

The Marys of Mother Africa: Story of Greedy Boy

Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés | Mar. 26, 2009 | El Rio Debajo del Rio

Mother Africa: for hundreds of years she's groaned under humans who have harmed her by looting her treasures, setting enmity between peoples, and by forcing stones atop her greatest minds and hearts so they could not grow into giants.

But, also I sense from knowing many souls who were born into the earth there, that in Mother Africa is rooted the mysterious Heart of the World, a Heart of Humanity that ever beats strong no matter what, and that is oddly ever vulnerable ... yet ever invincible ... ever wounded ... yet ever covered with flowers of acacia ... the honey of which flows like deep amber sweetwater.

Though the crown that Mother Africa has been forced to wear is made of piercing thorn branches ... even these, because of her immaculate generosity of heart, are ever bursting with fragrant blossoms.

... And always present anywhere there is so much death and so much resurrection: there are the Marys.

The Marys

"The Marys" are what old believers call souls, both men and woman, who have been sorely wounded, yet carry such depth of sight and generosity rather than bitterness of heart, they make you want to weep just to be near them again ... or for the very first time.

As in other parts of the world, there are millions of Marys hidden in refuges and out of the way places across Africa. Contrary to the brutal African dictators, Robert Mugabe, Idi Amin and others who have purposely driven their nations into poverty and slaughter, the Marys are the rememberers and restorers of "what the soul is truly fashioned from ...

some combination of the finest delicate pink ivory, and the blackest most enduring ebony ... the strengths the soul has always been born from ... the first to be fashioned into beauty, the latter to endure what beauty often draws in predatory interests and to triumph over those.

The Marys anywhere in the world, are the ones who endured despite -- and in a way -- because of, all attacks, all indecencies against them. The Marys are the ones who were made to carry the World Heart in a basket woven strong from one's own courage bones and brawn and scar tissue.

Creator knew the pulse of the world would be safe with those who had suffered and yet persevered. Creator knew they would pass "that which cannot be allowed to perish from the face of the earth? hand to hand, heart to heart, generation to generation, hiding The Heart next to their own hearts during night treks from village to village, no matter what contravening winds.

And most especially, the Marys, would pass the Heart of the World, soul to soul, through stories that tell not just

what is treasure, but exactly how to hold to the strong center no matter what.

Tiny Magical Treasure Boxes for African Villages

It has been a long while ago now that I met with a group of Africans I was enthused to help with their work. "Wait! Listen to this sister," they'd said to me. They were trying to start their own radio broadcasting stations in their home places in various African nations, creating a winged miracle of sorts ... They wanted to make words fly through the air.

I'd published a dozen audio books, many of them broadcast over National Public Radio and community radio stations in the United States and Canada. I was recording radio commentaries on a weekly basis and it was that last, a deep involvement in community radio broadcasting that brought me into direct touch with the Marys of Ghana, Angola, South Africa and other African nations, some of the most kind, most gentle people I've ever touched lives with. And all these Marys wanted to be radio mavens and mages.

I gave them encouragement and was able to help them raise a little money to help their endeavor. I kept saying to myself: just think of it, as in the days of old: story flying through the air invisibly and landing in full timbre and tone far away in little villages. How amazingly low tech and yet blazingly modern.

Just think of such a miraculous way to teach, tell, remember others back into themselves again ... for unknown and anonymous Marys to be teaching village people who couldn't read but who could speak, and oh what beauty of warm poetry they spoke just in everyday talk ... to be able to broadcast by themselves, wholly independent, without the censorship and silencing of voices by whichever regime.

A New Magical Storyteller Appears

Thus my African friends went back home and set up Rube Goldbergesque studios in their cooking rooms, and begin broadcasting through the air to villages far off ... villages that had nothing but hot sun, dry dust storms and a few clay pots ... and the true riches of the land ... humans with deep souls.

It was arranged that a number of villages would be given a precious little treasure chest that was to be kept safe by the headwoman of each village ... for this little box was the most rare of magical objects ... one that would be magical to us too ... a little plastic radio with a crank ... in reality, a tiny receiver that was powered by ... the sun!

Solar cells. Leave the little radio in full sunlight for several hours. Let it "harvest the sun." Then, when a pre-arranged afternoon arrived; twenty, forty, one hundred villagers stood and squatted in a circle to listen to the magical storyteller coming through the little radio.

Solar cells at that time would allow a radio to receive broadcast for perhaps up to 20 minutes at a time Thus the radio gave out stories, speaking to the people in their own down-to-the-bones manner.

As it was in the beginning, it was now again. Except for one thing, the old stories were still told by the old ones in the village sans radio. But now there were new stories, magical new stories from the radio-teller that seriously and concretely educated the villagers about how to chase away the demons of death. Seriously.

Chasing Away the Demons of Death

The never before heard stories on village radio were little skits with heroes and monsters. We'd written storylines around overcoming monsters that soiled the water, and a hero/ heroine cleansing the water, showing how to keep it clean by separating refuse and bodily functions from the water, never letting them meet.

