

DISSECTING DUKAKIS ■ SISTINE'S NEW GLORY ■ THE UNKNOWN STALIN

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# LIFE



The Family Remembers

# RENK

His Legacy  
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# CITY OF LOST BOYS



Driven from Sudan's farms and villages by civil war, famine and poverty, some 10,000 children scratch out a precarious existence on the streets of Khartoum

**T**hey are called the *shamassa*, Arabic for "the children who run under the sun." At midday they are indeed a seemingly resilient band of urchins. But it is dawn that takes their true measure. Huddled in small groups, they wake from an uneasy sleep along the rubble sidewalks of the city, their undernourished, ill-clad bodies unequal to the chill of early morning.

Khartoum (pop. 1.8 million) is not alone among the world's cities as host to an influx of the dispossessed. Indeed, among an estimated one billion homeless (one fifth of the world population), Childhope, an organization partially funded by UNICEF, estimates that up to 100 million are street children. But perhaps nowhere else have cast-off youth gathered so swiftly

Homeless children ward off Khartoum's dawn chill. The city's suq (above) is where they play—and pilfer.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARY ELLEN MARK  
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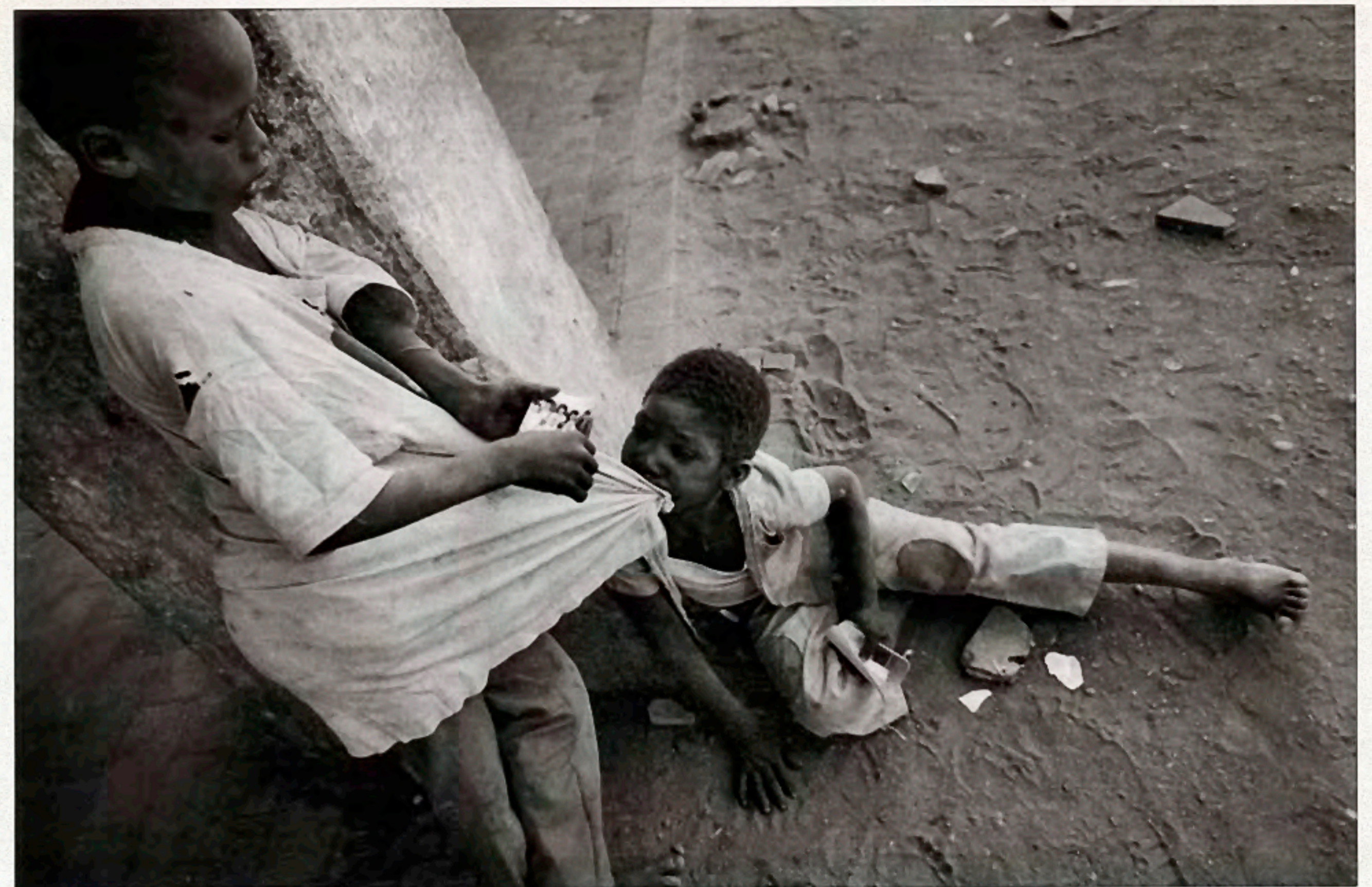
and from such great distances. Upward of 10,000 boys (Arab mores dictate that girls stay at home) between the ages of five and 18 have been drawn to the capital from all corners of Africa's largest country in just five years. Sudanese family stability, disrupted by a ruined economy and a renewed civil war, is crumbling.

