



*Charles Oscar, a brutal police chief at the turn of the 19th century is still satirised by Carnival performers. A hundred years later, human rights violators are still plaguing Haitian society.*

*Photo by Leah Gordon*

## US makes a mockery of justice

In a July interview with the US magazine, *Emergence*, Emmanuel Constant, the leader of the FRAPH death squad that murdered hundreds of Haitians in 1993-4, claims that his organisation is still operating in Haiti, and that, together with former soldiers, he is planning to engineer the return to power of former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier. Meanwhile, in Haiti at the end of July, police arrested 10 people on suspicion of taking part in a plot against the government. The alleged ringleader, a former army colonel, remained at large.

July also saw the publication of the latest Amnesty International report on human rights in Haiti. The report notes that "perpetrators of human rights violations committed while the military were in power remain largely free and unpunished", and that "the failure to address the question of impunity for past human rights abuses, compounded by the failure to make speedy progress on the question of judicial reform...has created an atmosphere in which human rights violations continue to flourish." It concludes that "the future of human rights in Haiti is on the edge of a dangerous precipice."

Much of the blame for the parlous state of justice and the continuing climate of impunity in Haiti must be laid at the door of the Haitian government. As Father Daniel Roussière of the Gonaïves Justice and Peace Commission told *Haiti Info*, "If there were a World Cup for impunity, I think that the Minister of Justice and the Haitian authorities would at least get to the quarter-finals, without a doubt to the semi-finals and maybe they would even win the World Cup of Impunity."

However, the bragging of FRAPH leader, Constant, and the suggestion that members of the former military are still politically active and dangerous, focuses attention once more on the cynical double game being played by the United States. In 1995, the US

began funding a five-year \$18 million programme to reform the judicial system, yet, at the same time, Washington is blatantly obstructing the very process of Haitian justice.

Constant, the acknowledged former CIA employee, faces charges of murder, torture and arson in Haiti, and the Haitian government has asked for his extradition from his current home in New York. But the US suspended a deportation order, and then agreed that Constant could remain in the US with a work permit and "self-deport" at any time to a third country of his choice, effectively allowing him to escape justice. The US decision flouts its commitment under the United Nations torture convention to extradite or bring to trial suspected torturers.

Then there are the 160,000 pages of documents taken from the Haitian Army and FRAPH offices by US troops in 1994. Washington insists they will be returned only after the names of US citizens have been excised, apparently for the illegitimate purpose of covering up US complicity in political murder and other abuses. The former US Ambassador to Haiti has stated that information identifying US citizens has already been removed from 113 pages. The Haitian government has asked for the return, in their entirety, of the documents, which contain important evidence needed for the prosecution of cases against the military and paramilitary leaders.

The Haiti Support Group joins Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch/Americas, and the independent expert of the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva, in demanding the immediate and unconditional return of the documents. A new judicial system cannot be built while past crimes remain unpunished. Violence and instability will continue while human rights violators remain at large.



# AN EXILE'S STORY

**F**RANCILIEN PAUL has lived in the UK since 1993, having fled his native Haiti in 1991 following the military coup. Earlier this year he returned for the first time to visit family and friends in his home town of Limbé, outside the northern city of Cap-Haïtien. Back in the UK, Paul told his story and shared his impressions of the current situation with *Haiti Briefing*. Like many young Haitians at the end of the 1980s, Paul was actively engaged in community initiatives to bring about social and political change. After graduating from the Baptist bible college in Cap-Haïtien in 1989, he founded a school in the village of Bas Limbé. "I saw the deprivation there. Kids were wandering around naked in the street. There was no school and children had to walk about eight miles to the nearest one. So I said to my friend we can start something there, and with just twenty Haitian dollars we started up, and enrolled about 80 young girls and boys." Paul was also an active member of a youth organisation in Limbé which held regular meetings to discuss social injustice and how to deal with harassment from the police and section chiefs. He was inspired by the activities of the Catholic Ti Legliz community organisations. "I liked their philosophy of going from village to village discussing the way people could change their situation and deal with problems with the military."

## On a death list

At every meeting his organisation held, there were "uninvited guests checking on us." A few days after the September 30 1991 military coup against the recently elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a friend who was a surgeon in the Haitian Army called to tell Paul his name was on a death list prepared by a colonel in Cap-Haïtien. "He told me that if I didn't leave I would be in trouble. He said they were killing everybody who was working with people to stand up for their rights."

Paul fled to the United States and was granted political asylum. "I was lucky to have the chance to escape. As I was leaving to get to Cap-Haïtien airport, I saw the bodies of three young people in the street. Their blood was running along the road. When I got to the US I felt bad when I heard that others had arrived on the beaches of Florida and had been sent to Krome (Miami detention centre) while Cubans were getting full political status."

