

Understanding the Powerless and the Powerful in our communities. Stories told through the eyes of Youth.



These stories came about through dialogue with young people on issues of Economic and Ecological Justice in the world in which we live. The first six stories have been prepared by groups of young people between the ages of 18–20 years. This 2009 Discovery Programme as it was named had its aim which was to help young people find themselves and their faith in the society and the world in which they live. The young people represented five Denominations across eight countries in Southern Africa.

The final eight stories were prepared by a wider representation, beyond Southern Africa. These were young people who attended the 2010 Training in Mission (TIM) Programme. The young people on TIM are aged between 20-30 years. The aim of the TIM Programme is to help young people to explore the meaning of 'Mission' as it is understood by the Council for World Mission.

The Bible was the primary source for the young people to understand matters of justice and injustice. Particular focus was on the life of Jesus and his pursuits for justice in his own context in the midst of the oppressive reign of the Romans. We exchanged ideas on the implications of the ministry of Jesus for our own Christian faith today. Participatory discussions were pursued and exercises were done to help the young people deliberate on the topic. The stories were written through group work and individual thought in which they reflected on their own contexts and examples of stories that have disturbed them in their own countries.

These are the young people's own stories with as limited editing as possible just to ensure that sentence structure or spelling could be corrected so that the stories would be comprehensible.

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This book is appropriate to serve as a learning tool for Senior Sunday School children, for Youth and Bible Study Groups, or in Workshop settings to;

- i) Gain more knowledge and understand situations of those who hold power and those who do not hold power around the world.
- ii) Serve as case studies so as to draw parallels with the state of affairs in our own societies and countries and engage in Biblical reflection so that we might understand our role as Christians in these circumstances.

I will use the first story to illustrate two examples of how the stories could be used to achieve objective (i) and (ii) above.

The Group Leader needs to be well prepared to pursue constructive discussions and provide sensible leadership. Each story has a particular emphasis on those who hold power and those who have no power in our communities. These are either because of unjust policies, foreign values or ecological destruction to name but a few. Careful reading can assist to bring these subject matters that are often not mentioned to the fore so that the right leading questions can be asked. The quotations at the end of each story can provide guidance on possible leading questions or discussion points that could be asked in our own contexts.

Example One

Step One:

The Group Leader will collect resource materials; map books, historical articles and any information that will assist in providing information about the topic. In this case it will be about the Basarwa in Botswana.

Step Two:

The group should be asked to find Botswana on the map. They could talk about the different ethnic groups existent in Botswana. They could talk about who the Basarwa are and how they differ from the other ethnic groups in Botswana.

Step Three

They can now be given the story to read aloud. How do they feel about the story? Let them talk about the characters in the story. Who holds most power and why? Who has no/little power and why?

Step Four (is optional as it goes beyond the objective (i) which is mainly to gain knowledge about other situations)

Read a Bible passage in which there is a similar scenario. Ask the group to discuss this and talk about what is just in this situation. Compare scripture to the situation of Botswana and draw parallels. What responses if any does scripture provide for this situation in Botswana.

Example Two:

Step One

Let the group read the story and share how they feel about the story. Who holds power in the story? Why do they hold power. Who are the powerless? Why are they powerless?

Step Two

Let the group in small buzz groups find a Bible passage that describes a similar situation? How does the passage 'advise' that we respond to the situation. What does this say about our Christian responsibility?

Step Three

Let the group reflect on their own societies. Are there similar groups that have comparable experiences? Who are they? Why are they powerful? What gives them power? Why are they not powerful?

Step Four

What can we do to bring about change in our societies?

The Central Kgalagadi Game Reserve incident in Botswana

This story is about the Basarwa or the San people of the Central Kgalagadi Game Reserve in Botswana (CKGR). In 1997 the Government of Botswana removed the Basarwa from the CKGR which is their ancestral home. The Basarwa are the first inhabitants of Botswana and are regarded as a minority ethnic group. The Basarwa often live on the fringes of society and are the most impoverished ethnic group in Botswana. The reason given for their removal from the Central Kgalagadi Game Reserve is that the Government wants to bring them closer to developments, such as schools and clinics. They were compelled to relocate to villages such as New Xade and Kaudwane, which are outside the game reserve.



The Government also claimed that the Basarwa were killing wild game without licenses, which is illegal. This claim has not been proven, especially that the Basarwa have co-existed with wildlife for centuries without depleting any species. It is outside hunters, poachers and big business who have in fact contributed to the decline of some types of animals.

Some people have argued that the Government wants to relocate the Basarwa because it has plans to start a mining project in the reserve. Whilst there is no proof of this more and more suspicions will continue to spread because people do not know why it was necessary to remove people from their traditional home.

