

The disposal of the objects, or perhaps the act of someone else stealing them, removed them from their object-human relationship that vested them with multivalency and they became objects per se once more. However, in the context of their new location, as they are encountered by tourists and local people, they enter new human-object relations. In these relationships the objects acquire new meaning as markers of migration that negates the possibility of forgetting the processes of migration on a broader scale.

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[Found objects, abandoned by immigrants, on St. John USVI.]

(RE)MEMBERING SELF: OBJECTS, MIGRATION, AND THE PERSONAL ARCHIVE

Individual and family mobility has been a major characteristic of Caribbean life for three centuries (Catanese 1999: 59). Within the U.S. Virgin Islands, “off island”, “on island” and “down island” are local expressions frequently used to explain someone’s absence. Migration is a part of daily life. Few of the tourists staying at the posh resorts on St. John consider the migrations that created and sustain the island, nor are they aware that illegal immigrants are occasionally experiencing a very different kind of overnight stay in the forests, off the beaten trails, where the tourists enjoy hiking and ecological tours.

In this essay I explore the intersection of memory, material culture, and migration by focusing on the materials abandoned by one individual as a means to personalize an objectified group of individuals—Haitian migrants. The found objects comprise a personal archive that embodies the trilectic of selective remembering, forgetting and envisioning of migration.¹ This discussion frames the first phase of research which will be augmented by ethnographic research in Haiti, St. Maarten, St. Thomas and St. John in the near future.

HAITIAN MIGRATION: PAST AND PRESENT

For this generation, the media portrayal of Haitians as boat people is a primary referent for understanding Haitian migration. Overcrowded boats of nameless masses of weary, hungry, anxious individuals approach the shore, only to be returned from whence they came. In contrast, Haiti’s first large diaspora was initiated two hundred years ago,

consisted of both black and white individuals, and was the response to the revolution that created the first black republic of the modern world. Between the earliest diaspora and the most recent, frequent migrations from Haiti resulted from revolutions, political complexities, and poor economic conditions. The demographics of Haitian migrants changed according to temporal, political, cultural, and historical context.

The most recent wave of migrants, between 1957 and the present, comprised two broad stages (Laguerre 1984). After Francois Duvalier established his dictatorship, the politicians and members of the upper class were the first to leave; they were able to find jobs as educated professionals. The second stage of migration occurred when Duvalier’s son replaced him in 1971 and continues into the present. The economic situation deteriorated and migrants from both urban and rural areas began to leave in large numbers, including the undocumented individuals who became conceptualized as “boat people.” These migrants have settled primarily into the service industry, agricultural work, and/or they work as day laborers for contractors. Large migrations from Haiti were, and still are, punctuated by critical events such as revolution, war, and genocide.

If memories are the mountains of mental landscape, the tallest mountain within Haitian historical memory is the Haitian Revolution. It was the solution that led to Haitian freedom, and Haitians continue to use revolt as a means to transform political complexities. Magloire identified 69 ‘significant’ revolutions for the period 1806-1879.

¹This trilectic was developed by David Parkin 1999: 303 and Verne Harris 2002b: 75.

²Pseudonym to protect actual identity. Publication of this material is made with approval from Ulysses’ family members.

Of Haiti's 24 chief executives between 1807 and 1915, only 8 were in office for a period equal to their elected terms, and 70 percent were ousted by revolution, usually toppled by military leaders and juntas (Mintz 1974:285). This trend continued after the US occupation of Haiti, which lasted from 1915-1940. There have been 33 coup d'états in Haiti's 201 years of independence, including the most recent. Most recently, the coup d'état of Aristide and the democracy that he represented has resulted in a vigorous mass exodus, contributing to the expanding Haitian Diaspora.

The illegal nature of the current migration process forces a liminal citizenship that renders low visibility to the individual migrant. Illegal immigration has created a ritualistic gesture wherein individuals arrive on shore with extra clothing and personal belongings in plastic bags. They remove their clothing, wet from swimming from the boat, put on dry clothes, shedding old lives for new ones, and leave the wet clothes and bags on the beach, before heading into town. Remnants of this process are found scattered on the shoreline and in the bush. It is here that we found traces of 'Ulysses.'² Examining Ulysses' belongings as a personal archive serves as a means of considering the relationship between objects and selfhood, and the materiality of memory. But first, a brief discussion of the theoretical connections between these three concepts is necessary.

