

Gender issues:

**Relations between men and women in the low-income
districts of Port-au-Prince**

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1. Introduction: overall objectives and the research universe

In Haiti the term *gender* evokes questions relating to violence and extreme poverty, exacerbated by natural catastrophes and by a supposed cultural acceptance of women's inferiority to men, expressed in the large numbers of single mothers bringing up children and caring for the home alone. Female single parenting and matrifocality are identified as marked characteristics of Haitian families, especially in low-income urban environments. These ideas inform the recommendations and policies for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, which seek to dissociate the female condition from violence and extreme poverty as a way of promoting democracy and the socioeconomic development of Haitian society. Two sets of data that support this agenda are certainly significant: according to figures prior to the January 2010 earthquake, for example, 25% of Haitian women in stable relationships interviewed by the MSPP (Public Health and Population Ministry: *Ministère de la Santé Publique et de la Population*) had suffered some kind of physical, emotional or sexual violence from their partners, while 60% of the homes headed by women live in extreme poverty.¹

The vast majority of the residents of Port-au-Prince's low-income districts are migrants or children of migrants from the country's interior. Men and women maintain ties with their families' places of origin, coming and going regularly as part of trade circuits or simply visiting, sharing important moments of family life. They are also closely involved in the dynamics of the Haitian diaspora abroad: they travel to other countries, help to organize and finance the travels of their partners, children, other family members and friends, and receive money transfers and other items as help from those living abroad.

This mobility, a striking feature of the Haitian social universe under study, which we shall describe over the course of the text, tends to become even more intense during

¹ The main documents forming the basis of gender and women's empowerment policies in Haiti are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – Haiti, UN, 2008; and the Gender Assessment – USAID, 2006, along with the reports produced by the MSPP (EMMUS-II, 1995; EMMUS-III, 2000, EMMUS-IV, 2007 and EMMUS-V, 2013).

periods of political violence (the most severe in 2004-2006, the most recent coinciding with the field research period between 2012 and 2013) and after natural catastrophes (most notably following the January 2010 earthquake): children are sent both to the interior and abroad, and in the main their mothers travel with them, either alone or in the company of their partners, other relatives, neighbours or friends.²

According to some estimates, more than 60% of homes in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area are headed by women.³ As well as raising children and step-children, running their homes and feeding children and adults, women are also responsible for providing a daily source of income: more than 70% of them are involved in commerce. Hence at the same time as they, along with children, are the main victims and sufferers of the social and economic conditions imposed by extreme poverty, women are also the centre around which the life of homes and families revolves.

Despite the enormous difficulties faced by Haitian men and women in their everyday lives, there have been signs of transformations over the last few years: younger women are acquiring new forms of capital, principally in professional training; female schooling matches or exceeds male schooling; more and more women are literate and women in general have higher levels of education.⁴ This data are

² The January 2010 earthquake is estimated to have affected at least 1.5 million people (around 15% of the population living in Haiti) causing between 200,000 and 300,000 deaths, leaving about 200,000 people injured and more than one million without homes. Among the regions most affected were the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince (which as well as the city itself includes the towns of Carrefour, Petion Ville, Delmas, Cité Soleil and Kenscoff), Léogâne and Jacmel (Amnesty International 2011; Feinstein International Center 2013; Cluster Protection 2013).

³ The report produced by CEDAW (2008) suggests that between 42% and 44% of Haitian homes are headed by women. EMMUS-V, which uses household samples, indicates that 41% were headed by women in 2012. Other reports point to similar figures, such as UNIFEM (2004) which reports an overall figure of 40% female-headed homes. Some other reports show a sizeable difference, such as IHSI (2003), where 53% of homes are reported to be headed by women, predominantly in the metropolitan area (64%) and provincial towns (60%).

⁴ Data referring to the 2010-2013 period estimate that 36.3% of the male population aged 25 or over has finished secondary education; the proportion drops to 22.5% among women (PNUD 2013; 2011 and 2010). When we shift our focus to young people, for example the age group spanning from 20 to 24 years, the difference between the genders practically disappears: according to data from the MSPP, around 64% of females had reached secondary level or above, compared to 68% of males (EMMUS-V, 2013). The comparison of illiteracy rates that take into account age and sex also reveal an

consistent with women's involvement in the country's politics⁵ and with female participation in the intense organized community life of lower-income districts, populated by a myriad of associations, committees, cultural groups, churches, *ounfòs*, *bases*, and other entities.

Although, as we shall show, this organized community life is clearly animated by men more than women, the latter take an active part in the associations for various purposes alongside the men, as well as setting up and promoting women-specific associations. Two generations of female leaders are active today: the younger women, aged around 20, with more schooling and more closely involved with the dynamics of international aid and the intervention policies promoted by networks of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), International Agencies (IAs) and government bodies working towards 'stabilization and development'; and a generation of women leaders aged around 40 with trajectories as activists linked to the political turmoil that followed the Duvalier dictatorship (1957-1986), the Lavalas movement, the leadership of Jean Bertrand Aristide and opposition to the coup d'états that removed him from office in both 1991 and 2004.

The pursuit of gender equality has been a longstanding aim of Haitian women's movements, especially those involved in the struggle against the dictatorship and against the subsequent military governments between 1986 and 2004. The denunciation of the *tonton makout* paramilitary force and the military regimes as radical versions of male domination were among the issues foregrounded by Haitian

improvement for both sexes, but especially for women, indicating 13% illiteracy among girls aged from 15 to 19 years old, compared to 57.4% among women aged from 45 to 49. Among boys the illiteracy rate is higher than for girls of the same age group, totalling 16.5%, while the rate for men aged between 45 and 49 years is 40.6% (EMMUS-V, 2013).

⁵ In November 1994, with the aim of promoting and defending women's rights, a decree created the Ministry of the Female Condition and Women's Rights (Ministère a la Condition Feminine et aux Droits des Femmes: MCFDF). In 2011, the Haitian Parliament approved a constitutional amendment guaranteeing 30% of posts in public administration and the country's political parties (Articles 17.1 and 31.1.1). Over the last few years the country has had its first two female ministers: Claudette Werleigh (1995-1996, the Aristide government) and Michèle Duvivier Pierre-Louis (2008-2009, the René Prével government) and currently women occupy seven ministries among the 23 that make up the government of Michel Martely. Despite these advances, one of the main demands of feminist organizations and movements, namely application of the law regulating paternity and affiliation, approved unanimously by the Senate in April 2012, has still not been promulgated by the President.

women's associations and, more generally, the campaigns for democracy in the country.

In contrast to much of the literature on gender, the focus of this research is not women in isolation, but gender relations, taking into account the viewpoints and values attributed to these relations by women and men in diverse interactive contexts. Our interest is in comprehending how the inequalities, interdependencies, solidarities and conflicts that modulate very often ambiguous and ambivalent relations are socially and culturally constructed in everyday life. This aim in mind, we shall present the findings along four main thematic lines, which structure the content of this report:

- a) family and conjugal dynamics;
- b) economic dynamics;
- c) the dynamics of violence and victimization;
- d) the dynamics of politics.

Additionally, at the end of each of these topics we present brief biographical narratives that look to unite episodes relating to the life histories of women interviewed as part of the research and who express, in a shifting and dynamic form, questions discussed over the course of the text and that extend beyond the five trajectories presented. However it is essential to note that a separation of this kind is only justified by the need to present the data in an intelligible way. In the flux of social life, of course, these thematic lines are perceived and experienced by subjects in an integrated form as part of their inter-relations. As we shall see, 'conjugal conflicts' can transform into 'political conflicts' (or even into 'armed conflicts') between larger networks and social groups; the mobility of people (which modulates family relations) is partly explained by economic dynamics (such as the circuits of markets and remittances); the same term (such as violence, *vyolans*, or frustration,

fristrasyon) can refer to diverse questions and scales: to the domain of the family and interpersonal relations or to the sphere of politics, to ways of dealing with enemies and friends, or to morally legitimizing manners of thinking and acting, including between men and women.⁶

Over the course of the text we present and discuss the main sets of data produced over the last decade by the Haitian state, research institutes and international agencies concerning the relations and inequalities between men and women. The dialogue with this data is necessarily complex since, as happens with all the statistics referring to Haitian society (not only in relation to the female condition and gender relations), continuous and consistent historical data does not exist: the reports are produced by various agencies according to heterogenic objectives and methodologies, and, in many cases, present different values for the same indicators.⁷ On the other hand, the available reports do not show data relating to micro-regions, which is why they are not directly utilizable in the dialogue with the ethnographic data on Greater Bel Air, the place where our field research was concentrated. In compensation, for the areas studied we were able to make use of the Census conducted by Viva Rio in 2007 and the set of data produced by our team in relation to various dimensions of social life in the zone from 2008 onwards.

1.1. Methodology and research area

The research on which this report is based was conducted between the months of May and December 2013. The results presented here are also based, as we just mentioned, on the experience of the team that has developed research in the area since 2008. The report has likewise benefitted from investigations conducted by members of the team in other regions of the country (particularly in the south and southeast) and, furthermore, outside the national borders, in the circuits of the

⁶ It is important to note that in this work we reduce the universe of gender to that composed only by heterosexual men and women. Our focus does not exclude considerations concerning gender relations in a wider sense, including homosexuality, transsexuality or transvestism, for example. It is worth noting that there are almost no works in this area in relation to Haiti (one exception is Schwartz 2008).

⁷ To take one example, the percentage of homes headed by women: according to UNIFEM 2004, 43%; USAID 26% and 28% for urban and rural areas, respectively; and MCDFFD 33% (2009).

diaspora. This research allows the addition of data and perspectives, at the same time as it serves as an important methodological resource for controlling information and hypotheses relating to Greater Bel Air.⁸

The team that conducted the research between May and December 2013 was made up of six members, four men and two women. During this period various investigative techniques were combined in order to pursue different tasks:

- (1) Ethnography, involving the everyday conviviality with people in the area;

- (2) The reconstruction of a dozen life histories of female leaders from Greater Bel Air, which complements the 40 life histories (male and female) presented in Braum, Neiburg and Nicaise (2013);

- (3) Three focal groups:
 - (a) with female leaders,
 - (b) with male and female leaders, and
 - (c) with female traders, leaders from the Croix de Bossales Market area, which, as we shall see, is closely integrated with the low region of Greater Bel Air (La Salines, Forturon, Warf Jeremie and Pont Rouge).

- (4) A survey of women's associations or those associations that focus on issues relating to the female condition and the gender issues present in the zone.

