

*Those who have experienced the fire
fragments and fantasising for an upcoming film*
by The Living and the Dead Ensemble

January 2020. For long months, the burning heart of Haiti has been stirred by protests. State corruption is denounced in the PetroCaribe affair. Port-au-Prince, the capital city of fire — the epicentre and echo chamber of global upheavals. This is where the members of The Living and The Dead Ensemble meet to inhabit an endless night and imagine an evening gathering populated by the living and the dead, hopes and ashes in the wake of the furious figure of fire. “Those who have experienced the fire” edits together fragments of a work in progress, of a chaos wherein the images of an upcoming film are being created, a polyphony of voices inspired by the fragmented narratives of the great Haitian poet Frankétienne.

1. The location of the fire is thereby created (chant).

Deep within the Earth, I lay down my home

OBATALA I am the
Original fire
I maintain the stability of Earth.
OLICHA ALEGBA, I dwell at the door.
Whoever demands fire
Comes across me

Between fire and water
Ogou Balendjo
Between fire and air
Ogou Balizay
Between fire and earth
Ogou Feray

Ogou, the fire of war
Source of strength and victory.

2. *Thereby the living enter, thereby the dead enter (chant).*

We exist, here — that is, we are fighting daily
We exist, here — that is, we are playing with fire
We exist, here — that is, we are walking on fire
We exist, here — that is, our dreams go up in smoke

3. *Hence the poet sets up the night.*

Even when the sun is shining brightly at noon, slavery is nocturnal...
And the entirety of slavery has been a series of night fringes enveloping one's being.
To evolve in the space of slavery, one is forced to get used to nighttime, to discover
invisible and elusive beings that do not instantly manifest themselves... The night is
the time of conspiracies, of protest, it is the space where protest finds the vigour to
later come to light, for we cannot achieve light if we do not first have darkness¹.

4. *The world is burning. The starving General is eating everything that hits the social media. Stomach and passport on fire, he pierces the night.*

Fire, fire, fire, fire!
O fire, fire, fire, fire!
Fire, fire, fire, fire!
Fire, fire, fire, fire!
Forest, fire!
Carrefour Marassa, fire!
Croix-des-bouquets, fire!
La Saline, fire!
Marché Hypolite, fire!
Bel Air, fire!
Martissant, fire!

My guts are churning
Swallowing each other
Donald Trump, my little barbecue
Jesus, my *pikliz*
I am gobbling plastic
Stones under my teeth
The United States, my pot of boiled peas
With France, I act picky

¹ Extract from an interview with the poet Frankétienne conducted at his house in Port-au-Prince in January 2020 by Olivier Marboeuf and Louis Henderson.

President Macron, the bone of my *poulet pays*
Poutine, my little dry gratin
China my *tonmtonm*
Canada, quick my *calalou sauce*
Glug, glug!
I am swallowing a doll's foot
Glug, Glug
I am swallowing forests
My Throat: madan Deboure²!

Fire, fire, fire, fire!
Fire, fire, fire, fire!
I am eating clogs
I am eating ears
I am eating toes

Fire, fire, fire, fire!
Fire, fire, fire, fire!
Haiti, complete country, capital of fire
The hot country is not for me
Passport of fire
Africa for me
Africa for you
Africa for all of us
Long live the hatless country!³

5. The city is exhausted / No more day, no more night.

Dust city
Whirlwind city
After one hell of a dance move
Some no longer had hips
Nothing but a dance
In a few seconds
Everything had gone up in smoke
Gunpowder smoke
Venom smoke

A viewer of one's own film
We no longer know if reality is real
A nameless nightmare

² Famous Haitian woman selling syrups for digestive problems.

³ "The hatless country" is an Haitian expression that means death.

We scream but still remain trapped in it

Sprinkled city
Zombie-teethed city
Cracked city
Dragon city spitting out ashes

Hallelujah city
City whose memory has been forgotten
Whose culture has been scorned
Without a patronymic
We yell after a father who is deaf to our woes
Indifferent to our pain

Breathless
Arid throat
There is no longer a way for the voiceless
We no longer have a choice
This is only the beginning
We simply hope for a brief end to the end

6. In the morning, the capital city wakes up from its own nightmare.

In a dark room where the light of dawn passes through a single window, General Fire is seated before a mirror. He is combing his hair.

GENERAL FIRE.— My eyes, fire, my tongue, fire, my mouth, fire, my back, fire...