The stories' underlying motifs were about teaching the way to prevent typhoid which killed those who drank unknown, tainted water, ways to prevent the monster dysentery who killed so many babies and elderly through dehydration. In the dysentery saga, the hero taught how to keep the village from being touched by the monster

to begin with; a kind of folkloric science based on reality.

The stories' heroes and heroines taught how to properly wash a leg wounded by a machete while chopping brush, and thereby to chase away the monster called infection and tetanus. The Africans are story people who have not forgotten their ancient stories. They have also not written them all down so they are fixed like dead butterflies in a box.

Rather, they hold stories as the blood flow to and from the Heart of the World, an essential, rather than a mere entertainment. Whereas we might hear the solar radio stories about monsters and heroes and health, and learn their values, and thereby think we'd not need to hear them again because now we knew the precautions ... the village people in Africa had a different idea about it all.

The people of the villages began to tell the radio stories themselves and to each other and to visitors and distant relatives who lived outside the villages. The mask maker made masks portraying dysentery, for instance, a mask that was made of withered, gray leaves ... and so on. Thus, the new stories made their ways into the tribal mind, into the hearts of mothers, fathers, babies, dancers, artists, and became part of the village life of story hand-me-downs, just as important to tell the tale of how Typhoid was vanquished in the village, as how the first dawn of creation took place and First Man and First Woman were born.

One set of stories from time out of mind were thereby melded with stories that were of this time. And their commonalities were that simple words, whether broadcast or spoken in person, were telling the how-tos, how such and such is made, how something else is avoided, how this is turned this way in error, how this is corrected, how to protect, and most especially how to save the lives of the soul and of the body. The stories taught the how-tos, step by step, so everyone has a chance at full, conscious life.

The pope on Africa's women, and the necessity of step by step wise instruction rather than just exhortation

On his recent trip to parts of Africa, Pope Benedict XVI did say that Africa ought treat its women more decently. And that was good. Unprecedented really.

But, there too is the rub, the how-tos were missing, weren't they? Be respectful of women ... but how? In what ways? How would that look? Where have we already gone wrong specifically? What are the steps to helping, healing, mending, correcting the unaware heart?

My Ghanaian friends knew what the issues were for women throughout much of Africa, how hard a woman's life is, but the prevalent and unquestioned mindset for abusing women, especially by men, was sometimes also enjoined by older women also who had their son's "best interests" in mind by blindly demeaning and often enough beating the son's wife.

In this last week during the pope's visit to Africa, many of us were hoping he would broadcast to the huge crowds, how to reverse all this turning away from the humane soul. A backward de-evolution that was implanted long ago in the psyche of Africa ...

not only by crass colonization, but also by ancient Africans warlords who had no good in their minds with regard to souls in general, and women and children in particular.

In the psyche there can be, under pressure to survive, a strong tendency toward identification with the oppressor. This is often seen in those who have been colonized, their nation over-run or conquered. If what one learned while surviving an oppression is not carefully examined afterward, and measured against a strong norm of what it means to be humane, and certain traits discarded as inhumane ... the once oppressed sometimes have a tendency to mimic their own oppressors with the persons closest to them who are not in any way oppressors

themselves.

Eventually as deleterious attitudes are handed down generation after generation in a culture, those taking the demeaning attitudes toward others, often have learned to so easily disrespect women and others with such self-appointed impunity ... they no longer even register their own cruelties, and exclusions.

Thus, they exile worthy souls because they have, for generations now, normalized brutality toward a certain class of "others."

When I'd asked my African rookie broadcasters what was the biggest issue faced by their people, one of the Marys, a soulful gentle man, said it was 'children with great power who had not overcome their greediness for all the butter in the world.'

We worried over this matter of 'ravenous child in a man's body' and attendant matters of abject inhumanity. We finally decided I'd weave a story from all the hours of heartfelt testimony I'd heard from my African friends, in order "to tell the story of it all" ... for as long as it took to tell it, but also 'as short as need be,' in order to be heard in full on solar radio with its tiny span of receiving time.? This is that story.

Story of Greedy Boy

A little boy was sent to bring butter from a neighboring farm. "Bring it quickly so it does not melt," said the mother. So the little boy set off, arrived at the farm, was given the fresh butter in a crockery pot, and the child set off for home. But somewhere along the path, the boy got the idea that the crockery pot sort of looked like a crown, and so he turned it upside down, and put it atop his head.

Thus he strode through the brush emulating what he'd seen and heard of kings, tromping around, ordering the weeds to bow down to him, and trampling on smaller creatures. He felt so powerful.

But also, because of the heat from his head under the "crown," the butter began to melt and drip down his forehead, then nose, then into his mouth.

And the more he dallied marching about pretending to be king, the more the butter melted and the more the butter ran into the boy's mouth ... and he lapped it all up very enthusiastically.