- (5) Six life histories of female water sellers, which completes the set of life histories begun in an earlier work (Neiburg & Nicaise 2009). As we shall show, the *machann dlo* offer a privileged window for us to comprehend the universe of social dynamics relating to commercial practices, so central to the female condition in Haiti. The lives of these women also opens a window onto the precariousness of some female

⁸ Among the works produced by members of the NuCEC team in Bel Air are: Braum 2014; Neiburg et alii 2012; Braum, Neiburg & Nicaise 2011; Neiburg & Nicaise 2010 and 2009.

professions and onto the central role performed by women in the distribution of basic staple items such as water and food.⁹

(6) In coordination with the Biwo d'Analiz of Viva Rio (Kay Nou), a training course (theoretical and practical) was offered on qualitative research and gender issues for a group of 6 young people coming from 3 *blocs* in Greater Bel Air: Warf Jeremie, La Saline/Fortouron and Bel Air. The course also included the participation of all the members of the Biwo, as well as some members of the Viva Rio Community Protection Brigade. The training course lasted ten days.

The objective of the course was to discuss gender roles, family dynamics and the logics of the violence between men and women in the zone, focusing on cases described as 'interpersonal conflicts,' 'domestic violence' or 'conjugal violence.' A methodology was also created for field research that included:

- a. The reconstruction of social logics (principally family and economic) that compose these cases (conflicts, violence);
- b. The temporality of cases, each event entering in the flow of social relations of which it forms part (i.e. in the series of past events that shape relations between agents);
- c. The different points of view of the social agents involved (men, women, families, houses, network);
- d. The potential for cases of becoming 'public' transforming into 'scandal' and eventually changing scale to armed conflicts (relations between the interpersonal conflicts at the level of conjugal and family intimacy and armed conflicts was one of the main research concerns).¹⁰

⁹ As well as our own work on female participation in the water market, see Beasley 2012 on the case of food and the *machann manjé* female cooks.

¹⁰ Marcelin (2014) utilizes the term *connectivity* to describe this collapse of scales.

Around 20 cases have been analyzed in-depth – some of which were followed until the end of field research. It should be stressed that the observed cases involve violence perpetrated both by men against women and women against men, and include a consideration of generational variations.

(7) Along with Biwo d'Analiz of Viva Rio, we held meetings with the security and conflict mediation agencies that focus on issues of gender or relating to the female condition in the area – principally the female section of the PNH, UNPOL and BAL-Bywo Assistance Legal Bel Air (a conflict mediation and free legal aid service, which operates from Viva Rio's community centre in Bel Air and is run with resources from MINUSTAH) – in order to understand how these agencies operate (their objectives and methodologies), how they are accessed and the perceptions that the population has of them.

1.2. Greater Bel Air

Greater Bel Air refers to a cluster of low-income districts located in the centre of Port-au-Prince. The higher region comprises Fort National, Bastia, Solino, Delmas 4, Delmas 2 and Bel Air, while the lower region covers Portail St. Joseph, La Saline, Fòturon and Warf Jeremie. To the south it borders the zone of Champ de Mars and Palacio Nacional; to the west it merges with the country's largest area of markets, which revolves around the Croix de Bossales and the port; to the north it extends as far as Cité Soleil. The region's proximity to the centres of power and the markets amplifies its political and economic influence, meaning that social life in the area, especially the conflicts, receives much wider attention, including at national level.

The area was the setting for the start of the intervention of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) in 2004. MINUSTAH and UNPOL still maintain a base in Fort National today. The region, along with Boston in Cité Soleil, is considered red (highly dangerous) by the United Nations, which directly affects the implementation of projects by the UN system (whose staff are prohibited from circulating in the area without military escort). It was in Bel Air that Viva Rio began

working in Haiti, in 2005-6,¹¹ and it is this region where we have concentrated our own research since 2008.¹²

According to the data available, approximately 130,000 people live in Greater Bel Air, 55% of them women, with roughly half of these women aged between 10 and 30 years old.¹³ The region's social morphology clearly reflects the severe transformations experienced by the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince from the 1960s onwards: dizzying demographic growth caused by the crisis in traditional farming and the promise of jobs in industry, the virtual absence of infrastructure (water, light and basic sanitation) and the marginality of formal employment and wage labour as a source of income in personal and family budgets. Following again some estimates relating to the city's metropolitan area, 70% of the population lives on less than two US dollars per day, and approximately 50% on less than one US dollar, that is, a situation of extreme poverty.¹⁴ These percentages are even more pronounced when we turn to low-income districts (*kati popylè*) or ghettos (*guetò*) of the city like Martisant, Cité Soleil or those located in Greater Bel Air.¹⁵ According to data produced by Viva Rio (2008), 47% of students from Bel air were enrolled normally, while 24% of them were a year behind.¹⁶

2. Family and conjugal dynamics

According to the Ministry of Women and Women's Rights (MCFDF/2009), 33% of Haitian women are family heads. In its most recent report (EMMUS-V 2013), the Ministry of Public Health and Population indicates that 41% of the studied households (that formed part of the sample) are headed by women, representing

¹¹ See Muggah & Moestue 2009.

¹² <http://www.nucec.net/pesquisas.html>.

¹³ Viva Rio Census 2007.

¹⁴ PNUD 2005.

¹⁵ In 2007 family per capita income was estimated at up to US\$ 10 for around 20% of the population surveyed by the Bel Air demographic census (*La violence à Bel Air, Port-au-Prince, Haiti: étude sur la victimisation/2007*).

¹⁶ Viva Rio takes the year/age ratio as an indicator of school performance. According to its own definition, a student enrolled 'normally' is one who started his or her school career at age seven in the first year of primary school and progressed without repeating any years.

around 46% in the metropolitan area and towns and 37% in the rural zones.¹⁷ Hence in the low-income urban districts, such as those of Greater Bel Air, the presence of households headed by women is undoubtedly striking.

Globally we know that similar situations are common in other regions with extreme poverty, caused by rapid processes of urbanization in which the economy's 'informal' sector spreads exponentially and wage labour becomes almost non-existent. However, in the Caribbean and Haitian case, these characteristics coincide with the traditional forms of family organization that developed from the slavery era. The literature on the region has always stressed the need to understand the family dynamics that actually exist, abandoning the normative idea of a nuclear family composed of father, mother and children living under the same roof.¹⁸

A recognition of the importance of the configurations of families and households centred on women rather than men (as the nuclear family model implies) underlay the development of the theory of matrifocality. According to the latter, Haitian and Caribbean family configurations are characterized by the fact that women are salient in domestic affairs, while men, in the status of husband-father, are marginal to the close bonds between mothers, children and daughters' children (Smith 1956).¹⁹

Along with the matrifocal nature of family configurations, the literature drew attention to a correlated phenomenon: the economic importance of female activities, especially those connected to trade, which ensure the basic livelihood of those living in the domestic space. As in West Africa, Caribbean and Haitian women have always dedicated themselves to trade (Mintz 1971, more recently Ulysse 2010), they were and are in daily contact with money, which reinforces their central in the families and favours relatively independent and autonomous femininities.

¹⁷ The reports produced by the MSPP over the 2000s show a slight reduction in the number of households headed by women in its samples. The proportion was 43% in 2000 (EMMUS-III, 2001), 44% in 2005-2006 (EMMUS-IV, 2007) and finally 41% in 2012 (EMMUS-V, 2013). According to USAID (2006), 26% of the homes headed by women in Port-au-Prince are below the extreme poverty line (i.e. a minimum income lower than one US dollar).

¹⁸ Herskovits (1937) and Bastien (1951).

¹⁹ Momsen (1993) uses the expression "patriarchalism in absentia."

But this female centrality and independence were and are above all ambivalent (paradoxical is the term used by Janet Momsen 1993). They are the source of tensions and inequalities, conflicts and hierarchies that, on the other hand, coexist with practices, ideas and ideals centring on the mutual support and solidarity between men and women²⁰ – practices, ideas and ideals that surface in everyday life and that during our research would appear in the focus group discussions, referring sometimes to Christian motifs, at other times to Vodou cosmology. The Biblical narrative on the creation of men and women, for example, is widely used as an argument in support of the complementarity and cooperation that should ideally exist between them, as well as the condemnation of homosexual practices.

Hence the description and denunciation of female inequality (e.g. Bell 2001, N’Zengou-Tayo 1998 or Neptune-Anglade 1986) coexist alongside the observation of women’s power and relative autonomy and the fact that they constitute the pillar of Haitian society, families and households. The Creole expression *fanm se poto mitan* expresses the centrality of this position: it points both to the physical pillar of the house (the infrastructure of care and feeding) and to the centre of gravity of the family (Dalmaso 2014), a connection with the ancestors via descent – like the *poto mitan* located in the centre of the *peristyl*, in the ritual space of the Vodou house.²¹

It is within this background of social practices shaped across different time spans (the long history of slavery, the post-plantation period, the configuration of rural life around the *lakou*,²² the more recent history of urbanization and the formation of the

²⁰ Besson 1993 (in Momsen 1993) suggests reading the interdependencies between the Caribbean ‘weak man’ and ‘strong woman’ through the proposals of Peter Wilson (1973) on the hierarchical and egalitarian Caribbean sociabilities, organized through the female respectability/male reputation dichotomy.

²¹ Contemporary elaborations of the rich Haitian feminist movement around the idea of *poto mitan* can be found in the project <http://www.potomitan.net/> and in Bell, Beverly; Danticat, Edwidge. 2001. *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance*. NY: Cornell University Press. *Poto mitan* is a classic of the Caribbean female images, the courageous woman who keeps the home going, the magnet forming the centre of attraction around which the entire universe seems to revolve (as in the Vodou festivals).

²² The *lakou* have been described by the academic literature studying the ‘Haitian family’ as the households and habitats of the extensive family (Bastien 1951). Generally speaking they comprise a terrain containing one or more houses of people linked by family ties, graves belonging to ancestors

Port-au-Prince ghettos) where we need to situate the data relating to the female condition in Haiti. The public policy agenda aimed towards female empowerment and the promotion of gender equality must consider these complexities and ambivalences in the relations of interdependency between men and women, constructed over the course of generations.

2.1. A complex universe of interdependencies and expectations

The gender inequality indicator (GII) produced by UNDP and included in the reports on human development aggregates a series of information relating to inclusion in the work market, access to education and life expectancy, and so on. On the GII scale, Haiti is always ranked between the most unequal countries (for 2012 the country was placed in 127th position from a total of just under 200 countries considered). This finding is consistent with the country's perennially low ranking in relation to other indicators of development (in the case of the HDI, for example, also calculated by UNDP, Haiti occupied 161st position in 2012).²³

In a social universe of such urgent needs, there is unfortunately little novelty in the fact that women and children are particularly vulnerable and subjected to extreme hardship, even more so after political or natural calamities, a sad constant in the history of the Caribbean country.

