

Murder in the Waters of
New Orleans
(New Orleans-Haiti 1992-2005)

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Author's Preface

One can wonder about the essence of inhumane crimes. What motivates people to abuse other people, murder, or kill, even if the victims are young children? The motivation never lies within the victims. And they can originate in strange combinations of human emotions. Egoism, egotism, envy, materialism, psychopathy, sociopathy, and maybe one of the worst causes, a superiority complex within the perpetrator, who views their prey as objects of a desire towards self-indulging goals. These goals contain everything to confirm superiority, even the most poisonous hatred, the craziest mental constructions, and the belief in fantastic monolithic outcomes.

The worst of these outcomes is discrimination against any designated type of human being. The prejudices that keep superior minds afloat are too childish for words. I have experienced such discrimination in various contexts. These personal experiences and the consequences of discrimination in the world motivated me to write this crime novel, drawing on my research about Vodou, experiences in New Orleans, and my studies of Caribbean cultures.

I am a cultural anthropologist, and when people ask me what I believe, I answer: "Everything and nothing. Ask me what I can imagine emphatically, and I answer, honestly, almost everything." The rich imagery and symbolism of Vodou culture create a mystical blending of past, present, and future in divination and rituals. Vodou culture has been officially recognized as a religion in Haiti, alongside Catholicism and Protestantism. It is as much a purely African-dominated religion as a religion characterized by syncretism. Despite all the prejudices, Vodou embraces good and rejects evil.

The practice of "restavecs" is not part of Vodou culture. The practice has developed as both an informal adoption of children from poor families who cannot raise them. The term comes from the French concept: "restèz avec" meaning "to stay with". By some economic profit-focused organizations, it has been used as a means of illegal adoption and slavery and domestic service, resulting in child abuse, especially targeting children between the ages of 5 and 15 years old. Some families adopt these children without abusing them. However, as with so many phenomena, the real solution lies in the

abolishment of Haitian poverty, as in the end, that is the real abolishment of slavery. I have the highest respect for Jean-Robert Codet, who experienced the phenomena himself and thereafter put everything in his power to prevent children's abuse. His experiences and publications have been a great inspiration for my writing.

Poem

The Waters of New Orleans

*A white triangle
It seemed like a large cloud
It billowed up
And waved side by side
It cracked and exploded
And disappeared beneath the waves
The hold violently tore open
Like the rupture of a womb*

*The pouring rain, moist
Made him crawl among the swamps
Along the waters
The woods and the reedbeds
Only the moon guided his way
Then darkness and then clarity
Like a strange planet
With no stars, no grass, not even sand*

*Being free in barren lands is nothing
If all-around barren emptiness is the
rule
Then what difference does a murder
make?*

Characters in the book

Adelaïde (Adi): a young woman from Haiti

Fara: a Mambo, and her female friend and spiritual guide

Uncle Baptiste: Uncle of Adelaide

Fòst Bouchy, A Vodou Bokor

Freida: The chairwoman of Manman Potomitan after Fara's flight

Madame Celine Solange: Voodoo priestess in New Orleans, friend of Fara

Simon Crow, crime reporter, Tremé Picallion News, paper from the Tremé district, friend of Celine

Joseph, formerly Barebone Fairbank, was adopted from Haiti

Baby boy: survivor of the 1992 murders

Fabian: Attempted Haitian restavec kidnap in 2005

Father Timoteo, Pastor of the Louisiana Church of Purification

The **Fairbank couple,** members of the Louisiana Church of Purification

Father William, a mysterious younger colleague of Father Timoteo

Honorable Judge: Willard Abernathy, Criminal District Court, and member of the Louisiana Church of Purification

Thomasson: Director of the Clayborne Agency, law firm, Colin's lawyer, and advisor. Lawyers for the Louisiana Church of Purification

Emanuel (Manny) Hobs, New Orleans Children, Adoption & Family Agency, member of the Louisiana Church of Purification

Zoë: Female translator and poetry writer

Georgie, Zoë's housemate, is a saxophone musician

Louis, a restavec from Haiti, temporarily staying with Zoë and Georgie

Dixie the cat

Ann, Social Worker

Antonia Wells, Defense Lawyer

Renaud, a human trafficker

Alex Cone, District Attorney

Colin Newly: Democratic Right Politician (nickname Dandy Colin), member of the Louisiana Church of Purification

