

# A LARGER VIEW

*A Commentary On How Current Events Reflect—  
Or Not—Our Spiritual Search*

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## **Hadijatou Mani: A Story in Courage**

It's doubtful many people have heard of her or will ever know her name. Hadijatou Mani was a slave in Niger, sold to a master when she was about 12 years old (such slaves can never be sure of their accurate age) for 250 pounds after what she calls being bargained over "like a goat". That was maybe 12 years ago. In 2003 Niger criminalized slavery and many slaveholders had to let their slaves go. But her master who was using her by then as a sex slave and claimed she was his wife, did not. So he gave her a "liberation certificate" and refused to let her go. Eventually a local tribunal allowed her to leave, although later when she married another man, she spent three months in jail for bigamy.

Now, Ms Mani is suing the state of Niger, an impoverished West African desert nation, asking not only for a 40,000 pound compensation (about \$80,000) but for Niger to enforce the anti-slavery laws. Her case, the first of its kind, is sponsored by anti-slavery organizations which are very aware, as is she, that ruling in her favor would send a strong message. Romana Cacchioli, of Anti-Slavery International, said the case sends a message that the "longstanding legal prohibition on slavery must be translated into practice." The case is also being watched because if Ms Mani wins, the ruling would affect 15 other West African countries and force them to take anti-slavery action.

Often, in non-industrialized nations, slavery is still acceptable, a taboo subject denied at official levels. In Niger alone, some 43,000 people are thought to be enslaved. This makes Hadijatou Mani's case all the more admirable, a testament to the power of one.

## **The Drug Problem: Learning From Tanzania**

Tanzania is a small conservative East African nation which has a growing HIV/AIDS population. While medical officials mirror the value held by the culture that drug addiction is a legal rather than a health issue, the growing number of people afflicted with AIDS may be causing a shift in their thinking, leading them to address addiction as a problem in order to lessen its incidence. Geoffrey Somi, head of epidemiology of Tanzania's National AIDS Control Programme which is run by the health ministry, admits that "if we continue putting everything against drug use and not actually helping them to quit or to use in a better way, the spread of AIDS will continue." As it is, according to UN AIDS statistics, the adult prevalence of AIDS in Tanzania stands at 6.5 percent.

Prostitution is also part of the drug use problem. In a recent study, almost 65% of drug users said they had sold sex in the prior month to finance their habit. But at the root of the drug use problem lies poverty. A third of the Tanzanian population, according to UN figures, lives on less than a dollar a day. Taking drugs to escape daily hardship is common, especially among the youth. The drug problem is also exacerbated by the lack of therapy centers, clean needles, and of drug education. A ready supply of drugs compounds the problem. Tanzania because of its location is a crossroads to the Middle East and Europe. This means an abundance of drug smugglers and drugs that are not only easily available but also cheap.

Regardless of the many arms of the drug-use problems, Tanzania is slowly, and so far surely, addressing addiction trying to get users to kick their habit through a hands-on approach and the involvement of the community at large.

Rarely are the causes of problems addressed, and hopefully Tanzania's tackling addiction and its related problems as a means to prevent the spread of AIDS will inspire other nations and communities.

## **Nazi Atrocities and Ordinary People: Could It Be Us?**

For a long time those studying the Holocaust believed that the atrocities had been committed by a band of sadists and criminals around Hitler. But now historians and other experts have undertaken a large scale search for the men and women who carried out the orders, and the picture is sobering at best. The research is not yet complete but to date what emerges is that ordinary people, doctors, teachers, clergymen, schoolchildren, in all roughly 200,000 ordinary Germans (and some Austrians) helped the Nazis. Some had to, but many did so voluntarily. Those who helped carry out the atrocities came from every group of the society, and the percentage that can be said to have been psychopaths is no higher than what it is for the society as a whole. There were those who committed crimes out of the conviction that the Jews were evil. But there were many who committed crimes of excess such as rape and theft by taking advantage of the Jews' lack of rights. In Western Galicia, for example, some members of the occupation police force made it a sport to shoot Jews in the ghetto or blackmail them for their jewelry.

