

## SONGS OF CONFINEMENT

By

Boadiba

where are the people oh I don't see the people oh (2X)

where are the people speaking ill of me people speaking ill of me woy woy woy

"Kote Moun Yo," traditional sacred song of Haitian Vodou. Translated from Haitian Creole by Boadiba

On this tenth year anniversary of the Haiti earthquake we remember those who died, those who survived and we renew our deepest sympathies to those still mourning. In a traditional Haitian household, a death in the family is sometimes referred to as an instance of the Baron balancing the house.

### BAWON SAMDI

Great God who gave free will to the humans, gave us, the Bawon family, jurisdiction over life and death on earth. So we're not here to rectify human mores. Related to the ancient Egyptian rites for the dead through the Gedhevi nation of Dahomey we originate in mystic Africa. I am the foam on the flashflood, I am 3 pickaxes, 3 rivulets, 3 hoes, 3 shovels.

From Deita's *La Legende des Loas*. Translated from French by Boadiba

September 11 2001 the Baron balances his New York City house. The world changes forever.

January 15 2010 the Baron shakes his Haiti house and reveals to the world the underbelly of disaster economy.

January 2020 The Baron rocks the world through the agency of a virus. We will never be the same.

These years will always represent breakpoints between a time before and a time after. Breakpoints at ten year intervals, associated with great trauma on earth at an individual as well as international and cosmic level. To the twins the saints the dead and the living and to Gregory Vorbe, Haitian musician and painter whose Puela series inspired it, I dedicate this

### Post-Quake Blues (Fragment)

Blue blue blue of bright blue tarps we call puelas

Quilts together our land ourselves

Puela blues patch the rubble with chards of sky set into the canyons of fallen things

Where desiccated corpses are still trapped

Puela blues puela

Armies in silhouette come to make good money from our poverty

Puela infantry who spread imported cholera

By dumping their shit in our riverbeds

Puela soldiers waving before our faces their rosary of rapes

Puela blues puela

Children herded in evangelical holds

To lose their souls across borders where they are sold

Puela puela blues

Missionaries finger the places where strategic metals lie

Blue blue barriers of bright blue tarps hide enclaves

Where black men stagger under sacks filled with our stolen treasure

Puela blues puela

Endless successions of destructive administrations

Presidents fallen from the greed for power

Ramming down our throats their chosen successor

Generals returned to reclaim their turn

All roll in the money of our puela economy.

As much joy as sorrow, the Baron teaches us to experience all sides of life while appreciating our blessings. This is the Baron's black and white face under his top hat: life and death as continuum. Love and hate, which will you chose for your own soul? That choice is what determines which aspect of Baron is revealed to you. Our beloved elder Deita, in her seminal book *La Legende des Loas*, tells us that most people might think the Baron's name, Samdi, means Saturday, which is one of the days attributed to him. She encourages us to remember that in Haitian Creole the sounds 'sa m di' also mean 'what I say'. That is the significance of his name: what the Baron says goes.

The Baron's family and his children the Gedes rule the cemetery, this bed of soil from which we all rise. They are our ancestors from the beginnings of time. For who among us has no one in a cemetery somewhere?

Mathematical complicity between branches of an ever pulsing helix

Earthly paradigm catapulted to the edge of storms

Lent draws in her children one by one  
Her face covered in ashes  
She leans on a car fender  
Behind the house behind the house the sea  
Makes a trench that eats up the sand of the sloping beach  
Where Baron officiates  
A girl cartwheels backwards in the silver light  
All the way to the rim of catastrophe  
Where Baron is the master of ceremony  
Who takes sickness away by putting it in a casket  
Music releases birds from dark veins of translucent earth  
When Baron attends the birth of a white baby from a black woman's thighs  
Of a black baby from between white thighs  
Inside the cemetery gate knock three times at the Baron's cross  
Light a yellow candle spill three drops of water  
Three drops of gin three drops of coffee three puffs of smoke from his cigar  
Lay the food under a tree and remember each of them and say their name  
Remember those you cannot call those you do not know  
And share this picnic with your beloved dead.

