730 nautical miles off Florida. But the US didn’t extend diplomatic recognition to Haiti until 1862, 60 years after independence, because the Americans feared—and rightly so—that the millions of slaves being beasted on American plantations would emulate the Haitians and slaughter their former masters. To many outsiders, the quake seemed to sound the death knell for Haiti’s future. Carrié knew that the billions in aid money pouring into the country wasn’t

the solution to rebuilding his country and that most of the money would end up lining the pockets of corrupt officials. He grasped instinctively that the key to recovery wasn't charity but the empowerment of Haiti's vulnerable poor. Carrié's entrepreneurial vision has stretched from plastic bottles on the ground to the sun. "I have started financing lower income households towards solar energy," he says. "Electricity shouldn't be a luxury anymore, it should be available to everyone." Ed Carrié is exactly the sort of social entrepreneur his country needs right now to recover from its latest national tragedy. His business has empowered hundreds of Haitians, who earn a living that supports thousands. A few years after the earthquake shattered Haiti, foreign NGOs began ambitious reforestation programs that are gradually reclaiming the dusty beige countryside. At the same time, Ed Carrié and his army of plastic collectors are earning a living reclaiming the cities and, as important, reclaiming their dignity.

Saving Her Island One Fish at a Time

On a dark day in September 1971, Zita Cobb's father, Lambert, walked into the kitchen after a day on the waters off Newfoundland's Fogo Island, threw a single cod onto the floor and gave up, saying, "well, it's done." The next day he drenched his boat in kerosene and lit a match to it. "My father died a broken-hearted man," Zita says. "But he always told me, 'Remember, it wasn't the fish that let us down.'" Between 1647 and 1750, subsistence fishermen like Lambert caught about eight million tons of cod off Newfoundland, representing about 35 generations of fish. In the 1950s, massive freezer trawlers from Europe started vacuuming cod in their enormous nets. They took just 15 years to catch what the locals had caught in a century, dooming the cod fishery, which was closed in 1992. Like many outports, Fogo just couldn't adapt to the moratorium in time and many families had no choice but to leave the island, including the Cobb family.

Zita was the sixth child and the only girl of seven children born in a 900-square-foot house in Joe Batt's Arm, the largest of 10 small communities on the island. In 1964, she had to spend a year at a tuberculosis sanatorium in St. John's. The island the seven-year old returned to was frozen in time; the Soviet Union had won the space race with the launch of the Sputnik satellite and an American nuclear submarine sailed under the North Pole, but most Fogo Islanders lacked indoor plumbing, phones or electricity. There was no money either. Instead, the local Fishermen's Union Trading Co. store operated on a barter system basis -- customers would receive winter provisions in exchange for their summer's catch of fish. They made everything else.

Zita left the island at 16 to study business at Carleton University because of something her Dad said when she was 10; "You have got to figure out how this money thing works. Cause if you don't, it's gonna eat everything we love." After graduating, she spent six months wandering Africa and then entered the IT world with a fibre optics company. By 2000 Zita was chief financial officer of tech giant JDS Uniphase and the third-highest paid female executive in North America. She cashed out in 2001, exercising stock options worth $69 million, and spent four years sailing the world on her 47-foot yacht, Bakeapple. But the innate sense of place felt by most Newfoundlanders brought her home to a destitute island. Zita set up scholarships for bright kids until a mother confronted her with a stark truth and a challenge. "She said I was just paying our children to leave. Then she said 'You look smart enough. Can't you do something to make jobs?'" That exchange inspired her to create a foundation with her brothers Tony and Alan to promote economic, social and cultural resiliency on Fogo, naming it after the line and mooring rig that attaches a cod trap to the shore. One of the Shorefast Foundation's first initiatives, Fogo Island Arts, was original and audacious; invite contemporary artists from around the world to come to Fogo Island and just create art. The artists in residence live with locals and get weekly stipends and access to a studio. Zita hired an award-winning architect and

fellow Newfoundlander, Todd Saunders, who created six geometric structures that contrast starkly with the white limestone of the shoreline, worn smooth and round by millions of years of the wildest wind and waves in the world. The program began with seven artists in 2010 and has grown every year, with several artists returning year after year. The studios range in size from 200 to 1200 square feet, are entirely off the grid and perch awkwardly on stilts mirroring the many small fishing sheds, known as stages, scattered along the shoreline.