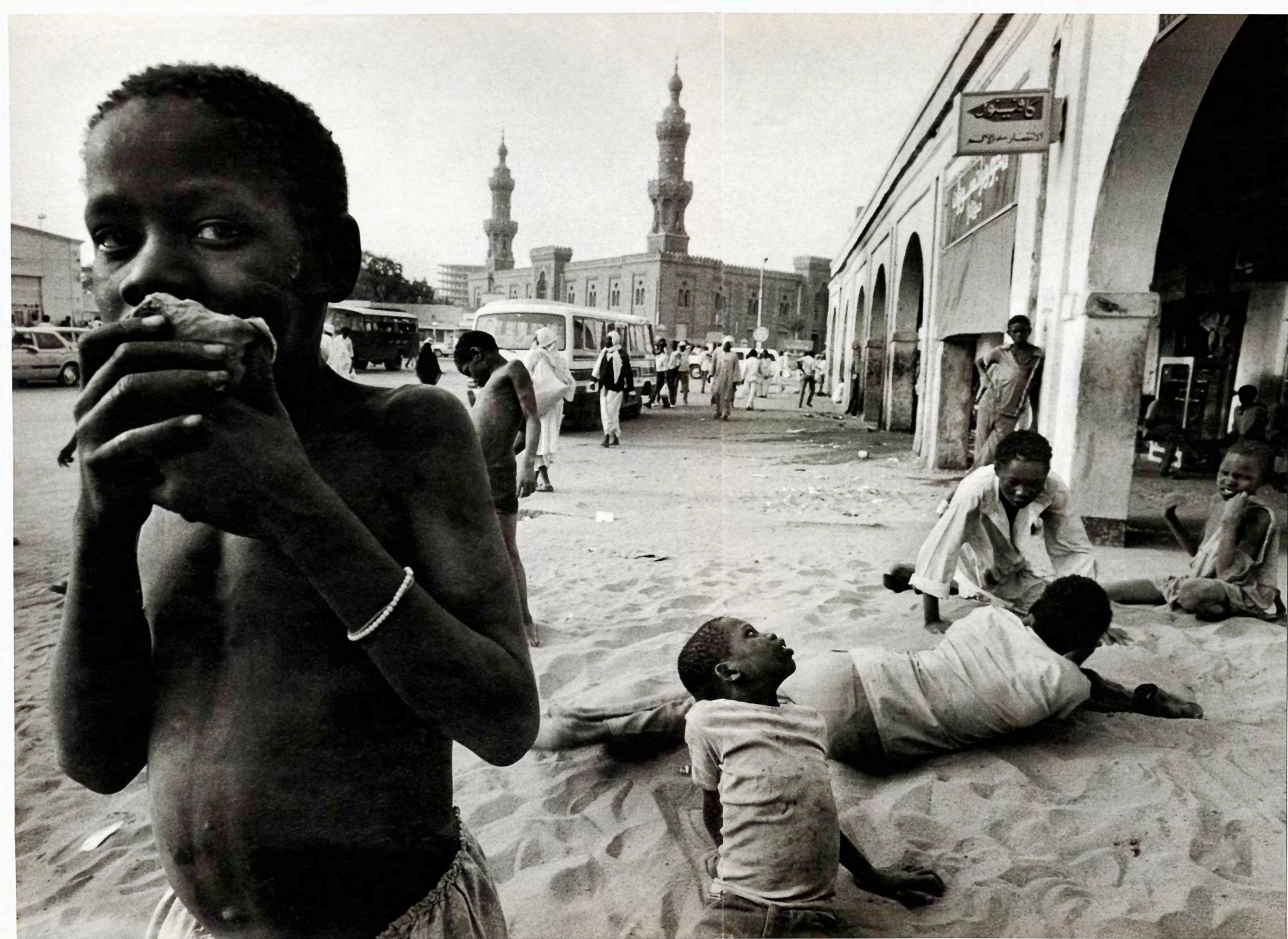
**T**he young vagrants form surrogate families on their own. Typically, they appoint one among them as "jockey," the leader who provides protection. Simon, 15, is jockey for a gang of six. (To protect identities, some of the names have been changed.) Two years ago he lost both legs when he fell beneath a moving train. Today Simon moves about the city on a bike cart ingeniously adapted for hand pedaling. Simon's No. 2 is James, 15, who has a congenital nose deformity and a scar that obscures the sight in one eye; other gang members include Ibrahim, a handsome 13-year-old; Ali, 11, who instructs everyone to call him Muhammad Ali; and Amer, a moody 10-year-old.