Most of the Basarwa were forced to move because the Government stopped all water and food suppliers to them. Only a few remain in the reserve to this day but they live in abject poverty. They are cut off from family and relatives who have had to move because they had no choice.

The Basarwa continue to protest their removal from their ancestral home. They have taken the Government to court with very little success. They have also appealed to local and overseas NGOs for assistance in their struggle to get their land back.

“The ... often live on the fringes of society...”

Foreign Investments in Zambia

When the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) came to power in Zambia in 1991, they brought about several reforms to the country's political and economic structures. Some of these reforms included privatization of most government owned companies as well as the liberalization of the economy. The MMD were desperate to try to entice foreign investors by literally scrapping tax off when they came to 'invest' in our country. They gave all foreign companies and individuals a five year tax holiday while locals were made to pay tax immediately they started businesses. In as much as this affected all areas of our economy, we will mainly focus on the most visible form of this injustice which is the mining sector.



Copper Bangle made in Zambia

Recently, the Baluba mines in Luanshya that were run by Indians were closed down. This was because their tax holiday period of five years had elapsed. One wishes we could say this was a rare occurrence but that would be false. Many multi-national companies do exactly the same thing. They would come into the country for five years and withdraw to avoid paying tax. Most of the time they would even come back under a different name so as to enjoy another five year tax holiday. Several such scenarios have been observed including at the Nkana and Mopane Copper mines.

These mines not only leave many workers jobless after they leave but many of the miners often suffer from all sorts illnesses. They do not have good conditions of service nor are they given enough protective garments. There are even incidents where people are displaced because of these foreign investors. There was a claim of gold discovery in Lundazi area in the Eastern Province. Because of this claim, which later proved to be false, several people were displaced.

Through all these injustices, several questions run through our minds. WHERE IS THE GOVERNMENT IN ALL OF THIS? Are the voices of the masses too small for our leaders to hear? Are they so high in the clouds of power that they cannot hear the screams of the miners that are down below? Are they helpless in their own country? Are they victims of the laws they have made? Have they made their people the victims of these laws? The government has just sat in silence as its people are constantly oppressed. Leaving us with one other question... WHY?

“WHERE IS THE GOVERNMENT IN ALL OF THIS? - Are they helpless in their own country?”

The case of Sheritt Company in Madagascar

Sheritt is a Canadian (Transnational) Company working in the mining business. In Madagascar the Sheritt Company is dealing with the extraction of Cobalt and Nickel in Ambatovy Moramanga. The Company employs many local people and therefore contributes to the economy of the country. However, despite its economical advantages on the Malagasy economy, the project also creates and hides numerous forms of problems in the way that it operates. These problems negatively affect the livelihood of the local people.

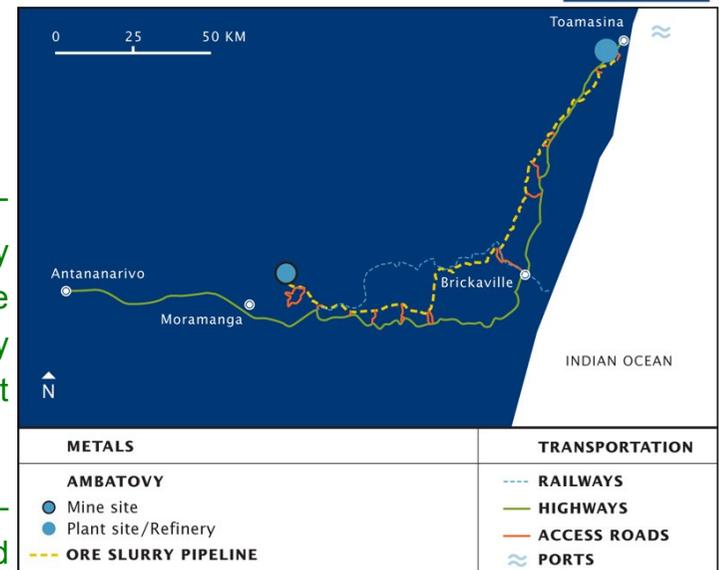
People in the villages near the work-field and in some parts of the region are victims of oppression and injustice. For instance, the company, when installing the pipelines removed the people away from their lands. Some of the ways that this company has removed the local people has been unjust. For instance the company bought some of the land from the owners at very low prices. In most cases the people could not buy land of similar size elsewhere. Another effect was the destruction of the environment due to the de-bushing as well as the radiation produced by the company activities. Not only has the immediate environment being destroyed by this company but the health of the local people has also been put under threat. Of course the company gives reassurances that radiation levels are low and therefore not a danger to human health. However, the people still live under fear and are not satisfied by the assurances of the company. In addition to that, another major concern regarding this company is that it hires mostly foreign workers. The company is also known for paying its workers very low salaries. Further, the working conditions are less than acceptable to the workers. They have to work very hard with no hope or signs of fair rewards.