The literature has underlined the victimization of women in emergency situations, as in the case of denunciations of massive violations occurring during the periods of 'violence' in the 1990s (James 2010), between 2004 and 2006 (UNIFEM 2004, USAID 2006) and, more recently, in the refugee camps, victims of the January 2010 earthquake (INURED 2010, Amnesty International 2010, VSF, 2010, Schuller 2011, Report Cluster Protection, 2013). We have already highlighted the intrinsic relations

and a small garden with medicinal plants and sometimes fruit trees. The *lakou* may also be the dwelling place of the *lwa*, spirits who their founders worshipped when they were alive. Although traditionally associated with the traditional forms of ritual life, urban *lakous* also exist, as in the case of the ghettos of Greater Bel Air. On the Saint Martin region, see Marcelin 1988 and on Upper Bel Air, Laguerre 1982.

²³ The figures in both cases have remained fairly steady. For example PNUD indicated that Haiti occupied 150th place in the HDI ranking and 123rd in the IDG ranking for 2000.

between interpersonal and collective conflicts and violence. This important question is examined in sections 3 and 4 of this report. Beforehand, though, we need to comprehend better the logic of the conflicts.

2.2. Motives for conflict and violence

When people were asked to talk about 'gender' in the context of the research (especially in the focus groups and the activities carried out with the Biwo d'Analiz of Viva Rio), men and women generally referred to cases that they described as 'conjugal violence,' 'domestic violence' or 'interpersonal violence.'

As well as highlighting the everyday coexistence with violence in domestic space and conjugal life, the language and expressions used reveal the lengthy prior contact with programs and projects relating to gender issues, show the familiarity that both male and female leaders have with the idiom of the gender policies sporadically implemented over the course of almost three decades by government agencies, NGOs and IAs – as we know, the intervention projects usually include training courses and awareness-raising campaigns.²⁴

The figures are striking, even more so considering that they only involve those cases that were registered, about which people spoke to the researcher when completing the questionnaire. The last report published by the MSPP (EMMUS-V 2013) stated that approximately one in three women who live in a stable relationship with their partners have suffered some kind of physical, emotional or sexual violence from them. The same report also indicates the incidence of violent acts committed by women against men: around 20% of the interviewed women living in a stable relationship had physically attacked their partner at some moment, with the majority of cases concentrated in urban environments (6.5% versus 3.6% in rural environments).²⁵

²⁴ Most of the region's leaders assembled in the focus groups or interviewed during the research had taken part in some of this organized work on 'gender.'

²⁵ In the zone (inside the MINUSTAH compound in Fort Nacional) there is a Female Police Station with two offices, one run by PNH and the other by UNPOL. Its main function is to process complaints from residents concerning situations of 'conjugal' or 'gender' violence. The Station is permanently staffed

In our research the episodes of violence reported involved perpetrators and victims of both sexes, revealing (in a form that the statistical data cannot show) how these are never isolated acts, but sequences of actions inscribed in temporalities of varying duration (very often dependent on the viewpoint involved, which attributes a particular origin to the facts) within which agents other than the victims and perpetrators are also involved: other members of the family networks, parents, children, partners and former partners, friends, bosses or prominent figures from the zone.

The reasons attributed to violent actions reveal the affective and moral structure cementing interpersonal relationships, as well as the complex interplay of interdependencies, expectations and obligations between men and women.

Issues relating to jealousy and money are cited as the main reasons for the frustration that leads to conflict with both topics generally appearing interwoven. From the viewpoint of women, the frustration caused by jealousy does not relate to infidelity only,²⁶ but also the fact that men do not meet their obligations to help in the home, making repairs when necessary and possible, contributing to children's education or payment of rent (made annually when the tensions produced by the need for money escalate).

Women's complaints and frustrations concerning men's indifference often increase when a relation of formal marriage (*mariaj*) exist or when, in the context of *plasaj* (common law marriage), the couple's children have been recognized by the father – either formally, in documents, or informally due to the father haven given his son or

and receives around two dozen denunciations per month. A considerable discrepancy clearly exists between the number of cases that can be projected and those (relatively few) that reach the Station. The fundamental question concerning the conditions that lead some victims to make a complaint (*pote plent*) and others not lies beyond the scope of this work. Likewise we lack the space here to examine which people use the conflict mediation services like BAL-Bywo Assistance Legal Bel Air, based in Kay Nou, the head office of Viva Rio in greater Bel Air, with resources from MINUSTAH. We return to these important questions in the conclusion.

²⁶ According to EMUS-V (MSPP 2012), 16% of women who live in a stable relationship with their partners declared that they maintain some kind of amorous/sexual relationship with another woman.

daughter his *siyati* (signature): in other words, he wished or permitted the child's name to contain traces of his own name or surname.²⁷ In such cases the woman is very rarely able to rely on the support of family and neighbours, who may also participate in violent actions on the side of woman/victim against her partners/perpetrators. These actions can range from verbal insults and public humiliation, which tarnish the man's honour, to the threat or use of physical violence (using knives, for example), on some occasions involving the expulsion of the man from the home.

Jealousy also tends to underlie conflicts and violent acts committed by men against women. In the field we recorded various cases in which the suspicion of infidelity triggered a spiral of violence that could include threats and physical punishments and the man's definitive or temporary abandonment of the home. In some cases the man might return, demanding sexual obligations, shelter and good from the woman. The latter's refusal or resistance in meeting the man's expectations could change the scale of conflict, worsening the incidence of physical abuse.

Men's frustration with women is not limited to retaliations for acts of infidelity committed by their partners. Men sometimes feel themselves to be victims of women due to their perception that women use sexual relations for financial gain. This male perspective, which reduces female sexuality to economic interest, is expressed in sayings like *chak fanm fèt ak yon karo tè nan mitan jann-ni* (all women are born with an acre of land between their legs) and even in theories like those that conceive sexual relations between men and women through the notion of the contract, whereby women are obliged to provide sex in exchange for the economic assistance of their male partners.²⁸

²⁷ The forms of stable relationship recognized by the population and cited in EMMUS-V (2013) are *mariage* (marriage), *plaçage* (common law marriage), where cohabitation is almost the rule, as well as *fiancé* (engagement) and *renmen* (love affair), considered transitory stages to marriage and *vivavék*, which involves the situation where a woman has an ongoing relationship with a man without necessarily cohabiting with him.

²⁸ Lowenthal (1987) cites this proverb as proof of how female sexuality is seen as a capital used by women – based on a false public image, sustained by themselves and men alike, that women do not desire sex and that for them it is more work than pleasure. Schwartz (2008) meanwhile suggests that Haitian women only seek material resources from men in their conjugal relationships.

Hence two complementary suppositions, relating to the predatory natures of male and female sexuality, collided and mutually fed each other in several of the conflicts that we were able to analyze over the course of our research, reinforcing practices, ideas and feelings that connect sex and money. The fact that men had sexual relationships with several women may be seen by the latter as an indicator of the predatory form of male sexuality, while the economic interest attributed by men to women may be seen by men as a predatory trait of female sexuality.

2.3. Mobilities

The high frequency of homes headed by women or, something less apparent in the statistics, the high frequency of homes in which children are temporarily or permanently looked after by women other than their biological mothers, reveals a central characteristic of the social universe and of gender and generation relations in Haiti: the mobility of persons.

The absence of a man from a particular household space indicates that he is either in another house in the same town or in another town in the country or abroad; or that he is out and about in the street or on the road, or perhaps travelling across the nation's borders. The same occurs in relation to women, albeit in different ways and rhythms: many of them spend much of their working day trading in the streets, while others regularly undertake longer journeys to the country's interior, to the Dominican Republic and to other centres of Haitian commerce located outside the national territory, such as the cities of Panama or Miami. These women are the *madanm sara*, the travelling saleswomen frequently mentioned in the literature on women and trade in Haiti and the Caribbean in general.²⁹

Mobility is explained as the product of a variety of factors, just some of which are cited here. At one extreme, we encounter situations in which enmities between neighbours, accusations of sorcery and political conflicts can force a person to leave

²⁹ Ulysse (2010) mentions the use of the names of other twittering birds, as well as *madan sara*, to refer to travelling saleswomen in other Caribbean contexts.

the locality for short or long periods or even permanently – moreover, *fé mawon* (the act of going away) may involve both men and women, albeit in different forms. At the other extreme, the search for employment and money can lead to people embarks on extensive transnational circuits. More recently these have included Brazil and other South American countries, along with more traditional destinations in the United States, Canada, France, the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean countries.

As we observed earlier, some estimates suggest that roughly 40% of Haitians live outside the national territory today. In the Greater Bel Air region, everyone interviewed as part of our research knew someone close from home now resident in another country. Those living abroad look to maintain relations and honour their obligations with family left behind in diverse ways: they can contribute to founding new homes, organize and fund trips for new travellers and send back money and other items to assist the day-to-day life of relatives in the ghetto.³⁰

Female participation in the circuits of the Haitian diaspora has a long history and is increasing. As well as the female traders, Haitian women are more and more likely to travel, not only in the company of their partners and children, but also – especially in the case of those women with better school education – to expand their personal horizons and visit their own networks of families and friends.³¹

Haitian mobilities do not fit into the usual pattern of migration involving a one-way journey (from rural areas to the city or from a home country to places abroad). Here, on the contrary, people – like objects and money – live in a constant to and fro, *antre / soti*.³²

³⁰ www.mhave.gouv.ht/mhave.html. According to data from the Multilateral Development Fund run by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), money transfers sent to Haiti in 2007 amounted to over US\$ 1,065,000,000, corresponding to 24% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Handerson 2013).

³¹ Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001), Richman (2005), Handerson (2014) Olwig (1993).

³² According to the Ministry of Haitians Living Abroad (MHAVE) approximately 4.5 million Haitians are resident abroad today. The country's population is currently estimated at 10 million inhabitants.

But mobility as a phenomenon does not involve just adult men and women. Among poorer people especially, it may begin early in life: in the case of orphan children (a phenomenon undoubtedly made far worse after a catastrophe of the scale of the January 2010 earthquake)³³ and in the case of children who are given to be raised in other homes due to their biological mothers' lack of resources. The literature (and international cooperation policies) has highlighted the case of the so-called *restavèk* children, denouncing the neglect and abuse to which they are subjected and classifying the contribution demanded of them by adoptive families as a form of slave labour. Unfortunately, though in many cases the denunciations are pertinent, they fail to apprehend the circulation of children within the wider dynamics of mobility that shape Haitian family structures, just as they ignore the fact that rather than being an example of exploitation pure and simple, taking in a child can be a demonstration of solidarity, comprehension and compassion by the family and, above all, the woman, the head of the home receiving the child. The intense suffering of mothers who are forced to give up their biological children to be cared for by other families is, sadly, a crucial subject, but one little remarked on by the literature on women in Haiti.³⁴

Biography 1: Destination, New York

On a street corner of Lower Bel Air, Wilna, Sherline, Nanouchka and Katrina, mother and three daughters, run a small restaurant. The establishment operates between the living room and verandah of the house where they all live. Every morning they all wake early and go to the Croix-des-Bossales market to buy the ingredients for the dish of the day, generally rice, beans, vegetables and some kind of meat. After lunch they return to the market to buy produce for the *bouillon* (a stew of meat, vegetables and greens) which is cooked ready for the end of the day and is famous throughout Bel Air. The big cooking pots are placed on the verandah and are supervised by Wilna. The chairs and tables used by the clients are located in the room. Sherline, Nanouchka and Katrina deal with the clients, clean up and help their

³³ In a household survey conducted in 2012, MSPP recorded 12% of children had lost either their father or mother and 1% both. However this survey did not take into account orphans living in orphanages. The IBESR, on the other hand, cited in the Cluster Protection Report (2013), estimated that around 30,000 children were living in the 700 residential centres identified by the institute in 2012.