It does make one wonder, under what conditions each one of us as an ordinary citizen would turn into a willing persecutor and feel justified in doing so?

## **Nabbing Fugitives: Whom Does It Help?**

Last March Roger Lee Crona was arrested after being a fugitive for 36 years for having escaped from a prison in Michigan. When arrested he had been a skilled technician at UC Santa Barbara for 14 years, working there under the name Jason Vonstrausenburg, known as a good colleague who was not only congenial but who could be depended upon to find solutions to quirky problems. Before the UC job he had worked at an airport machine shop and as an auto mechanic. Now 61, Crona is married, has a stepson and a son from a former marriage. His ex wife says of him, "It surprised me that anybody would turn him in, pretty much everyone likes him."

In 1971 Crona, who had a couple of prior offenses, was on parole for receiving stolen property and driving a car, not his, with an altered license plate. He was sentenced to 2½ to 4 years at a minimum security work camp. He escaped June 20 1972 and has been on Michigan's most wanted list for over 30 years.

We are increasingly concerned about the number of people incarcerated as well as the cost of prisons and of healthcare for prisoners. Now, as we are developing an awareness of what happens after release, we need to include the cost of re-entry into society. Contrast that with a man who goes straight on his own, who becomes a productive member of society, who worked, paid taxes, helped others and essentially lived the life of a reformed person. Still, in the name of justice we interrupt this life to send him back to Michigan where he will more than likely serve his remaining sentence and perhaps more. Last March in California there was Sarah Jane Olson. She was previously known as Kathleen Soliah when in the 60's she belonged to an extremist group and her actions ended in the death of a policeman. She was freed on parole after serving 6 years of her sentence, but following an uproar among the law enforcement community, was returned for another year. The official explanation given for her extra year behind bars was that a clerical error had been made. She too had lived a reformed life married to an emergency room physician, the mother to 3 teens, and had volunteered in her community. She was somehow discovered, then arrested, tried and sentenced.

Certainly there has to be fairness in the application of the law, but when does it seem more like revenge, like hard-headedness, even stubbornness? Who gains by these people returning to prison? The victims' anger? But would that be a proper criterion? In a society where the rule of law is to be applied, what place should this kind of emotion have? If we believe in compassion, in giving people other chances, in a deeper definition of fairness, and too in a better utilization of public funds, then we ought to rethink under what circumstances we are to return these people to prison. A reformed life ought to matter

**Website of Interest:** [www.romereborn.virginia.edu](http://www.romereborn.virginia.edu)

## Behind The Colosseum

A \$2 million project allows scholars, students and the general public to explore Rome in the year 320 through the click of a mouse. ([www.romereborn.virginia.edu](http://www.romereborn.virginia.edu)) The virtual recreation, reinforced by music and stills enables one to take a tour of several landmarks including the Colosseum. It is hailed as a marvel of architecture. It has endured, it is distinctive and a feat of creative thought and the genius of humankind at its best. Visiting it in this way, this writer was somehow freer than in previous images and renditions, to also remember the Colosseum as a testament to human cruelty, its inhumanity, its worst. The building itself may be an achievement, but what it was used for was ignoble—humans thrown to lions, gladiators fighting to the death. Perhaps visiting this unusual site will also elicit a visitor's thoughts about Rome in the fourth century, an exercise at least as worthwhile as the site visit.

## To Ponder On The Price of Water

Slum dwellers in Dar-Es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, pay the equivalent of \$8 for about 250 gallons of water which they buy by the canister over time. In households connected to the Dar-Es Salaam municipal water supply, the same amount of water costs about 34 cents. Figures from other countries also indicate that the poorest pay the most for water although water is the most essential natural resource.

The Earth's surface may be 60% water, but water is in short supply and becoming more so for many: One billion lack access to clean water and 2.61 billion have no sanitation. In addition, according to Water Aid, a London based charity, some 5000 children die every day from water related diseases.

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