Theory: Objects, Memory of Self and Migration

Key theories of material culture developed in the 1980s demonstrated that social worlds and materiality are reciprocally constituted (cf Miller 1998:3; e.g. Bourdieu 1977; Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987). The critical role of material culture for (re) construction of identity has been a focus of historical archaeology since the early 1990s. Identity construction, both individual and cultural, is a mélange of past, present and future. Objects are pivotal for the memory process—including memory of self. According to renowned psychologist Csikszentmihalyi: "Without external props even our personal identity fades and goes out of focus (1993: 22)." Alfred Gell theorized that objects develop social trails through use by individuals, which renders the objects as extrasomatic extensions of personhood (1998). Remembering is a form of work engaged through everyday practice. Selectively choosing what to bring when relocating is a choice about what to remember and what to forget. The role of possessions in maintaining memory through displacement has been emphasized in research on migration. Parkin considered the significance of the objects that refugees bring with them when they are forcibly displaced (1999). He suggested that human-object attachments are critical for redefining personal and collective identity. Objects are equally important as elicitors of the narratives with which they are inscribed. Narrative and performative aspects of memory are inextricably linked to material objects (Hamilton 2002: 224).

Traces of memory can be accessed through appropriate stimuli. Objects offer the most direct access to these unconscious traces, through allowing direct re-engagement and continuity with past experience in ways that are precluded by language (Rowlands 1993: 144). Because memories are fleeting, people

desire to make them permanent by converting them into a tangible form (Brundage 2000:5). Objects serve as these culturally invested aide-memoire to signify and combine past events associated with their use or ownership (Rowlands 1993). Their materiality links past, present, and future, and provides a degree of consistency and continuity.

Parkin suggested that "private mementoes may take the place of interpersonal relations as a depository of sentiment and cultural knowledge (Parkin 1999: 317)." Parkin's analysis called for future research into which objects refugees take with them and leave behind at their point of departure to understand the processes of individual and cultural continuity through displacement (ibid). This suggestion is the point of departure for the following case study, a consideration of the objects an individual selectively chose to remember, forget, and imagine his shifting individual and cultural selfhood.

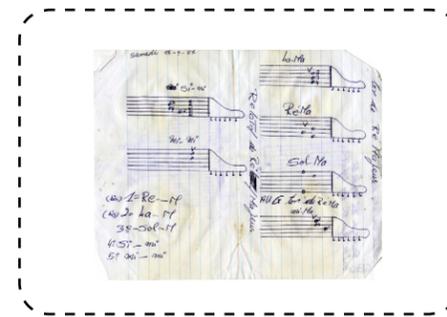


Ulysses: Case Study

This case study focuses on the backpack and associated personal belongings of 'Ulysses.' The backpack was found in a wooded area adjacent to a frequent immigrant landing-site on St. John, USVI. The backpack was open and its contents were scattered on the ground. The scattered nature of the items suggested that it was pillaged quickly. Its remote location, up a steep cliff crowded with catch-and-keep and cactus, suggest that the person who brought it there wanted to ensure isolation. It was unclear whether Ulysses' backpack was stolen or abandoned. The backpack was no longer wet, indicating it had been there at least for several days. Upon finding local contact information we made an unsuccessful attempt to return it to Ulysses. At this juncture, we were in possession of the backpack and agreed it was inalienable. We ultimately decided to develop a project to attempt to relocate Ulysses and in the process shed some additional light on the complexities of Haitian migration.

Documents, letters, objects, and personal reflections contextualize the identity of Ulysses as a Haitian migrant. Dispersed around the backpack, we found the following objects: 43 audio tapes containing music by Caribbean, French and American artists, 1 audiotape with messages from family members, 1 page of prayers, 1 audiotape of his graduation, 2 white under

place within it. The page from the English dictionary further represents an added dimension to Ulysses' identity, that of a Haitian in, but not of, America.