Ambrose and Bertrand, homicide detectives, New Orleans Police Department (NOPD)

Chris Pence: George Dolby, Clark Davis, NOPD officers

Malcolm Harris; NOPD: Police Captain: Later Chief Harris

David Chan: FBI agent

John Smith, CIA agent, designated adviser for Haiti

Martin: John's brother

Caroline: Martin's wife

Etienne, an adopted Haitian son of Martin and Caroline

Captain Giles: New Orleans Coast Guard Commander
Jocelyn, son of a former Tonton Macoute
Claude, son of a former Tonton Macoute
Coroner/ New Orleans
Madelaine: 1820, Loa, and a wandering spirit in the story
Papa Legba: Loa of the Crossroads
The Baron Samedi: Loa of the Dead

Vocabulary

Asogwe, houngan asogwe, mambo asogwe: The highest rank in Haitian Vodou.
Baka: An evil spirit.
Baron Samedi: Is he the loa of death, top hat, black coat, skeleton, cigar
Bokor or Houngan: An evil sorcerer.
Gris-gris: a small bag with spiritual items serves as a protective charm.
Hounsí Kanzo: The first degree of Vodou initiation.
Kalfou: Strong spirit that can be seen as a shadow for good or bad.
Kanzo: The ceremony of initiation as a hounsí kanzo, mambo/houngan sipwen or houngan/mambo asogwe.
Loa: Spirits that come back to ride followers and help in certain circumstances
Mambo: A female priestess of Haitian Vodou.
Makandals: Haitian vodou priest, or bokor (1730-1758).
Marassa: Sacred twins; child spirits served with candy and sweet things.
Mort: A malevolent, dead spirit.
Papa Legba: The “old man at the crossroads” who opens the door so the other spirits can enter.
Papa Gede: part of the family in the spirits of the dead
Peristyle: A Vodou temple. (Also called a “houmfour” or “hounfo”)
Poteau-mitan: A ceremonial pole in the center of a peristyle; seen as the passageway between Heaven and Earth.
Sipwen, houngan sipwen, mambo sipwen: The second grade of Vodou initiation.
Tonton Macoute: a paramilitary group engaged by Papa Doc to terrorize the Haitian population
Vèvè: A ceremonial drawing used to symbolize and to call upon a Loa.`

Historical timelines

Haiti

1791: Dutty Boukan begins the Revolution, the first slave-free republic in the colonial world
1801: abolition of slavery
1804: Haitian independence
1915: U.S.A. invasion of Haiti, until 1943, but maintains financial control
1957: Papa Doc, Francois Duvalier, takes control with military support

1964: Duvalier, president for life, using Tonton Macoute (secret police), committed massive human rights violations.

1971: Death of Duvalier, his son, Jean-Claude, "Baby Doc," takes power.

Worse repression makes thousands of Haitian "boat people" flee to the USA by sea.

1986-1990: revolt, takeover, and chaos

1990: Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first freely elected president

1991: military coup, Aristide removed

1994: United States interference employed Preval as president

1999: Aristide elected to a second term, elections disputed

1999-2004: Gang violence and intimidation by Aristide's gangs

2004: Aristide flees, gang violence increases

New Orleans

1718: Jean-Baptiste of the Mississippi Company created La Nouvelle-Orléans

1762: formal transfer to Spain by the French, preventing English domination

1792-1793: Spanish-English war, Spain sides with the American Revolution

1798: Establishment of St. Louis Cemetery

1812: Establishment of the State of Louisiana, New Orleans as its capital

1818: New Orleans becomes part of the United States

1849: Baton Rouge becomes the state capital

1862: The Union captures New Orleans in the Civil War against the Confederates

1965: Hurricane Betsy

1975: Opening of Superdome

1990: Establishment of the Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge

2005: Hurricane Katrina

Prologue: 1992, The New Orleans Bayou: Flight in Despair

*What I left behind
Cannot be worse
Then what I found
Water and land
Now tell time
Surely, it is time to die*

She remembered keeping the baby close to her breast when leaving Port-au-Prince, using rubber dinghies to reach the sailing vessel. The price had been high. Six thousand dollars, half to be paid in advance, the other half on arrival, through her new job. She was then frightened that the dinghy, which resembled a raft rather than a boat, might turn over. It had been nighttime, with high humidity and temperatures, but such conditions were expected in August. Yet, the sea was uncommonly wild, and excessive rain poured down.