We agree that our economy gets benefits from the project. However, we cannot keep quiet in the face of such injustices and when such “dirty” systems are used to make the project work. Now that Madagascar is experiencing this intense political turmoil, these issues are getting more and more worse and uncontrolled. We believe that if this kind of thing continues then the country will be left with no benefits.

“...despite its economical advantages... These problems negatively affect the livelihood of the local people. “

Madagascar Operations

sherritt



Growing the Economy in the Eastern Cape in South Africa?



In a small town of Butterworth in the Eastern Cape, there is a small rural area called Centane. Along this rural area there is a river which branches to the Indian Ocean. Back in the olden days this was used as a small harbor where missionaries would enter the Eastern Cape region from their respective countries. This was also used by the community for things such as camps, fishing, and picnics amongst other things. They would sell whatever they got when fishing in order to make an income and would also share some with their families as it is hard sometimes to make ends meet. This has been going on for generations as they made a living from being dependent on the ocean.

Development came along and this was the start of many problems for this small community. The local municipality saw an opportunity and used it to make business and to grow the economy by building restaurants and hotels along the harbour. Suddenly the local communities were now forbidden to hunt, fish, camp or even hold picnics without paying fees to the municipality. New systems were put in place which meant the community had to pay for those activities or events. This money goes to the government.

Now the ordinary men and women of this community have to look for other alternatives to make ends meet as their source of income has come to an end as they are struggling to pay for permits to allow them to engage in business. They are not benefitting from this new system and they are unable to freely enjoy themselves since this recreation facility has been removed from them.

“Development came along and this was the start of many problems for this small community.”

A Chinese Cotton Factory in Malawi

A Chinese company was established in 2008 in Malawi. The company was located in Balaka district, the southern part of Malawi. The Government of Malawi made an agreement with the Chinese company. The Government provided this land to the Chinese company for the establishment of a factory. This land was owned by the local people and it was very hard for the people to allow this company to occupy this land. There were lots of protests prior to the establishment of the company.



The Government through the Local Assembly discussed with the Chiefs and the Local leaders the issue about this land. They were told that if the factory is established in this area, farmers would sell the cotton at a nearby market and that local people would be employed. The Local leaders and Chiefs were convinced that this could work and they told the villagers so. After some persuasion the community accepted the proposal to sell this land to the Chinese company. The owners of the land were given Mk 80,000.00 per hectare even though the price for land in this area was at the time over Mk 300,000.00 per hectare.

After the company was established, people who were employed by this company received a minimum wage of Mk 150 per day which amounts to Mk 4,500 per month. The Chinese cotton factory buys cotton from the local farmers at Mk 40.00 per kilogram even though the government set price for cotton during this year was Mk 70.00 per kilogram. Although the company buys the cotton at a lower price from the local farmers, the government has been silent and no action has been taken.

“After the company was established, people who were employed by this company received a minimum wage”

Chinese—Namibian Partnerships

The Namibian Government went into partnership with the Chinese people (Government). This political agreement led to many Chinese nationals migrating in large numbers to Namibia. The influx of Chinese people into the country has created large Chinese communities throughout the country. The Chinese have so many enterprises in the country, in the city and even especially in the rural areas.

The unemployment rate is so high and there are limited career opportunities for local people in my country whilst the Chinese come into the country and create companies and employ their own people. The Chinese initiatives mostly benefit their own people. There has also been recently a case where the community heard of initiatives where the Chinese gave bursaries to universities for Government official's children only. These bursary initiatives seemed unfairly distributed as they were not even advertised. So one wondered how come only they got the bursaries and other young bright people who are financially disadvantaged did not get or were not informed about these. The Government had the power and did not take the country's youth into consideration.

Racism is also existent in Namibia. We can still trace racism back to economic injustices and it still occurs even after we say we have been independent for nineteen years. The youth has been blinded and we live in silence. Even though we see all these wrong things we do not try to do anything or to speak up. We should develop a critical eye and be aware of all of this.

“We can still trace racism back to economic injustices...”

China eyes Namibia's minerals

JOHN GROBLER - Apr 09 2010 16:09

After two decades of ever-closer relations with Namibia, China has finally thrown its hat into the local mining ring, closing a contract to buy 100 000 tonnes of coal a year from the African country and offering to buy up all marble produced by a struggling local stone plant. It is seemingly no obstacle that the coal is still buried deep under the Kalahari Desert's sands and that the local marble was deemed inadequate for use in Namibia's new, Chinese-funded State House.

The deals, signed after a visit by Jiang Qinglin, chairperson of the Chinese Communist Party's People's Consultative Conference, appear to have overtly political aims.