Music: Remembering, Forgetting and Imagining

From a quantitative standpoint, the 43 cassette tapes of music were the most abundant type of object. These tapes were not commercially produced, rather they were copies of popular and religious music dubbed onto blank cassettes. A psychological study of the links between memory and home possessions revealed that music is among the primary memory referents memory among young adults (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Music is an important portal for memory in multiple ways. It can simultaneously serve as a reminder of place, people, events and timeframe, mentally transporting one back to the place and time where the song formed its associative connections. Music is also important because, like clothing, it is an important medium for self-definition and memories of self. It is a means of defining who we are, who we were, and who we want to become.

Music itself is not typically conceived of in terms of materiality. However, an article by Tacchi suggests that the textured soundscape created by music is experienced as a strong material presence that can combat the material presence of silence (Tacchi 1998). This material presence would be of considerable comfort to a migrant removed from his/her personal network. Familiar music provides a temporary means of return to a familiar mental landscape, both real and imagined, and a sense of continuity. In this way, it is a form of briefly forgetting one's current context.

Abandonment of backpack and the Archival Sliver

In an audiotaped message, Ulysses' sister mentions sending a letter and photograph. The letter was found, but the photograph was conspicuous for its absence. The absence of the photograph, and likely other items as well, highlight the partial nature of Ulysses' personal archive. Like all archives, it is best perceived as a sliver of personal memory, rather than as an incomplete whole (Harris 2002: 13)⁵. It is not an inclusive reflection of Ulysses' journey, rather it is a limited collection that speaks to what Ulysses' chose to remember while in St. Maarten and then forget, through the physical act of abandonment of material memories, when he arrived on St. John.

Photographs are important mnemonic devices because they

are objects created specifically to remember. In a psychological study, photographs were ranked highest above all other objects as memory aids, despite age or gender of respondent (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). The photograph of Ulysses' sister was missing and no other photographs were

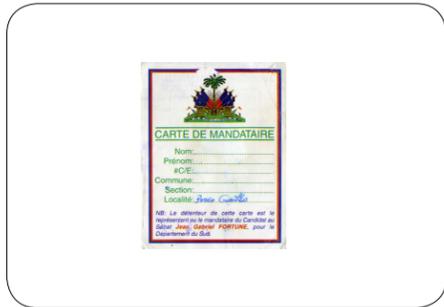
found. It is likely that Ulysses took the photo(s) with him as a cherished object when he abandoned the backpack. Because he was carrying so many cassette tapes, it is likely that he also had a tape player. If so, this was also taken when he left. It would be interesting to know what Ulysses selected to take with him, because those few articles are likely those most highly invested with meaning. What did he choose to remember at this point? And, what did he choose to forget? We hope to begin to answer these questions in the near future with ethnographic research. Until that is done, we are left to consider what Ulysses left behind and what this act of physical abandonment meant at this phase of his journey.

Although Ulysses carried the objects we found throughout his considerable stay on St. Maarten, he abandoned them once he reached U.S. territory. Why did these formerly inalienable objects become disposable? The abandonment of the backpack may have provided a degree of psychological distance from the uncertain, danger and vulnerability of the physical journey. A more practical reason was Ulysses' desire not to get caught and consequently his need to blend in with the surrounding population. Carrying a wet backpack precluded this possibility. His identity card, his political ID, and correspondence to and from Haiti and were direct links to his Haitian identity and thus required their disposal. The undershirts and personal care items were relatively easy to replace. The ties did not have a practical function in this new environment and the cassette tapes were conspicuously bulky; the added risk and burden of carrying these items outweighed their sentimental value. The pillaged nature of the backpack suggests that Ulysses' went through it and gathered some objects before his departure into town, though he had to be very selective to avoid suspicion. This physical abandonment is a form of forgetting, a negation of the Haitian self in outward appearance to avoid detection and the shedding of the personal archive of the first stage of Ulysses' journey.

The personal archive of objects and documents are remnants from Ulysses' long, arduous journey from a politically and economically conflicted homeland to St. Maarten, and then to a contested US territory. The recovered objects are tangible artifacts of struggle, persistence, and agency. They are simultaneously artifacts of identity, expressions of self-definition as a Haitian migrant in transit. This identity is further developed through narrative. Artifacts and narrative are combined in a personal archive used to remember, forget and imagine through the transformation into his Haitian in America identity. Though this partial archive is fragmented, we start to get a sense of Ulysses through its examination.

