



*Boutilliers tower complex, 3,323' elevation
South of Port-au-Prince*

Photo courtesy of Gerard Schut
Italian photographer & hiking trail expert

HAITI

Solidarity Meets Survival.

story by Jim Thomas

“When you live in Port-au-Prince, you may not know the name of the place, but you’ve seen it many times. It’s the mountain top with at least 10 different radio towers.”

Those are the words of Gerard Schut, a global hiking trail expert from Italy. In 2015, he took on the Boutilliers Observatory trail, a 7.25 mile trek clinging to the perimeter of the Boutilliers summit. Boutilliers, which is five miles from the village of Petion-Ville, is the home to every AM, FM and TV signal that blankets the city of Port-au-Prince.

Schut continues with his suggested tour guide directions. “Drive to the observatory and park there. From there, the hike starts from the paved road, but soon turns into unpaved road and eventually will turn into a hiking trail. For the first four kilometres, the hike will go downhill. The next 4 km are uphill and can be quite steep from time to time. During the first half of the walk, you will have a view over Port-au-Prince while you walk through a quiet and green mountain. You’ll hear the buzz from town, but it will be surprisingly different than in town.

Once you get back to civilization, you will see a mix of the big houses and small sheds. It seems that the rich of Haiti live around here.

The second part of the hike is over the top of the mountain, largely on paved road. There is still some uphill hiking, but

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it's not too hard on this road. Part of the time there will be large walls along the road, but there is still plenty of places where you have a view to the north and the south valleys.

Near the end of the walk, you will see the communication towers and follow the road towards them. At the end, you walk around them and get back to the observatory where you have earned a nice refreshment and maybe dinner?

This walk is obviously best enjoyed during a clear day and I recommend to do this walk in the afternoon. If you start around 2 pm, you should be well back before sunset, which you can enjoy from the observatory.

Remember to bring plenty of water and your camera. If you have one with a good zoom, you may snap a few nice pictures of town from the hills."

The Boutilliers Observatory, peak and trail are just the type of place the residents of Port-au-Prince look to go to, to briefly forget about the troubled history of Haiti and also events in recent years there. Some might say that the people of Haiti are not "playing on a level field". In French it translates to, "*règles de jeu équitables*" - a situation in which everyone has a fair and equal chance of succeeding. Haitians, or Ayisyen, in Haitian Creole, are not known to run from their troubles.

Beverly Bell, a writer for The Huffington Post, made the observation about the people of Haiti, "What saved many during the earthquake, Hurricane Matthew, the cholera epidemic and what is keeping them alive today, is a culture and economy of solidarity, or mutual aid. Solidarity is an essential strategy through which on-the-margins communities, and their individual members, can survive and thrive. Today the generosity is on overdrive."

Yolette Etienne, a development worker in Haiti, commented: "The tremendous chains of solidarity of the people we saw from the day of the earthquake and on: That is our capacity. That is our victory. That is our heart."

IN THE AFTERMATH of Haiti's devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010, one small radio station became an information lifeline for the people of Port-au-Prince.



4VRE at 90.5 fm, also known as Signal FM, managed to stay on the air during the earthquake. At the time, station managers didn't know if the radio station would stay on, but they put the computer on to play continuous music while its employees fled the building. Surprisingly, the station's studios and broadcast tower survived the 7.0 magnitude earthquake. When power failed, they returned to get the station running again with multiple generators. It became one of the few places stunned Haitians could turn to for information and directions in the following days.

Station manager Mario Viau told news reporters, "We say that the only way communicate with the people and the world is to stay on. And we stayed on."

Signal FM managed to remain on the air for nearly two weeks following the quake, though occasionally broadcasting at reduced power. At first, it had only three days of fuel to keep its generators going, but the Haitian government and private organizations contributed more.

One of the tens of thousands that ended up in a refugee camp, is 22-year-old Louis Richardson, whose mother, father, brothers and sisters died in the quake. Taking shelter under a tree from the stifling heat, he told news reporters that Signal FM is "the most important source of information now."

EXISTENCE. Most outsiders are puzzled how those living in Haiti manage to even exist. Take that of the one-time outsider, Paolo Woods. Woods is recognized around the world as a respected documentary photographer.

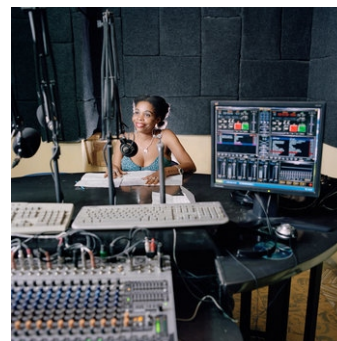
Growing up in Italy as the child of a Dutch mother and a Canadian father, Paolo Woods was fascinated by the notion of the state. How does where you live, and how you live, shape individual and national identity? To find out, he moved to a country most often described as anything but a state: Haiti.