Until finally ... all the delicious sweet butter was gone.

And that is how a child pretending to be king became a tyrant, nearly overnight. For the taste of something sweet that came from the hard work of others, but that he kept all to himself without offering it to any other soul, had turned his heart. Even though his first intention was good, to bring the butter to his mother who in turn would share it all around ... he wound up depriving all others of the sweetest tastes of life, taking it all in for himself, only.

Before we can ever be free, said my friend, the moral decay of such butter carriers has to be faced.

I'd agree with my Ghanaian brother: confronting the endlessly greedy child in those who abuse women and children -- and anyone else as well -- is the first and foremost defense, and if taught well, cure ... against further abuse of persons, and women and their children in particular.

Yet, vaguely spoken medicinal words will never effectively help to mend a deep wound. The church, I think, has to decide whether indeed they want to help free Africa and lift her, or buy right back into boys pretending to be king and self-centeredly consuming all the sweet butter, that is all the gifts of the Holy Spirit meant to be shared with and by all others ...

Espirito Santo insists on respect toward women instead of shouting and scowling at women as a matter of course in order to try to intimidate them;

Espirito Santo insists that a man request clear permission to court or be intimate with a woman, rather than forcing himself into a woman or a child sexually,

Espirito Santa requires that neither woman nor child, before, during or after day's end, be beaten or shunned for not acquiescing to reasoned or unreasoned demands ...

Espirito Santo insists that a man bend to do his just share of what is for the common good at every level, rather than imposing servant slavehood on others under the guise of "do this for Jesus" ... because the man is bent on pretending to be a king tromping around in the bush exploiting others to undergird his fantasy.

All these and more are to be brought into the open and spoken about, not once, but rather many times. Moving from being unconscious of harms one does to others, into consciousness of acting in ways that do not harm others, is indeed heavy lifting that one can hire no slave to do for oneself.

Each soul has to pry their consciousness out of the primal ooze and develop, and enact these new attitudes and practices for themselves. That would indeed be a move from being a monster in the making, to being a hero on the mend.

Wish list for the pope

Pope Benedict, despite the fact he could have offered a far more thorough instruction, still and yet, displayed a consciousness in himself and about others ... that could be understood to be his assertion that Africa still has too many greedy boys who want a pretend kingship.

And, I wished he's said something about all actions derive and are funded by underlying and unspoken attitudes. That these have to be questioned and the deleterious ones changed. I wished he'd told how women could better protect themselves theologically from men who wear the dress and the pomp but act disgracefully toward women and children.

I wish the pope'd listed the common offenses: Forcing sex on women. Beating women up repeatedly, pushing them, slapping them in the face, whaling on them with their fists and with sticks, breaking their bones and cutting them. Calling them whore. Enslaving them, disallowing education for them, pressing them into menial service in order that the men can live like kings. Forcing the women and children to service the men's addictions. Throwing bellowing temper tantrums that insist the man is supreme when he hasn't earned that status, and the women and children are property to be used, sold, traded and degraded.

Yet I can see what the pope left out of his speeches will become the work of the Marys of Africa; what was left unsaid, and what even more so, the pope did not know how to define point by point and clearly ... the how-tos, the step by step, the vanquishing of the monster by the heroic soul ... I can see, and I think you as old believers can see too, that the step by step will be carried by the Marys, the Marys of the Heart of the World.

Prayersong for the Marys

Some songs are soaring prayers, as is this one simply called "Mary," written by Patty Griffin. Let these small excerpts by a singer/musician inspired, be our prayersong for Mother Africa, for all the Marys across the lands ... that the Marys everywhere endure in strength ... and clear mind ... and great heart ... and sharpest vision for what is needed next, step by step into a new future:

Mary you're covered in roses, you're covered in ashes

You're covered in rain
You're covered in babies, you're covered in slashes
You're covered in wilderness, you're covered in stains ...

... Mary you're covered in roses, you're covered in ruin
You're covered in secrets
You're covered in treetops, you're covered in birds
Who can sing a million songs without any words ...

... Jesus said, Mother I couldn't stay another day longer
Flys right by me and leaves a kiss upon her face.
While the angels are singin' his praises in a blaze of glory
Mary stays behind and starts cleaning up the place ...

CODA

... ?cleaning up the place? doesn't likely mean making the bed and doing the dishes. It more so means the Marys undertake the work to "clean up the place" ... a long overdue making straight and lifting up what has somehow sunken and gone crooked.

You can [read the entire lyrics](#) [1] Miss Griffin wrote and hear her sing this haunting song in a little Youtube-like video she made. Gratitude to La señorita Lereen who spontaneously burst out singing this song ?Mary,? a cappella, to a grieving mother at a gathering of las hermanas y Marias. I hope our readers hearing this song rocks the soul as it did mine. Aptly for Africa and elsewhere, surely it is one of the most heroic Marian hymns of our times.

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[1] http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/p/patty_griffin/mary.html