A perusal of applications with Namibia's ministry of mines and energy showed that Chinese mining interests hold or have applied for about 70 exclusive prospecting licences, mostly for iron, manganese and copper, but also for lithium and uranium.



The Power struggles in Kiribati Society

Kiribati is located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. It is also the tiniest country in the world. Even though it is a tiny country there are many sort of obstacles that exist in this country. One of the biggest struggles in this country has been related with the power of inferiority and superiority in the community. These are some examples through which Kiribati is affected:

- Administration

Finding jobs in Kiribati is not easy, because the Government cannot afford to sustain the population number or the number of graduate students so as to give positions to them at one time. But the real problem is, in some of the Kiribati Government Administrative offices, those people who have gained high positions seem to treat these positions as their family's property. This means finding jobs in Kiribati is not easy for those who do not have relatives in the Government Administration but those who have relatives in these positions as Government Administrators can gain jobs much easier than others.

- Gender

Gender discrimination is another struggle. Gender discrimination is a worldwide issue which happens in every nation or country in the world. In Kiribati too, Gender discrimination always happens because it is seen as part of our CULTURE. For instance, most of the time males are regarded as more important in the community and they also have a right to talk during any function. Females are not allowed to say something because they are not regarded as responsible enough to do so.

- Education

Education in Kiribati has become more of a priority than culture. An example of this is how nowadays communities do not rely on their own traditional food or traditional lifestyles. They rely on western food and culture. Another sign that education has become more powerful these days in all our societies of Kiribati is that without education one can not earn money. Besides that, education also results in a lot of discrimination in Kiribati. For instance, those who have good qualifications or higher degrees always separate themselves from those who do not have a higher degree or good qualification.

- Government.

The Kiribati Government has a lot of authority. For instance, in Kiribati landownership is the common thing, that means all I-Kiribati had their own land. Nowadays most land has been taken by the Government. When owners claim land, they have no right, because it is regarded as illegal. This is some of the information about Kiribati with regard to the sort of powers held by people in different situations.



“These days many ... customs and traditions are being abandoned for modern ways of being.”



Who holds power in India?

Since Old Testament times we have seen that power was in the hands of those that had positions, money, and authority over other people. And we see the same situation in today's world too. Nothing has changed rather it has become worse. In most of the cases power was and is meant to crush the common people; leaving them to live a hard life. Even though the Roman Empire had such power Jesus over-powered them. He developed a certain way through which he told the truth and provided life to all. Jesus died for the sake of this way of life and rose again on the third day. He even defeated the death which no one could or can ever do. The worldly power is just for today. Jesus demonstrated that the power that we have as children of GOD is for eternity.

In INDIA there are many power systems that have full authority over the powerless. In some of the states there are always insurgency problems. The militants are always in power in fact often more than the Local Government of the concerned states. These two powers which are the Government and the militants, whenever they collide with each other it is always the powerless, which is the common people, who suffer. On October 30th 2008 in one of the states in India which is Assam there was a devastating bomb blast. The consequence was that many common people died; children, women, school and college students. There were reports that the bomb blast was caused by the militants. The bomb blast was meant to demonstrate what the militants were able to do. Nothing happened to the Government but many powerless people died as a consequence of that bomb blast.

The people who were responsible for the bomb blast were arrested later by the Government. When the powers collide with each other it is always the powerless that suffer. There are many incidents we see in India where power always suppresses the powerless. The military power was made to protect civilians but it has instead hurt many powerless. There are some incidents where we are told that a soldier or a group of soldiers have raped a minor or adult women. The raped victims are often powerless. So, those who have power always overpower those who are powerless.

INDIA is a diverse country in respect of religion, culture, language and people. The minority religions in INDIA are Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jainists, Sikhis and Parsi. Hinduism is the dominant religion. So one can regard the Hindus as those who are in power and others as powerless. I want to demonstrate through another incident how power has overpowered the powerless. In late August 2008 anti-Christian violence was orchestrated by Hindu fundamentalists. This followed the murder of the Hindu leader Swami Lakshamanananda Saraswati who was shot dead on the night of 23 August in his Ashram home at Jalespata in Kandhamal. Though Maoist rebels claimed responsibility for the murder, Hindu groups said the murder of the Hindu leader was a Christian conspiracy as the slain Swami (monk) had been spearheading a vicious campaign against Christians in Kandhamal for three decades. Armed Hindu mobs went on targeting Christians for weeks while the police and state administration seemed to do little to curb the acts of violence. Yet, one thing has come out shining from these ashes – THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

“There are many incidents we see where power always suppresses the powerless.”

People vs. Government

When the people switched roads in Samoa.