Paul hoped to return to Haiti once the situation improved but the crisis dragged on, and in 1993, now married to a British woman, he came to live in Cardiff, south Wales. "It was a real culture shock because in Miami there was a Haitian community but in Cardiff I didn't meet a single Haitian."

## A shocking situation

During over six years abroad, Paul kept in contact with his family and friends in Haiti, but nothing could prepare him for the changes he experienced when he returned for the first time in early 1998. "It was shocking. The first thing was the poverty level. As soon as I got off the plane in Port-au-Prince I was shocked to see the massive relocation of

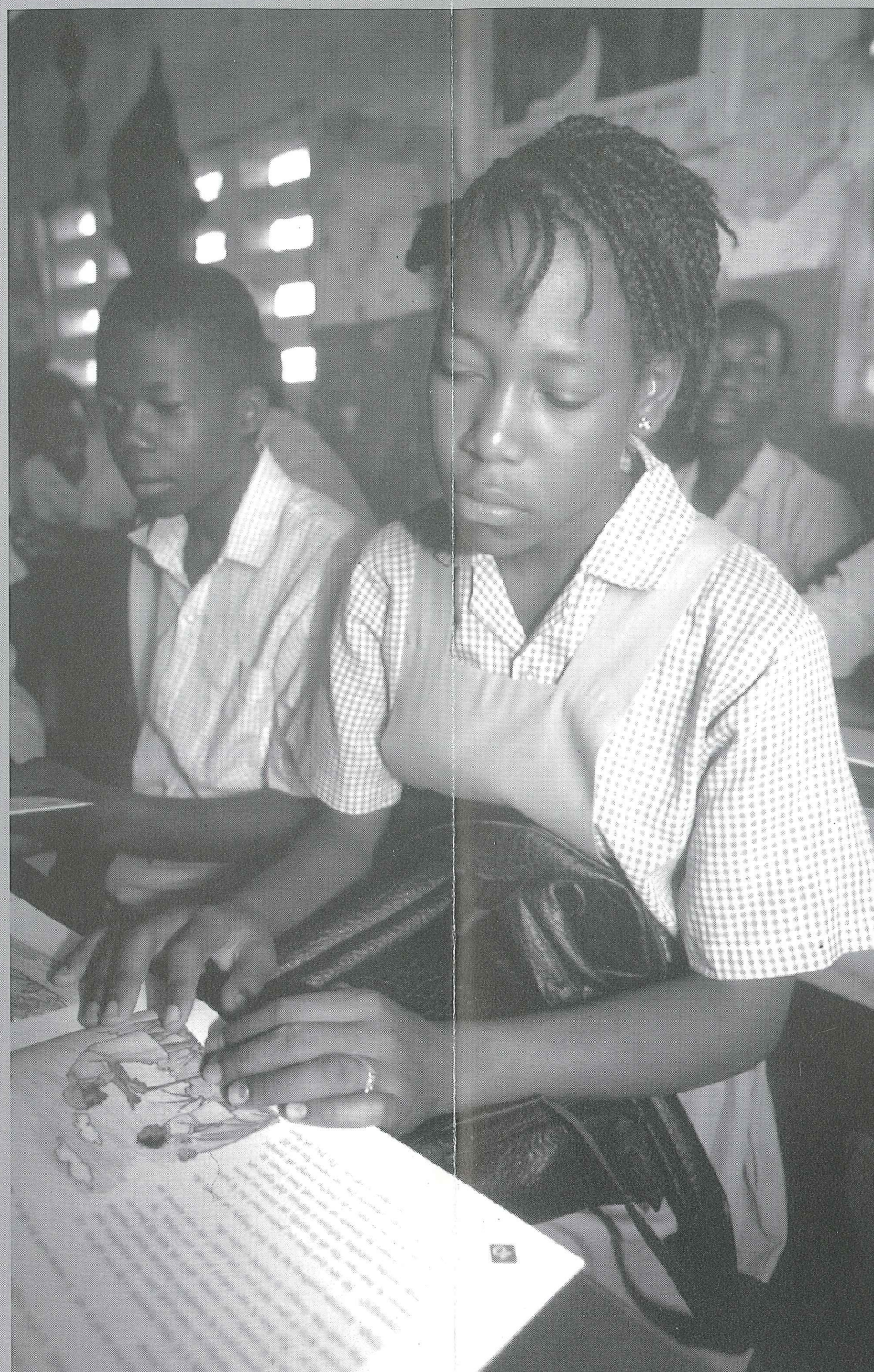
people from the countryside to the capital. Then there is the insecurity. There is no safety in the streets, there are killings at night, and the situation has deteriorated since I was last there. Because of the poverty, there are some people who don't care about human life."

