

## PROFESSORIAL INAUGURAL LECTURE

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### Language, Education and Representation: Towards Sustainable Development for Haiti

First let me welcome all my colleagues, the general public, my good friends and family, for coming out to this Lecture tonight. A special welcome to Deans, and Heads of Department. But I know that everyone has taken time out from very busy schedules to be here and I thank you.

It was late last Thursday night that I realized I had the wrong title and topic for this Lecture, notwithstanding the fact that a first topic had been substantially prepared for the last six weeks while my new topic was then at ground zero! There had been no apparent publicity to that stage, however, and that suddenly became a distinct advantage which I was now able to capitalize on!

Two days earlier I had been immensely saddened by the news that Pierre Vernet, Dean of the Faculté de Linguistique Appliquée, an arm of the State University of Haiti, along with all other colleagues and students in the building when the earthquake struck, had been killed. It is strange but, in a sense, salutary to find the website still up and running with buildings and staff gone. In the first slide you will see and hear the description of the Faculty's work from that website. (Slide 2) Without paraphrasing in its entirety, the statement tells us that the Faculty was designed to produce scholars equipped with sound teaching methodologies

aimed at instrumentalizing national languages; this, in the Haitian context, is spelt out as bringing about appropriate educational reform and, very practically, preparing materials in Kreyòl and for Kreyòl. Pierre had worked over many years to bring an effective language education policy to the territory and I had last seen him when he had invited a group of linguists including myself from locations including the US, France, St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago, into Haiti to give a series of lectures on language education and language policy. That was in January 2000, exactly 10 years from the day of his death. Previous to that, I had been into Haiti twice as part of a professional organization seeking means to support those inside Haiti build the nation up through planned development of sub-sectors of its economy. I felt important to go back once again.

In 2000, when Pierre invited us in, he was seeking to inform his country on what needed to be done to provide an effective language education policy through using 'expert voice' outsiders since his own voice, being local, was having little effect. Once again we note that a prophet is not without honour, except in his own country'. In my own case it had been my work on child language acquisition in a creole context that was his particular concern as well as work which had emanated out of that as effecting language education policy. While it was known at that time that children can learn any number of languages that they are exposed to it was also proven that they would not normally do so if their own language was not valorized. Given the fundamental need to reposition the Creole language in Haiti, and despite legal measures established towards this, its status in the society remained- and remains- ambivalent.

I was meshing that event in 2000 last week with the daily reports of aid pouring into Haiti in a circumstance which had brought sudden publicity to a country that had effectively slipped off the world's radar for the last several years. The absolute ignorance of the BBC in trying to make initial contact within Haiti or even to describe Haiti as it had been was painful for a world news network which is held to be of the highest caliber. Suddenly disaster had brought the country to front focus yet again and the obvious world response was to provide aid, including most specifically food and medicine, and, of course, financing on a vast scale. While many are genuinely moved to support, in some cases we have to believe that the money is also a salve to the conscience, a symbolic gesture which allows us to move on with our lives of plenty- and trust me, our most basic lives in Tand T are lives of plenty compare to Haiti, even before the earthquake.

Whilst we were hearing of \$200,00US per hour pouring into one relief agency alone, however, we were hearing also the disturbing news that the old people in a hospice which was one mile from the airport receiving this aid, had not received food or water for the week following the quake and were now dying on the street. Then of course the reports of looting and of Haitian 'violence' began to surface, confronting me in another major area of research concern that has developed in the ten years since I was last in Haiti: the whole issue of the way in which the media and other forces of state control, manipulate what we see and hear to serve their own world view. To a great extent aid to Haiti in the long term is mediated by the way the country is represented in the world news channels and too often this has entailed a focus on violence, ignorance and lawlessness which misrepresents a people of extreme resilience, compassion, creativity and patience. Even the images of poverty whilst they do demonstrate a condition which we need to understand, can at best

motivate pity, which is a negative and demeaning emotion, casting its recipient in the role of victim and negating the overcoming force of the resilient spirit. This discursive aspect of representation also demands our attention, both internally and externally in relation to the country.

What was masked in the initial coverage of the massive relief effort but was surfacing now some ten days later as I wrote was that it is extremely difficult to bring aid to a devastated society, that, even before the disaster, had little infrastructure to sustain it, much less in the chaos following the earthquake, when the UN, its most effective internal source at the time had also been largely wiped out. Important as it clearly was to bring immediate relief and to save as many lives as was possible, the issues of Haiti's long term sustainable development needed to be addressed now more than ever. Suddenly policy suggestions that had been made ten years ago took on a renewed significance.