³⁴ Smucker G. R. & Murray G. F. 2004.

mother when necessary. A blind uncle, who also lives there, sells alcoholic and soft drinks stored in an ice-filled Polystyrene box.

Wilna today devotes all her time to the restaurant. But there was a period when politics took up a large part of her time. In the 1980s she worked in a textile factory on the outskirts of Bel Air. She was a union leader and often helped organize demonstrations. In 1985 she participated actively in the protests against the former dictator Jean Claude Duvalier. Following an escalation in the repression practiced by the army and the *macoute*, she decided to leave the district. She spent almost a year in the house of her mother's family in Trouin, in the rural zone of Leogane, in the West Department. When the dictatorship fell, she returned to the capital and joined the ranks of the nascent Lavalas political movement of the former Liberation Theology priest, J. B. Aristide, who would become president a few years later. Between the end of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s she campaigned actively in the organization *Komite Leve Kanpe*, which, formed by residents of the area, fought for Aristide's return to the presidency after the 1991 military coup. Years later, the birth of a series of daughters and her disappointment with the directions taken by the country after Aristide's return to power (1994-1995) led her to desist from politics. "One day I woke up with a load of daughters and country without a president," she muses jokingly. Nevertheless, she continues to participate in other neighborhood organizations, but without the same degree of militancy. "I only take part in the meetings and make my contribution," says Wilna.

The father of the three daughters lives between the house in Lower Bel Air and another house in St. Marc, a town north of Port-au-Prince where he works in a business buying and selling old iron. Wilna, however, also suspects that he has another family there. "Men are like that, it's not a question of believing them or not, because that's simply the way they are. I don't know and don't want to know what he does in St. Marc."

Aged 20, Katrina is the oldest of the three sisters. She finished her secondary education two years ago, an early age compared to most girls from her social group, who seldom remain in school due to a lack of resources, pregnancy or difficulties passing the national exams. An excellent student, she always obtained high grades. This achievement enabled her to obtain a scholarship in a traditional teaching institute in the city, in Lalu district, where one of her aunt's works as a cook. Her mother and father wanted her to go to university in the United

States where part of her father's side of the family has already been living for many years. Katrina is all set to move to New York and is only waiting for her visa to be approved by the US embassy. While waiting to receive the document, she, as well as helping her mother, attends entrepreneur classes run by a Haitian women's organization funded by USAID. She argues that the course helps in the administration of the small restaurant run by her family, but complains that it would be better if they were able to access some money to expand the business. "We can't obtain much money here, just enough to live on and keep some food in the house." Wilna sets aside any leftover money to buy the airplane ticket that will some day allow Katrina to leave the country.

Katrina has a boyfriend, Roland, a neighbor. Roland has already completed his studies and lives off a small income from a weight-training gym improvised on the roof of his family's house. Between used car tires, bits of twisted metal, sand bags and dumbbells, Roland laments the imminent end of his relationship with Katrina. "I would like to stay with her, but Haiti is a difficult country in which to make a life, I understand..." The young man wants to join his girlfriend one day but knows it won't be easy. Unlike her he has no close relations in the United States, which he considers another obstacle to obtaining a visa. One solution would be to marry, but he says that she always changes the subject, despite agreeing with the idea and also being sad about the inevitable separation. "Katrina's father and mother don't want it. Sherline told me that they prefer her to find someone there, who already has money and isn't from the ghetto. But I'll find a way of going after her and she knows that."

At weekends Katrina splits her time between household chores with her sisters, her Baptist church and the cyber café located on the street corner. A friend recently taught her how to use Facebook. She spends hours in front of the computer looking at photos and chatting with her female cousins living in New York. During the most recent conversations she agreed the bedroom she would share with one of the cousins. "I'll have a wardrobe just to myself!" Katrina celebrated, used to keeping her clothes in a suitcase at the end of the bed shared with Sherline. Another cousin also wants to fix her up with a boyfriend. She even sent a photo of the lad, born in the United States but the son of Haitians – taken on a sunny day, dressed smartly, leaning on a wall with a view of the Statue of Liberty behind him.

Biography 2: Artist

Edwige was born in the Janis *lakou* in Caravelle Street, in the Solino region of Greater Bel Air. Her great grandfather, *Messie* Janis, arrived from Artibonite at the start of the 1970s. Like her family and neighbors, she very often heard the story of how he made a deal with an *Iwa* soon after arriving in Port-au-Prince. The *Iwa* had given him the start-up capital needed to set up a gas bottle retail business, the profits from which soon enabled him to become the owner of the *lakou's* land. The latter today contains six residences, two latrines and a few tombs. One of these is the grave of the *lakou* founder himself, said to have died bewitched and enslaved by the *Iwa* who had lent him the original loan.

After the death of *Messie* Janis, the *lakou* began to be run by women: Edwige's great-grandmother, her oldest daughter, her own mother and now one of her aunts, all of them recognized *mambós* in the region. Edwige's matrilineage is linked to Vodou. In the *lakou* there is also a *peristyle* and, at the back, various other small *Iwa* rooms, which also serve as settings for parties and magic ceremonies. One of the *lakou's mambós* leads an association of *oufòs* from Bel Air.

Edwige traces her passion for music back to the dances and drums. However it was in the college choir that she learnt to like her own voice and discover her artistic vocation. She was a teenager still when she set up her first musical band with three young male friends from the street. That was at the start of 2005, some months after the downfall of President Aristide, when the region had become the stage for armed conflicts, exacerbating the economic hardship. Many of her friends, including the band itself, lost any hope for the future, expressing their frustration and leaving, while others began to use the guns to carry out small thefts. She and other comrades favored political engagement and, above all, working for 'development'. Edwige's identity as an artist is linked to these engagements, evident in the content of the music that she sings and in the parallel activities that they sometimes develop, such as the projects aimed towards artistic training for children. Edwige's friends and neighbors refer to her or call her an 'artist.' Consequently Edwige has earned much respect, and she modestly takes pride in this fact, despite the toughness of the profession, forever waiting for a new project to take hold, or to be invited to take part in a show or a radio program.

Edwige has had various partners and one daughter, who is now 7 years old and who she manages to see from time to time, the gaps between some times lasting more than a year. The girl is being raised with another aunt who lives in Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic. The father left soon after Edwige became pregnant. The pain caused by the distance from her daughter fails to shake her conviction that the choice she made seven years ago was right: she would be unable to look after the girl properly, or allow her to accompany her on her journeys as an artist and trader: Edwige travels regularly to Miami to buy goods to sell on her return to Port-au-Prince. She tends to stay in Miami for a few months at a time, looking for small jobs as a singer, trying her luck with bands from the Haitian diaspora, nourishing her dream of one day releasing a hit song that will change her life.

3. Economic dynamics

The data available on segmentation of the work market by gender indicates large disparities between men and women. UNDP (2005) informs that average annual incomes among Haitian men are practically double those for women (US\$ 2,247 for men, US\$ 1,250,00 for women). According to the same source, the largest source of female employment is the service sector (57 %). USAID (2006) indicates that 75 % of the activities of the economy's informal sector are performed by women. The IHSI (2003) calculates that 83 % of the female population is linked to the informal sector or is involved in self-employed work.

To this information we can add a bewildering number of other examples contained in reports and tables produced by a wide array of agencies. Despite the frequent contradictions and inconsistencies that emerge, exacerbated by the fact that the entities involved seldom release the raw data that would allow verification of the methodologies responsible for producing such disparate figures, a number of general trends can be detected, including the strong and permanent presence of women in the informal sector of the economy associated with small-scale trading.

However this data acquires more vivid form when cross-checked with the kind of qualitative ethnographic research conducted by our team in Greater Bel Air. Women's economic activities and the segmentation of the work market by gender are better understood in relation to the dynamics of conjugality, family relations and mobilities described in the previous section. At the same time, the economic activities of women from Greater Bel Air are embedded in the general dynamics of the popular economy, characterized by factors that will be examined below, such as the pluriactivity of persons and the multifunctionality of spaces, which involve men and women in different forms, of course.

As highlighted previously, the large majority of women in low-income districts of Port-au-Prince, like those of Greater Bel Air, devote most of their time and energy to caring for the house, young people and food, as well as the commercial activities through which they earn the small amounts of money (*piti kob*) needed for everyday living. Given the multifunctionality of residential spaces and the porosity between them and spaces of circulation, it is common for commercial activities to take place inside homes, just as aspects of family life happen in the streets and alleys.

Hence windows and rooms can serve as either permanent or temporary sales points, in the same way that locations in the alleys or on street corners can become kitchens serving food to members of the house or *lakou*, or sometimes larger and diverse networks that include other families, neighbours and friends.

At a larger scale the food sales points that populate the streets of the ghettos may have originally been domestic kitchens that turned into restaurants. Whether the meal is paid for immediately or put on tab indicates the degree of trust and proximity with the female cooks who run the establishments, the *madann manje cuit*. At the level of food, in fact, we should imagine a continuum that spans from the home kitchen to the professional food traders located at mobile or fixed points. It is no exaggeration to stress the crucial importance of these street kitchens in terms of feeding a population characterized by its mobility.

3.1. Men and women in markets and small business

As well as being key links in the distribution of food to the population of the area, the women participate intensely in market trading, both in the so-called 'public' markets and in the street markets. Female specialities revolve around the sale of food, clothing, jewellery, household appliances and perfumes. The women also offer services, principally personal care (hairdressing, manicures and so on).³⁵

Yet although the vast majority of women are involved in commerce, the markets are not exclusively feminine spaces. In fact they are spaces of relations between men and women. On one hand the sale of some commercial produce is basically male territory, such as trade in meat and animals, or the sale of tools, electronic items (mobile chargers, plugs, extension leads, watches, glasses), parts for cars, motorbikes and bicycles, along with offering services like vehicle and machine repairs. At the same time men are largely responsible for controlling the infrastructure of the markets, regulating access to their spaces and busying themselves with transportation and the security of goods, traders and transactions.

The security of the markets (closely linked to political questions) is basically undertaken by men. In the public markets this security involves surveillance committees linked to City Hall and members of the PNH assigned to the zone's Police Stations (Fort National, Delmas 2, Portail St. Joseph and La Saline). But the networks that cover street commerce are also essentially male: men are responsible for accompanying women and their goods to the sales points, providing security at the spots where the transport vehicles (*tap taps* and trucks) are loaded and unloaded, and helping with transportation through the alleys with their *bourèt*.

