

Synopsis :

« Ghost Children »

Dominican Republic - 2005

The children of Haitian sugar cane cutters, who were born on the Dominican Republic soil, have no legal existence. Neither the Dominican government, nor the Haitian one accepts to acknowledge those children as citizens. Deprived of official identity, they are doomed to live in the local ghettos – the *bateys* – and to become slaves or prostitutes in the tourist resorts of a country that happens to be one of the favourite holiday destinations of French people.

The children of the *bateys* seldom have access to school and health care. The international humanitarian organizations have not been worried by what happen to those children, as the Dominican Republic has an expanding economy– tourism being one of the dynamic sectors, and is free of conflicts – which normally catch media attention.

The *zafra* (sugar cane crop) takes place between November and June. At the end of the crop season, once the men have cleaned the fields for two to three months, the children go to the fields and begin seeding. But for the children's activity during the period when the fathers are inactive, families would not be able to survive until the next season.

In the region of San Pedro de Macoris, 40 km from Saint-Domingue, Christopher Hartley, a catholic father who arrived in 1997, has built two schools in the *bateys* and obtained the appointment of a Dominican teacher from the government. That the children be recognized, go to school and stop working is what he fights for daily. His colleague, Pierre Ruquoy, who was based on the Dominican-Haitian border for over thirty years, has just been expelled from the country. His main crime: to let Europe know about the slaves' situation.

Having spent four months in the *bateys*, I myself wanted to denounce the abandonment of the Dominican Republic, hoping that new horizons enabling the children of this country to escape the cycle of slavery will open up.

Céline Anaya-Gautier