In Limbé, Paul's friends and former associates expressed their disappointment with the current situation. "There are some peasant and youth groups in Limbé that are so frustrated and angry because they thought that when Aristide came back (in 1994) things were going to get better. They thought the cost of living would go down, and that parents would be able to send their children to school, but nothing has changed. The Limbé people were expecting much more from the US invasion."

As in Port-au-Prince, the issues of insecurity and impunity were major concerns. "The army has been abolished but the criminals who tortured and killed young people have not been judged or jailed but are walking free. I met a woman in Limbé who lost her son. Some men came at night, took him away, and the next day he was found dead on the beach at Cap-Haïtien with two bullet wounds. She has tried to find justice but so far there is no answer. People are really upset. They are disappointed that there was no disarmament of the Macoutes who used to beat and arrest young men. They still have their weapons and still kill people at night."

## Lavi chè

The other main issue for Limbé residents, says Paul, is the cost of living. "Life is so expensive, I don't know how the poor survive. Haitian soil is fertile and if we had a good irrigation system we could provide food for all the population. But when I went there it was



**A private school in Arcahaïe. In Haiti less than half of the population can read and write, and almost half of the 1.3 million children of primary school age do not attend school. Community activists such as Francilien Paul have attempted to fill the void, but the population is still waiting for the State to respond to the demand for better education.**

only US rice and US chicken. Everything in the market is from the US. That's OK for those who have some import business but for the masses it's bad. They can't afford it, and Haitian farmers are discouraged because their goods are not worth anything at the market. Food can be produced, so why buy it from the US?"

Some people told Paul that they now feel the invasion only served the interests of the middle class. There is disappointment too that Aristide did not achieve more when he returned. "Some people expected too much of Aristide, expected miracles. In general, people are very disillusioned with Haitian politicians who make promises but never do anything. Having said that, some still expect things from Aristide in the future, remembering that he did not have a full term as President."

Noting that both the Ti Legliz community organisation and his old youth group are still active in Limbé, Paul retains his faith in the Haitian peoples' own organisations. "They are determined, and are fighting for a better future. They must take the lead and not expect international organisations to do it for them. People expect too much from foreigners."

## Life in Britain

Paul hopes to return to Haiti some day to make his own contribution but for the moment he is making a life for himself in London. "It's not easy here in the UK. I can feel lonely even with people around me. I've only met four Haitians here and a few Haitians from France. Some British people don't even know where Haiti is. It's bizarre, because Haiti is the first black country to take its independence, yet it seems few people know this story. Even people from neighbouring Caribbean islands don't know much about Haiti."

One thing most people in Britain connect with Haiti is Vodou, and Paul can scarcely contain his frustration with the level of prejudice he encounters. "It's a question of cultural identity. When the slaves organised themselves to defeat their masters they gathered together around Vodou. People don't understand. You have to take things in their context, and even as a Christian you still retain your identity and your ancestors' identity. The evangelists try and make Haitians forget their roots and their culture, but Haitians should say they are proud of Vodou. It is a religion of the oppressed, and a religion of resistance...Remember Boukman, the Vodou priest who helped defeat slavery, Vodou started it off, and I am proud of Vodou."

*Photo by Leah Gordon.*

Gratuitous Diana link...

# Fayed: Haitian citizen

**F**rom the pages of "Papa Doc and the Tontons Macoutes", published in 1972, we bring you the strange tale of Mohammed Fayed, a 25-year old, Egyptian-born businessman who arrived in Haiti in June 1964. The book, by Al Burt and *Time* magazine correspondent, Bernard Diederich, reveals that Fayed's investment proposals won him major concessions from the government of dictator, François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier.

Fayed promised to invest millions of dollars in the long-term development of an oil refinery and the Port-au-Prince harbour. In return, he received "exclusive concessions that gave him control of the oil industry, shipping, and the port." He was also named "sole shipping agent for the twelve steamship companies serving Haiti. Besides these agent fees he collected wharfage fees that previously went to the government, and he quickly increased these fees."

These were the glory days of corruption in Haiti when money and friends in high places could get you anything you wanted. Fayed's connection was Clémard Charles, Duvalier's banker, and Fayed "became a Haitian citizen in a matter of months although normally a ten-year period of residency is required." Together they set up a lucrative car insurance scam based on a government decree that required every motorist in Haiti to purchase \$67 a year liability insurance from Charles' private bank.

Fayed's business ventures in Haiti, while lucrative, were short-lived. Regional shipping organisations opposed his monopoly control of Haitian shipping, and protested to Duvalier. At a meeting of the shippers' conference Fayed failed to appear. Too late the dictator moved to freeze his bank accounts. Fayed, and "a large sum of money", had left Haiti. The promised investments had never materialised, but Fayed was one step nearer the fortune that one day would...



