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Black women in the marketplace: everyday gender-based risks against Haiti's *madan saras* (women traders)

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ABSTRACT

In Haiti, *madan saras* have for centuries personalised economics through a *sistèm pratik* that has institutionalised market operations by connecting buyers and sellers. This study – based on 77 interviews, mainly (73%) with *madan saras* from northern Haiti – exposes gender-based violence (GBV) towards Black women entrepreneurs, examining the views of the *madan saras* about their work and using the framework of Black feminist theory to contextualise their experience. Despite social awareness of the contributions of *madan saras*, the pervasive GBV against *madan saras* in business is ignored by society and policymakers, and Haitian women must contend with these risks by themselves.

Introduction

The Republic of Haiti, with a population of 10.3 million (World Bank, 2013), is the least-developed country in the Americas. It ranks 168th out of 177 countries in the 2014 UN Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme, 2014) and was seen as one of the most corrupt countries in the world in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index, which places it 161st out of 174 countries. Political elites collude with economic elites to determine how markets operate in the country (Maguire, 1997; Fatton, 2002; Shamsie, 2006; Girard, 2010). Haiti was the first enslaved country in the Americas to end slavery by the French colonisers, yet the country has been plagued by authoritarian political regimes, economic instability and natural disasters like the earthquake of 2010, which have all contributed to large-scale emigration. Haitians leave because they cannot find meaningful economic opportunities (Government of Haiti, 2010).

However, one group of business people, women traders, or *madan saras*, stay and work in the country despite the challenges. As the director of one Haitian non-governmental organisation (NGO) told me in an interview,

There is a view that the middle-man is bad, but madan saras are my hero. They are the ones coming into the hard-to-reach villages by foot or donkey to buy the produce from the farmers even though there is so much personal risk to them on the roads. Despite the many hazards, madan saras bring fresh produce from the rural areas to city people. Without the madan saras to connect farmers to markets, agriculture will die here. We are all very blessed to have madan saras. (Port-au-Prince, 5 October 2011)

These women, excluded from educational opportunities and unable to find decent full-time work, engage in informal economic activities to support their families. As the quotation above notes, *madan saras* ensure that goods move around the country despite the risks involved. The term itself, *madan sara*, refers to ‘women traders’ or ‘petty traders’ who work in the informal sector to distribute goods from one area to another. In this article, I use this term, sometimes shortened to *saras*, to refer to these businesswomen who travel between villages, towns and cities to buy and sell goods. *Madan saras* can also be viewed as ‘middle-men’ in that they buy goods from the farmers and distribute them in markets. Mintz (2010) has suggested that the distribution channels of goods by *madan saras* is possibly the country’s only national institution. This buying and selling – or, as it is called in Kreyol, *vent and acha* – is a means for these women to have a livelihood. To be a *madan sara* does not require education or a lot of start-up capital, and this is why thousands of marginalised women engage in this type of business activity.¹

Madan saras have been navigating the business world for more than 200 years (Mintz, 2010). Despite the fact that thousands of women are engaged in the value chains as *madan saras*, little attention has been paid to the work they do (N’Zengou-Tayo, 1998; Mintz, 2011; Borns, 2012). Hossein (2012; 2014a; 2014b) defines the Jamaican higglers, Guyanese hucksters and Haiti’s *madan saras* as businesswomen. But, in fact, only certain *madan saras* are recognised for their work, mainly those who live in the south and close to the capital city of Port-au-Prince. My research here exposes the violence experienced by these women entrepreneurs in the marketplace as they carry out their everyday business, a violence that is clearly gender specific. To understand the gender-specific risks to *madan saras*, I examine the work of women in the north of Haiti who travel the country, mainly to the capital markets in Port-au-Prince, selling a mix of foodstuff, household items and clothing.

Linking business and violence, this article considers how the latter affects the lives of Black women entrepreneurs. The work of the *madan saras* is dangerous, as they carry out their activities in a hostile business climate. In August 2014, for example, *Alter Press*

1 *Madan saras* who travel long distances and bring news and gossip were named after a local bird that migrates from place to place and makes quite a bit of chatter doing so (Mintz, 2010).

reported a case in which *madan saras* from the Croix des Bossales market, near the capital of Port-au-Prince, were kidnapped, beaten and raped. Such stories reveal the targeted nature of these attacks on female traders by bandits in the marketplace. In the context of wilful attacks on poor businesswomen, it seems clear that markets are no longer neutral sites for doing business. Despite the fact that prolific Caribbean scholar Sidney Mintz (2010) has documented the risks faced by *madan saras* since the 1950s, this aspect of the business lives of the *madan saras* has been ignored, mainly because it involves the sensitive issue of gender-based violence (GBV) in the markets.

