

# It Takes Much More Than Just One Village

## by Zinta Aistars

Vol. 2: Issue 5: Spring 2009

*This world's anguish is no different/from the love we insist on holding back.*

— From *The Homeless: Psalm 85:10*, Aberjhani

ABERJHANI DESCRIBES AN ARTIST who gathers the homeless to record the rumblings of their empty stomachs—the rumbling of unfed emptiness is just the sound the artist craves for his symphony. He pays the hungry a dime and pushes them back out into the street.

What Aberjhani captures in his poem echoes the commentaries about our economy that I've heard on National Public Radio during my daily commutes. The stimulus package, the inconceivable billions, now underway in an effort to nudge our ailing economy back into the black—is it wise? Rise, Lazarus! We have all heard it, and many of us join in the heated debate: To whom do we give? From whom withhold? Yes, who is deserving and who deserves punishment?

This sad state of affairs was caused by unbridled greed. The rich ached to get ever richer. The poor ached for an end to their misery. With that combination, the wealthy tapped into the dreams of the less wealthy and promised them manna from heaven, and sure, it was almost, just about, free. Well, not really. The loans for big dreams rolled out shiny and tempting, but the price to pay was there, and it is that hidden price we are all paying now.

Should the many pay for the greed and weakness and foolishness of the few? Those of us who bought homes within our means, paid cash for our groceries, drove sensible cars, made the payments on our bills on time, and generally lived our lives responsibly—why should we now bail out those who did not?

I have lived much of my adult life as a single parent. I had dreams, too, but I understood frugality. Yet here I am, with modest shelter, stocked pantry, debt nearly paid off, and a reasonable mortgage payment. So, why should I pay for those who drove up their bills and lusted for five-bathroom houses on cul-de-sacs in gated communities?

I listened to the NPR wise folk. Now, a poem echoes those thoughts and it rings true to me. Why should we care about bailing out others? Who are we to pass moral judgment on those who reached for too much? While some may have been greedy, others may simply have been big dreamers. A moral failing is a conscious choice, but what of an act of foolishness? The important factor is that we remember what got us into this mess: greed. Caring too much about our own comfort, not enough for that of others. Are we to be greedy now and ignore our foolish neighbor?

These economic commentators point out that property values fall in a domino effect when one house, two, three, foreclose. We cannot save the deserving without including in the net the undeserving. We cannot save an ailing economy for an entire country, indeed, an entire globe, if we pick and choose who gets what and why. We are none of us free if one of us is yet a slave to debt. A nation of self-absorbed, narcissistic citi-

zens cannot thrive. Can we learn from our own recent history? What got us into this mess—always putting our own desires first—will never get us out.

Or, as one commentator, an ethicist, pointed out—if we all got what we deserved, we would all be in hell. How about a little heavenly bailing out? The water is flooding into one and the same ship, carrying us all.



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