



Selling home-made snacks to bus passengers – Haitians going it alone more than ever

Photo by Leah Gordon

Feeling the fallout from the attacks on the US

The United States' declaration of a "war on terrorism" following the 11 September attacks was met with some scepticism, if not cynicism, by those familiar with the case of Emmanuel 'Toto' Constant. Haiti's number one terrorist fled to the US in early 1995 after murder charges were filed against him. Constant was the leader of the death squad organisation, FRAPH, which terrorised the Haitian population, killing and torturing hundreds, perhaps thousands of pro-democracy activists in the years 1993-4.

Although the Haitian government requested Constant's return to stand trial, he was released from custody by the US immigration service in mid-1996, and since then has been living freely in the Queens district of New York City. In his absence, the landmark Raboteau massacre trial went ahead in 1999, and he was one of

37 ex-soldiers and FRAPH members found guilty of the premeditated murder of innocent civilians in the city of Gonaives in 1994.

Turning a blind eye

Yet, even as the US sends its forces half way round the world in 'hot pursuit' of Osama Bin Laden, Toto Constant still lives and works just a mile or two from the

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site of the World Trade Centre. Speculation as to why he is allowed to stay in the US and not sent to stand trial in Haiti, centres on his close involvement and co-operation with the US Central Intelligence Agency during FRAPH's reign of terror in Haiti.

Whether the US administration's new concern about terrorism prompts it to wash its own dirty laundry remains to be seen. What is clear is that Haiti will feel the consequences of the September attacks most severely in terms of the knock-on effects of the US's subsequent economic malaise.

Reduced remittances

Each year, Haitians living in the US send back an estimated US\$700 million to relatives and friends at home. This vast sum almost single-handedly keeps the country afloat. But with an estimated 600,000 expected job losses in the sectors of the US

economy in which many Haitian immigrants have found low-paid, unskilled work – tourism, hotels, the restaurant trade, and taxi services – the amount of remittances to Haiti is likely to be severely reduced.

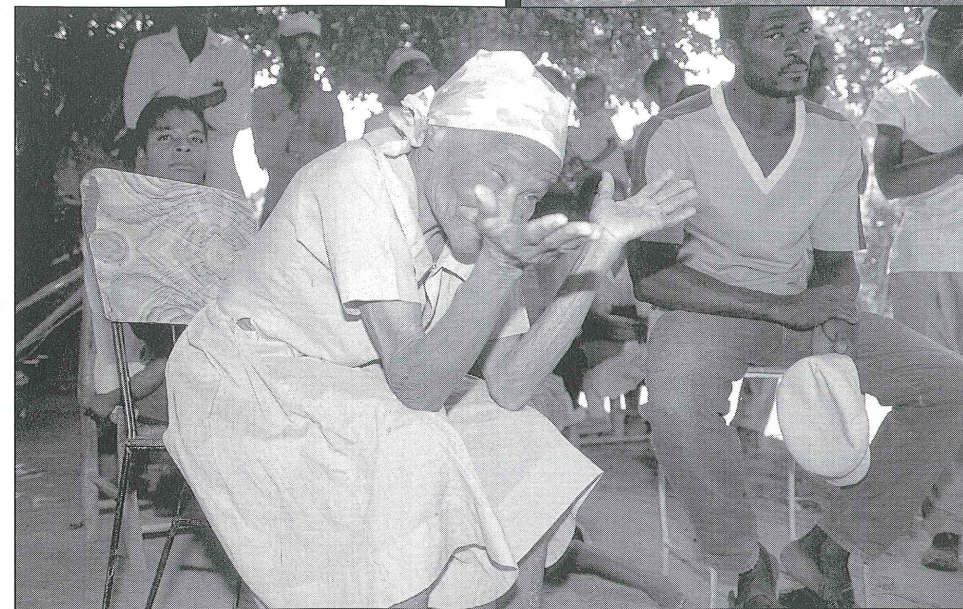
The Haitian assembly sector, that re-exports clothes and electronic equipment to the US, and accounted for seven per cent of the country's GDP last year, is also likely to suffer from the US recession. 11 September-inspired restrictions on airfreight have already damaged Haiti's lucrative mango export trade with the US.