The study I present here only scratches the surface in terms of the research needed to understand the harms embedded within public marketplaces against women. Most research programmes use a 'generic' lens when analysing the work of *madan saras*, examining their business activities without considering the personal risks *madan saras* encounter in the marketplace as women (Development Alternatives Inc. [DAI], 2013; World Bank, 2011). The marketplace is said to create economic livelihoods and 'freedoms' for marginalised women, yet many *madan saras* endure physical and sexual crimes as part of doing business (Borns, 2012). Indeed, Haitian Minister of Women's Affairs Marie Yanick Mezile, in a recent interview, acknowledged that *saras* are abused and attacked while engaging in their trade (Borns, 2012).

In these cases, the attacks and violence are directed specifically at women. GBV refers to the deliberate harm done to a group of people because of their gender. GBV is often regarded as a stand-alone issue, but in the case of the *madam saras*, the misogyny is a workplace hazard that is highly gendered and classed, directed as it is at poor businesswomen. Examining GBV in the marketplace thus requires a normative lens to understand the violence experienced by Black women entrepreneurs in everyday business and the impact this has on their social lives. To that end, I suggest using the lens of Black feminism.

Black feminism and the marketplace

Familiarity with race politics in Haiti and the issue of exclusion of the *moun andeyo* (outsiders) is crucial to my research in this article, underlining the significance of using Black feminist theory to examine the role of Haitian women in business. As legal feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) argues, intersectionality offers an alternative theory to deconstruct the essentialist frameworks that negate Black people. Critical theories speak to Black people, and women in particular, in rethinking how society operates. In my work, I use Black feminism of a particular brand – that of the African diaspora – to examine Haitian women entrepreneurs, focusing on elements that specifically address the politics of empowerment and lived experience. I thus use the framework of Black feminist thought to contextualise the experience of Black people, especially of women traders (Hill Collins, 2000; Wane, Deliovskey & Lawson, 2002; Few, 2007; Ulysse, 2007).

The idea of using Black feminism to examine businesswomen in Haiti seems intuitive; yet it has never been done. Patricia Hill Collins' seminal work *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) makes it clear that African American women have always had to work and often did so in difficult working environments. Hill Collins argues that the study of Black women requires theorising to be done by people who know and live their experience – in other words, Black women have to find their own voices and be able to define their own experience. Lived experience is therefore crucial in analysing the violence perpetrated against women in the

marketplace. The *madan saras* in my study come from poor economic backgrounds and are forced to work. Black feminist theory helps to locate the indignities of Black women in the Americas, and this study will specifically reveal the struggles of Black women in the Caribbean. Black women in the USA as well as elsewhere in the diaspora, such as Haiti and the rest of the Caribbean, draw on cultural affinity through the shared historical experience of the slavery of their ancestors. Wane, Deliovskey & Lawson's *Back to the Drawing Board* (2002), for example, claims that African Canadians need to rewrite the stories of African people, arguing that lived experience is important in storytelling. In a similar way, looking back to Africa helps to explain why Haitian women do the work of *madan saras*.

Few studies have applied Black feminism in understanding Black women's roles in the marketplace (Ulysse, 2007; Hossein, 2013). Indeed, to date, research in general on the participation of Black women in the marketplace and the risks they encounter to carry out everyday work as *madan saras* has been very limited. One film on the issue, *Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of the Global Economy* (2009), documents that market fundamentalism has excluded Black women in the Americas, and as a form of resistance, they have turned to ancestral modes of cooperative business to push against societal oppression. Haitian American feminist Gina Ulysse (2007) argues for using Black feminism as a method to examine the work of Jamaican higglers (market women), making room for the acknowledgment of ancestral ties to the work Black women do. As noted above, Wane, Deliovskey & Lawson (2002) argues that African Canadian women in the diaspora draw on practices that are deeply rooted in an African heritage. Redefining the work women do according to a Black epistemology is important in this case; in this way, Black feminism becomes not only a way to theorise but also a method (Few, 2007).²