It is in that context that I set out to frame this Lecture which I do hope you will find not only informative but also useful, in a practical sense. I hope to demonstrate that we can give sustainable help in the area, most critically of education and language education, and can process negative representations more critically to appropriately comprehend the heart of a people.

Haiti has been set apart within the Caribbean region not only by its status as the first independent Caribbean nation but also by its continued history of violent oppression by dictatorial and foreign powers, by its resultant economic impoverishment, and - not least -

by its vibrant, resilient and talented people. There can be no greater testimony both to the cumulative nature of violence and to the human capacity to overcome than is to be found in Haiti's history of resistance to violence meted out to it. Yolette Etienne, a well-known Haitian activist has described the Haitian people as aptly symbolized by the bamboo (Slide 3). She says:

*'The bamboo is not a great big tree with a magnificent appearance. But when the strong winds come....even a great tree can be uprooted...The bamboo....bends but it doesn't break. Bamboo takes whatever adversity comes along, but afterwards it straightens itself back up.'* (Bell, 2001, 23)

In stark contrast to that resilience and to the fierce pride in their country which Haitians evidence we have Haiti's international image on which Poet Jean-Claude Martineau has commented (Slide 4):

*'Haiti is the only country in the world with a last name. It is Haiti, the Poorest Country in the Western hemisphere' ...The nation is often characterized overtly or through inference as a troubled, God forsaken people, where troubling, God forsaken things happen.'*

This insightful observation turns our minds immediately to US tele- Christian spokesman Pat Robertson and his pronouncements on Haiti's belonging to the devil because of a rumoured pact with Satan on the part of its first independent leaders. He seems to lose touch with reality here, and indeed to forget fundamental facts of the Bible he claims to proclaim, but suffice it to say for now: 1) that earthquakes occur according to the physical condition of the planet such that seismologists can predict their likelihood 2) it was early

acknowledged that this particular earthquake would not have had its devastating effect, had Port-au-Prince not already been a shamble of ill-built and maintained edifices 3) the responsibility for that condition lies in the hands of the internal and external exploiters of the country over hundreds of years, and includes most particularly the United States. 4) With all that to blame Satan and Haitians for what happened is a gross miscarriage of justice in apportioning responsibility! So who really sold out to the devil anyway?

The larger point not to be lost, however, is that, save perhaps for its art, we never hear of Haiti unless there is some negative circumstance pulling it down. It is represented to us as a beleaguered and distressed land, full of violent people, caught in Satan's grip. It has long become a repository for second hand items of every kind: what the United States of America is throwing out, however much used, is good enough for Haiti. On the side walk are heaped up piles of discarded clothes from which impoverished Haitians must select what they may (Slide 5). Christian missionaries will lend support if they can be sure that the Church that is built is ultimately American and not Haitian. Meanwhile, mothers have to eke out flour with dirt to feed their children - yes, it is true- and it takes the mighty shaking of an earthquake to make the world sit up and take notice.

### History

First of all it is necessary to give a very brief historical review of the country's development for no synchronic analysis can be complete without some contextual grounding in the past.

Haiti's succession from Spanish to French control is very close in overall pattern to that in the history of Trinidad. From the time of invasion by Christopher Columbus in 1492 there were few slaves under the Spanish, but major decimation of the Amerindian population nonetheless; then under the French from 1697, a sugar economy was built up with thirty seven thousand African slaves coming in to support the production of not only sugar cane but also indigo, coffee, tobacco, cotton and cocoa. The slaves were brought from a range of tribes in Congo, Guinea and Dahomey (now Benin) (Slide 6). It is reckoned that the Creole language, whose name in Haitian is Kreyòl, developed in the period between 1680-1730, as the newly arrived slaves needed to forge a common language in face of the considerable differences among their native languages. Successive waves of slaves were brought in in vast numbers up to 30,000 per year. The new code was realized out of the contact among regional and colloquial varieties of French and the various Niger-Congo languages spoken by the Africans. Both the Kwa group of languages in West Africa and the Bantu languages in Central Africa were influential in the formation of a code for which several explanations have been sought including one which supposes a theory of relexification whereby African language structures had French lexical items superimposed upon them (e.g. Lefevbre, 1999). The vote is out on the precise nature of the determining influences, however, and I do not plan to interrogate the diverse views this evening. It is important for our overall comprehension of the situation, however, not to liken Kreyòl to what we call in Trinidad 'dialect' or, within our own programmes, Creole, in the Trinidad context. For Kreyòl is a totally distinct language, mutually incomprehensible with French, though very similar in kind to what we call Patois as is still to be found used in some villages and towns in Trinidad including Paramin, Valencia, Blanchisseuse, and Toco. Speakers of French creoles throughout

the region and beyond can understand one another to a large extent, however, because of structural similarities among them as well as because of a partially shared lexicon. I have a slide here that will indicate for you, at least as a starting point, the extent of similarity among different varieties (Slide 7) Here are three utterances in Haitian and Guadeloupan juxtaposed. You will see differences in the first and third person singular pronouns I and he/she as well as in the progressive aspect marker ap in Haitian and ka in Guadeloupan. You will hear a poem in Haitian Kreyòl a little further along