"When you see Haiti in the press, it is almost always described as a failed state," he said. "How does a failed state live? Who takes the place of the state? How is society organized and how does it reorganize on the corpse of a failed state?"

Mr. Woods, 46, has been exploring those questions since late 2010, based out of Les Cayes in southern Haiti and traveling with the journalist Arnaud Robert for a series of stories dealing with everything from religion to the country's oligarchs.

In Haiti, a country where illiteracy is at 85%, radio is the king for distributing news and entertainment for the masses. Radios are a major part of Haitian culture. Almost everyone - children, teens, women and men in Haiti listen to radio. Statistics show that over 97 percent of the country's population own a radio set and at least 350 licensed FM radio stations are in operation.

As Woods made the observation, every influential person in Haiti in need of audience gets space on radio. Catholic nuns and voodoo priests get their share to broadcast religious material. In 2012, Woods and Robert took a photo-journalism display on the road, called "Radio Days", featuring modern Haiti radio stations. It was featured in museums in New York and Paris.



4VMY, Radio Macaya 102.5 FM, in Les Cayes. Marie Lourdes Jean Pierre is a mambo, or female Voodoo priest. Every Sunday she hosts a program about her religion, countering the negative stereotypes promoted by Protestant missionaries.

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In addition to Haiti's illiteracy rate, only 25 percent have regular access to electricity. That means most Haitians do not read the country's only daily newspaper, regularly watch television, or spend hours surfing the Internet.

But they can listen to the radio. And Haitians do listen. ALL THE TIME. According to Woods, the radio "is always on" in Haiti. It is playing everywhere - in the shops and restaurants. "It is like background sound".

Since the introduction of battery-operated transistor receivers in the 1960's, radio has been the main media in Haiti. American missionaries donated the first transistor radios, hoping to convert the masses through the 24-hour evangelical programming on Radio Lumière. Radio Lumière even distributed radios that would only tune to one frequency - theirs. But in the hellish years of the Duvalier dictatorship, Haitians far preferred the radio programs in Creole broadcast on Radio Haiti Inter by legendary opposition figure Jean Dominique, to being constantly reminded about hell awaiting them if they did not become Protestant.

When the Duvalier era ended in 1986, independent radio stations blossomed and have been a fixture in Haitian daily life ever since.

Haitians are not passive listeners, either. Not only do many shows rely on call-in contributors, but many Haitians have taken to broadcasting themselves. Broadcasting material and operations are relatively inexpensive, so very small groups of people can mount and operate local radio stations. Thus, there are hundreds of radio stations in Haiti. And this has presented itself as a problem for CONATEL, the regulatory agency that issues licenses for radio broadcasting operations. Haiti is currently experiencing double the number of radio stations operating on the FM dial that hold a license from CONATEL. Whether



4VTD 97.3 RTMS FM, Les Cayes
DJ John is on the air mixing Haitian music and American R&B. RTMS relays for a couple of hours each day Radio Voice of America. People in Les Cayes suspect it receives American money for this reason and some refer to it as Radio CIA.

the station is legal or illegal, they closely mirror society in almost all its political, religious, and social variations.

Radio has a crucial importance in the daily life of Haitians. Radio waves reach remote areas that cannot be reached by 4x4 vehicles. Easily available batteries or solar power radios ensure that people can stay tuned in. Ninety-seven percent of the population owns a radio, and they all listen to it.

Besides the ubiquitous Kompa music, radio stations host endless political discussions, inflamed live broadcastings of European football, proselytism by dozens of religious groups, local news and educational programs. Haitian president Michel Martelly was a former Kompa star, and when he entered the presidential race in 2010 he had absolutely no political experience. But he had millions of dedicated followers who knew him through the Haitian radios, where his music is on constant rotation. When the cholera epidemic broke out in 2010, radio stations bombarded listeners with instructions on avoiding the deadly disease and getting help for their sick. This was vital especially in rural areas, in most of the country, as Haiti had not known a cholera epidemic in at least a century. Experts agree that radio stations have been essential in saving lives.

Woods has photographed a selection of DJ's and announcers of different radio stations in Les Cayes, the city in the south of Haiti where he lives. The city, with a population of 50,000, has an estimated 30 FM radio stations, one for every 1300 people, but even this figure likely understates the number of radio stations. Many stations don't register so as to avoid paying taxes. The announcers are journalists, politicians, community activists, Vodou priests, students, nuns and pastors. The broadcasting equipment is often very bare bones. A used transmitter, mixer, antenna and generator can cost as little as US \$2500 and housed in a few free square meters wherever space is available. Woods also photographed, in a 100 meter radius around his house, a sampling of the actual radio receivers used by his neighbors. These varied from old, bulky cassette players to recent cellular phones.