Personalised economics: *sistèm pratik* and the *saras*

Madan saras base their business relationships on trust. The trade *madan saras* do is deeply personal; it is business conducted person-to-person, called *sistèm pratik* (Mintz, 2011). In Haiti, *sistèm pratik* refers to business organised around a practical system based on personal relationships between a *sara* and her clients, whom she can count on to sell to and buy from her. *Saras* help farmers in the rural areas to make a living and have their goods sold, and town folk, in turn, can enjoy the produce from the villages (Mintz, 2010; 2011). The *madan saras* thus bridge the relationship between farmers and town people, and this is the *sistèm pratik*. According to Sidney Mintz (2010), who has studied Haiti's *sistèm pratik* since the 1950s, *pratik* is the site of struggle, where women traders negotiate sales and profit from the right to render service to a buyer. *Madan saras*, large and small, engage in these personalised economic activities, connecting remote sellers with city/town-based buyers.

The common view of *madan saras* is often exaggerated as the *reine de la marché* (queen bee of the market) who controls the prices of goods in the open market (Hossein, 2014c). Table 1 outlines at least three types of *madan saras*, as delineated in the report of a local Haitian firm, Agridev, which works in the agricultural sector. This report, focusing on the main sub-sectors affecting *madan saras* in the northern region (DAI,

2 It should be acknowledged that terms like 'Black feminism' and 'feminism' do not translate easily into Kreyol (Haitian French). As my local assistant explained, it is very complicated to translate such terms for the women we met (Hossein, 2014c). We resorted to terms such as 'women's empowerment' or asked about the 'specific risks women experienced'.

Table 1: Typology of the three types of *madan saras*

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3
Transport	Foot		
	Pushcart	Pushcart	
	Moto-taxis	Moto-taxis	Moto-taxis
	Animal-pulled vehicle (e.g. donkey and cart)	Animal-pulled vehicle	Animal-pulled vehicle
	Pick-up truck, tap-tap ³	Tap-tap	Various trucks, vans
Markets	Local markets	Local and regional markets	Regional, national and international (Croix des Bossales, Croix des Bouquets, Dominican Republic)

Source: Author's data collected in 2013 and DAI (2013).

2013), defined these businesswomen as intermediaries who buy and collect goods, usually foodstuff, from farmers, and then sell the merchandise to *détaillants* (wholesalers) or *ti machann* (market vendors) or to large supermarkets.

The three types of *madan saras* are based on the different sizes of business they operate, which relates to their mode of transport and the markets they sell in. Type 1 *saras* are village-based and often cash-strapped, sometimes having to use credit to buy goods from the farmers. These are often farmers' wives who sell locally. Type 2 *saras* may be rural but have the means to travel to regional as well as local markets and sometimes to the capital city. Type 3 *saras* are successful and pay in cash for goods; they also may be able to give credit or small loans to farmers and can pre-order large quantities for major markets in Port-au-Prince as well as the Dominican Republic.

Methodology

The leisure time of *madan saras* is structured around *jours de marché* (market days), and this will vary from day to day. The main markets in the northern regions are at Limonade (Wednesday), Ouanaminthe (Monday, Friday) and Ferrier (Tuesday). My interviews were scheduled on days that women traders would not be at the market. The use of qualitative multi-methods helps to examine the constraints affecting *madan saras* through various perspectives. Elite interviews were carried out to understand the context of the work and the risks *madan saras* experience. For example, non-profit leaders were extremely helpful in explaining the dangers and issues affecting women in the informal economy. As shown in Table 2, the bulk of the interviews were conducted with *madan saras* in the five agricultural sub-sectors (rice, cacao, maize, bananas and beans) in the north and northeast provinces. Together with two research assistants, I interviewed 77 persons, of whom 81% (50 persons) were *madan saras* in the seven

³ A tap-tap is a privately-owned bus or pick-up truck (sometimes known as a camionette) used as a shared taxi but normally following a predetermined route.

communes of the north: Fort-Liberté, Limonade, Ouanaminthe, Ferrier, Grande-Rivière, Milot and ville du Cap Haïtien. Fifteen (19% of the interviews) stakeholders from government, civil society, credit unions, cooperatives and microfinance organisations were interviewed to understand the complexity of gender equality in business. The research was carried out in November and December 2013 (Hossein, 2014c).