³⁵ In the lower region of Greater Bel Air, at the two ends of the Croix de Bossales region, towards Champ de Mars and La Salines/Forturon, are located various brothels (*kay fème* or *mekrel*, in Creole). It should be stressed that in this report we omit any systematic consideration of gender relations in the context of male and female prostitution.

As well as mutual help and solidarity, relations of interdependence are formed around commercial activities between men and women that acquire highly asymmetric dimensions. This appears repeatedly in the interviews conducted with women, as well as the discussions occurring within the Biwo d'Analiz of Viva Rio and the focus groups, especially the one held with female market traders and leaders. Complaints about thefts and threats, about the arbitrary leasing fees charged for spaces, transportation and protection, the acts of violence, and the fires that dramatically occur with frequency in the markets, very often associated with periods of political tension or warfare between the 'bases' that from time to time fight to control the trader areas, and the duties charged on sales points and the flow of goods.

The hierarchical gender relations and the subordination of women to men are greater the more we move down the social scale and the more vulnerable the female traders. The women who live in Greater Bel Air are in this sense relatively privileged in relation to those forced to sleep overnight in the area depending on the pace of sales, the product being traded or the distance travelled, sometimes for several days or even weeks at a time. Consequently the women have to pay for the use of small spaces in rooms in which various women sleep, or in the product depots whose owners or managers are generally men.

One of the activities lowest on the social scale of the markets and, paradoxically, one of the most essential in terms of providing basic services to the population is the sale of water. Since the residences in Greater Bel Air are seldom supplied by the public mains, water reaches some fortunate homes for just a few hours a day, a few times each week. Water is supplied basically through the use of barrels and buckets (*boukits*) that transport the water from the sales points (kiosks and private cisterns) to the residences. This is an essentially female activity undertaken by the young women from the households and, principally, by the water traders (*machann dlo*) who literally irrigate the region's streets and alleys. The vast majority of the women come from the country's interior, especially from the south, to where they return regularly in fortnightly or monthly cycles, or for festivals and holidays such as

carnival, taking the small profits earned home to their families. While they are in Port-au-Prince they are subject to relations involving various extreme forms of subordination to the owners of the cisterns for whom they work and with the families of the latter: the women sleep in locales indicated by the bosses, sometimes are asked to help look after the children and assist the women of the house, and sometimes demanded sexual favours.

3.2. Perceptions of risk and opportunities

Female activities are linked in an equally intense form to trade and loans. The infinite forms of credit available in the zone are also a key element in the capitalization of the traders, as well as a source of finance when needed in domestic and family contexts. The credit systems are varied: they include loans from family, neighbours and friends, loans from specialist lenders, usually at extortionate rates, and, above all, the revolving fund systems that demand varying degrees of engagement of the female traders in their networks (like the *sol* and *sabotay*). The systems also vary in scale: they may include more or less extensive networks of traders, varying numbers of participants, and the longer or shorter duration of the associations involved. In the field we were acquainted with networks of revolving credit run by women (*mama*), though they are more commonly run by men (*papa*). Once again loans – which, we repeat, are closely entwined with trade and the dynamics of the family economy – relate men and women and establish hierarchies between them.

Children also participate in commerce from an early age, helping in the organization of activities at home (packing and preparing goods) and accompanying the older women to the sales points where they socialize with other children, as well as adults, both men and women. Aside from helping with sales, children eat in the markets alongside the *machann*, who reserve part of their earnings for the everyday sustenance of themselves and their little ones (called *pitit mwen*, in the first person, from the viewpoint of the mothers).

Many boys and girls grow up in close contact with the markets, therefore, spending much of their time in the streets. Girls may remain linked to trade on a more or less

permanent basis, while the more privileged among them begin practicing other activities. It is no exaggeration to say that women stay connected to trade throughout life, or can always fall back on commerce as a complementary or alternative activity. If a job or project work is going badly, trading always seems on hand as a possibility, reinforced by the fact of being a relatively independent activity, compatible with others, linked to other professions and opportunities.

One of the most prominent characteristics of the popular economy in Haiti's low-income districts applies equally to women: pluriactivity. People (men and women) perform various activities consecutively over the course of life and simultaneously, as *plisie chapò*. The world of the popular economy requires both planning and a sense of opportunity. For women trade can be a permanent activity or an ever present and available basis for pursuing other activities, or to which they can return temporarily to generate capital, or while waiting for other opportunities.

In a universe of extreme poverty like the ghettos of Greater Bel Air, educational capital is an extremely powerful principle of differentiation. Completing secondary education, going to university, learning a trade, speaking French and other languages well, are all essential trump cards in the small formal job market to which young women have access, including the international cooperation market in which they can be employed in administrative areas or in other kinds of work linked to projects.³⁶

Gender equality policies form part of the objectives and architecture of the mechanisms linked to development, a central dimension and one of the main sources for obtaining money in low-income districts. In many international cooperation projects and even those run by the Haitian government in the area, a set proportion of posts are often allocated to women, sometimes 50%, as in the case of the Cash for Work initiative and others of the same kind. This practice was also

³⁶ In 2007, around 13% of the residents interviewed by Viva Rio in Bel Air (over the age of six) had reached or finished secondary education. On the other hand 10% of them had never frequented school (*Recensement de Bel Air et environs Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2007*).

common in Viva Rio. Between 2008 and 2012 the Dlo, Fanm, Santé (Water, Women, Health) project, which distributes drinking water through a network of nine kiosks located across Greater Bel Air, implanted systems of rainwater collection, treatment and storage in 18 schools and provided medical care for its students. The project was coordinated and implemented by women.

As we shall see in the following section, women participate intensely in the collective, political and cultural life of the ghettos. There are women's organizations and leaders, female cultural associations and women artists. Again these activities are very rarely exclusive or permanent. The women who participate in them are pluriactive: they may circulate among them, returning to commerce. The women are also highly mobile: they may alternate, for example, between working as an artist abroad, as part of the diaspora, spending some months of the year in New York or Miami, participating in shows, producing CDs or films, and buying products to be sold in Haiti on their return, when – in this temporary or permanent too and fro typical to the lives of these women – they will spend some months linked to small-scale trading.

Biography 3: *Machann dlo*

By becoming a trader and transforming this activity into a way of obtaining most of the money with which she sustains her family, *Madanm* Paul followed the destiny of the vast majority of Haitian women. However, rather than sharing a fate common to so many other women, Paul followed the same steps as her mother Nancy and, just like the latter had done in the past, sold water and washed clothes for money in the La Salines region.

Having mains water supplied regularly to the house is not part of the quotidian experience of most Haitians. For this to become a reality residents need to find all the materials and funds to install pipes connecting their homes to the nearest national water company network. As well as the sale of drinking water in small *Kreyòl* or *French* bags in the country's public markets and streets, a wide variety of

means of obtaining access to water – which may be fit to drink or not, depending on the use – proliferate in response to this situation.

Early in the morning various women and children can be seen gathering around the taps with buckets (*boukit*) and bottles to fill and carry back home. In Bel Air water tends to be bought directly either from water kiosks belonging to the government distributor or run by NGOS (such as Viva Rio, over the last few years), or from water trucks or water cisterns belonging to residents from the region. In the region's large streets and smaller alleys alike, it is also common to see women walking with buckets of water on their heads, selling water from door-to-door, which they themselves have bought from kiosks or private cistern owners.

Madanm Paul, a widow with four children, became a *machann dlo* many years ago, selling buckets of water for a man known as *Mesye* Joseph, a former resident of the La Salines zone. As the fifth daughter from a total of 11 children born to her mother, fathered by two different men, she arrived in the capital with her mother when she was about 15 years old, coming from the Marmelade commune located in Artibonite, in the north of the country. At that time, her mother who, in *Madanm* Paul's words, was already used to selling what 'she had to sell' in her place of birth, became involved with the water trade and ended up starting in this activity too. Around 10 years ago, Nancy, by now too old to work, returned to the Marmelade province where she lived out the remainder of her life with some of her children and other relatives who had stayed in the region.

According to *Madanm* Paul, she was unable to attend school when she was young and it was only a few years ago when she was already nearly 50 that she was able to take part in an adult literacy program where she learnt to write her name and read in a very elementary way. The man with whom she married was also from Marmelade and worked as a grower until he died. With the money from selling water and the help of two brothers living in Miami, *Madanm* Paul managed to pay for the school of her four children, all of them now fully grown-up.

For many years, especially while her children were still young and her husband alive, her work was interspersed with constant trips between Marmelade and Port-au-Price. She says that she never wanted to take the children to live with her since she considers the place where she stays in the capital inappropriate and very small for children. Madanm Paul shares a small house with two rooms located in the backyard of Mesye Joseph, the owner of the cistern, with another nine women who, like herself, are *machann dlo*. The women's work begins at daybreak, when they leave with the buckets on their heads, or when they begin to serve the people arriving to buy water at the place itself or bring their clothing to be washed.

Madanm Paul and the other *machann* are also asked to help with the domestic tasks in the house of *Mesye* Joseph himself, such as looking after his grandchildren or helping in the kitchen. At the end of the day her profit from selling water tends to be around HTG 200.00 (US\$ 5.00). With this money *Madanm* Paul buys her food and pays for the cost of the transport to and from Marmelade when she decides to visit her family members. The money is also used to help them in various ways, either by buying personal objects or items for the home (presents that she takes with her on her visits), or by helping with the children's school fees or even leaving a small amount with her relatives before returning to the capital.

4. The dynamics of violence and victimization

One of the issues that emerged in the course of the focus groups and interviews informing the present research is that of violence against women. The term 'violence against women' means a myriad of things ranging from the lack of employment, marital infidelity, abandonment by husbands and partners, the limitation of activities to domestic work, the exchange of favours for sexual services, physical aggression, rape and prostitution.

As mentioned earlier, according to data from MSPP, 29% of Haitian women in a stable relationship have suffered some kind of physical, emotional or sexual violence

(EMMUS-V, 2013). Also according to MSPP, 13% of women aged between 15 and 49 have already been the target of some type of sexual violence (EMMUS-V, 2013).