It is worth noting that when the country won its independence in 1804 and became the first black independent nation, it set in place a law that any escaped slave from another territory who arrived in Haiti could, on setting foot in Haiti, become a Haitian and hence a free man; it thereafter served as a haven for slaves fleeing Jamaica and other relatively close enslaving territories. The Caribbean's own modern-day rejection of Haitians fleeing their circumstances, which has improved only slightly since Haiti was admitted to CARICOM, is further reason for the region to examine its position vis-à-vis this society today. It is interesting that from the outset the image of violence has been exploited, creating a negative misrepresentation. The most straightforward Haitian histories pick up on this as the example in the next slide indicates (slide 8):

*'Haiti became independent in 1804, but no nation recognized it until the 1820s. Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) took refuge in Haiti during his struggle against Spain, but even the newly independent nations of the Americas did not want to have anything to do with a nation of freed slaves. Haiti was too potent an example to the blacks in the rest of the hemisphere. **Haiti's leaders were demonized in French and American propaganda of***

**the time and since, and Haiti was and to some extent still is held up as an example of how black people cannot rule themselves and need supervision’**

"Haitian Revolution." *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. 2008. Thomson Gale. *Encyclopedia.com*. 25 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

The country has systematically been decimated internally by oppressive, self-interested leaders since its independence in 1804. Foreign influence, in particular from the United States of America), has characterized the twentieth century, and has been heinous in its oppressive, self-serving force. The reign of the Duvalier family from 1957 until 1986, however, was the most heinous of all the regimes, first under Francois Duvalier, better known as “Papa Doc”, and second under his son, Jean-Claude (Slide 9). The economy was subverted to both Duvalier’s and US interests, such that grossly underpaid factory labour became the mainstay of a large portion of the masses; peasant agricultural production was systematically undermined by state seizure of lands and by enforced labour for less than minimal wages. At that time Haitians report that anyone involved in helping others to acquire literacy or any kind of education was arrested. Ironically Baby Doc is said to have fled with up to \$900M dollars; he is now tearfully offering Haiti back 8M – a real drop in the bucket- he maintains a profit of 892 M.

When Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the people’s great hope, came to power at the very end of 1990, a repressive military coup followed some seven and a half months later, and in the three-year period of suppression which followed, which was financed by Haiti’s then dispossessed rich, the extreme brutality meted out to the population and in particular,

women, has been documented (Bell, 2001). When Aristide finally came back with American support in 2000, his capacity to change circumstances for the masses, was never actualized. (Slide 10) Aristide ultimately proved as corrupt and ineffectual as its former leaders and was violently ousted from power in 2004. The Haitian people had believed that this man would finally rule them with justice and their disappointment when he failed to do so was the more profound because of these expectations. The slide shows demonstrations against him and the burnt out van of a group of those who opposed him. On the next slide you will see a news report put out since the earthquake; a tearful Aristide (photo inset) offers to come home to 'help with the catastrophe'. The reality is that, if he did return, there would be even more instability, as, despite the disappointment of his rule, he does still have serious pockets of support. In the meanwhile, René Prével, Aristide's former protégé, has been President since 2006, supported by UN peace-keeping forces. Haiti is a country where around 56% of the population — four and a half million people — still live on less than \$1 per day. Punitive international trade and financial arrangements ensure that such destitution will remain a structural fact of Haitian life for the foreseeable future.