⁵ I borrow this concept of the archival sliver from Verne Harris (2002: 135).

shirts, 3 neckties, 1 deodorant, 1 bottle of hand and body lotion, 1 comb, 1 pair of nail clippers, 1 sewing needle inserted into a fragment of envelope, 1 promotional black bag from Western Union, 1 address book, 1 book of stationery, 3 small empty white envelopes, 1 notebook, 1 political party ID, 1 tax receipt, 1 page from an English dictionary, 1 used envelope, 1 brown 'Aerostar' brand backpack, and 14 pieces of paper with notes and letters. Time and ethical considerations preclude a detailed discussion of each of the objects and letters. For this reason, I've selected a few objects and narratives that demonstrate that this pastiche of artifacts and narratives forms a personal archive that provides a means of remembering, forgetting, and envisioning self through the process of migration.



Context: Identity Card/ The Haitian Self

The material culture and written documents of Ulysses provide a means of accessing his sense of self and defining his migration process. Given the dates on the letters, we know that Ulysses' migration process to St. John from Haiti took over one year to complete. He arrived in St. Maarten by January of 2001 and didn't arrive on St. John until March 2002. Ulysses' identity card specifies that he was born in a small coastal town in the south of Haiti. The economy of the town is based on agriculture and commercial fishing. The birthdate given on the card indicates that he was twenty-four when he arrived on St. Maarten. The card expired in March 2001, but was not discarded until one year later. His decision to carry this document suggests he may have been uncertain whether he would make it to his expected destination or be returned to Haiti, the only location where this identity card continued to have a practical meaning. This document also provided continuity with his sense of Haitian citizenship, with its accompanying rights and privileges. The liminality that Ulysses experienced as a migrant non-citizen in St. Maarten may have been mitigated by the physical presence of this tangible memory of his former civic self, providing a sentimental reason for it to remain in his possession.

Why did Ulysses leave Haiti? His letters provide partial answers to this question. Ulysses left Haiti primarily to improve his economic situation and that of the family and friends that he left behind, as the Western Union bag also attests. A letter from a former schoolteacher emphasizes his social obligations and the change in Ulysses' social status initiated by his migration:

Ulysses my friend, you must know in the first place the reason why you are displaced, the reason that you leave one place for another. You must know equally that you have left your mother, your sisters, and your brother and you are the first that occupies an important place in the family. For that reason the main goal of your displacement must be to work to earn something that is good with the helping of them and to prepare for your future. My brother you must know that in Haiti there is nothing, there is no medium to function for young people as you were able to witness and you left that experience. Although life in Haiti is a life of getting up in the morning and going to sleep at night without any accomplishment. For that purpose, occupy yourself well to know why you are in St. Maarten.

This narrative explicitly reminds Ulysses of the reasons for and necessity of his migration as well as his obligation to those he left behind, evoking their presence and reaffirming his role in this network even through absence.

Another document offers insight into how Ulysses gave meaning to his migration. Ulysses was asked to give an address at his Christian high school upon the dedication of a new gymnasium. He use this opportunity as an occasion to invoke the past to envision the future. Following are excerpts from this speech:

In the goal of conserving in our memory and to celebrate the victory of the indigenous army over the expeditionary army which represents an acquired independence with the price of blood recalling at the same time the past of our dear fatherland, our conscious compatriots thus of the Haitian nation, the school supporters have judged it is good to organize at the school a moment of reflection to elevate our recognition toward our enthusiastic combatants. From Dessalines, the proclamer of independence, who had the courage and intrepidity to make Haiti pass from a state of servitude to a state of emancipation that we recognize at this moment. This moment of hard work created a stimulus to repeat at the example of Victor Hugo "Those who live are those who fight."

This consolidated independence has a significant value for the Haitian expatriates and also for those who remain in Haiti who understand that after the shameful death of our dear ancestor, we would presume to peak the curiosity of having this independence again.

How are we going to sustain ourselves?
This question is for us, youth, here we are at the threshold of life.
For a longtime this intellectual life is going to be made of white nights and laborious days. We can, and it is joyful to, envision the future with optimism, everything depends on the way we envision the present.