THE NAMELESS MAN. (*staggering into the room, half asleep*) — Already up at that time! Don't you ever stop!

GENERAL FIRE. — I'm working.

THE NAMELESS MAN. (*Looking out the window*) — And what a job you have, General! There's nothing left to burn in this goddamn city. Piles of bones and piles of stones!

GENERAL FIRE. — Fire, my bones, fire, my stones... and what do you think of my hair?

THE NAMELESS MAN. (*smoking*) — The city is walking through a nightmare.

GENERAL FIRE. — I find that very beautiful, when it will be longer! Fire, my hair, fire, my head, fire, my leg, my fist is a flame, my head is a Molotov cocktail! Fire, my throat, fire, my throat!

THE NAMELESS MAN. — Thirsty! You're even burning my saliva! (*he pauses, and sits on the bed*) Damn, I'm hungry now!

GENERAL FIRE. — I'm knocking on the door of the mansion with fire! (*he claps his hands*) I'm knocking on the door of the mansion with fire!

THE NAMELESS MAN. — *(he gets up again and looks out the window)* I wonder when the day is finally going to rise.

7. *The nameless man goes out to smoke in a world where General fire has left only desolation.*

The Earth is lulled by your blows
You left your mark
You wrecked Australia
You screwed up the Amazon
So fire, evil runs through your veins, General!
Every time you show up, you knock off everything
Dead animals
Uprooted trees
Ey dife ou flanbe fê
Ou flanbe bwa
You're still super thirsty
You're never quenched with water
Oh yes
Your presence frightens us!
And when your anger strikes
The ecosystem vanishes
The Earth is shattered
Everything is withdrawn
When your rage is unleashed
Well, fire, tell us where to take shelter?
Wesh wesh my nigga
You lack any sense of coexistence
It seems that your ego is overflowing
From Hong Kong to Haiti
Your Molotov cocktails, your bombing
Frankly, we escape from you here but over there you're hanging out
In short, you're following us!
So fire, tell us where to take shelter?

8. *Only one young rebellious woman still braves the forces of the dark kingdom of fire.*

Publicly, pyromaniacs have declared their love to fire.
Tokyo
Marché en Fer
Croix-des-Bossales
Gunshots!
Houses are burning.
Calling the police or firefighters is pointless.
In these circumstances, our addresses don't appear on the map anymore.

Dreams are carbonised
Our perpetrators blame us, they victimise themselves

Outraged, our claims have made us highly flammable.
When prices explode, even domestic rocks are used as barricades.
Meanwhile, the prevailing public policy is that of
air when it comes to expanding the fire of media manipulation
of water when it comes to putting out the fire of our anger, of our rage,
in short, the torch of mass mobilisation.

Flash fire
A flash of fire
Raging storm
Kalfou Rezistans — the sun isn't the only thing that shines and burns.

The police are paranoid,
Firearm
Tear gas
Port-au-Prince
mercenary, political and military city.

***9. General fire never sleeps. He throws away his horde of kids in the last suburbs
and settles his empire.***

Crouching in the confused night, quenching my thirst with light from weakening
embers
I do not know how to stand up anymore
I have given up my vertebrae to the dry woodlands
my chant to their crackling
When the flames will brandish
I will rise up with them
I will restore in their arms

I contract my empty belly
I tense my tired lips
I tighten my ass until my anus gets sucked in
I condense all my resources
and let out a goddamn blow: magic!!!
I spit out a ball!
Fire!
I yell, O fire!

And this wakes up the lighters, the torches, the kerosene lamps, the flamethrowers,
the Molotov cocktails, the matches and the candles going with the flow
All this arsenal to hoist the flames!

But the candles did not get
that to succeed in their affair
no need for a prayer
Rather set the altar on fire

10. The dead speak to the living and the living speak to the dead (Chant).

*It smells of gunpowder and Clairin. From the heights of the city, the young man with
a machete looks at the twisting fumes in the morning.*

THE YOUNG MAN WITH A MACHETE.— O evil fire!
- Go and tell the families what you are doing with their livelihood!
THE CHORUS.— Isn't smoke?
- Go and tell the mothers what you have done with their kids!
THE CHORUS.— Dead bodies on the pavement?
- Go and tell La Saline what you have done with its sons
THE CHORUS.— Barbecues for the dirty little pigs?
- Go and tell Bel Air what you have done with its houses
THE CHORUS.— Beautiful memories burnt down?