This project employed Haitians local to the area to assist in the data collection, ensuring that they either were from the northern region or shared a similar class origin to the *madan saras* interviewed (e.g. their own mothers were traders). These local research assistants began their search for candidates at women's associations and cooperatives, and interviews would then snowball, providing us with other *madan saras* to meet and interview. One glaring issue that emerged in the research was the tension among Haitian women which Mayoux (1999) refers to as the 'vertical hierarchy' of power that exists among Cameroonian women of different classes. Haitian women are divided along lines of uneducated-educated (class), rural-urban and *mulatre-noir* (colour of skin/shadism).⁴ The issues of class and colourism-shadism among Haitians quickly became apparent, as all of the *madan saras* I interviewed were very dark complexioned, and the research team, with the exception of only two who were fair-complexioned, were dark as well.

Table 2: Interviews about the work of *madan saras* in northern Haiti (2013)

	Fort-Liberté	Limonade	Ouanaminthe (2 groups)		Ferrier	Milot	Grande-Rivière-du-Nord (2 groups)		Cap Haïtien	Total
Small group interviews	8	12	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	24
Focus group	0	0	8	0	0	0	12	11	0	31
Individual interviews	0	0	0	0	1	6	0	0	0	7
Total <i>saras</i>	8	10	8	0	1	5	12	6	0	50
Business people	8	12	8	4	1	6	12	11	0	62
Individual interviews with elite/stakeholder informants								1	14	15
Total women interviews										56
Sample size										77

Source: Author's data collected in November and December 2013.⁵

4 Shadism and colourism are pervasive in the Caribbean. In Haiti, *mulatres* (mixed-race) are a part of the privileged classes but a distinct group from the *blancs* (White people).

5 The author has also carried out research with *madan saras* in Cayes in 2011 and Port-au-Prince in 2008, 2010 and 2011.

The various methods of qualitative inquiry included the following: first, a review of secondary materials and policy documents; second, semi-structured and unstructured interviews with elites/stakeholders; third, focus groups with women micro-entrepreneurs; and fourth, small group interviews with *saras*. Small group and focus groups permitted me to meet many *saras* in a short period of time. Most interviews were conducted at the homes of the *madan saras* or a neutral meeting place (e.g. community centres, restaurants, milling machines). As this material is sensitive and individuals are vested in promoting the faith in the market, I ensured that my data were triangulated: collecting information from stakeholders, businesspersons, NGO experts, civil society and women activists. One important general observation I made, which was emphasised in a small group interview in Limonade (9 December 2013), was that when men joined a meeting, women withdrew from the conversation, so every effort was made to have all-female focus groups (Hossein, 2014c). Individual interview tools were primarily semi-structured, to ask questions that focused on gender-specific challenges encountered by *madan saras*. The interviews from the individuals and focus groups were transcribed and organised in an analysis matrix to map out the findings and experiences of the *madan saras*.

Findings

My great-grandmother was a sara, my grandmother was a sara, my mother was a sara and I am a sara. And now my daughter is a sara. We have been doing business for a long time and need someone to help us who knows us. Someone who has a business and can help our business grow too. I am not a small child going to school. (Rosna, a madan sara from Grande-Rivière, 11 December 2013)

Many of the Haitian *madan saras* interviewed in this study are drawing on work carried out by their mothers before them. Working as a *madan sara* is an important achievement for uneducated women in that they are able to make a living through commerce and trade. The reasons women become *madan saras* are rooted in social exclusion as well as in the need to cope and provide for their families. Women who turn to this work usually inherited it from their mothers at a very young age. It soon became evident that the 50 *saras* I interviewed in this study were industrious, brave and resourceful women.