Samoa is a small island in the Pacific region, with a population of approximately 150,000 people. Families and villages have already started to develop themselves financially. One thing to determine how a family has developed through the year is the number of cars they have. Most families in Samoa have either two or more vehicles. This has resulted in some small towns like Apia being overcrowded with cars. This means that there are too many cars for a small amount of space, which has also increased the amount of car accidents happening in the country daily.

However, on the 7th of August 2009, a very historic thing happened in Samoa. On that morning at around 6am, if you were on the road driving, you had to stop your car for 10 minutes and then start moving to the other side of the road and then continue driving. It was the day people no longer drove on the right-hand side of the road as it was done for many years. They now drove on the left side of the road. It was the day of 'road switch', as it was known. The Government approved this change in May 2008, a year before the road switch. They also stopped the import of Left Hand Drive (LHD) vehicles, which 90 percent of people drove.

A high profile lawyer named Toailoa Solomona and other independent leaders started a group which opposed this government act. This group was called the 'People Against Switching Side' (PASS). Eighty percent of the country supported the PASS and went on strike. It was the biggest crowd Samoa has ever seen in its town, and was noted as the highest record in the country's history.

As the strike went on in January 2009, it was taken to Samoa's high Judiciary court as PASS vs. Government. The PASS had many facts which proved that the road switch should not take place. This includes that road switches never happen in most countries, because it will take millions of dollars to implement. They also brought up the fact that one country in Europe went through road switch, but passed its Government Act five years before the switch, unlike the Samoa Government who is planning it within a one year period. The PASS also hired a highly qualified automotive engineer from New Zealand to testify against the Government. He explained that it will be very dangerous for LHD cars to drive on the left side of the road due to the positioning of the steering wheel, and that LHD cars will have their head-lights beamed more to the right side, which will obviously shine directly into the opposite drivers eyes which may cause serious accidents.

But the main problem was that the country is overcrowded with cars. People started buying cars from New Zealand and Japan which were cheaper and so people who could afford to buy cars had more than one car. The other question therefore was what will happen to LHD cars? The government will for sure move on to banning LHD vehicles on the road. This will devastate people more. This is what the PASS has been trying to tell the Government, but those who have power will always prevail.

“Eighty percent of the country was against this, but even this majority was powerless against the Government which has the



The Power of Peaceful Protest at Parihaka

(A story of Power and Powerlessness in New Zealand)

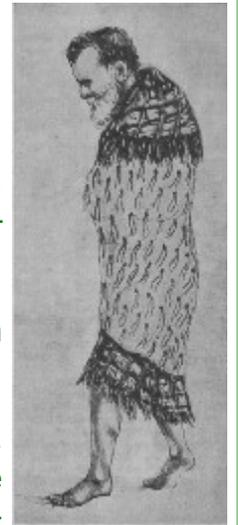
Every country that was colonised by the West has a similar story; we know about the indigenous people being seen as a lesser race, seen as primitive, driven out and enslaved by the European colonizers. New Zealand too has this story in its history. The powerful British came in and took over the land that the indigenous Māori people inhabited.

In New Zealand in the 1800s there were many varying Māori tribes; the different peoples were not united so when a force with numbers like the British came, they were overthrown one after the other. The British had more power because they were more technologically advanced in terms of weaponry and industry. However, I would say that underlying all these material means of power was the strong mental power; their belief in their own western knowledge. The British believed their way was *the* only right way. They thus enforced it onto the Māori peoples. They judged and believed themselves to be better, a more developed race and thus saw the Māori people and the land as theirs for the taking. With the power in the hands of the British, the Māori people had little power to fight and resist colonization. The Māori people believe that nobody owns land; it belongs to everyone, whilst the British believe that land is privately owned and therefore available to take by anyone. For many decades this land issue ensued. Numerous Māori Chiefs took up arms to fight against the Europeans. Throughout the countryside land was taken and the Māoris colonised. The fighting resulted in many deaths and threatened the extinction of Māoris. Yet to succumb to the British powers and their imposing structures was to turn your back on Māori culture and tradition. It was a lose-lose situation.

It was different for one place; Parihaka. Two Chiefs at Parihaka, Te Whiti O Rongomai, and Tohu Kākahi were leading their tribes in ways of peace. They upheld the values of non-violent action which they drew from their Ancestral and Christian teaching. They were committed to maintaining Māori independence and freedom in New Zealand. Both men advocated for good relationships and interaction between all races as long as Māori ownership of lands and independence from *Pākehā* (European) domination was respected.

In the late 1870s Te Whiti and Tohu disallowed violence and greed amongst their people, instead they encouraged practising peaceful ways of protesting against the confiscation of land. Whilst during the day, the British were building roads, surveying and putting up fences to divide the land, when night fell, the Māori of Parihaka would plough the land and destroy the roads, take down the erected fences as well as the surveying pegs. When the Māori were arrested, they offered no resistance, but were often treated harshly by the British and held without trial for extended periods of time.