Though these figures are substantial, it should be emphasized that quantifying the cases of violence against women is far from easy and very often subject to discrepancies (as occurs indeed in other national contexts, like that of the United States). As well as differences in the methodologies used by the research entities concerned, women who suffer abuse are reluctant to report the cases, talk to the leaders or organizations that address the issue, or pursue judicial or reparatory measures, generally out of shame, fear, or the lack of appropriate institutions at police level. Nonetheless, when a case occurs and especially when the community leaders are told of the incident, the procedures used in response tend to be similar: psychological assistance, the attempt to mediate with the assailant and, in those cases judged more serious, the recourse to legal advice and the help of the competent authorities.³⁷

It is worth stressing, however, that these forms of violence are abhorred by the population in general and tend to provoke violent reactions, such as when a incidence of rape becomes public and elicits the response of family, friends and neighbours. Satela, a community leader from the Fort Dimanche district, one of the poorest areas of Greater Bel Air, officially located in the commune of Cité Soleil, says that rapes are rare in the area because “the population doesn’t tolerate them.” Nonetheless, the topic is always highlighted in the meetings of the association to which she belongs, PAVDES.³⁸

³⁷ To carry out this work, many of the women’s associations of Greater Bel Air rely on wider networks, including national-level associations, the Ministry for Women and sometimes funding or active involvement from projects run by international cooperation agencies. This is in addition, of course to the Women’s Police Office (PNH-UNPOL) located in Fort Nacional and the BAL.

³⁸ Here we should also highlight the occurrence of politically motivated rapes in the periods of heightened tension and political instability that have affected Haiti. On the 1991-1994 period, see James (2010). The victims of the rapes – some of them gang rapes – taking place at this time became the focus of specific policies implemented by the government and cooperation agencies from the second half of the 1990s. As we mentioned earlier, the refugee camps set up after the earthquake of January 12th 2010 were repeatedly denounced due to the incidence of rapes.

During the fieldwork conducted for the present research it was possible to see how the theme of 'violence against women' pervades everyday conversations and affects the life of residents of the region as a whole. Indeed many women have been assaulted in the past, while many others have had to deal with some form of sexual violence (or attempted assault) and women to some extent are afraid of being the target of an attack. Not by chance there are dozens of women's associations in the area, which have fairly high memberships, in some cases more than 300, such as PAVDES to which the leader Satela belongs. Generally speaking the language that permeates the discussed cases, concerns and fears of female residents emphasizes the idea of the 'victim' (*viktim*) – of men, of the family, of bosses and of society as a whole. Also flourishing alongside the language of victimization is the language of 'rights' (*dwa*), which emerges from the responses to all kinds of violence and the search for punishment, reparation and above all the gradual transformation of what are seen as extremely unequal gender relations.

In a world where formal employment is extremely rare and the search for money a daily challenge, one of the forms through which women manage to obtain resources and some degree of independence is through trade in the marketplaces, as examined earlier. Yet, as we also saw, even in these activities women are not entirely free from male dominance. In Greater Bel Air it is relatively common for some of the region's 'bases' to charge fees from the women traders, generally under the pretext of providing security and unknown to the government authorities. Although these charges are not high (varying from five to ten gourdes per trader) they have to be paid every week and cannot be avoided. As an important source of money for many armed bases, these fees very often become a source of contention between them and sometimes even a motive for conflicts or war. Paradoxically the explosion of these conflicts leads to an increase in the fees charged since the members of the bases need resources to buy guns and ammunition and to maintain their soldiers. Occasionally the traders complain about the fees among themselves, in conversation with community leaders and even with those who collect the fees. However when they cannot or refuse to pay, they are assaulted and threatened, including with death. On the other hand, there are occasions when they contribute

freely and spontaneously, such as when contributions are sought among residents with the aim of expelling one base by another, generally under the accusation of perpetrating crimes or even of making abusive demands.

According to the data collected in collaboration with Viva Rio's *Biwo de Analyz* there were a total of 93 killings in Greater Bel Air over the period from January to August 2013. The vast majority of the victims were men (83, representing 89.5%). Among the 10 women killed during this period (10.5% of the total), seven were killed on the same night in February in the Warf Jeremie zone (one of the poorest and most abject in Greater Bel Air), in situations that involved accusations of witchcraft (*lougawu*).³⁹ The other three women killed during the period were murdered in various ways: one died in the context of a 'marital conflict,' another was a trader killed following a 'conflict of interests,' and the third killed during an 'act of banditry,' the victim of a robbery.

As well as these situations, it is necessary to point out that armed conflicts frequently broke out among some of the bases of Greater Bel Air. In the last 15 years there have been three important cycles of conflicts: one that involved groups from La Saline and Fòturon, which involved a dispute over the fees charged to female traders from the Croix-des-Bossales market at the start of the 2000s; another that began with the reaction of local bases to the overthrow of former president J. B. Aristide, in February 2004, but which, due to a series of internal disagreements, transformed into a conflict between them in the 2004/2006 period;⁴⁰ and finally the last conflict involving especially bases from the districts of Delmas 2, Delmas 4 and Bel Air, which stemmed from the competition for government contacts, an increase in the number of crimes in the area, the reaction to the latter by other armed groups and the return to the region of fugitives from the National Penitentiary, destroyed in

³⁹ In the universe of Haitian magic, the *lougawou* is an entity characterized by drinking the blood or flesh of victims, generally children. Those individuals accused of being witches and transforming into *lougawu* to attack their victims may be men or women, though there is a preponderance of female witches.

⁴⁰ J. B. Aristide was elected president twice, once at the start of the 1990s and once at the start of the 2000s. He did not finish either of the mandates, cut short on the two occasions by coups-d'état.

the earthquake of January 12th 2010 between the end of 2011 and 2013 (Braum 2014).

These conflicts, as well as being experienced by residents in a dramatic form, bring all kinds of instability to the area and have direct repercussions on the increase in assaults, criminality in general and murder rates. As an example, we can cite the period that followed the years 2004/2005 and ending in 2013.

Homicides in Greater Bel Air 2006-2012 (per 100,000 inhab./ Source: Viva Rio)

2006/07	32
2007/08	22
2008/09	16
2009/10	19
2010	50
2011	50
April 2011/ March 2012	73
Nov 2011/ Oct 2012	104

The armed conflicts between the Greater Bel Air bases usually have diverse impacts on life in the region for families, women and gender relations in general. It is common for residents and members of the different associations to complain that the conflicts lead to a decline in the commercial activities from which many women obtain the livelihood to sustain themselves and their families – the streets become deserted, the markets less busy, and there are fewer festivities and public activities. Likewise during the moments when the attacks become more frequent, many of the inhabitants, particularly women and their families, have no alternative save to leave the region, if not definitively then at least temporarily. Between 2012 and the start of 2013 there was a substantial drop in the local population in some areas of Bel Air, Delmas 2 and Delmas 4 – according to estimates made by the NuCEC team, more than 50%. This occurred, for example, in the zones of Rue St. Come and Kafou 3, two

of the epicentres of the conflicts. Similarly between 2004 and 2005, around 40% of the residents throughout Bel Air left because of the armed conflicts that had swept the region (Viva Rio Census, 2006).

These population dislocations arising from the increase in violence usually have a larger impact on the life of women, who leave the neighbourhoods accompanied by their children and grandchildren, heading for other parts of the city or even small settlements inland. Finally we should highlight the cases in which women themselves become direct victims of the increase in violence. This occurs with the already cited increase in the rates charged to market traders, the rise in cases of rape (also seen between 2012 and 2013) and the fatal victims of the confrontations involving the bases, generally by stray gunfire.

4.1. Women, gangs and bases

Nonetheless women are not only victims, whether we are talking about marital violence, sexual violence or even the consequences of the increase in criminality. The involvement of women in violent behaviour and even in the armed conflicts that from time-to-time involve the region's bases is much wider, more multifaceted and far more fluid than found in any simple account of activism and the problems experienced in the day-to-day life of associations. A rapid analysis of the world of the bases shows that, despite being predominantly masculine, many of the practices, initiatives and spaces engendered by the bases (like the development projects, political movements, armed actions and even festivities and cultural activities) involve women. Even though these forms of association are overwhelmingly male, women also belong to the gangs and groups, they benefit from their activities and they help in the organization of their initiatives, like festivals, development projects, political movements, and so on.

However the role of women within the bases can go far beyond conviviality and participation in their initiatives. This is because they have a significant impact in terms of the formation and maintenance of the bases themselves, especially when civilians or soldiers considered 'strangers' (*etranje*, born and created outside a

neighbourhood) come to stay to live in a district or zone because of love affairs, marriages and the birth of children. One example of this took place in Bel Air in recent years. At the start of 2012, base 117 was expelled from Delmas 4 by the Van Vire and Ròyam 50 bases with the accusation of practicing robberies in the area, calling the attention of the police and breaking the rules on charging fees to the region's women traders. After some months members of 117 moved into Bel Air, in theory because of the friendship ties built with a local base, Al Quaeda. But as the weeks and months passed, their stay in the zone became legitimized through love affairs with women who had been born in the neighbourhood. Not by chance, the members of the bases in question considered the relationship between 'foreign' women and men to be the basis for an 'alliance' (*alians*) between them. Nevertheless it did not take long for what happened in Delmas 4 to recur, this time in Bel Air. Prompted by the increase in assaults in the district and by the emergence of new armed leaderships, the Lindi base – which considered itself responsible for the armed defence of the neighbourhood – responded and expelled them from Bel Air. Following the outbreak of the new conflict, many of those women who over the previous months had enabled the 'foreign' soldiers to remain in Bel Air were also expelled.

From the viewpoint of the soldiers from the Lindi base it became imperative to break the 'alliance,' something that could only be achieved with the departure of the women involved from the area. In fact many residents were left with no doubt: the girlfriends, women and partners of the soldiers can be as dangerous as the men themselves – the women give them shelter, a home, access to the area and, above all, pass on information to their enemies. Between January and April 2012 more than two dozens young women from Bel Air were expelled from the district because of these arguments, almost always with threats of death or physical harm.

Residents commonly refer to these figures as the *fanm solda* (soldier women), not only as their girlfriends and partners, but also because they themselves perform a role deemed vital: they make the alliances possible, they underlie the configuration of the bases and take part in the everyday activity of these groups, notably through

the circulation of information and assistance to its members.⁴¹ In other cases, the expression *fanm solda* may also designate those women who take an active part in the conflicts by bearing arms and participating in attacks. This did not occur in the most recent period of conflicts, but it was reported by both women and men in relation to the armed political movements and wars that swept through Greater Bel Air in 2004 and 2005.

The love affairs, relationships and marriages between men and women from a base also call attention to another phenomenon. One of the origins of many of the armed conflicts between rival bases, attacks between the members of a group and aggressions between men in general is jealousy. The cycle of wars that began in Greater Bel Air in the second half of 2011 (and which lasted almost two years) began with an attack by a soldier from a Bel Air base and a soldier from a Delmas 4 base over the fact that the latter had been involved, months earlier, with an ex-girlfriend of the former.

It did not take long for the conflict to increase in scale and start to include larger collectivities and their own bases through apparently endless retaliations. The possibility of a change of scale in a conflict like this calls attention to a subject already mentioned in the previous sections of this report: a marital dispute may lead to larger conflicts with collective dimensions, as well as causing difficulties for the classification and analysis of these events for those security professionals concerned with the issue, such as the community leaders who belong to Viva Rio's *Biwo D'Analiz*: the limits, frontiers and definitions between what is a 'marital conflict,' an 'interpersonal conflict' and a 'conflict between armed bands' are always fluid and liable to diverse interpretations.