Yes, underground is the domain of the Baron family whose celebration begins on the Hallowed-Eve (Blessed Eve, Halloween) of All Saints' Day and the Day of the Dead. We can call him Pappy and his wife, known by her Viking avatar's name Great Brigit, we can call her Granny if we imagine a youthful and sexy granny. She is our grandma who longs for Spring like her Greek avatar Persephone, the one who like her Egyptian avatar Maat holds the scales of justice, in a world where the justice of humans is lacking. She rests her hand on our shoulder to comfort us and fills us with a grandma's love. She whispers in our ear: 'Yes my child I see what is happening and I'm here with you. Don't worry I will raise your spirit so you can hold on firm.'

## Where Has Our Life Gone

Where has our life gone

Father carries the child to sell at Bonkira's

Like a beast to the butcher's where has our life gone my friends

Father carries the child to sell at Bonkira's

Like a beast to the slaughter

Baron shuts his door he says bring the ropes oh

Joseph's in hot water everyone bring ropes oh

Gesnel's not into evil

God gave him Guinea so he can heal the sinners

Vodou priests are not Spirits

Servants of nature Vodou priests are not Spirits

By God we'll speak the word for them.

"Kote la Vi Nou Ye" contemporary sacred song of Haitian Vodou, Wawa (Youtube/Google: Wawa and Azor)

2001 the twin towers in New-York, 2010/2011 Haiti, Chile, China shaken to the bones/ nuclear disaster in Japan, 2020 world sickness. Serious blows, ten years apart serving forever as demarcation lines for life before and life after.

10 years after the quake Port-Au-Prince is a post-apocalyptic town ruled by gangs and politicians on the make. Nothing has been rebuilt and the 2 billion dollars in aid donated dollar by dollar by the American people to the Clinton Haiti office? I asked the cook at a well-to-do home:

(Beta J, Port-Au-Prince 2010)

## Cook's Complaint

Woy the Eternal!

Hear this tale I'm telling

In the wake of the quake

An office has opened here  
That will give you money yes! You can get money from them  
But here's the hitch:  
First you have to be buried underground  
Before you can receive this money  
Before the capital mother money makes children  
Before this interest money benefits small fry  
You're already in the ground  
And that's as sure as Bush and Clinton cash.

When I returned from Haiti in February 2010, one month after the earthquake destroyed us, people would ask me how it felt living there in these times. I had no mouth to speak then, still reeling from the trauma, my body shaken and floating in clothing that had become too loose. Today I can say that it was a lot like it is here and now. The sense of dread of uncertainty of not knowing when the calamity will end, how far it will go, of being in suspense with the consciousness of seeing only a small part of the political equation. The feeling of powerlessness of being played with, taken for a ride when social services are unreachable and unemployment offices unresponsive, the feeling of ignorance of which shenanigans of power are going on behind the scenes. The agents provocateurs discrediting the integrity of genuine demonstrations. The strength that rises from our core as we see the trees.

The lines outside the store in Petion-Ville right after the quake were calm. A man invited me to shadow him so I could get the best deals because he knew this store. People were placing few items in their carts and though the shelves were emptying everyone made sure to leave something behind for the next person. We didn't know how long the food would last or where we would get water. My sister took out all the water bottles from the machines at her broken office and we handed them out of the car windows to the people who walked by covered in dust and carrying their possessions on their heads. That night the woman next door brought us gallons of water from her workplace. Those who were still working helped out, neighbors shared food, we gave to the ones who had lost everything. But many temples were burned and Vodouists killed by fanatic evangelicals. Here and now I see the hatred and what encourages it but I choose the love also at work among us. This side of the Baron's face. The young man who lost his job, could not get unemployment to reply to his claim and had to leave his rental but not before he paid two months' rent to honor a prior agreement with his housemate. The people at the place in Oakland where farmers leave vegetables and fruit every Sunday to be distributed for free. The young guy who brings a shopping bag filled with goodies to his housebound friend. The friends who share their confinement by sending music and videos. The young couple who offers seniors free service at their laundry. The tech-savvy youth teaching the elders how to function remotely. We hold each other up as best we can. We fight the feeling of paralysis by turning our energies to whatever actions we are able to take. Save the post offices, write to your big chiefs. Write to them they want your vote.