In 1880 hundreds of men and women had been taken as prisoners by Colonialists. They were sent far south to build infrastructure in many towns, including Dunedin, my home town. Many never returned to Parihaka as they died on average of one person every two weeks. Meanwhile more Māori rose as more were imprisoned, the passive resistance continued until 1881.



*Te Whiti surrendering to the Military Forces, Parihaka, November 5, 1881.
(From a drawing by G. Sherriff)*

Parihaka was taken by force by 1500 soldiers on the 5th November whilst more than 2000 Parihaka people sat quietly at the *marae* (Maori meeting house).

Te Whiti and Tohu were led away to a mock trial and imprisoned in the South Island. When asked what he thought of the European technology Te Whiti replied that “indeed the *Pākehā* did have some useful technology but not the kindness of heart to see that Māori also possessed much great technology which if *Pākehā* were prepared to adopt would lead to stability and peace and the building of a great new society.” On the 12th of July 1898 the last of the Parihaka prisoners returned to a hero’s welcome at Parihaka. Their release brought an end to 19 years of imprisonment of Parihaka men and boys.

The important thing about this particular story of power struggle is in the response of the Māori people at Parihaka. They had the chance to retaliate, they could have fought back with violence but instead they chose peaceful protests. They could have surrendered, accepting their powerless situation but Te Whiti and Tohu led their people in the way of the Kingdom Values rather than that of the British Laws. The history of Parihaka scars our countryside, even in Dunedin, where I live. The ~80km road leading out to the peninsula was built by the captives from Parihaka. Caves with barred doors can be seen along this road, a reminder of their imprisonment for peaceful resistance to the Colonial Government. The events at Parihaka have affected the political, cultural and spiritual dynamics of the entire country (1).

Parihaka is a story of inspiration and hope that I believe we can all learn from. It is easier to respond in the same way that the powerful attack by taking up arms and fight. It is difficult to rise above and respond in the way that Jesus calls us to; through love, forgiveness and justice. This story especially speaks to the fact that the powerless can have power. Those who are often regarded as powerless in the community can make an impact of change in society if they are united in Christ, if they lay down their weapons and desire to see the Kingdom of God realised here on earth. ‘They will turn swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning knives’ (Isaiah 2:4). It takes courage and faith to stand against the powers of this world, but as witnessed in the history of Parihaka it is possible. Te Whiti believes that “if this wind should bend you, don’t fear, for it won’t break you.”

1Despite this, Parihaka’s history is not well known among most *Pākehā*. Partly because of this and because of continued emphasis on Western thought, it is common today in New Zealand that the *Pākehā* have more rights and opportunities than the Maori people; our government has only a few allocated seats for the Maori people and there are still massive ongoing settlements regarding the land that was taken when the British arrived in New Zealand. Whilst we may have learnt, we have not yet changed.



*The prophet Tohu Kakahi, on his way to New Plymouth, after his arrest, November 5, 1881.
(From a drawing by G. Sherriff.)*

“They upheld the values of non-violent action which they drew from their Ancestral and Christian teaching.”

'Re-Development' in Korea

Development is often regarded as a process which would result in making a basic design gradually better and more advanced. As Korea has developed, there is a lot of transformation when we see the external appearances; it seems like there are no problems. However, some of the cases tell us that there are a lot of matters to solve. Let me give an example;

Seoul, the city in Korea had the plan to re-develop a small water-course (stream). It is called Chung Gye Chun. The Government for the sake of this re-development took away people who lived there in board houses saying they had no permits. Government also evicted people who sell products on the roadside.



Chung Gye Chun in Seoul in Korea

In 2003 the city of Seoul designated Chung Gye Chun as an area not permitted for selling and dwelling. To take decisive action Government set policies and people in place to implement the decisions. The people who were removed were transferred to another place. The Government then made a proclamation saying; "We thank you for your sacrifice and because of you we could establish our re-development project. We will thank you forever for your decision..." The Government did not provide concrete alternatives to them. The number of people who suffered pain are estimated at about tens of thousands.

Through such issues in Korea, we can think about many situations of power and powerlessness. The Government said that they work for the sake of their citizens. However, where is the human rights in this? Governments seem to put their own benefits before the people's needs. Is it really development? For who? It is time for reconsideration. The Bible reminds us that "The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free." Then, what are our responsibilities as a Christians?

"Governments seem to put their own benefits before the people's needs"

Poor Health Systems in Rich Zambia

“Why are you killing mother Zambia?”