Income from the transshipment of cocaine that, like it or not, makes a significant contribution to the Haitian economy, may also fall. Only too aware of the links between drugs trafficking, arms shipments and terrorism (remember Oliver North and the Contra-gate affair?), the US may increase its pressure on Haiti with regard to the flow of Colombian cocaine. In early November, the US announced that Haiti was once again on its list of major drug-transit countries, and, along with 22 others, can expect punitive aid sanctions to be applied. ■

On 30 September, the tenth anniversary of the military coup which caused the deaths of over 5,000 people in three years, the Haitian NGO, the Centre for Research and Action for Development, spoke to a militant from the popular, social movement.

Stephen Phelps is an agronomist, a specialist and instructor in peasant farming techniques, who has worked with peasants and young people to set up the organisations that, since the 1980s, have led the struggle for change in Haiti.

"It's really difficult to find any positive elements in the sense of democracy-building in Haiti." With these words, Phelps demonstrates both his bitterness and anxieties regarding the situation in 2001.



Popular organisations have yet to recover

Photo by Leah Gordon

His thesis is that the logic of the coup d'état still dominates Haitian reality. "The coup d'état is a process", he says, "and its military phase was only one stage." He adds that, over the course of several years, Haiti has been transformed into a "delinquent and Mafiosi-style" State where the people have been pushed back from a position from where they can exercise any power, and that this has happened in the context of an unprecedented growth in Haiti's dependency.

Keeping the people out of politics

Phelps remembers the early days of the return of constitutional government as ones of incredible hope and expectancy. "The people hoped that the government would pick up where it left off in 1991." But, contrary to expectations, "progressive actors were co-opted in the President's Small Projects scheme", and, as a result, the "people were excluded".

At the same time, Phelps explains, armed gangs developed, feeding a variety of types of banditry. We are witnesses to "a phenomenon of democratisation of drugs (trafficking), which had itself financed the coup", while, Phelps continues, "the political gangs" appear to also work well for the government." That is to say that, on the one hand, Lavalas and

Ten years after

An activist assesses the decade since the coup d'état



Drying rice in central Haiti - once self-sufficient, Haiti now imports half the rice it consumes

Photo by Leah Gordon

the Macoutes have reached a reconciliation, while, on the other, "a lot of the opposition supported the coup d'état."

The above scenario has created a general feeling of confusion where violence has become "commonplace". For example, Phelps notes that today's gangsters in Cité Soleil act just like the paramilitary FRAPH group by sowing terror in this vast shantytown to the north of the capital. In other poor areas, "the representatives or supporters of the government terrorise the population," and "one does not know when they are acting as employees of the Minister of the Interior, as armed gangsters working for the mayors, or as Macoutes." The Army has been dissolved but "in fact", he says, "with these gangs we are faced by an even more dangerous force."

Aristide's return and the rehabilitation of torturers

Phelps strongly rejects the idea that the return

of Aristide in 1994 after three years in exile can be seen as synonymous with the return of democracy. "There was the physical return of Aristide but with clear conditions such as the neo-liberal plan that was negotiated in Paris, and the amnesty for the coup criminals - there was no return of democracy."

With 20,000 US soldiers disembarking in Haiti ahead of Aristide's return, "we basically had the fracturing, demobilisation and beheading of the popular organisations", suggests Phelps, alluding to the role of the US. Much more than the repression, it was the "political asylum (in the US) given to nearly 5,000 people from popular organisations that left these organisations broken."

For Phelps, the US returned Aristide to Haiti with only one goal: "to control the masses." The US knew that only Aristide had the ability to promote "reconciliation with the Macoutes." What has in fact happened over the last 10 years is that the supporters of the

Duvalier dictatorship have hoisted themselves up into the important posts in the national administration, and Aristide himself has received numerous notorious Duvalierists, including the coup leaders' former adviser, Serge Beaulieu, at the National Palace.

Phelps also criticises the ruling party's adoption of traditional political practices that had been rejected by the progressive sectors. He heard "that during the last elections, the Lavalas Family candidates offered a gallon of rough rum (kleren) to every family." What's the difference, he asks himself, between that and the Duvalier times when "to win a political campaign you just had to put a little rice in the peasants' hats?" He is just as critical of the anti-Lavalas opposition. "The one and the other just want to use the popular vote for their own interests."

Commenting on the recent scandals of houses purchased by the State for former President Préval and the current Prime Minister

Jean Marie Chérestal, he adds that once in power, "they buy houses for more than one million US dollars for the former head of state or for the Prime Minister while the country wallows in misery."

Trapped between the government, the opposition and the international community

Regarding the electoral crisis that has lasted since the legislative and local elections of May 2000, Phelps thinks that the "people are trapped between the international community and its local puppets." There is still no difference between "the populists in power" and the opposition coalition Democratic Convergence. From one side to the other, neither offers any evidence of having a vision that could move the country forward. He describes the entire political class as "truly immoral."