### Language Rights

But what of the long term language situation? Haiti has a population of eight to eight and half million at the present time, all of whom are *Kreyòl* speakers. Outside Haiti there are another three and half to four million speakers. *Kreyòl* is modern Haiti's national language and one of two constitutionally-recognized official languages, the other being French. Despite this, however, most official documents published by the Haitian state are still

written exclusively in French to the detriment of monolingual creole speakers, even though French is spoken today by at most one-fifth of the population, at various levels of fluency. The Haitian birth certificate, the very first official document that every newborn Haitian citizen is, in principle, assigned by the state, exists in French only. Such French-only policies, at least at the level of the written record, effectively create a situation of what Yves Dejean (1989, 1993:123-24). has described as “linguistic apartheid” in the world’s most populous Creole-speaking country. This linguistic apartheid goes against the spirit of Article 5 of the Constitution which states that “all Haitians are united by a common language: [Haitian] Creole”. In theory, Creole is legally on a par with French, but not in practice. As Haitian MIT Linguist Michel DeGraff has put it:

*‘This disparity seems an inexorable neo-colonial legacy of post-Columbian Caribbean history and the imperialist ideologies of settlers, slave-holders, missionaries, historians, linguists, philosophers, politicians, etc., throughout Haiti’s history. Policies promoting various sorts of Creole exceptionalism were part and parcel of Europe’s missioncivilisatrice from the beginning of the colonial period and throughout Haiti’s existence as a Creole speaking nation.’*

Sandra Evans, our own French-lexicon Creole lecturer, herself a St. Lucian, will now read you a short Haitian Creole poem so that you can get the sense of how it sounds. (Haitian poem to be read). That poem is all about the value of the Creole for its speakers, about the fact that everything he or she says, thinks and does, is in Kreyòl, whereas French, she merely learns. We do have copies of that poem in French and Kreyòl and another in Kreyòl and English if

individuals would like to have copies you might collect them at the end of the session. The second poem relates the peculiar situation of the diaspora community in Miami and elsewhere, who hesitate to offer sustainable support because it is frustrated by the internal government machinery.

### Language Education

The particular present day problem with which Pierre Vernet and his colleagues have been so much concerned to solve effectively is that of creating an educational system that allows of education in the mother tongue for Haitian children at least in the initial stages. It has been demonstrated world-wide, wherever pilot programmes have been set up, that children learn better in their mother tongues. Ethnicity, language and culture are deeply intertwined. Children acquire language to belong to a community, to fit in with its established norms. When they are encouraged to acquire literacy in this first language they are learning a new skill from a base of a spoken language that they already know and love, and they develop well accordingly. In contrast, when they are taught literacy in a second language they have been found to suffer alienation and failure. Not only are they being asked to acquire a new skill in a new language, but most often the second language is one which is being touted as superior to their own first language which is being concomitantly rejected by their teachers and the society in which they live. There has been found to develop a condition known as subtractive bilingualism (Skutnabb-Kongas, 1981) whereby the child ceases to progress not only in the school language but in his/her own language as well. The barrier of school language is often enough for children not to enrol in school or, if they do, for them to experience difficulties, become discouraged, repeat years, or drop out.

Every effort was made in Haiti to avoid this, at least on paper, through a language education policy, which passed into the Constitution in 1987, and which allowed of the first four years of education being conducted in the Creole. This plan was put forward from as early as 1978 when a standardized orthography was established for Kreyòl but it has never begun to be properly implemented partly through the lack of trained teachers to implement a policy which demands considerable teacher training as well as fluency in the two languages at issue. It has also been frustrated through the opposition of parents who perceived themselves and their children as being kept back by the Creole again because it has been represented to them as a language of ignorance and degeneration notwithstanding its efficacy as a full language in its own right. Rachel Doucet (2000) in a wide scale ethnographic study of language attitudes in Haiti found this problem. While children viewed Kreyòl absolutely as their language and as a language in its own right, which is a major positive development, they simultaneously perceived the advantages that accrue to knowing French. Additionally, for parents, their own socio-economic situation has demanded that they need their children at home supporting their painstaking agricultural endeavours and, if education does not offer a way up and out as they perceive it, then they will reject it and keep their children at home to add to their limited earning power.

The most forceful issue however, has been the absolute lack of equippedness to train teachers in the system. Fifteen year olds who graduate from high school go immediately back into the school as teachers in a system reminiscent of the monitor system which once pertained in Trinidad and Tobago but with less potential for any kind of real training at any

stage and with less initial education to begin with. There has simply been no money to change this situation and education has remained the preserve of the privileged few. The empoweredness that comes with education has been effectively cut off from the vast majority of the people.