“How could people be so inhuman and why should people treat their fellow human beings without any emotional attachment?” That was the question I had been asking myself for the past few years and did not understand until I found out the answer from Rev. Cheryl N. Dibeela, through a discussion on those who hold power and those who are powerless.



Zambia is known as the “real Africa” because of its richness in its mineral resources, traditional ceremonies, rich cultural values, friendly people, wild life, different sorts of tourist attractions and most of all by its simple but yet adaptable life styles to all sorts of people. However, most of the Zambian people are very poor and depend on Donor Aided funds. These donor funds are often provided in the form of medical care through the Government. It is for this reason why many regard the Ministry of Health as the most important Government department because without healthy living standards, people may regard the education, tourism, communication and other departments to be useless.

The nightmare all started when the Donor Agencies decided to stop funding the Ministry of Health due to the Government’s misuse of the financial resources for their own selfish needs. This situation led to the Government not being able to pay the workers of the Ministry of Health for three months. They were paid half salaries only, whilst their housing allowances and overtime could not be paid. This led to the workers going on an industrial strike for more than three months.

During the strike many of the people’s lives were lost because there was no medical personnel to take care of the sick poor people. The HIV/AIDS patients were highly affected, young children, pregnant women and most of all the casualty cases. There was once an incident that shocked the nation when three different women gave birth in public places because they had been denied access to the hospitals. These women gave birth in the car park, in a foyer and at the back seat of a taxi. This situation led to a Women’s Organisation named ‘The Women for Change’ to start advocating for women rights using different media. In spite of this, the Government still turned a deaf ear to the needs of the women. This went on for about three months and according to statistics 100 people died each day. By the end of the strike more than 1092 people had died in both rural and urban areas because of lack of medical care.

But one significant thing was that the rich people who had full medical care from the private hospitals and the Government officials were not affected at all. During the strike we were told that the President took leave and went for a holiday with his family for close to about three weeks. When he returned it was publicly announced that the President was ill and was flown to South Africa to one of the best hospitals to be treated while he left his people to die in abject poverty and sickness! Frankly speaking I hated this system and all those who stood for it because good leaders were supposed to sacrifice themselves for others and not vice versa. I never really knew how important the Health Ministry was but it was during this period that I began to honour the health workers more than anything.

There were numerous road traffic accidents but the survivors of most accidents were left to die unattended to. Funeral ceremonies during this period were very common and if there were no funerals in your area then it meant that you had to give thanks and praise to the Lord for his mercy.

The news about the incident were flashed all over, BBC, Sky news and others. The big organisations such as the United Nations, Red Cross and the Flying Doctors were finally able to put an end to the situation. They let the Government come to their senses and tried to reason with them. The Government agreed to put an end to this by putting the soldiers to work in the hospital, but other organisations disputed the idea. This led the Government to audit the health accounts and the Government officials who were responsible for the money misuse were arrested. The two Government officials who were arrested helped in the investigation of others. When the Donors heard about this news, they agreed to fund the Ministry of Health under certain terms and conditions.

How could people be so cruel? Why should people who are in important positions squander the money just because they feel they are above the law? Why can't they follow the leadership of Jesus of being a servant in order to be the master? Why is there so much injustice and oppression and why are the rich people getting even richer? The answer lies in understanding terms such as 'power and powerless'.

“Why is there so much injustice and oppression and why are the rich people getting even richer?”

The Roma in Europe

The life of the poor is a constant struggle, but happy people always enjoy life – Prov. 15:15

When God created the heaven and earth, he had a big oven to bake people. The first time he tried to bake people, he forgot the time and they turned to be very dark. To these black people he gave Africa to live in. Then he tried again to bake more people. This time he was very careful and took them too early out of the oven. These people remained white. To them God gave Europe to live in. The third time God finally succeeded to bake the perfect people. They were not black and not too white. God called these people the Roma and gave them the whole world to live in.

This is a folk story of the Roma, better known as the Gipsy. I don't know if the Roma live all over the world, but they are spread over the whole of Europe. The Roma came to Europe thousands of years ago. Nobody knows exactly where they originally come from. The most common theory is that they come from India, because of the colour of their skin and the language that they speak. The Roma used to travel in family groups around Europe, with their horses and all their belongings in houses on wheels. They then stayed at a certain place for a while before they travelled further.

Nowadays just a few Roma families travel around in this way. Most of them are settled at one place. The history of Roma in Europe has been difficult. They were never welcome wherever they were. People had a lot of prejudices about the Roma. They thought the Roma are lazy people who don't want to work, you can't trust them, they always lie, they steal and smell very bad. These prejudices are still common amongst the European people. In World War II not only six million Jews were killed but also more than a million Gipsy. We easily forget this.