⁴¹ It should be noted that the term 'soldier' does not apply only to the armed elements of the bases: it is also a generic and common form of referring to people who engage together in any activity, share tasks or maintain some kind of hierarchical relation with another. In the specific case of the relationships between men and women, the term may also be used to refer to female partners, girlfriends or wives.

The importance of the relationships and disputes between men and women in terms of the eruption of wider armed conflicts is such that once a community leader told us that “while the women of Bel Air and Delmas look for men from the neighbouring district and the men from Bel Air and Delmas look for women from the neighbouring district, we shall always have war.” Hence it would be no exaggeration to say that many of the conflicts, killings and cases of violence in the region are animated by a permanent geopolitics of jealousy.

Finally it should be highlighted that women-only bases exist and that female residents also perpetrate acts of violence of all kinds, against both men and women. As cited earlier, according to the report by MSPP, around 20% of women in a stable relationship had physically assaulted their partner at some time (EMMUS-V, 2013). Likewise during the period in which the field research for the present report was conducted, there was a famous women’s base, located in the centre of Port-au-Prince, which as well as holding festivities was held responsible by residents of Bel Air for petty crimes, scams and even assaults.

Generally speaking, though, women – just like the community leaders of the organizations to which they belong – say that the situation of inequity, abuses and violence to which they are subject is gradually improving. Women have an increasingly central role in the projects run by governments and cooperation agencies, they have obtained more space in the education system, gender violence has assumed a more prominent place on the public agenda, there is a growing awareness of the possibilities for obtaining help, reparation and punishment of assailants, and the victims of assaults have more and more options for making complaints – PNH, NGOs that work in the region and local women’s associations.

Biography 4: The Bel Air hairdresser

Winnie was born in Port-au-Prince in 1987. She was raised among the streets of Lower Bel Air where her family has always lived. Her mother and father moved from the town of Leoganne (south of the capital, also in the Southeast Department) to the

district shortly before she was born, looking for better opportunities to earn money. Her father went to Miami at the start of the 1990s and since then has worked as a security guard for a private company. Her mother runs a small store from the front of their house where she sells everything from food to beauty products and cosmetics. Her mother, herself, three siblings and an uncle live in the same house, on Ramparts Street. Her uncle has a *tap tap*, bought in partnership with her mother, which he uses to transport passengers and make deliveries.

Winnie did not finish her schooling, but she came close. She completed the *reto* (penultimate school year) and daydreams of returning to college to complete her secondary education. She wants to study administration at university and work in a bank, what she calls 'a normal job.' In the meantime Winnie earns some money as a hairdresser and manicurist. She is famous among her friends and neighbors for her hairstyling, especially when one of the women needs a special hairdo to go to a party or a special occasion.

Winnie has a boyfriend called Luckner, though better known on the district's streets as Big. He is a musician and has a rap group that frequently plays at parties held in the region. She wants to marry one day but, though she likes Big, harbors few expectations concerning him. "Big is a real badass, he has lots of women everywhere," she often says. Her boyfriend never denies this fact to his closest friends, but insists that "Winnie is the number one, she's the one I want to marry and settle down with." Nevertheless, Winnie also has other men she flirts with. She claims that they are not serious, just 'friends.' These men typically send her presents, food and telephone credits.

Big is one of the bosses of the *Gèp Wouj* base of Upper Bel Air. This base often organizes parties and football championships. But over the last few years (2012 and 2013) its members, in alliance with other groups from the region, became involved in an armed conflict with bases from the neighboring district, Delmas 2. The argument was over the allegation that members of the latter groups had started to make small assaults in Bel Air, demanding a response in kind from its residents. Winnie disliked

this story and did everything to stop Big from becoming involved. She talked with him and with friends, warned him that he would end up in prison or dead, and even threatened to end their relationship. But it was no use. Her boyfriend was always seen in the company of other men, patrolling the streets of Upper Bel Air. Winnie felt she had no choice but to move away. She left the district, fearing attacks from the Delmas 2 bases, since everyone knew that she was 'Big's woman.'

At the start of 2013, as he left a party, Big was attacked and wounded by two gunshots. He still had the strength to get on his motorbike and drive to Bel Air. From there he was taken by friends to the hospital run by Médecins Sans Frontières, located in Cité Soleil. He was kept there for almost a month. Everyday relatives, friends and acquaintances went to visit. Among them were innumerable young women, quickly identified by Winnie as other girlfriends and lovers of Big. Although jealous, she kept her cool. Big's mother told her how he needed support at that time. "My son needs all his strength now. A fight here will only make him worse." But it was not only the advice of Big's mother that calmed her. Visitors could only go to the ward where the injured man's bed was located one at a time. And Winnie was by far the most solicited, the woman who spent the most time with the boss from the *Gèp Wouj* base. Her anger about the presence of the other woman, always contained, also gave way to pride. It was a public demonstration that she was Big's 'number one.'

When Big left the hospital they both went to live together in the house of some of Winnie's relatives, in the Fort National district, also in Greater Bel Air. It did not last long, though. Soon after Big left home never to be seen by her again. People say that he went to meet a brother in the Dominican Republic. A few months ago Winnie opened a small beauty saloon with money sent by her father. She continues to call Big a 'badass,' but now dates Joseph, a young man studying to be a Baptist pastor. Now and again her old boyfriend calls her to ask how she is.

5. The dynamics of politics and associativism

Greater Bel Air is historically an important area for Haitian politics. Bordering the National Palace, the complex of squares forming the Champ de Mars, Parliament and the country's most important markets, and with a traditionally politicized population (see too Laguerre 1982), the region's residents are accustomed to engaging in all kinds of political movements, through local associations, popular organizations (also called *OPs*: Muggah 2009) and bases.

Although political participation is overwhelmingly male, women also have their own spaces, whether in the organizations and bases found throughout the area, or in associations specifically dedicated to their causes, especially those focusing on issues such as combatting violence against women and gender inequities and seeking to improve women's lives.

Analyzing the interviews, as well as the material produced in the focus groups and the data accumulated since the start of our team's fieldwork in Greater Bel Air, one of the fundamental landmarks in women's political participation was the mobilization that took place between the end of the Jean Claude Duvalier dictatorship, the rebuilding of democracy in the country and the rise of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his party, Lavalas, from the mid-1980s to the start of the 1990s.⁴²

⁴² François Duvalier (Papa Doc) was elected in 1954. Three years later he staged a coup d'état and became the country's dictator. In 1971, after his death, his son Jean Claude (Baby Doc) assumed power and declared himself 'President for Life.' The period in which both of them governed was marked among other factors by authoritarianism, persecution of opponents and the creation of the *Milice Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale* (Voluntary National Security Militias), the infamous *Toton Makout*, which functioned as the regime's guard and political police. The *makout* were recruited from government supporters who occupied key positions in national society, including military officers, academic staff, pastors, *ougan* (Vodou priests), traders and local leaders. In January 1986, after the rise in opposition to the regime, the denunciation of human rights violations by international agencies and the emergence of a broad movement challenging his power, Jean Claude Duvalier fled the National Palace and the country. One of the leading opponents of the regime was the Salesian priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who preached from a church located in Greater Bel Air, linked to the Catholic Liberation Theology school (also known in Haiti as *tilegliz*). Aristide stood for president in 1990 and was elected with wide popular support, especially in the poorest zones of the metropolitan region of Port-au-Prince. Seven months after the Aristide government was elected, it was overthrown by a coup d'état.

According to many community leaders aged from their 30s and 50s, this was a period of intense mobilizations among women. Their main campaign issues linked democratization, the demands of popular sectors and the fight for better living conditions. Among them we can highlight the denunciations of the way in which the *makout* treated residents: they refused to pay for services provided (like cooking, washing clothes, etc.) and demanded sexual services in exchange for security or some other benefit. It is important to emphasize the last point, we think, because much of the literature that has focused on the processes culminating in the end of the dictatorship (Braum 2014, James 2010, Halward 2004, Hurbon 1987, Trouillot 1990) has given little or no attention to the struggles of women and the theme of gender inequalities.

The residents of Greater Bel Air and other low-income districts of the city were active in the movements leading to Aristide's election in 1990, his re-election in 2000 and the protests against the second coup d'état perpetrated against him in 2004. On the other hand, they also became targets. As James stresses (2010), many women who lived in poor areas of Port-au-Prince and who were identified by some sectors of the opposition – including the military officers responsible for the coup and other paramilitary groups – were systematically persecuted and subjected to all kinds of violence, including sexual, between 1991 and 1994, a period when the country was governed by a military junta.

In conjunction with the processes of redemocratization that culminated in J. B. Aristide's rise to power, we also need to highlight the political participation of women in the factory unions in the metropolitan zone. During the 1970s, 80s and the start of the 90s, Haiti experienced various bursts of industrialization, generally spurred by economic agreements with the USA. The areas closer to Greater Bel Air began to be occupied by a number of industrial units from this period on (Laguerre 1982). Most of the jobs generated were taken by women, which occurs even today in the few factories that remained from that period.

Although today it is not common to find leaders from the region who belong to unions or dialogue with them, this seems to have been easier 20 or 30 years ago. As well as meeting women from the generation that worked in factories and who maintained ties with the unions, the research team discovered that some of the local political leaders holding key positions in the area's organizations over the last few years had mothers, sisters or aunts previously linked to this world. Among them we can highlight Sanba Boukman (killed in March 2012), a former activist prominent among Bel Air's popular organizations and the Lavalas party, and the main political leader of the mobilizations that, emerging from the metropolitan zone's ghettos, demanded Aristide's return to power and fought against the military government between 2004 and 2005. In an interview conducted by our team in mid 2010, the leader recognized that his interest in politics was heavily influenced by his mother, a factory worker and union leader who used to take him to meetings and demonstrations as a child.

5.1. Development, politics and arms

Parallel to the political mobilizations that began in the 1980s, Haiti began to be a target of international cooperation networks, programs and professionals motivated by the themes of redemocratization, development, human rights, community participation, conflict mediation and gender inequality. These efforts converged with traditional Haitian associativism (Barthelemy 1989, Smith 2001, Smucker and White 1997), resulting in an explosion of organizations of every type, scale and objective and the hegemony of 'project-based' development (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999, Mosse 2005) as a technology of social intervention.

This series of confluences had a direct impact on the creation of women's associations, government policies and the matching of these to the set of issues that informed the work of foreign agencies. Indeed today there is not one street, zone or district of Greater Bel Air without at least one organization that dialogues with the problems identified with women's lives. Likewise one of the objectives of the Ministry for Women is the promotion of women's associations.