Having said this, however, I must add that my experience of young adults in Haiti in the brief period I spent there was that they were hungry for knowledge in a way that, as educators at UWI, St. Augustine, we would marvel at! As we toured venues speaking nightly in early 2000 the crowds thronged the various university halls and embassies that we spoke at. Their questions were myriad and if they were disappointed in not having their question answered one night, they would turn up again on the next, so determined were they to find answers. Their misunderstanding of aspects of their situation was profound, however. In terms of their own reckoning with their immense poverty many of them spoke of its being rooted in their language situation. They were amazed to find that there were successful Caribbean independent nation states and that there were other indigenous creoles among the Caribbean islands. They saw success solely in terms of a United States model and were empowered by the very notion of a Trinidad and Tobago or a St. Lucia which were largely self-sustained. I would say that their French competence at least receptively seemed higher than we had been led to expect. I also noticed how many apparently uneducated people spoke passable English and seemed to adopt it quite readily, more readily perhaps than the French of their government rulers. English is the passport to perceived prosperity in the United States and for them has less taint of colonialism than does French did by reason of their own history of colonial exploitation. Keep these comments in mind until we discuss representation a little further along.

As the situation stands at the present time, there are private schools, like that of Yves Dejean which teach a full curriculum in Kreyòl. Dejean began his school in the rural village of Petit Goave in 1987 -- one year after the Duvalier dynasty fell. Every aspect of education was organized around the Creole. Today, the five-classroom school offers a flexible curriculum and services some hundred students. School meals are also supported, another consideration that has to be taken into account in education for many children come to school on a breakfast of salt water. Linguists like Dejean as well as Michel DeGraff believe that only Creole education is relevant and appropriate for the Haitian people. Their lives are rooted in a Kreyòl speaking environment and will always be so. Only good can come from the valorization of the Kreyòl and its full instrumentalization and much has been done in terms of the establishment of an orthography and the provision of some educational texts in the language well as radio stations which broadcast in it. I have tackled them both on what I have laughingly described as their linguistic schizophrenia because both are fluent speakers of Kreyòl, French and English, and would not have been as successful as they are today had they been monolingual in the Creole. They reject this argument as spurious, needless to say, pointing out appropriately that their own situations are atypical of the Haitian experience in many ways.

Michel has said of his own education (Slides 12 and 13):

*'Growing up in Haiti I went to a school run by a French religious order of Catholic brothers: Les Frères de l'Instruction Chrétienne. The brothers' meta-linguistic attitudes*

*were brutally creolophobe and passionately francophile. Actually, at that time, they, like many among the Haitian elites, seemed to despise most cultural phenomena that were not of (un-ambiguous) European pedigree, from linguistic to religious practice. Not very "Christian", it seems to me.*

*From that experience, and from what I've discovered and read since, I've come to a rather pessimistic conclusion: certain modes of (mis-)education in neo-colonial societies often turn students, along with their professors, into conformist and pseudo-elitist non-thinkers—uncritical consumers of pre-established myths, obsequious and self-serving upholders of that European "normative gaze". And you won't be surprised that I take "neo-colonial" to apply beyond the Caribbean and Africa and to even include some sectors of the North American and European intelligentsia.' (2001)*

He was one who survived his education to tell the tale, however, very much with his own mind!

Before we attempt any ultimate resolution of the language education debate I would like to turn to issues of representation and ideology for it is very evident not only that the above debate rests in ideological and representational conflict but that Haiti's treatment by the larger Caribbean and the world also rests in a large scale representational dilemma. Through examining the whole issue of representation a little deeper, we can come to see why linguists like Dejean and DeGraff feel as they do about the real and symbolic value of the Creole language.

### Representation

Discourse, that is what we actually speak and write is recognized by analysts as the most every day form of social practice, of social being and social force, and both constitutes and is constituted by, socio-political realities. Public discourse is most usually in the hands of the power elites who control societies in a variety of ways. In Haiti, we are working from within a society in which both coercive and discursive control has been profound and normative and within which the path to real democracy is only slowly being forged; entailed within it, as has already been noted, is a battle over language, over having a voice at all. Even when we did the work I have described to you in 2000, morning sessions were conducted in Kreyòl and evening in French. Some speakers considered refusing to speak if they could not speak Kreyòl, while some French speakers, who were merely listeners in this case anyway, walked out of the Kreyòl sessions. Clearly there was far more at stake here than language optionality. French is the language of control and repression in Haiti while Kreyòl is the language of the people, and carries the counter ideology of resistance through which they sustain themselves. Activist Yanique Dandin recalls the situation thus (Slide 14):

*‘Haïtiennité was a search for identity within a system dedicated to controlling how we could express ourselves. Beyond the identity question reporting news in Kreyòl...helped the population start getting ...conscientized. Having news in Kreyòl on Radio Haiti for the first time helped people understand what was happening in Haiti and in other countries...whose struggles were similar.’ (Bell, 2000, 82)*

Three broad domains of life, which have been identified as being “discursively constituted”, are:

1. “*representations of the world,*
2. *social relations between people and*
3. *people’s social and personal identities*” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1998: 273).