"Haiti is always at the forefront" goes a familiar saying; we led the way to end slavery in 1804 and we're still trying to do so, we were the first of four major earthquakes in 2010/2011 and since the beginning of

2020 we have been on lockdown for more than one year. For the last 4 years we have slowly or rapidly been sucked into a total economic, social and political vacuum. The official cause of the lockdown was money scandal, the disappearance of millions of dollars of the Venezuelan PetroCarib fund earmarked to improve condition in Haiti but ending up even before the quake, absconded by successive administrations of our leaders as far back as Preval (chosen successor of Aristide's party Lavalas/flashflood) who held power during the quake crisis, through Sweet Mickey's presidency which marked a return of the Duvalier contingent, and finally to the current president, Mickey's designated heir Jovenel Moise.

The opposition's past 20 years in power certainly should have given them a chance to take loving care of their country and their people but that never happened. The same rabid appetite for money unites the usual suspects and the country continues to stagnate and now to plummet. Each administration is quick to hide the thefts of their predecessors with a view to continue them; hide and then take over the shady contracts, but first get your party in power even if you can no longer be president yourself. Stolen by opposition as well as Duvalierist powers over the years, billions from various sources could have been put to work to benefit the people of particular urban and rural regions of Haiti. The members of Parliament and the opposition have been demanding that President Moise step down and to this effect they have managed to put such pressure on the general population that businesses are failing, jobs are closing, housing is lost, children are missing school, our future is truncated. Lower middle class is becoming poor, middle class is becoming lower, upper middle class and lower upper class are both trying to hang on tight but losing their means, while the rarefied upper strata is as usual hedging their bets. The more or less armed groups people have been referring to as parliamentary or political gangs posted at the entrance of roads leading to and from the capital and main towns froze all traffic, blocked all access to routes leading from rural to urban areas, forced people to stay at home, stopped farmers and merchants from moving their products and made all travel impossible due to the fear of not being able to return. Political analysts and ordinary people both pinpoint the motives of members of Parliament and opposition parties alike as simply wanting their piece of the delicious pie that presidential power drops into your pocket for you and your friends' benefit. Who profits from this situation? Haitian analyst Ashley Laraque answers drug dealers working the cocaine corridor between Columbia and the U.S, arms dealers because they go hand and hand as the Iran/Contra scandal taught us, pimps moving young prostitutes from the Dominican Republic whose tourism is largely focused on sex, sellers of children, kidnapers, killers for hire, shake-down-men, all those whose activities towards propping up the underground economies, benefit from the absence of scrutiny from a police force busy quelling street disturbances. Now with Covid-19 ordinances in place the entire world joins Haiti in hot water as our day to day situations become more similar.

People here also often ask why the big difference between Haiti and the Dominican Republic just next door, which seems to be doing so much better? Our esteemed journalist, Professor Michel Soukar, in an interview on the program Boukante La Pawol (Exchanging Words) points out that in some other countries like the D.R, Costa Rica and even Mexico or El Salvador the big guys as we call them might practice institutionalized corruption (that seems to be the norm pretty much everywhere) but they leave some money behind for running their country. They sometimes protect their agriculture, their local economies, their environment, their mining or fishing rights, they might invest personally within their own country and plan to retire there. Haitian chiefs have to steal a lot and fast because they never know

when the level of their excesses or those of their friends will cause the situation to blow up in their faces and force them to leave in a hurry. Their kids go to school abroad, they buy homes in Boca,

Coral Gables or the D.R. At home they proudly parade in designer clothes atop piles of garbage because heaven forbid they would have so much as a plan for garbage management. A good crisis can cause elections to be postponed or put on the back burner indefinitely making it easy to plot the choice of a successor with our foreign boss. Our well respected political analyst Ashley Laraque reminds us that in Haiti at most 10 to 15% of the voting population actually votes, so in fact 85% of that population has never spoken for itself, belongs to no political party, and is not represented by any.