However the conjunction between associativism, the influence of foreign organizations, the preponderance of the themes of development, empowerment, inequalities and conflict mediation, and the sociopolitical context of permanent economic, humanitarian and institutional crisis, worsened by recent natural disasters, including the earthquake of January 12th 2010, has had various consequences for women's political involvement. While the generations of leaders aged in their 40s and 50s combined (and many still combine) political activism with associativism, younger generations in their 20s seem to be moving away from the former and towards the latter – though there are exceptions and almost all the women recognize the importance of political participation in solving the country's problems.

This has consequences that are difficult to ignore: while the women-only organizations proliferate, the involvement of female residents in the most important political organizations, bases and *OPs* from Greater Bel Air is strikingly low compared to men. As an example we can highlight the creation of the 'United Ghettos' political movement, which emerged from the low-income districts of Port-au-Prince's metropolitan zone to become one of the main focal points of opposition to the government of President Michel Martelly in 2011 and 2012. In its group of leaders, composed of a dozen people, there was just one woman: Rachelle, a former activist of the Fanmi Lavalas party, a resident of the Martisan ghetto.

On the other hand, the Haitian state has implemented initiatives designed to increase women's political participation. In recent years the Constitution (promulgated in 1987) has undergone a series of reforms related to the theme, as cited earlier in the introduction. These legislative changes have had various impacts on national political life. According to data published over the last few years, 129 women occupy posts in parliaments, including at departmental level.⁴³ Despite this fact, the Senate has not one female representative.

⁴³ www.alterpresse.org/spip.php?article16097#.Uzv6iPIdWYg).

The impact of legislative reforms, the increase in political participation and the projects that focus on women's empowerment and the fight against inequalities have made themselves felt in Bel Air. No project run in the zone today by the government, international cooperation or Haitian organizations fails to take into account women's issues and attempts to treat men and women equally. In the projects for generating jobs, such as those in waste collection, demolition or healthcare awareness programs, for example, there are almost always clauses or recommendations setting quotas for women, sometimes up to 50%. Jenny, a community leader in Bel Air for more than two decades and coordinator of the Bel Air Active Women organization, testifies that soon after the earthquake of January 12th 2010 many opportunities were created for residents of the zone in projects that emerged in the wake of humanitarian aid. But the opportunities were not always taken up. She cites the case of a project sponsored by USAID for training drivers of heavy duty vehicles (trucks, tractors, diggers, etc.). Although she managed to fill the 50% quota for women's appointments, this was done only after considerable effort, since the female residents are very often uninterested in certain kinds of work, are afraid or think that some activities are actually more suited to men.

Like other leaders, Jenny argues for development projects in the zone that focus more on what women already do, such as working in the markets, trade or craftwork. But she points out that few such initiatives exist and that many of the projects introduced in the zone end up promoting activities that involve men more, require physical strength or are linked to the (predominantly male) world of armed force, like the projects designed for conflict mediation, disarmament and combatting violence. Yet despite this fact, many of the residents recognize the progress made in recent years and the increase in opportunities for training and work for women enabled by the governments and cooperation agencies active in the region, like Viva Rio, the United Nations, USAID and Worldwide Concern, even though these efforts are deemed insufficient to meet the region's demands and needs.

Although most of the community leaders, women's organizations and residents of Greater Bel Air agreed with the importance of politics for the country's future, many

of them prefer to observe from afar, concentrating their attention on those public agendas that specifically concern development, possibilities for improving the life of the zone and promoting women's rights through projects and programs run in partnership with government agencies, national organizations or foreign entities. It is not rare to hear women say that "men have ruined the politics of Haiti," referring to the constant crises that have devastated the country and the male predominance in politics.

Biography 5: The birth of a leader

Satela used to hide whenever she came across representatives from the media in Fort Dimanche, a zone in which she has lived since 2005. It was only after she saw someone being killed 'right in front of her' that she lost her fear and timidity and decided to tell everyone – the media and the judges – about the crime that she witnessed. This event, which took place in 2005, is recalled by Satela as a kind of landmark, the starting point from which she began to gain prominence and build her legitimacy as a leader about a year later.

Born at the start of the 1970s in the commune of Thiotte in the Southeast Department, Satela grew up in the Sartre region in Cité Soleil, where she lived until 2004 and where they still have a house. Satela's parents, a joiner from Jacmel and a *madanm sara* from Thiotte had nine children in all, but only she survived. This led her father and other family members to accuse her mother of having 'eaten her children,' causing huge rows until Satela's mother decided to flee with her daughter to Cité Soleil in 1981. The house in Fort Dimanche where Satela lives today was built in a part of the terrain containing the ruins of an old prison, built by the French during the period of colonization and that functioned as a prison and place of torture in the Duvalier period (1957-1986). She recounts that she constructed the house in 1994 after Aristide (during his second presidency) had claimed that the land was 'for the people,' at a time when the region was still sparsely populated.

Satela married at the age of 15 against her parents' wishes. Her mother, who is still alive and lives with her, opposed the marriage because the boy's family was from a poorer background than her own. Even so they married and had two daughters. At this time she was involved in trade, selling food produce in one of the region's markets. Shortly after they got together, her husband he left for the Dominican Republic to 'try his luck' and her mother ended up helping her pay for their daughters' school. Years later, when he returned to Haiti, he brought another woman and a child with him to live in Thiotte where he lives still today.

According to Satela, she and her first husband lived well, without fights or rows. The same did not apply to the second husband, who left her a widow. This man was from another zone of Cité Soleil and 'carried guns.' One day when he came back from a party to the house where they lived in Fort Dimanche, he had a fit of jealousy and shot Satela in the leg. Frightened, she took refuge in the house of an uncle who also lived in the Boston zone in Cité Soleil. The man ended up dying a few days later near to the national theatre and, according to the rumors, Satela's mother had been responsible for killing him. Satela and her mother returned to the house in Fort Dimanche where they still live today.

Satela recounts that she always found a way to get by. She has been a trader and has also worked for the APN (Autorité Portuaire Nationale), for the Meuse family, at Sonapi (Société Nationale de Parcs Industriels) and at Viva Rio soon after the 2010 earthquake. In this last organization she took part in the Zile Vèt project. Satela is a recognized leader in the zone where she lives and she has belonged to a variety of women's organizations throughout her life. In addition she played an active role in the resistance movements that sprang up against the Meuse family, the former owners of most of the lands on which she and hundreds of other people built their houses after these lands were given to the population by Aristide. Satela often says that she possesses *san dizod*, as a way of summarizing her history of involvement in the battles in which she was engaged during this period when the community was subjected to police operations, and in other campaigns in which she has become involved more recently.

Today Satela acts as a spokeswoman for PAVDES, an organization of 200 women recently set up at the request of a Venezuelan cooperation project. As a leader she says that she is used to managing interpersonal conflicts in the community, such as, for instance, mediating in legal disputes. In the majority of cases, these conflicts are between husbands and wives, or between neighbors, and do not end up in the justice system (*jistis*). Satela claims that most cases of violence taking place in Fort Dimanche are related to fights with guns and that although reports of rapes exist, the population itself rejects this practice and does not allow it to take place in the community.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Over the course of this text we have been able to examine various dimensions of the relations between men and women in low-income urban districts of Haiti. We have explored the dynamics of interdependence, the creation of inequalities, the cultivation of solidarities, observing the violence against women and their subordinate position in relation to men, the two aspects typically highlighted that tend to delimit (and limit) the 'gender' issue in the literature informing public policies in this area. In dialogue with the statistical data, which is usually fragmentary and sometimes contradictory (produced by a variety of national and international agencies, very often without any presentation of methodologies and sources), we have presented the findings of the ethnographic research, which provides a deeper insight into the interrelated lives of men and women, in the intimate spaces of homes and streets, development projects and cultural initiatives, in family-based, affective, political and economic dynamics.

We have been able to show, for example, how violence and victimization, topics so frequently touched on (or examined) in the reports on gender inequalities in Haiti, possess various levels, ranging from the relatively intimate space of marital relations to those spaces more closely linked to the public dimension of politics or the warfare between bases. We have also observed how in some cases these spaces remain

separate, while in other cases they interact and exacerbate spirals of violence that affect men as much as women. In this universe, as in any other involving humanity, joy and suffering, love and conflict, friendships and enmities are experienced by men and women in like fashion, although the power differentials between them are unequally distributed. In the case of Greater Bel Air this becomes particularly evident when the questions concern the control of spaces (of the bases or of the sales points and circuits in the markets, for example) and of flows (of goods, people or money). In these cases, where firearms are also often involved, men and women are both victims, but women without doubt emerge as the most vulnerable. The multidimensional consequences of an incommensurable tragedy like the one caused by the January 2010 earthquake expose all these ambiguities, ambivalences, paradoxes and inequalities involving the relations of men and women: the solidarity between family and friends, the specific role of women in maintaining access to the circuits of food in commerce, the kitchens, houses and the streets, the specific disempowerment of the women from whom men demand sex, including with violence, particularly where the spaces are involved, as in the case of the displacement camps.

On the other hand, over the course of the text we have noted how the social universe of the ghettos is to a large extent structured around women, whether in the family configurations, the care of houses and families, food preparation, or the daily provisioning of money. We have seen how both women and men engage in diverse kinds of work simultaneously and throughout their lives. In addition many women involved in commerce also invest time and energy in caring for their homes and families, and also participate actively in the associative and political life of the ghettos, like those of Greater Bel Air. In fact we have seen how there is a tradition of militancy and demands relating to the female condition, which includes the fights for democracy under the Duvalier dictatorship and later in opposition to the military governments of the 1990s and 2000s. This tradition highlights the relations between gender equality and democracy with which the gender policies implemented in the area can and obviously should dialogue more closely.

To build more egalitarian relations between men and women, Haitian women – organized in associations and taking part in the public life of the country and its places of residence – have their own lists of demands, some of them of extreme importance, like the reform of the legal code ruling on paternity and inheritance, recognizing the full rights of the children of unmarried women who live in a situation of plasaj, or like the rules that encourage female participation in civil society organizations and political representation, or like the projects that aim to stimulate women’s recruitment into the judiciary and the police forces. At the local level of the urban low-income districts like those of Greater Bel Air, other more specific measures can be conceived:

- . Create ‘sensibilization’ campaigns and multiply the instances of conflict mediation with the participation of women’s organizations and government bodies.

- . Implement surveillance systems in the markets (both the public marketplaces and the spaces of commerce in the streets) paying particular attention to the forms of subordinating and disempowering women (an issue linked to the formalization of rate payments).

- . Intensify the microcredit policies especially targeted at female traders and linked to cultural production.

- . Ensure female presence in the elaboration and implementation of community security projects – in general conceived and administered only by men.

- . Create and stimulate the amplification of community organizations that produce data in an efficient on-going form on gender inequality (including violence) along the lines of the project that maintains the existence of Viva Rio’s Biwo d’Analyz.

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