On a recent afternoon, Woods was walking down the main street in Les Cayes with Franz Nazaire, one of the local radio hosts. He was recognized and greeted by dozens of listeners. He turned around to me and smiled, "You see? In Haiti, video has not killed the radio star!"



4VST 106.5



4VCF 94.5



4VG 104.5

DISASTER ON HAITI'S FM AIRWAVES

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Center: CONATEL Director General Jean-Marie Altéma,
 Left: Chief Engineer Jean-Claudy Balan
 Right: Engineer Myrthil Alexandre

On September 2, 2016 the Director General of CONATEL, Jean-Marie Altéma, held a press conference that essentially turned into an emergency management conference for Haiti's FM radio airwaves. Mr. Altéma explained the importance of broadcasting in Haiti and the role it plays in the socio-economic development of the country through its access to information, education and entertainment. Mr. Altéma then

informed the media there are serious problems with Haiti's FM spectrum management across the country and was ordering an immediate investigation and inventory count of all operating FM radio stations. He said there are more than 350 legally authorized radio stations operating in Haiti and another 347 unauthorized or irregular or illegal operators operating on national territory. Despite this, we are receiving more and more requests from those who want to have a radio frequency while the frequency band is largely saturated for certain zones. Mr. Altéma said that due to the extreme nature of the FM band in Haiti, he was ordering an immediate moratorium on new FM licenses until the illegal operators could be addressed. Additionally, Mr. Altéma said that an emergency broadcast plan was being implemented. The emergency plans for managing FM frequencies were to be a temporary change in the authorized power allocation per zone and were to change, as follows: All FM radio stations in Port-au-Prince were to reduce to 1000 watts power; Cap-Haïtien: 500 watts; Les Cayes, 500 watts; Gonaïves, 300 watts. Mr. Altéma said that is called Pipeline Plan 1. Pipeline Plan 2 includes the following zones and powers: Jacmel/Gonaïves, 300 watts; Miragoane/Jérémie, 300 watts; Hinche/Port-de-Paix, 300 watts.

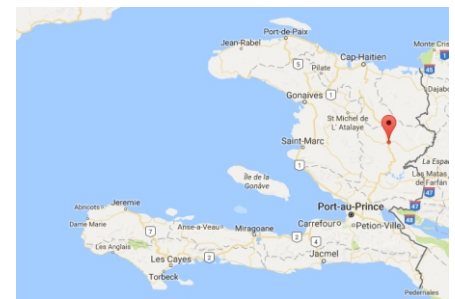
Finally, the Director General of CONATEL also highlighted the problem of interference caused by several radio stations to aeronautical communications. This sometimes prevents better communication between airline pilots and the National Office of Civil Aviation (OFNAC).

Mr. Altéma explained that they have also seen a kind of war between the radio stations, with some of them increasing their kilowatts disproportionately, in an attempt to overpower another nearby radio station operating on the same frequency. Mr. Altéma commented, "They do not take into account technical criteria such as, location of the antenna towers and power limit."

The Director General of CONATEL also announced a package of measures against offenders. An inspection work on antenna towers has already begun for several weeks and there will be a geo-located identification of these towers. Given the saturation of the frequency bands, Director Altéma took the opportunity to announce that requests for new frequencies will not be received because there is no way to satisfy them.



Antenna Transmitter Park in Hinche, Department of Centre, where several unlicensed radio stations were operating.



Hinche, Department of Centre

CONATEL Haiti Shuts down 7 Radio Stations and 3 TV Stations

On Thursday, March 21, 2013, CONATEL shut down 7 radio stations and 3 television stations, saying that all of the broadcast facilities were operating illegally and without a license.

The stations were: Super Continental Radio, 98.1 FM; Prince Fm, 97.3 FM; Radio Africa, 94.7 FM; Centre Inter Radio, 98.9 FM; Daily Radio TV, 95.5 FM; Radio Tele Men FM, 89.1 FM; and the TV station Leve Kanpe were shut down. All of the transmitters were seized by the departmental director of the National Council of Telecommunications (CONATEL) Pharel Marseilles.

4VJU 94.1 FM Liancourt



Radio Jupiter Plus 94.1 FM Liancourt launched on August 6, 1997 and is a talk and music channel that broadcasts nonstop Creole/French Talk and Haitian music from department of Artibonite.



4VMQ 96.9 FM Cap-Haïtien

What's the top hits on the Zouk or Kompa charts???
 On your next Haitian E-skip adventure, tune in to 4VMQ 96.9 in Cap-Haïtien. Audiences can enjoy a variety of programs including news, info, sports, cultural, and regional stories. Zouk, Reggae, Kompa, Dance, Hip Hop, Rock, Jazz, etc., are mixed with the contemporary genres and world music to serve a large number of listeners.