

Tout Moun

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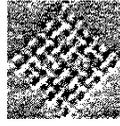
*I Dream to Change the World
Literature and Social Transformation*

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Yveline – I Love Sewing



Opal Palmer Adisa

To say that Ayiti/Haiti is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere is to not know Haiti at all. Is to not know the history of embargo and neo-colonialism. Is to not value creativity and resourcefulness. Is to not know the people and their perpetual insistence on not just surviving, but thriving. To say that Ayiti's present state is a sad cry from its illustrious past, is to not understand what it means to forage for freedom and maintain your dignity when almost all western countries have done everything in their power to try to ensure that Ayiti does not succeed, not just for itself, but as a symbol of self-determination for the entire world.



January 2011, exactly a year after the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck Ayiti (its true and indigenous name given by the Taino people meaning mountainous) displacing more than a million and killing 220,000 people and destroying 250,000 residencies and 30,000 commercial and government buildings, including The National Palace, that has to be demolished, I visited Haiti for

the first time. I traveled as far beyond Port-au-Prince as Jacmel, which was also impacted by the earthquake, toured five camps, and with the help of a translator, interviewed and photographed several women about their lives. The story below comes from one such woman. However, I must insert a disclaimer because as a writer, I have embellished some details that I conjectured. As such it is a fictitious biography.

I've been sewing all my life. All my life, since I was nine years old, maybe even younger, but that was when I stopped school to help mama. There were six of us and our Daddy left one day and never came back. Mama tried, but she needed my help so she apprenticed me to a woman who sewed. I lived with that woman, Madam Bertin, who had me sewing until my fingers bled. But she taught me the trade, and I have supported myself ever since.

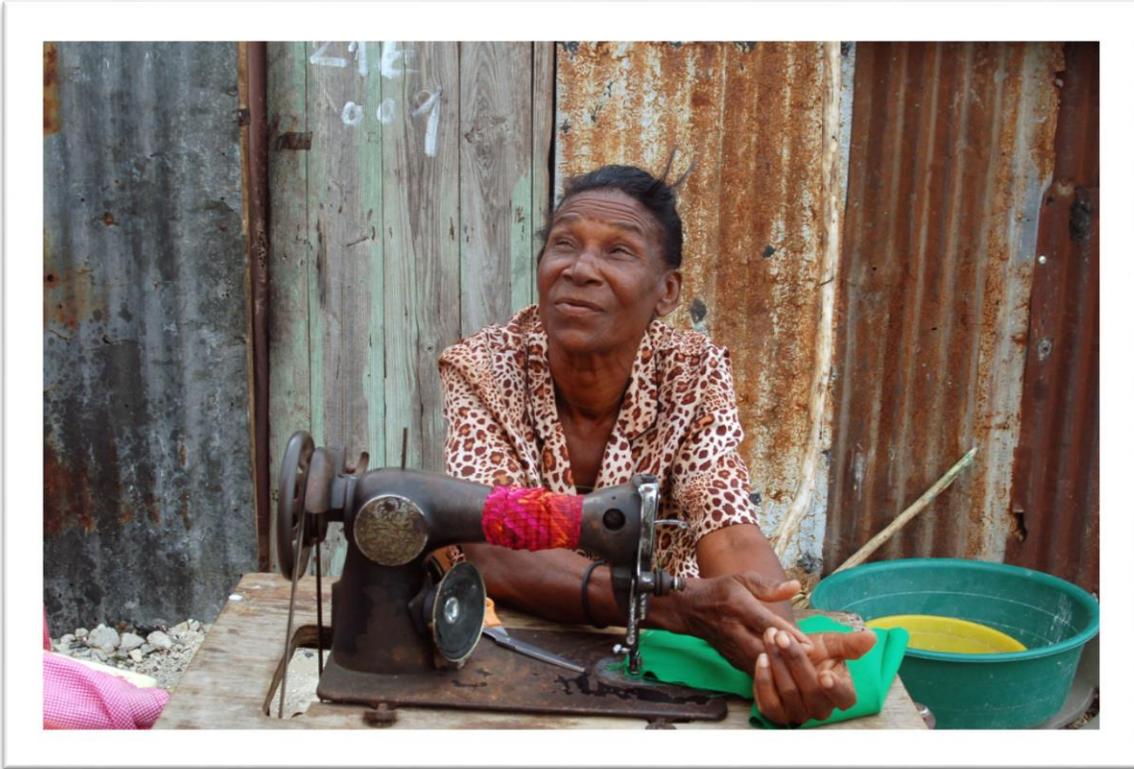
This machine was the only thing that remained after the earthquake. That's the only way I knew that that was the place where our house was. I guess I was meant to sew. I love this machine as much as my life. Living in this camp, in this tent with Gaele, my daughter, and her husband and my grandchild, this machine helps us to buy food and other things. No matter how hard times are, Haitian people like to look good. They want clothes for their children. They want a piece of cloth stitched with colorful threads to spread over a box that they use as a table.

I don't remember much as a child. My life was hard. Carrying water every morning and evening with the other children. Walking barefoot and cutting my soles on broken bottles or tin can. Mama was kind. She was tired and even now when I close my eyes I see Mama's sad eyes. She died before I was fifteen. We didn't have money to take her to the doctor. She became sick just sudden, burning up with fever, vomiting. Two days later she died in my lap, as I sat on my haunches, her head resting in my lap as I spooned sugar water into her mouth. I don't like to think about that but I remember just before she turned her head away, she looked at me and smiled. She smiled big then closed her eyes and died. That's all I remember as a child.

I don't want anything for myself, but I want a house for my grandchild. I want to sew my way out of this camp. Save enough to build a house that belongs to us. My husband and daughter always tended a little garden before the earthquake. I want to find my husband's body and give him a proper funeral. He was a good man. We loved each other.

I want my granddaughter to go to university. My daughter didn't get to go, but she went all the way to high school. My husband and I worked hard to make sure she went. I sewed and fell asleep at this same machine, and even stitched my finger. That's what I want – for my granddaughter to go to university and for us to have a house of our own again.

I want to see Haiti have a chance. There are some bad people here, but most of us are good and hard workers. We deserve a chance. I want the world to know we deserve a chance. We are a good people. My granddaughter deserves a home.



Yveline is a woman in her mid-fifties. She has been a seamstress all her life. She doesn't remember where she was when the earthquake happened, but she is glad she is alive, as well as her daughter, her daughter's husband and their child, her only grandchild. She has not seen or heard from her husband of thirty years since the earthquake, and although she suspects that he is dead, she remains hopeful.