"It's a disgrace to witness that there has been a continuity between the coup era and the current period where the foreign diplo-

ats still come to Port-au-Prince to give orders. Their names may have changed, but the international community's approach has not."

As for the attitude of those currently in power, Phelps thinks that they are benefitting from the crisis themselves. While the government sees itself as obliged to put some programmes into action to improve the population's living conditions, they have "the pretext of the freezing of international aid to explain their inertia." The sum in question is US\$500 million.

Judicial reform - made in the USA

Questioned about reform of the justice system - the principal demand of the Haitian people over the last 15 years, Phelps stresses the lack of political will on the part of the country's leaders. For him that is the only way to explain why people such as Marc Bazin, the current Minister of Planning, has not been put on trial considering that he was a Prime Minister representing the illegal coup regime in 1992-3.

As for the reform process, undertaken over several years, he calls it a "prefabricated, US-made" reform contracted out to NGOs. Nearly US\$20 million was paid to international consultants, and the project was directed by a US American agricultural technician!

Phelps pays homage to the Lavalas regime for carrying out the Raboteau massacre trial in 1999, saying, "It was an exceptional case". He remarks "it shows how, with a certain intelligent international cooperation, things can be achieved. The proceedings at the Raboteau trial prove that if it wanted to, then the government could succeed with other cases too."

Neo-liberal reform and State dependency

Since the Préval Presidency (1996-2001), "the slogan 'change the State' has been forgotten," says Phelps. Instead we're told it's a question of 'restoring the authority of the State.' Attempting to restore the authority of a State that has not been transformed has led to a "resurgence of arbitrary rule".

At the same time, in agreement with the international aid donors "whose objective is to weaken the State", there has been a move towards the privatisation of all services... and Phelps feels that the changes these moves have produced are of the "technical and legal kind in order to facilitate Haiti's integration into the globalised economy."

As a result, ten years after the coup, Haiti's dependency has increased. "If in 1992, Marc Bazin, when he was de facto Prime Minister, authorised the Rice Corporation of America to flood the country with American rice, then in 1994, it was Aristide who, at the Summit of the Americas, invited the company to set itself up permanently in Haiti. Seven years later, one can see that despite the talk about agrarian reform, Haiti imports 200,000 tonnes of rice each year, 20 times more than in 1986. It is a fact that now Haiti is the world's third largest consumer of American rice."

■ Source: Information Service of the Centre for Research and Action for Development (SICRAD). Written by Gotson Pierre. (Translated from French by Charles Arthur.)

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Haiti Support Group,
 PO Box 29623,
 London E9 7XU
 ● Phone & fax:
020 8525 0456

● Email:
haitisupport@gn.apc.org

● Website:
www.gn.apc.org/haitisupport

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Charles Arthur

■ Designer:
Andy Smith

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Lineaments of the Lwa – new film about Vodou

Lineaments of the Lwa is a film essay on Vodou and its emergent spirits (lwa). It is a broad sketch of modern Haiti that reveals the roots of the spirits in all areas of life. The film portrays the spirits as manifest in Haitian arts and ritual, as well as in the elemental forces, the streets, markets and countryside.

The half-hour film shows that Vodou is not merely a vestigial primitive belief system nor a bizarre legacy of the slave trade, but a living and pertinent, contemporary religious practice that forms an essential part of cultural life in Haiti.

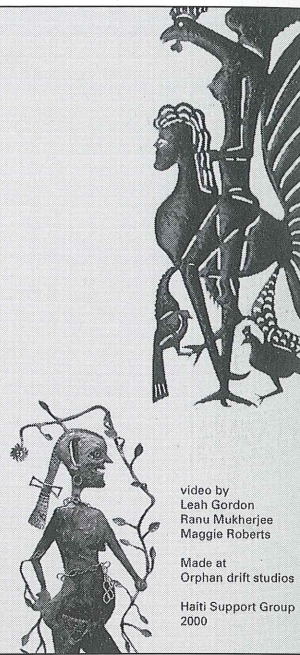
After a brief introduction to the history of Haitian Vodou, viewers are immersed in a journey through a sequence of montages, each portraying the essence of one of the primary deities. The montages combine footage from Vodou ritual and daily life, images of Haitian art, ambient sounds and the essential drumming and singing which accompany ritual. A voice-over describes the primary characteristics and functions of each spirit.