This important narrative speaks to the significance that Ulysses' places upon actively remembering the Haitian Revolution and those who fought for it and in turn drawing upon these memories as means to model the present and shape the future. He associates the struggle for independence with hard work and recognizes that hard work is necessary to sustain Haiti. At the bottom of the page is handwritten "I paid \$1300." It gives personal meaning to his journey as a means of sustaining Haiti and remembering his "dear fatherland." A copy of his speech provided access to a moment in which Ulysses was the selected guest speaker at an important community event, which was likely reassuring to him in the context of his liminal migrant state. The two narratives gain a physical medium in their written format. This concretization allows us to consider them as inscribed objects. The materiality of the letters serves as a physical touchstone to distant family members and friends and allows Ulysses to reflect and reinforce his sense of self in relation to them.

Political Identity Card: Remembering

Ulysses' political identity card identifies him as a supporter of Jean Gabriel Fortune, who was a Lavalas candidate (in Aristide's party) for Senator in the Department of the South at the time of its issuance. Fortune has had an illustrious political career. In 1995, as newly elected deputy of Les Cayes, Fortune was shot in an attack on the car he was traveling in with fellow deputy Jean Hubert Feuille. Feuille was killed and Fortune was wounded. By 2001 Fortune had become a member of the opposition group Democratic Convergence and he was attacked in May 21, 2001 and his store was pillaged. He was kidnapped on May 21, 2001 purportedly by Lavalas supporters, and released on June 4. The career of Fortune demonstrates the volatile nature of politics in Haiti. The violence directed at politicians extends to their supporters and egregious human rights violations with political motivation are well-documented³. This renders absurd the official U.S. position that Haitian migrants are economic rather than political refugees.

Ulysses received letters from his sisters and brother requesting money to assist in their education, these needs were among the factors that necessitated his migration. Improving education and health care were central goals of the Lavalas party under Aristide at the time that Ulysses' supported Fortune and this may have appealed to him. The significance he accorded to his own education is suggested by the audioteape of his 1995 graduation that he carried with him six years later. Ulysses must have been a good student, because a former teacher is among those who sent him letters and because he was selected to give the address.

Personal Items: Remembering through the Body

The personal care items include a rubber hair comb, toenail clippers, a Gillette Clear Stick deodorant with Wild Rain scent, and a bottle of P Latouche hand and body lotion. Ulysses also carried a needle that still contained a strand of black thread. The needle was important for maintenance of clothing, and consequently appearance. These items are practical, intended for utilitarian purposes. Yet, the simple, mundane performance of personal care on a basic level provided a means of continu-

ity with body maintenance rituals that reinforce a sense of self.

These items may have been used to maintain his appearance in a way that was consistent with his former bodily self, or to fashion a new appearance influenced by his new environment or the need to remain inconspicuous within it.

Ties: Envisioning

Aside from the personal care objects, there were five clothing-related items associated with the backpack. There were two white sleeveless cotton undershirts and three polychrome rayon/polyester blend neckties. Each tie has continuous geometric patterns. The neckties were already fashioned, ready to be used, indicating that the owner might have difficulty fashioning a tie on his own or the care of a family member, friend, or loved one in his preparations for departure. Alternatively, tying the ties may have been a way of releasing anxiety when preparing for the trip from St. Maarten to St. John, a personal ritual to imbue a sense of control in the face of the unknown. If they were self-purchased, they indicate Ulysses' sense of style and the importance he places on formal appearance. In this case, they would remain important ties to his former bodily self, though they would certainly prove impractical for the types of day labor available to Ulysses on St. Maarten and St. John. Perhaps, realizing this from the outset, the ties were kept as a reminder of dreams and future goals, an artifact of envisioning and imagining who he wanted to become, or of aspirations of using skills beyond his physical labor to shape his future.

English language book: Envisioning

Included among the found objects was one page from a book entitled L'Anglais Appris Quelques Jours⁴. This particular page is interesting because it is from a section of the text dealing with travel. However, train travel is the mode of transport discussed and the questions and phrases are fairly ironic, given Ulysses' method of travel and his forced overnight stay in the bush. For example: "Do you know a good hotel at Matlock?" and "Here are my keys". Particularly ironic for this research are the following questions and statement: "Do they examine the luggage here?" "Has one to be present when the things are being examined?" and "Those are my things."