**F**IRST the controversy, then the promotion, finally some analysis. Press coverage of the Vodou Nation event - the first Vodou ceremony staged in Britain in London and Liverpool last May, "performance Vodou" as *The Independent* dubbed it - was as mixed a bag as the *lwa* invoked at the ceremony. But it was a full bag - further testimony, as if it was needed, of the enduring fascination Vodou holds for westerners.

That fascination is of course based on all the old stereotypes - devil worship, the occult, the Baron Samedi/Papa Doc image of films like *Live and Let Die*. "Vodou Night Causes Uproar" proclaimed *The Journal* in two-inch high headlines on its 24 April front page, just one of seven articles that wheeled out the usual church suspects to condemn the event. One cleric labelled it an "ungodly practice"; another added authoritatively that he knew it involved people becoming "possessed by evil spirits"; a third opined that those attending might suffer from "demonic oppression." The dog biscuit must however go to Mark Stuge of the African-Caribbean Evangelical Alliance. He was quoted in the *New Nation* (4 May) as being worried that anyone attending may return to church "acting like a snake or roaring like a lion."

How this motley crew of clerics derived such deep-seated knowledge about something they had clearly never sampled remained unexplained. Perhaps more urgent was what right they had to attack a religion that in its belief in transmeditative states, possession and transcendence of death, mirrors their own - what, after all, is the resurrection, transubstantiation or speaking in tongues? Cultural imperialism is at its worst when religious discourse strays into ethnic comparisons. Indigenous peoples, tribes or ethnic minorities have magic, ritual, superstitions, all, in Haiti's case, wrapped up in Vodou. Civilised westerners and the missionaries they dispatch on the other hand have religion, the Holy Ghost, and the body and blood of Christ. Belief that you have the real thing and are keeping the phoney out is of course an essential ingredient of religious bigotry.

*New Nation* at least had the sense to get a debate going, giving Leah Gordon 200 words to put all the rubbish into some sort of historical context. Vodou she explained was the religion of the slaves, used as a means of bringing together people of different tribal origins. As such it played a major role in the revolution that made Haiti the first independent black nation and in keeping the white man out after

# NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS, WHITE SLAVES

review of Vodou Nation press coverage

1804. "They (Haitians) know it seems sinister and scary to outsiders and as they feared reoccupation by Europeans, they have played up to the image." Go along to event, Ms Gordon urged, people had "nothing to lose except their own prejudices."

It was left to *Time Out* in a preview headlined "Fear of Music" to get under the skin of this prejudice. Reciting the importance of Vodou in Haitian history, the listings magazine drew a salutary conclusion. "So here we have Vodou as an empowering force exclusively understood by black people - and you wonder why it gets a bad press in the West?" The "Holy Willies" were "just like the slave-owners who outlawed traditional African religions." And look where that got them, one might add. As dead as Vodou is alive.

Perhaps embarrassed by their ignorance, critics tried a new tack quickly picked up by the press. Vodou means animal sacrifices, they mused. Surely that was illegal? No retorted ¡Como No!, the company promoting the events. These were vegetarian, sacrifice free ceremonies. Julia Llewellyn Smith in *The Sunday Telegraph* recorded the disappointment of some of the audience at all this. "Is that all?" asked one woman. "I thought I was going to see a goat sacrificed."

*The Sunday Telegraph's* was one of a number of long balanced features. Llewellyn Smith mentioned "the near hys-

teria" that had greeted the event in passing then went on to dispel the myth by spending a day with Vodou priest Edgar Jean-Louis and his team as they discovered the delights of Hackney's Ridley Road market. Other papers, such as *The Times* and *The Independent* had sent reporters out to Haiti before the event, spawning detailed profiles of the Haitian dimension of Vodou. It was *The Independent* that pursued one of the most fascinating lines, asking what the visit to Britain meant. Since being recognised as an official religion in 1987, Vodou cultural acceptance has never been higher, abroad as well as at home. But could real Vodou travel and, as performance art, could it ever be the real thing, *The Independent's* Philip Sweeney asked.

*The Guardian* built on this theme and linked it with the tenet of the short promotional pieces that appeared in many of the listings/club magazines. These saw it all as something different, a cultural, educational event with religious overtones. "We've had jungle and trance. Could Vodou be the next sensation?" asked Matthew Kershaw in *The Guardian*. If the search for the new is all in clubland - Bagley's Studios, the London venue has held "fetish parties, transvestite gatherings, even happy hardcore nights," noted *The Big Issue* - the answer seems to be yes. In the July issue of *The Wire* Mike Shawcross reported that as "the ceremonial pulse ripples across the different beats of three drums...I feel the hair rising on the back of my neck."

by  
**PHILLIP  
WEARNE**