If we look back to the ways in which the young adults we spoke to viewed their own position we can observe how insidiously invasive such control is. Without French and without literacy in many cases, they were until recently without an effective voice of their own, receiving only their own ignorance and failure from those who wielded power. In Haiti the language struggle has been far more than just that: the people have been cut off from all form of real representation by their language situation. I have already mentioned the way that many parents see the way up for their children through learning French, the way that young adults blame their country’s failure to rise beyond poverty as rooted in their language This is because the entire government system has kept them subjugated and illiterate through a French official dictatorship which has consistently ruled and exploited them. It is in such circumstances that Kreyòl has become the most powerful symbol of Haïtiennité and in its battle for real official status has brought a voice to the people. Though the language is both loved and despised through its inherited representation, it gives a voice to those who have none.

In *Walking on Fire*, a text dedicated to describing the *istwa* or stories of Haitian women and their resistance, Beverly Bell (2000) describes Haiti as ‘fissured into two societies’(62). The first one is exclusively black, creole-speaking and poor, the second is mixed race and made up of persons who speak French along with Kreyòl, maintain an urban connection and are Francophile. Although they are only 15% of the population they control almost all the institutional power as

well as wealth in the country. African customs were banned until the 1970's and in some areas Kreyòl was banned from use in public spheres .It has been said in Haiti:

*'If you're poor...no one takes care of you they despise and mistreat you'.* (Bell, 2000:62)

Perhaps this partially explains old people dying on the streets one mile from the airport today. Author Edwidge Danticat, commenting on the situation of women, one in ten of whose children will not survive age five, has said:

*'There is a Haitian saying- Nou lèd, nou la –we are ugly but we are there. For most of us what is worth celebrating is the fact that we are here, that we against all the odds exist'*  
(Bell, 2000, 25-26)

That expression: 'Nou lèd, nou la', speaks powerfully to how the people see themselves as a result of their treatment, their poverty, the undermining of their language, the attempts to silence them.

Expression is about power. The expression of the dominant drowns out that of the dominated. From the 1980's the people have increased their demand for, and have achieved representation on radio which have become an 'open microphone' for the democratic movement. The delivery of the news in Creole has brought access for the people to what was going on in their country for the first time. Up until the 1980s children continued to be beaten for speaking their mother tongue in school and could not understand any of their classes. Peasant organizer and activist Vita Telcy has reported:

*'When the big educated folks come around and you say two or three words (only) in French they squelch all you have said and you come to understand you are nothing, as if it is nothing.'* (64)

It was in 1987 that Creole became the second official language and since then it has been forcing itself into public spheres including the legal system. But a period of twenty years during which violent oppression of the masses has continued is far too short a time to change people's image of themselves. Journalist Lellenne Giles notes:

*'The right to speak has always been a process, a battle. If I didn't have radio to speak in I'd stand under a tree to speak out... the word has to get out.'* (71-72)

Now I need to give a little time to the issue of external representation. Quite early in this lecture I alluded to the fact that before the earthquake, and save for random reporting of flooding and hurricanes, Haiti has been off the world's radar for a while. That is the power of modern media: if you are not in their prime focus then for the rest of the world you might as well not exist. It has been noted in the media that the world stands to account for the fact that the Haitian people have been starving for many years and it is only the earthquake that has brought a sudden outpouring of concern but there is a sense in which the media itself must take its own share of responsibility. I would like to give you a small example of the phenomenon we face with the media's assessment of what is and is not newsworthy. Have you ever noticed that one British life or one American life is worth so much more than one Iraqi life or one Palestinian life-or, in this case, one Haitian life?

On 4<sup>th</sup> May 2007, a group of Haitians attempted to reach the Turks and Caicos Islands in an overcrowded and possibly unseaworthy vessel, a regular procedure for Haitians seeking some form of means of supporting their families and one tacitly accepted by those same islands because of its bringing them cheap labour. While on 3<sup>rd</sup> May the disappearance of a three year old British girl on holiday brought an average two to three articles a day for the next 10 days in one newspaper alone and the child's name was mentioned in 164 articles, the loss of 80 Haitians on the following day was mentioned in one short article only by several newspapers and then laid to rest. Moreover, the criminal act that was responsible for these deaths was never taken up. The incident which occurred is worth describing.