When the dinghy was hauled in, the vessel did not look like much either. Even though it wasn't wood, large parts of its outside were rusty. The crew consisted of workers and guards. It had been explained ahead of time that these guards carried guns to protect the passengers. The vessel had two sails. One was a front sail, and the other was a giant pyramid-shaped sail connected to a ferocious sail boom. The vessel housed too many people; everyone sat packed on the shipboard or on the crates in the middle of the ship.

She kept to the bottom of the vessel. Two of the dinghies were tied to the back. She wondered if those would be sufficient lifeboats for the entire number of passengers. The captain must feel very secure to lack those precautions. Neither the crew nor the captain communicated with the passengers. There did not seem to be water or food on board, and thus, she expected the trip would be fast. She felt fortunate to be able to feed the baby by herself.

However, now, they had just passed the Bahamas and reached the Gulf of Mexico on their way to land in Florida. The weather was rough. The high seas enveloped the boat, and fear struck its passengers. The captain of the boat kept a watchful eye on the passengers. His crew grew increasingly agitated by the minute. It was apparent that the boat's overcrowding far exceeded its capacity. The sails had to be reefed. The crew panicked as they untied the ropes of the boat's main mast.

What happened next seemed unbelievable. The captain gestured with his hand, moving his arm across the bow and backward. The guards loaded their guns and started shooting at the passengers. They picked their targets, younger men, not women. After the younger men, the older men were shot. The passengers panicked. They started to move around the boat, trying to get away from the rain of bullets. Blood spread everywhere. Parts of the deck were covered with bodies. Women screamed, and the youngest boys hid at the bottom of the boat behind the skirts of the women who, panic-stricken, tried to cover the boys with their skirts. It was over in five minutes. The longest five minutes she had ever felt. Her baby did not even cry or wake up.

Left and right, the crew removed the dead bodies by tipping them over the side. One of the crew members bellowed at the women to remain quiet. "Just be happy you are still alive! We will let you pay the rest of your fees once you are working." Apparently, the women could deliver a higher return on investment than the men, as they still needed to pay at least half of their fee.

With three-quarters of the passengers gone, the vessel somewhat stabilized. The storm seemed to move westward. The captain decided they needed to leave Florida to the West and sail to Louisiana instead. Closer to the shore, they could easily disappear into the bayous of the Mississippi River using its entrance at New Orleans. And in this storm, the US Coast Guard would have one hell of a time taking care of all the other vessels. It would be easy to reach the South Pass Lighthouse, and in this weather, it would undoubtedly be abandoned. The women could stay there, after which the rafts could take them into New Orleans. It would even be better, as they could be "integrated" into one of the working houses available there.

The trafficker's network was, after all, applicable along the entire South coast.

At the entrance, they moved from the vessel to a raft. Five women boarded; the rest were to be transferred further down the coast. "Keep your voices down!" hissed the crew member while steering the raft, digging the pole deep in the swamp's bottom. The creek did not run very deep, but the raft shifted from one side to the other, making it challenging to keep balance. Yet, after the excruciating journey by sea, it seemed a quiet ride. The raft was flat and also overcrowded. One woman saw an alligator and cried in terror. The others tried to quiet her sounds. "Make sure she shuts up or else!" One of the guardians on the raft had been with the group during their travels overseas. He did not carry a gun but kept a large machete on his belt. They had entered the bayou to reach New Orleans by back creeks. Once there, it would be simple to go underground without papers. Three other men had boarded the raft, but it was unclear where they had come from.