The crowning glory is the Fogo Island Inn, a low-slung, 29-room, five-star modernist hotel built in 2013. The design is based on the traditional fishing hut and rests awkwardly on off-kilter stilts, a nod to the local building style as well as the delicate ecosystem. The glass-walled dining room features 20-foot windows that provide, depending on the season, panoramic views of the gray Atlantic or parades of huge icebergs. Zita was careful to instill a strong sense of place, so she asked local artisans and boatbuilders to furnish the inn, a regular fixture high on the list of the 100 Top Hotels in the World. Nearly all the furniture is a collaboration between international artists, designers and local artisans. "We invited designers to come in for a residency and paired them up with local craftspeople, whether they be textile people or boat-building people and asked them to come up with the objects that were needed," Zita says. The innovative community host program matches a person from the local community with guests of the Inn to help orient them to Fogo, by taking on a tour of the island or learning how to jig a cod by fishers who have been doing it all their lives. No effort was spared to be as environmentally responsible as possible. The Inn’s steel frame is highly insulated, and the windows have the equivalent rating of triple pane glazing. Rainwater from the roof is collected into two cisterns in the basement then filtered for use in toilets, laundry, and kitchen appliances. An outbuilding adjacent to the main structure contains wood-fired boilers, as well as solar thermal panels on its roof which supply hot water for the in-floor radiant heating

and the laundry and kitchen equipment. The fabrics for the chairs, pillow covers, quilts, and woven rugs are hand-stitched and personalized by the women of Fogo Island. Another successful spinoff business created by Shorefast is The Woodshop on Fogo Island, where local expert boatbuilders create beautiful furniture. When the Inn was being built in 2013, artists and designers from around the world were invited to experience the island and meet and work with local artisans and collaborate on the interior of the Inn. The boat builders prize a native juniper tree that grows strong, naturally curved roots that are used to create the structural ribs of punts: small wooden fishing boats that have been used for centuries off Newfoundland. Although Covid closed the Inn from March 2020 to July 2021, Zita said the silver lining "to the imposed ‘stillness’ of the pandemic, is that we were able to reflect on how things can and *should* be." Zita Cobb is a slender woman in her late 50s, with close-cropped hair and an air of subtle confidence and geniality layered over a fierce intensity that projects an impulse that doesn’t suffer fools gladly. But her face softens when she talks about her life’s work; "We are seeing a new kind of tourism emerging; one that is more community-based, nature-focused and carbon light." Fogo Islanders say their home is ‘far away from far away’ and getting there still isn’t easy; it typically entails several flights, a 95-kilometre drive, a 45-minute ride on a notoriously unreliable ferry and then another drive.

There are 10 museums on the island which lovingly preserve every aspect of the ebb and flow of life past and present of Fogo Island, but the most poignant historical artifact is mounted on the rear wall of St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church in Joe Batt's Arm. In April 1917, four young men, including three brothers, went seal hunting on the ice floes off Fogo Island and got stranded, unable to get back to shore when the ice shifted. They were terrified, knowing they were doomed and that their wives and family would never know what had happened to them. On a sealing gaff they had with them they carved their names and dates, along with the words, “laying down to perish,” and set it

adrift, hoping it would eventually wash ashore and be found by their families, which did happen several months later, when it was found on a nearby island and returned to Fogo. Even while freezing to death hopelessly adrift on a godforsaken sliver of ice in the black Atlantic night, those men selflessly used the last of their strength to try to let their families know that they were never coming back to spare them the agony of not knowing what had happened to them. That gaff epitomizes the legacy of five centuries of toughness, tragedy and fierce love of family that mark Fogo Islanders and is a fitting tribute to the resilience and passion of her sons and daughters.

Palestinian refugee women find hope in ancient soap

Somewhere in the world, a family will become refugees tonight. Maybe the ravenous Pacific will devour the beach and creep dangerously close to their door. Or murderous African thugs will be sighted in the nearby jungle. Perhaps a more familiar narrative will play out; the father will once again return home from a day of back-breaking labour red-faced and ashamed from being shunned by the local workers. Then the son will come home covered in bruises and cuts from fighting with his classmates again. The mother and daughter will recall the stares and whispers of the crowds at the market.

They've reached the breaking point.

Maybe they've been planning to flee and already have their passports, money and clothes carefully packed and ready to go. Or perhaps it's a panicked, last-minute decision and they frantically gather the necessities. Then their eyes quickly dart around deciding which belongings to take—those photos have to come but the precious bible that has been handed down through seven generations is just too heavy.