On May 4<sup>th</sup> , 80 Haitians 'disappeared' in the Caribbean when their boat sank. The sinking may well have been the result of criminal negligence since the survivors all gave the same story. They told how their boat had been rammed by a TCI vessel which had then attempted to tow their own vessel out to sea; the bow was dragged under, however, and the boat capsized. When the Haitians attempted to get on board to avoid the shark-filled waters they were pushed back into the sea by police with batons. Many of the bodies subsequently recovered had missing limbs. A statement published by the Turks and Caicos government on 11 May expressed sympathy with relatives of the deceased but explained that:

*'the boat was suspected of containing illegal migrants and, in line with their procedures they were trying to tow the boat in when the accident happened'.*

Journalist Peter Hallward, in an article entitled 'If Stones Could Float' asks:

*'But what sort of questions have been raised about this incident in the British press? As far as I can tell neither the Daily Telegraph nor the Guardian nor the Sunday Times nor*

*the Financial Times have ever yet mentioned the event. The Observer, the Sunday paper that belongs to the Guardian group, has so far devoted a grand total of 135 words to the story, clipped from a single Associated Press wire and published on 6 May 2007.[19] The Independent has likewise published just one short article about the capsizing, a full week after the story broke.[20] The Times dispatched it in a single two-sentence snippet from the AP on 11 May 2007. (Slide15):*

*The full Times coverage of the catastrophe reads as follows: ‘Survivors of a sunken boat carrying 160 Haitian migrants said that a Turks and Caicos coastal patrol rammed their vessel, towed it into deeper water and abandoned them. At least 61 people died.’ End of story. So far no British newspaper can be bothered to investigate the truth of such claims, let alone consider the implications of this indifference.’*

Incidentally, when the International press carries these stories the stock Trinidad and Tobago press response is to print the foreign versions in their entirety and to report no further. OK, so that’s differential life value for you.

Now what about the reports we get of Haiti in its times of greatest stress?

## **Officials Strain to Distribute Aid to Haiti as Violence Rises**



Damon Winter/The New York Times

People fled gunshots that rang out in downtown Port-au-Prince on Saturday, where the needy were growing desperate.

This one is typical (Slide 16). An arresting photo of a Haitian child is to be found on the cover of the Sunday New York Times of January 16th. A boy wearing a red, polo shirt is caught mid-stride by the camera, dashing through the streets of Port-au-Prince, eyes gazing purposely ahead, gripping a white plastic bag. The caption, which you probably cannot read, gives the following recitation of the facts. 'People fled gunshots that rang out in downtown Port-au-Prince on Saturday where the needy were growing desperate.' It is up to the viewer to connect the dots, and connect them to another front-page article below the fold: "Looting Flares Where Order Breaks Down." And the major headline above, of course, which links the boy and his bag surely undisputedly to violence rising!

While I have found that there has been much balanced coverage, there is a 'looting' focus which seems to have settled in over the course of time I have been writing this Lecture. Discerning readers have made comparisons to Hurricane Katrina when the victims were 'refugees' and 'looting' was the label then used to describe African-Americans searching for food. In the present Haiti crisis persons looking for food have been referred to as '*scavengers*' several times over, and photographs labeled '*looting and lawlessness*' show innocent people being harassed by obviously violent police and army personnel, a history of which is endemic to Haitian society. Strangely few are commenting on the evidence of police brutality against the people which is clear in some photographs. Though some BBC focus has been on looting the following report (audio file) (Slide 17 and 18) from Matthew Price is a balanced one which brings out both the patience and humility of the Haitian public and the wrong response of some US troops. Relevant statements are highlighted.

### **'Affront to humanity'**

During the last week in Haiti, I was left with one overwhelming impression - it is the survivors who are helping themselves. They are pulling together, not tearing themselves apart.

**Much has been made of the potential for violence, but I did not feel unsafe. Not once did I think the crowds might turn on me.**

**When I gave some food and water to a family we had been filming, others who had nothing stood silently by, glad that at least someone was getting a little help.**

Some of the aid agencies say they fear riots may start if they start to distribute supplies in the hundreds of makeshift camps where people have gathered.

I fear riots in the long-term if they do not start distributing supplies right now.

**There has been some sporadic violence. That should be expected. It would happen anywhere. Look at what happened in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.**



There has been sporadic violence, as in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina

**But to use the threat of violence as a reason for not distributing aid is an affront to the people of Haiti and their own humanity.**

We should certainly be concerned about overstating the security fears and undermining the aid effort, thereby exacerbating people's frustration and increasing the likelihood of violence. Earlier this week former US President Bill Clinton, the UN special envoy to Haiti, told the BBC: "When you consider that these people haven't slept for four days, haven't eaten, and have spent their nights wandering the streets tripping over dead bodies, I think they've behaved pretty well."