The youngest member is Rashid, seven, who comes from El Obeid, 250 miles southwest of Khartoum. Rashid tended the family's three chickens and sold eggs in the local suq. There he met Ibrahim, who had been to Khartoum. Last summer after the rainy season, Rashid told his mother he was going to the market. Instead, he and Ibrahim hitched a ride on the roof of "the snail," as the street children call the train making the four-day crossing of the desert to Khartoum.

Life for the vagrants is

Humiliated in a fight, a boy is beyond consolation (*left*). Muhammad, five, sucks at the glue-soaked shirt of a companion (*top right*). Middle row: Oblivion comes through sleep on the city sidewalks (*left*) or rubber cement. Bottom row: Boys feed milk to puppies they are raising in a storm drainage channel; gang leader Simon's transportation is a homemade bike cart that's earned him the nickname "Cranky."





a day-to-day affair. They come to Khartoum in hopes of bettering themselves, but the harsh realities of street life overwhelm ambition. Simon entered a trade school more than a year ago but dropped out. "I don't know why I left," he says. "I just want to get enough money to have a table where I can sell cigarettes and sweets." One recent evening Rashid found some money in the street and scurried off with three comrades to a neighborhood where illicit home-brewed alcohol could be bought. "I had a lot to drink," Rashid said the following morning, groggy from a hangover.

**W**hat little social welfare there is comes not so much from the impoverished state but mostly from private organizations and UNICEF. One such is Sabah (Arabic for morning), which provides medical care and a daily meal of canned fish or beans and milk for the 75 or so boys it can accommodate each day. But Sabah cannot replace the family. One boy, who had been given an oral antibiotic for an infected foot, poured the contents of the capsule directly onto his wound.

For the most part, the children fend for themselves by rummaging through restaurant garbage pails, draining the dregs of soda bottles, picking pockets and "kicking the ball," the boys' term for begging. Petty thievery is frequently tolerated by merchants, and even when the boys are arrested, they are rarely held. The police cannot afford to feed them. Much of the day is spent in search of piastres to buy dabs of rubber cement. Fifteen cents' worth, spread on a rag and held to the nose, will provide a hunger-numbing high for an hour. Children who inhale glue—the practice is almost universal among the boys—get light-headed, animated, sometimes aggressive. But prolonged sniffing puts them in a stupor. Gasoline fumes, inhaled from

Near Khartoum's main market a boy sniffs a rag daubed with glue, the opiate of the *shamassa*.



rags dipped in gas tanks, have a similar effect. Repeated exposure to the hexane and toluene in glue and tetraethyl in gas can cause brain damage. Amer, for one, walks with the typical rolling gait of a gluehead.

The other immediate threat to the boys' health is their widespread sexual activity—both among themselves and with paying adults. Younger boys, in constant fear of being abused by older ones, huddle with trusted friends during the night. According to UNICEF relief workers, 60 percent of the Sabah boys studied, including many who are sexually immature, suffer from syphilis, gonorrhea or urinary tract infections. To date, only 19 cases of AIDS have been reported in all of Sudan, but local health authorities are fearfully watching the epidemic in Central Africa.

**T**he plight of Khartoum's lost boys ultimately traces to the crises that grip Sudan itself. The strife between the Muslim north and the Christian and tribal south has intensified since an 11-year truce ended in 1983. Notes a Western relief worker: "Neither side takes prisoners." The war, a mid-1980s drought, and desertification resulting from misuse of the land have sharply reduced arable acreage. Although the drought has abated somewhat, the famine has not. Sudan, hobbled by a \$10 billion foreign debt, needs cash crops to meet its interest payments. So instead of growing protein-rich grains, farmers are encouraged to produce cotton and sugar.

Oil reserves—development has been curtailed by the war—may ease Sudan's fiscal crisis. Any respite, however, will come too late to aid the *shamassa*. "Some of Sudan's finest boys," says Magne Raundalen, a Norwegian psychologist who has studied them, "are dying in the streets." □

Returned to his home village 250 miles from Khartoum by a social worker, a runaway is embraced by his tearful grandmother. He went back to the city after less than a month at home.