But the one thing every refugee takes with them is the knowledge and traditions lovingly handed down from generation to generation. Like the Palestinian art of making soap from olive oil. The arc of Palestinian history starts in the Bronze Age. Some of the oldest olive trees in the world have been growing in the ancient Palestinian city of Nablus for 2,000 years. As early as the 10th century, Palestinian olive oil soap was being exported across the Arab world, and as far afield as Europe.

The seeds of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were sown at the death of the Roman empire, when the Roman region of Palestine was conquered by Muslim armies who brought Islam to Palestine around the year 621. Fast forward about an eon to an explosive Middle East riven by sectarian violence. The modern Israel-Palestine conflict began over a hundred years ago in Russia and Eastern Europe when the brutal massacres of Jews, or pogroms, spawned the Zionist movement which sought a Jewish homeland outside of Europe. Approximately 2.5 million Jews had settled the British protectorate of Palestine around the end of the 19th century. The rise of the Nazis in 1936 led to a surge in Jewish immigration which ratcheted up tensions between Jews and Arabs. In 1942, Palestinian and Jewish battalions formed the Palestine Regiment, a British Army infantry unit which saw heavy action in Libya. Their baptism of fire gave both sides valuable training in modern weapons and tactics, which would prove crucial in the coming conflict. Almost 300,000 Jews returned at the close of World War II. After the war, the British received a mandate from the League of Nations to administer Palestine, but because of Arab objections severely restricted Jewish immigration; even setting up armed naval patrols to prevent Jews from landing in Palestine. The Brits decided that pissing off the Arabs would jeopardize their security and access to oil in the Middle East after the war. Over half of the 142 voyages made by Jews were stopped by the British patrols and the passengers detained or sent back to Europe where many were killed or starved to death. Literally hundreds of Jews who'd lived through the starvation, savage beatings and inhumanity of the Nazi concentration camps, who had spent years choking on the ashes of their cremated loved ones, couldn't survive the tragically indifferent geopolitical maneuvering of Britain. After the League of Nations assumed responsibility for Palestine in 1947, it recommended the creation of independent Arab and Jewish states. The state of Israel was born on May 14th 1948. The US recognized the fledgling state just 11 minutes after it was proclaimed by prime minister David Ben-Gurion. The next day, Egypt,

Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq invaded across every border. The outnumbered and ill-equipped Israelis somehow fought off the invaders. More than 6,000 Israelis and 13,000 Arabs were killed. In 1949 over 700,000 Palestinians fled the occupation of Palestine, known as ‘Al Nakba’ or ‘the catastrophe.’ That war, and the 1967 Six Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbours unleashed a flood of Palestinian refugees that would become the largest in the world.

In 1949, the United Nations set up a relief agency for Palestinian refugees with the wordy title of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East [UNRWA]. The agency set up 10 refugee camps in nearby Jordan. The poorest is Jerash Camp, where over half the population lives below the poverty line. The camp is bleak and densely crowded. Three-storey concrete buildings slump on the shoulders of pot-holed streets overhung by sagging electric wires. The corrugated iron rooves of the houses are rusty and cracked. Here and there, tables of vegetables offer splashes of green and red amid the grays and beiges of the streets. Many of the residents of Jerash were born there and are permitted to leave the squalour of the camp but in doing so, they forfeit the cherished right of return to a homeland that exists, for many, in the bedtime tales of grandparents.

In 2014, two women from vastly different backgrounds came to Jerash to try to help. Jacqueline Sofia first arrived in Jordan from Baltimore in 2011 as a Fulbright Fellow setting up education programs for the women of Jerash. Noora Sharrab, a Palestinian woman whose family came from Gaza, lived for months in the Palestine refugee camps in Jordan doing research for her Master’s degree in Refugee Studies at Toronto’s York University. Sharrab co-founded Hopes for Women in Education to provide annual scholarships to Palestinian women. The two revived the 1,000-year old Palestinian art of

soapmaking to educate, employ and empower the women and girls of Jerash Camp. They named their soap *Sitti* – "grandma" – in honour of the women who taught them the craft.

Despite having been born in Jordan, not all the women of Jerash camp have Jordanian citizenship. Jordan was the only Arab country to fully integrate the Palestinian refugees of 1948 by granting them full citizenship. But Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip who fled the Six Day War to Jordan in 1967 have only two-year temporary passports. These passports are expensive to renew and limit their ability to travel, work and access health care and education.