It would be interesting to calculate how little money it would actually take to create and implement site specific low-cost programs at grassroots level in different areas of the country and to coordinate those efforts between various regions that face the same problems. Instead our big ones spend big bucks on phantom projects or receive chump change to sink economically healthy zones for the profit of the foreigners who pay them. We actually have individually sponsored projects such as the protection program for the young forests at La Visite in Seguin and on mount Macaya, the educational and hands-on programs for sustainable agriculture, drip irrigation, erosion prevention and economic autonomy (Mouvman Peyizan Papay, Goldman Environmental Prize 2005), for rehabilitation of the coral reefs, mangrove forests and fisheries in Caracol (PROFOBIM, Goldman Environmental Prize 2015), and more. They are few, they are isolated, they operate on modest amounts of cash raised by Haitian NGOs but they point toward viable solutions. Why must our top guys always be on the take? Why do they destroy anything good their predecessor might have put in place? Even one in whom we had high hopes, like Aristide, managed to deal us the lowest blow: A U.S occupation that morphed into a U.N one which has become too lucrative for everyone involved to let go. It's true that a foreign power, the U.S ever since it started its occupation of Haiti in 1915, has been controlling our elections and national policies in exchange for securing the presidency or paying a little cash or providing business ops. But let's face it: what we wish for are leaders who refuse to act as agents for encroaching superpowers and actually focus their attention on the nation's actual needs.

We can only hope that the health protocol that has proven successful in combating cholera can be implemented vis a vis covid-19 in Haiti. Hopefully the present administration will continue to follow it and resist the urge to trash their predecessors' program, which is always a great temptation. When a member of a household fell ill, they would immediately alert the family, pack their bags and go into isolation for testing and treatment at the local health outpost. A team of health workers would be dispatched at the same time to sanitize their home. The educational campaign set up for the present crisis seems far reaching and effective. As of now Wikipedia reports 2,788 cases of Covid-19 in Haiti (out of 10 million people) with 48 deaths and 24 recoveries. The official death toll in 2010 was 230,000 for the quake and more than 10,000 for cholera.

Meanwhile the game is suspended as the gangs, paramilitaries, nouveaux macoutes, political pawns infiltrating legitimate demonstrations also confined, are on hiatus from breaking and smashing and burning, from kidnaping and beating and killing. 'The motherless ones' as the population started calling them in the nineties, are gang-bangers from the U.S prison system deposited on the wings of the convict repatriation program meant to send criminals back to their country of origin with which they'd had no previous ties. Once in Haiti they are intent only on raising by any means the thousands of dollars needed

to return to the U.S. But even those hardened guys are fearful now of the new gangs of former local street kids. Those that grew up without faith nor law, those who, in the politically sponsored orphanages where they were given food and fed bitterness and hatred and equipped with little plastic sacs of crack to sell at open markets instead of education, sports, or other fun and useful activities suitable for children. They remain the neglected ones, groomed by men who turn them 10, 20, 30 years later into assault weapons. They are the new breed of tele-guided violent zombies.

### The Brazen Ones

“Malpouwont yo,” contemporary sacred song of Haitian Vodou, Awozam (youtube)

Look at the state of the country(2X)

Peasants look at the state of the ancestor’s country

The band of brazen ones they destroyed the country

(Refrain) Look at the state of the country(2X) My friends look at the state of the ancestor’s country

Small peasants look at the state of the ancestor’s country...

The brazen ones who say they are leaders so they can crush the country

Reduced peasant agriculture to zero

The band of brazen ones they destroyed the ancestor’s agriculture

(Refrain)

The brazen ones who say they are leaders so they can crush the country

Closed all the factories that were inside the country

Like Hasco that gave the country sugar

Like Minauterie that gave the country flour

Band of shameless ones they destroyed the country Haiti

(Refrain)

The brazen ones who say they are leaders so they can crush the country

They closed the cement factory from inside the country

Band of brazen ones they destroyed the country Haiti

...They slit the country’s belly making deals beyond the sea

Let them come in with turkey wings, come in with pig ears, come in with chicken feet

So they can crush the peasant’s agriculture

...When you enter Port-Au-Prince you say ‘Honor’ a pile of garbage answers ‘Respect’



You say 'Good morning' the neighbor asks 'won't you sit'

Before the shameless eyes of those who dirtied the ancestor's country...

Translated from Haitian Creole by Boadiba