The film shows how the spirits reflect life and experience for Haitian people now, as they did hundred of years ago, and how Haitian art functions to keep the spirits alive in the minds and hearts of the Haitian people. It assists in contextualizing the art of Haiti and the essence of the Vodou faith for those who have not been witness to it. It underscores the transformation of the everyday into the divine, and the divine into the everyday, which is the very basis of Vodou consciousness.



Lineaments of the Lwa
 28 minutes
 original in
 mini DV

Lineaments of the Lwa
 an exploration of the vodou spirits in Haitian life, art and culture



video by
 Leah Gordon
 Ranu Mukherjee
 Maggie Roberts

Made at
 Orphan drift studios
 Haiti Support Group
 2000

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Lineaments of the Lwa is a collaboration between Leah Gordon, co-director of *A Pig's Tale* TV documentary and author of *The Book of Vodou*, and Ranu Mukherjee

**A film by Leah Gordon, Ranu Mukherjee & Maggie Roberts
 Produced by the Haiti Support Group, 2001
 Made at Orphandrift Studios**

and Maggie Roberts, video makers and visual artists from the Orphandrift collective.

Available on VHS PAL for £12.99 per copy, and VHS NTSC for £25.00, by sending a cheque to the Haiti Support Group, PO Box 29623, London E9 7XU. Please add the following amounts for postage and packing: in the UK – £1.20; in the rest of Europe – £1.90, and in the USA and Canada – £2.90 per copy.

Action update: Cointreau workers

In July, the Haiti Support Group (HSG) translated and distributed an open letter sent to Rémy Cointreau by the two Haitian orange workers' unions. The letter countered the "mass of gross and deliberate lies" in the company's *Guacimal S.A. in Haiti* brochure. With September's announcement of Rémy Cointreau's first quarter revenues of US\$192 million/£134 million (up 30% from a year earlier), the HSG renewed its call for the French drinks giant to help resolve the dispute. We forwarded a press release to thousands of media and non-governmental organisations, trade unions and individuals in the UK, US, Canada and Haiti.

In an attempt to enlist the support of the British Labour Party, the HSG wrote to both Neil Turner, the Labour MP for Wigan, and the Labour Party leader of the Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council,

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Comme

Diary

Matthew Norman

● Even as he glories in his annual game of pretending to be in charge, Patsy Prescott finds trouble. The time is his startling lack of support for the workers of Haiti. Charles Arthur of the Haiti Support Group wrote to him after seeing reference in *The Guardian* to Patsy sipping Cointreau nightcaps. As Charles explains, the 350 Haitians who farm the oranges use by Remy-Cointreau have fought for years over pay (£2 a day) and conditions, with some being intimidated and attacked and others replaced by scabs. My colleague Emmett Borcik rings the Cabinet Office to demand a statement of support, but suffers insolence when he rings back about the rumour that Patsy, no content with betraying Haitian comrades, has no signed up to play the sun sugar daddy in a remake of the "oranges ripening in summer sun" Cointreau ads, a press officer titters disrespectfully before pausing him on to Debra, who Jean Train sounds irked. "This really is scraping the barrel," she says. "I can't believe I'm having this conversation." Click here.

asking them to support the Cointreau workers' unions. Wigan is "an archetypal Northern working class town in culture, economy and politics", and was the subject of George Orwell's study of poverty in Depression-era Britain, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. It is also twinned with Angers, the French town where Rémy Cointreau's distillery is based.

After reading that the Deputy Prime Minister enjoyed Cointreau nightcaps, we wrote to him too: "Mr Prescott, in Haiti, the British Labour Party is referred to in Creole as the *Parti Travayè* which translates as the 'Workers' Party'! We trust that you can reassure us that the Labour Party still believes in internationalism and solidarity with workers on strike."

Sadly, neither John Prescott nor the Labour Party's Wigan representatives were able to reassure us or even reply. But we were not alone.

On 23 August *The Guardian's* Matthew Norman wrote that Prescott's staff at the Cabinet Office refused to answer his paper's inquiries about this apparent lack of support for Haitian workers.

Better news from the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations which informed us it has been supporting the Cointreau workers' campaign, and is interested in developing closer ties with Haiti's new unions.

As the new orange-growing season has now started with the Haitian management still refusing to recognise the workers' union at St Raphael and only offering a derisory pay increase to workers at Madeline, activists in the US and Europe are planning to re-launch a concerted international campaign in late November.