The human traffickers had promised they had a network of reliable bribes, ensuring they would not be checked or deported. Haiti was far away. The women were already sorry for undertaking the journey. The promise did not live up to the hardships, and they were terrified after the slaughter at sea. The hope for the next step remained: take it one step at a time. The four guides and five women, plus one baby boy, a little over a year old, slowly moved through the bayou. The women had covered their colorful clothing with dark sheets to avoid being noticed from afar. They were told there was no need to fear the Cajun people living in the Bayou. These individuals were not interested in being ruled by the government, and most of the time, they lived in the bayous to escape bureaucratic control. The bayou was a world on its own. But there were occasional patrols, the traffickers had warned. The deeper they went into the Bayou, the less the risk, or so they claimed.

"Time to rest," the boatsman hissed, "there might be a patrol." They could see a sand plate ahead, surrounded by elephant grass, high enough to hide behind. Eight people jumped onto the minor stroke of land while the boatsman maneuvered the shaft away. One of the two guides whispered, "Lie down behind the grass and keep your head down, be careful, as these grasses have very sharp edges; they cut

you quickly. Cover your head with your arms.” The boy crawled up to his mother’s back, laying his head on her shoulder. The mother felt she could relax for just a little while. She felt the regular breathing of her small baby boy; it made her feel more confident about their future, just a bit longer, almost there. The sounds around were soothing—birds, pelicans, red cardinals, and occasional insects. And in between sounds, you could not recognize: she guessed it had to be a bird grinding its beak. Suddenly, the silence was broken by the sound of a motorboat. The guards were whispering erratically to each other, followed by muffled sounds and stifled cries. She felt her boy stiffen; his breath quickened, and he tried to sit up straight. She raised her head to see him, but when she turned around, she was horrified. The members of her party lay dead, bleeding from their limbs and necks. Her baby looked wide-eyed, and she was too shocked to understand. She could see two of the guides holding bloody knives. Where was the third, she wondered for an odd moment. And then she sensed a movement behind her, a fierce pain, and then, as if drowning, she panicked, hearing the screams of her little boy, quickly smothered by protecting him with her body in the last breath. Then nothing, no longer anything.

“Leave it, leave it!” The boatman hissed when one of the guides attempted to cover the bodies with the clothed sheets. The sound of the boat approaching could be heard. It was a faint sound, but clear enough. Probably some of the Cajun inhabitants alarmed the Coast Guard after all. “Let’s get the hell out of here; the alligators will clean up soon enough. With these temperatures, they will also more quickly decompose.”

In the silence after that, what seemed to be a spirit appeared. It seemed to carry its skeleton on the outside of its substance. “We will avenge you,” the spirit whispered... and, with her last breath, she heard the sound of a prayer from what seemed far away, “I am the God who made the sun, brings light, rules the sea, and creates the storm. God is here.” Her last thought was a prayer to protect her son, and then she concluded, “I must be in heaven”....

1992, Joseph's Bayou

The first time the image of a dead soul appeared in his dreams, he did not recognize it as such. He was shocked. Dreams like this were forbidden in his upbringing, and he felt the devil crossed his threshold. It was an old man with his skeleton on the outside of his body, and he grinned a broad sneer. "I know everything" he grinned, and Joseph broke out in a sweat, searching his mind for secrets or hidden urges he wanted nobody to find. But he could see nothing, and that even scared him more. "It is time you fulfill your purpose," the spirit continued.

No place on earth was more beautiful than the Bayous of New Orleans. The scene was so peaceful; Joseph had found an abandoned shaft and had lived in it for three years. It had a small generator and, much to his surprise, a fuel tank still filled. The shag was once owned by an old timer who passed away without family. No one cared for his legacy, so it remained untouched and partly overgrown by the swamps' fertile vegetation.

He loved to slide through the swamp creeks in his kayak, which he had made himself, and fish for crawfish. There was plenty of food, fishing, trapping, and knowing that he also had plenty of fresh water. Once every month, he would contact his befriended Cajun family for provisions, sugar, salt, grain, and coffee. He had learned to make his strong brew. And he traded for the rest with his odd jobs.