The US ambassador to Haiti, Kenneth Merten, meanwhile told PBS that "people should be aware that the vast majority of Haitians here are behaving in a calm and peaceful manner".

There are now thousands of US soldiers on the ground in Haiti.

**In places they act as if they are in the middle of Iraq or Afghanistan, pushing back people, sealing off secure zones.**

**One told a comrade that he feared another Somalia here.**



Haitians have had to queue for hours to get aid from international agencies

The ultimate tragedy, however, and the one that we are seeing least of in the media, is the extent of police brutality that we see in the final slide (Slide 19) meted out to 15 year-old, Fabienne Geismar, over some worthless pictures. She probably thought she might sell them and buy food for her family.

In our own local press, the reports from returning groups who have been in to carry aid have been mixed. Some have clearly been severely distressed and traumatized by the sheer horror of the circumstances they have witnessed but others have spoken of food lines breaking and of incipient violence in ways that have not been positive. In The Guardian of Saturday January 23<sup>rd</sup> (A5) we read a headline 'T and T charity group mobbed in Haiti'. On reading the article I found no evidence of 'mobbing'. Church doors had been closed when hundreds waiting for food had

started to press forward. A demand for food from a Haitian woman is reported as being supplied by a translator to the woman now relaying the story and its angry tone can hardly be taken as a likely fair interpretation of what was said. Like the BBC, they speak more than anything, of the potential for violence. Of course that exists-what in the world does anyone think would happen if the same thing happened in Trinidad. Wasn't their looting immediately following the 1990 coup at a time when no-one was short of any basic need? All the evidence suggests that the majority of the people have not yet received food and water despite the strong effort and many are watching their young and old die before their eyes. With all this the orderly lines we are seeing in many a photograph are surely a wonder to behold (Slide 19).

### Long Term Concerns

It behoves us now to do what we can within the Caribbean region for the people of Haiti, It must be clear that their long term life experience has been as devastating to the psyche as this earthquake has been in its immediacy. The capacity for survival which they have displayed is undoubtedly the greater because of what they have learnt to endure in their total life experience. We can never make up for the loss of life and hardship but beyond that the world has been forced to look at Haiti, to observe its everyday reality; a spotlight has been shone. One family can adopt a child but government ministries, tertiary institutions with their support, and CARICOM ready to act, should hopefully be able to channel funds for sustainable development. Beyond the immediate relief which is absolutely needed, we cannot allow its people to go back to living as they were before. The problem in Haiti has been one of handouts which have robbed people of their self-respect and militated against sustainable growth. We need to do something more. To

quote Dr. Jacky Lumarque, Rector of the University of Quisqueya in Port-au-Prince, whose email we received on the UWI mail yesterday:

*'The hardest time is still to come when we have to rebuild and spontaneous solidarity fades away. It is up to Haitians to get organized with the help of a network of friends acting out of solidarity rather than out of the search for media visibility only.'*

I noticed in Tuesday's Newsday an appeal from the Emancipation Support Committee to set up scholarships for young Haitians. This is important but how many scholarships are needed to make a difference? Amongst the plans and support towards long term sustainable development we need now to return to language education, and all education- within Haiti, and finally do something to empower the nation from within. Some years ago a plan was put forward to the CARICOM Secretariat for a language education project which took into consideration the physical, social-psychological and ideological factors involved in its implementation. Any such plan must entail societal adjustment for proper implementation. There has to be relation of schooling goals to community goals and the physical provision of at least one meal per day to the children in the programme as well as other provisions and life skills development. Of tantamount importance are trainer training programmes in all languages to be used and taught, language learning and teaching and language awareness. Education would be rooted in a solid Kreyòl base in which literacy would be acquired and which would later embrace French and English; as long as their own language is valorized the students would have no problem acquiring others. At the time it was put forward the plan was initially supported but then foundered for lack of finance but perhaps today, funds could be found to make it a reality. Only an educated people can transform Haiti and it has to be transformed ultimately by its own people, empowered in a way that can enable them to assume leadership in their communities and to develop small scale

industries and businesses. These too must be properly nurtured and supported. Haitians have been a profoundly hard working people thus far but have lacked the educational support that would make them meaningfully independent. We can hope to do something about that now. I would suggest that a spotlight on Haiti has been allowed for this kind of support to come through.

I would like to dedicate this lecture to the continuing work of the Faculté de Linguistique Appliquée, and to thank God for what He will do for the poor and needy. Thanks.

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