The millennium-old technique Sitti's soapmakers use is simple; they mix virgin olive oil, water, and caustic soda for several days in large circular cooking tanks. After cooking, the liquid soap is poured directly on to the factory's cold stone floor and left to cool. After it solidifies, individual bars are cut and stacked into large conical towers that allow air to circulate between each individual bar. The Sitti Soap artisans make roughly 250 Jordanian dinar (US$350) a month producing the soap. Working "enhances your self-confidence," says Umm Mahmoud, whose husband is unable to work due to illness. "You feel that you are providing something by working for the family." Many of the women say making soap gives them more than an income – it also gives them the opportunity to come together as friends, co-workers and counselors. "We're happy as well because if any other woman comes here and needs help, we can help them too, and train them," Mahmoud says.

Apart from the soapmakers, Sitti employs five full-time staff and 10 part-timers. Everyone can participate in the library book club at Hopes for Women in Education, a language exchange program and other skills and capacity-building workshops and training. The company also works with the Jerash Camp rehabilitation center's Carpenter's Workshop, commissioning refugee men with disabilities to make their

wooden soap dishes. The rehabilitation center employs about 10 men with disabilities, varying from autism to hearing and physical impairments.

One in three of the 30 million refugees in the world is Palestinian. In her blog, Sitti co-founder Jacqueline Sofia paints an eloquent portrait of the plight of the Palestinian refugees; “As a Palestinian refugee, peace can be illusive. For many Palestinian youth, peace is mostly the stuff of far-removed stories. These stories are passed down by their grandparents and great-grandparents who recall working in the olive fields side by side with their Muslim, Jewish and Christian neighbors in the heartland of the Middle East. Broken up and scarred by a winding cement wall, the physical representation of this peace is now unrecognizable.”

The debate has raged since the last shots were fired in 1948. The right of return is a universal right of refugees that is binding under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948. Article 13(b) is blunt and leaves no room for argument; "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." Israel was accepted into the United Nations in 1949 *on condition* that it accept the Right of Return of the Palestinian refugees. In 1969, the UN tried again with Resolution 2535 which stated "that the problem of Palestine Arab refugees has arisen from the denial of their inalienable rights under the [UN]." The Israelis cite three issues to justify denying the UN-mandated right of return to Palestinians. They claim that if a significant number of the five million Palestinians in refugee camps near Israel were to join the five million Palestinians still in Israel, they would overwhelm Israel’s nine million Jews, revive the Arab character of the nation and, according to some commentators, end the Jewish state. The Israelis have long since demolished most of the Palestinian villages and occupied much of the former homeland of the population of Jerash Camp. But much of the land remains unused or sparsely

inhabited. The Israelis have established 130 settlements in the West Bank that the United Nations says are a "flagrant violation of international law" because the West Bank is considered occupied territory. Most settlers are drawn by cheaper housing and cost of living, but a fringe group of ultra-orthodox Jews that believes God wants them to live in Palestine want to drive out the Palestinians. And they don't let their religious beliefs hold them back from violence and intimidation tactics; hurling stones at the often-elderly farmers, setting fires and chopping down trees. Jamal Atayni told the Washington Post that he had to rush to harvest his olive crop not only because the autumn was drawing to a close but also because he feared nearby Jewish settlers would steal his tools, burn his trees and attack his pickers. "They scream at us, 'This is our land!' and they run at us with rocks," said Atayni. Most of the Israeli settlements are on hilltops that overlook the olive farms. Many of them lack proper waste treatment facilities so millions of cubic metres of untreated sewage travels down streams near Palestinian communities. Abdullah Maarouf, 55, says his olive grove was once "a paradise." It has become a wastewater swamp, due to the sewage that runs from a nearby settlement. "We can no longer reach our land, nor can we harvest the olives. The settlement sewage water has drowned the land completely," he says. By conservative estimate, Israeli settlers have killed close to a million live trees.

Back in Jerash, Thair al-Jawaresh feels a visceral pull to the land, despite being born and raised in a refugee camp. His family is originally from the village of al-Malha, now a neighborhood in southwest Jerusalem. "I am going to go back to my land. I am suffocated in this camp, but I am going to stay until I can go back to my land. I am a man of the land. Our right to return is the most important thing to our resistance. Whether it is in one, two, or even 10 more years... it doesn't matter; we will return to our land." Mohamad Abu Nasser worked for years as an Arabic teacher to support his 10 children. He treasures the key of the family's house in the former village of Tel al-Saba. He

explained that his father gave it to him and that he would give it to his son: “When my father left Palestine, he brought the key to our house with him. My family were sure they would return. My father gave me the key when I was 30 years old. I hang the key on the entrance to my house in Jerash camp. When the time comes, I will give it to my son. The Palestinian collective memory cannot be erased. We will pass it on from one generation to the other.”