Initially, he lived with this Cajun family, working odd jobs on their fish farm and assisting with their swamp tour business for tourists. He enjoyed meals and their company. They had this free-fought New Orleans mentality that he admired so much, yet he could not rid himself of his past and felt he needed to create a more drastic measure. One night, he had a dream, actually, more of a nightmare type again... It was apparent that he had to retreat even further into the wild. The Cajun family insisted that he would maintain contact and keep a phone for emergencies and provisions. They taught him everything he needed to know to survive in the Bayou, including medicinal remedies like the bark of the black willow tree for fighting a fever and dealing with dangerous snakes, as well as what to eat

and what not to eat. His favorite place was Fort Macomb. It was across from the Bayous, where he roamed, and even though it was closed to the public, he could sneak in and out, and in winter, it sheltered him.

He gave himself the name Joseph after he fled from his parental home, where he experienced repeated nightmares that became increasingly violent until he feared he might harm himself.

Joseph had been adopted when he was a Haitian orphan by a couple named Fairbank. The couple was unable to conceive a child. The cause could not be found. Mr. Fairbank kept it a secret, and 'Lady' Fairbank did not reveal to anyone that she suspected it was her husband. Their motivation to adopt a colored boy was partly rooted in this flaw in reproduction. The Fairbanks were very religious. They were the ideal image of being White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. From the beginning, they paraded their "colored orphan" as a case of successful conversion. From the beginning, too, Joseph had to live up to their image of the ideal son. The Fairbanks, originally named Joseph 'Barbone', hated the name, as it was inspired by religious puritanism, which he also hated.

For the love of God, he could not understand why his parents, whom he also disliked, came up with the combination Barebone Fairbanks. It reminded him of the humiliating sacraments he had undergone at one time in a smelly bathtub, which, on that occasion, had been used by many subjects before by their Protestant mission on the outskirts of New Orleans. The Fairbanks were part of a congregation called The Louisiana Church of Purification. They battered Joseph continuously about being 'pure'. They placed him in a Christian school and told him and his teachers he was 75% white. And in school, his schoolmates mucked him about this, as his skin color was very clearly not white, nor 75%.

The roots of the Louisiana Church of Purification dated back to 1821, when the second congregation was established in New Orleans. It was a very prosperous and religious community that thrived on a reputation for abolishing the slave trade, seemingly understanding the plight of African slaves. Opinions of the church leaders in those days seemed progressive as they lobbied for ex-slaves to be entitled to a homeland of their own. However, in this idealism, they also worked with local plantation owners, who

increasingly worried about the growing number of free slaves. These free slaves would form a potentially dangerous and economically strong class. Looking at the first Negro republic of Haiti in 1907, the white population of Louisiana and New Orleans had threatening examples of that potential force. An African homeland did not exist; of course, slaves came from all over Africa, and there could be no such thing as real re-patriation.

Getting rid of the former slave population would free the white supremacists of threats and, simultaneously, of the burden of guilt. As many ex-slaves were mulatos, it also released them from their unrecognized offspring. And so, the first ships left New Orleans, containing some 40 'free-slaves', were sent to Liberia, of all places. Some 300 were shipped out of New Orleans altogether on a population of 10,000 free slaves. And with it, the myth of humanitarian American Protestantism was born.

In 1992, that history was ignored. The mission in New Orleans was more than ever convinced of its righteousness and exclusive superiority in saving the souls of the pagans.

In three years, Joseph learned to understand who he really was. Living in the Bayou, he had utterly lost his Protestant background. He became familiar with the spirits of the swamp, its history, its animals, and the Indian spirits that inhabited it. He felt he had found a pace for development.

Not knowing that today, all peace would end, and the horror would return, his spirit had pushed him to travel deeper into the outskirts of the Bayou, following the river toward the old lighthouse territory. Moving closer to these barren lands, which bordered the Gulf of Mexico, his motorized kayak slid along the enormous bushes of elephant grass. As it was dark, he did not want to risk losing control of the steering by pedaling. When he saw a stroke of sand, something else caught his eye. Colors that were alien to the surroundings. Some wild boars were strolling along the sand. He was angry that careless tourists had likely littered the area. He stirred toward the place, but suddenly, his kayak was hit by a harsh blow and became stuck. First, he figured it could be an alligator, and he was alerted, but then a spirit appeared. It moved left and right, causing Joseph to move along as he heard the faint cries of a small child. Then, something struck him on the head and knocked him out.