Discrimination against the Roma is still the order of the day, especially in Eastern Europe where most of the Roma live. The Roma are segregated from the rest of society. They live in camps outside the city or in villages under very bad circumstances; without access to streaming water and gas. The Roma are not allowed to sit in the front of the bus. In most churches they are not welcome, so they have their own churches. A lot of them are illiterate. In Ukraine there are special schools for the Roma, but the worst teachers work in these schools. They are not motivated to do their job. A lot of Roma children don't go to school every day, so they do not learn anything at all. It is very hard for a Roma to find a job. I know a boy who finished his school and went with his Hungarian friend to apply for a job in a factory. There were a lot of people who wanted a job. They had to do a test, which was very easy for the two boys. They finished first without making one mistake. The Hungarian boy got the job and the Roma boy didn't hear anything. Just because he is a Roma.



Violence against the Roma still happens. Women in Slovakia were sterilized so they were not able to have children anymore. One day the police came to a Roma camp in a village in Ukraine and took all the men. They didn't tell them why. After a while it turned out that there were some bicycles missing from another city. It was not possible that the men from this camp stole the bicycles, but the police had to blame somebody.

The situation of the Roma in Europe is very complicated. It seems almost not possible to find a solution for all the problems because the Roma have no country and live separated from each other. It is hard for me to define who the Roma exactly are. However there are some characteristics of how I see the Roma. The Roma have their own culture wherein music plays a big role. Freedom is very important for Roma. They don't like boundaries or rules. They live by the day, never plan in advance. When they have money today they don't save it for tomorrow, but invite everybody and have a party. The next day they starve. The Roma have other values which differ a lot from the values of the main culture. This makes it hard for us to understand them. Often Roma don't fit into the structures of a conventional society.

There is no political Roma party in parliament in any of the European countries, although the Roma are a big minority in some countries. I think that is why it is difficult for the Roma people to fight for and achieve justice because they seem not to stand together. It is hard to get every Roma to speak with one voice. There is a lot of trouble between the Roma themselves. These things seem to make them even more powerless.

I think as a European, we should look at our society with critical eyes. If there is no space for people who are different from us, then there is something wrong. We cannot allow any discrimination or racism. We should create a society where everybody fits in. We can learn from each other and enjoy life with each other. The Roma know how to make the best out of every single day. Even when the situation is miserable they find a way to enjoy and have a party. The Roma are free, not bounded by rules, plans or expectations. They don't worry about the future but live for every day. I have learnt a lot from my Roma friends. And last but not least I love their music!

The life of the poor is a constant struggle, but happy people always enjoy life – Prov. 15:15

**..we should look at our society with critical eyes.
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'Respect, Care and Achievement' in Taiwan

'Respect, Care and Achievement' is the goal of "China Petrochemical Development Corporation" in Taiwan. However reports have shown that the company did irretrievable damage by harming residents through environmental pollutions; "dioxin" and "mercury."

In the 18 century the Japanese built a factory that made poisonous gas in Southern Taiwan. It became a factory with an industry of chemicals which are "solid caustic soda" and "hydrochloride" and so on. However, the factory discharged those harmful chemical into the river. The residents relied on the aqua in the river and ate fish everyday as a main food. However, the water became contaminated. The residents drank the water and absorbed the "dioxin" for decades. They continued to feel uncomfortable and got cancer. According to reports, the Government knew the factory discharged the chemicals into the river but the Government took no step to stop the pollution. They therefore did not protect the residents.

There were more than 200 people living in the area; some people got cancer; some people became diabetic; some people died. Because the people had low levels of education, they did not know that the diseases were related to the chemicals in the river or even that it was because of the factory. Some of the community members started noticing this problem and gave a lot of help to the residents. Their actions included claiming compensation from the state and questioning the law of the Government and the "environment protection bureau", "CPD" company.

According to the "Global Mercury Assessment", if a mother's hair contains more than 0ppm dioxin it will have an impact on the baby's brain tissue. Therefore, people who have 1ppm have reached the human limit. But, the residents' average were 80,5ppm in their diagnosis. A woman who had up to 202ppm in her body, was recorded as the highest in the world.

Until now, this has continued to be a problem in Taiwan. The Government and the Environment Protection Bureau needs to pay billions in compensation to the residents. But, it's too late for the victims and people who still suffer from the diseases. Even if the Government and Environment Protection Bureau can make an appeal to the highest court, the company owns an important place in the stock market, and they have renewed their licence already.

The people who have suffered in this case have been ignored by the Government. The Government escaped the responsibility to handle the situation. The company too knew that the chemicals discharged in the water may harm the residents but they only cared about their own benefits. No justice has been shown to the people. People have power but sometimes they don't know what to do. As a result, we should think twice before we do anything, no matter what position we are, all we need is respect and love and take responsibility for ourselves.



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