This page was selectively chosen by Ulysses' as significant for his migrant journey. We know that he originally took the entire book with him to St. Maarten, but then either sent the book to his brother or gave it to someone else because he mentions the book and his intent to send it in a letter to his brother. Thus this particular page about travel was selected as necessary to keep. While in Haiti and in St. Maarten, the ambivalent allures were envisioned by Ulysses. This book helped frame that imagining and Ulysses' visualization of his

³Delegations from Amnesty International, the National Lawyers Guild and Let Haiti Live have documented widespread politically motivated killings of Haitians.

⁴Learn English in Days.
I borrow this concept of the archival sliver from Verne Harris (2002: 135).



Letter found in Francis Bay in St. John with a photograph.

Translation from Spanish:
Jesus I offer myself to thee . . . [illegible] . . . of Saint Peter and Saint Paul and my Lord. Even though he has hidden the things from my eyes I could see it very clearly like the rays of the sun sees my enemies my neighbor the justice like a wild animal like a terrible Lion and only by seeing me they become in dirt of the penitent vow as you gave the permission to enter in the holy house of Jerusalem to turn off the lamp of the holy sacrament of the altar if I want that the 5 senses of my enemies of my neighbor the justice enter that he humiliated under my feet like he humiliated our Lord Jesus Christ at the bottom of the holy cross amen. 1 Our Father and one Hail Mary.



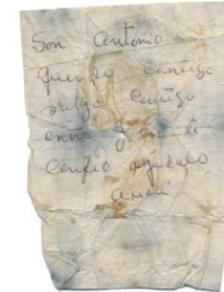
Tag from a life preserver, found on the Leinster Bay Trail, St. John.

This is the tag from an adult life preserver vest. It was attached to one of a group of life preservers found on the trail to Leinster Bay, discarded as the wearers dispersed among the bush along the trail upon their arrival.



French Bible found at Leinster Bay, St. John.

This bible was found in the wooded area adjacent to Leinster Bay. It was opened to Acts 9. The first verse on the page reads: *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* This is a fitting verse given that the next step on the journey is to go into Cruz Bay, the 'city', and determine what to do next.



Note found in the pocket of abandoned pants in Francis Bay, St. John.

Translation from Spanish:
My beloved Saint Antonio
With you I leave
with you I enter
In you I trust
Help him,
Amen



Folding knife found off the Johnny Horn trail on St. John.

This knife was found in a wooded area off the trail. It was found among clothing, plastic bags, and masking tape. The knife has tape attached to it, either to avoid injury or as a result of using it to cut tape, possibly the tape which sealed belongings in plastic bags to avoid getting them wet until the shore was reached.



Page from a passport, found at Brown Bay, St. John.

This page was torn from a passport (possibly Thai) and discarded in Brown Bay. It bore a stamp from St. Maarten.

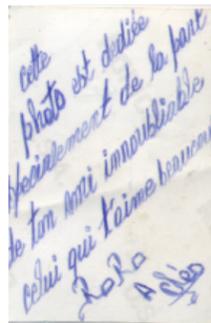


Photo found near Trunk Bay in St. John.

Translation from Kreyol:
This photo is specially dedicated from your unforgettable friend, who loves you so much.
This image is the back of a photograph that was found after a group of Haitian immigrants landed on St. John and were intercepted by immigration officials. As they attempted to flee, they discarded personal possessions that would identify them as Haitian, including this photograph.



Abandoned Haitian passport pages found in Brown Bay in St. John.

These passport pages bear a visa from travel from Haiti to the Dominican Republic. They were found with a pair of jeans and a gold chain bearing the name Miglaise. The brand of jeans was Always Illegal.



Green tea bags found at Francis Bay, St. John.

These tea bags were carefully wrapped in a plastic bag. This plastic bag was neatly folded inside a brown handkerchief and inserted into the pocket of a pair of brown pants. The pants were carefully folded and placed upon a pair of perfectly aligned brown shoes underneath a tree near Francis Bay.



Letter found in Brown Bay, St. John, torn into pieces, with other torn documents.

Translation from Kreyol:
Hi Brother in law, How are you, your health, and your work?
For me I'm not bad, thanks to god.
My dear, there is a lot of time we didn't communicate, but we are still there, thanks to god.
I wanted to make a tape but I never found electricity, things are not really going better, God has a plan for us (?...)
My dear if you see Lolite say hello for me because since October I have had her news and I tell to her all you send for me. Ok, it was Loder

A Sterlin

Lucienne says hello to you
Mouton says hello to you