In the quote above, Rosna explains that her work as a *madan sara* is part of a tradition passed down to her from the preceding generation. In other words, daughters receive the training to become *madan saras* from their mothers in order to ensure that they have a way to be economically independent. Rosna explains that *madan saras* are experienced businesswomen with generations of accumulated knowledge, many of whom have been trading for many years. As a result, they want to be respected for their practical, or lived, experience, which informs the work they do. The concept of *saj* in Haiti refers to the idea of drawing on people who can relate to them in a personal way: a *saj* is a person who has the lived experience of the *madan saras* and comes from their social class. This is the kind of support that would be meaningful to *madan saras*. On the other hand, one individual interview (1 December 2013) revealed that *madan saras* view 'outsiders' – who come from neither the locality nor a similar class – with suspicion.

The dangerous work of the *madan saras*

To understand why *madan saras* do what they do despite the risks, one needs to be familiar with the rights of women in owning and accessing land in the northern regions of Haiti (Lundy, 2010). Although the land tenure laws in Haiti give women the right to own land, cultural traditions interfere in how land is divided up among men and women. Men are usually given title of the land, and this puts them in charge of decision-making in the family (Dorte, 2008). The *madan saras* explained to me that the person with the land has the 'ultimate power' in the home, and this is usually the man. Most *saras* (43) interviewed in this sample did not own the land, but male partners gave them access to small plots. Casima, a *madan sara* from a small village in Limonade, said, *This is how it goes on in my house. When there is meat in the house with ten pieces, six of those ten pieces [will] go to the man ... the rest that is left is for the family. The man gets it ... first. This is the mentality here.* (Casima, 9 December 2013)

Saras who have little or no education and little access to land will turn to business activities that can give them some independence. Because of the small investment needed for becoming a *madan saras*, many women, particularly poor ones with no schooling, can turn to this work. Thus, Haitian female entrepreneurs who are in a lower socio-economic class can seize business opportunities when there are no other options (Hossein, 2014b; 2014c). The *saras* I interviewed do not belong to any agency or umbrella group. As of 2015, there was no national network representing the rights of *madan saras*, despite the fact that the government of Haiti was surveying *madan saras* in the country in order to understand their needs so that such bodies could be created (Mezile in Borns, 2012). The Haitian Chamber of Commerce serves only legally registered small and medium-sized businesses, which excludes *madan saras*. According to most of the women I interviewed (62 persons), *madan saras* begin working in the informal sector from a very young age. Fonkoze Okap, a microfinance institution in Cap-Haïtien (one of the largest microfinance banks in the country), provides extensive functional literacy and business training to businesswomen in the informal sector (Tucker & Tellis, 2005; Zanotti, 2010), including *madan saras*. In an interview, a Fonkoze branch manager stated that at least 70% of the *madan saras* they encounter have no literacy or very limited abilities (12 December 2013).

Besides lack of education, another reason *madan saras* have difficulty accessing finance is that these services, including microfinance, tend to be urban-focused. Many of the *saras* interviewed in this study belong to rural and peri-urban communities, and only 8% to 12% had bank accounts. However, 97% (60 women) were members of informal community banks, such as *sol*, *sangle* or *sabotaye*, which are rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs). These systems sometimes have savings and lending aspects that rotate in turn to their members based on an agreed time frame (Hossein, 2013). Other *madan saras* start their business activities by selling small items from the family garden, building up a small savings in order to launch their activities. And other women may rely on family, husbands or male partners for their capital needs.⁶

The cumulative work of *madan saras*, with thousands of women in the country engaged in this business, is impressive and significant. The work of *madan saras* is

6 In Haiti, common-law arrangements are known locally as *plasaj*, but a man may have several girlfriends.

revered by most Haitian people due to the challenges these women overcome as micro-entrepreneurs. In fact, as Mintz (2010) explains, husbands and male counterparts are usually proud of the marketing skills of their wives. Despite these positive points, however, the findings in this study show that *madan saras* are often confronted with negative opinions about their profession. Loudy a rural *madan sara* who walks long distances by foot and donkey pushcart to procure her goods, told me,

When the cost [for goods] is not what clients [farmers or customers] want to pay, they will get mad at me. They blame me. They will yell at me. Some spit in my face. They can throw bad words and insults my way ... Who am I? I am only selling things, and I cannot tell them what the price will be. It is what it is. But [the buyers] still blame me. (Loudy, 9 December 2013)

Such negative views of *madan saras* seem part and parcel of the job. In an interview with a male government official (name and date withheld), for example, he stated,

The majority of women [in the north] do not really work. Their 'work' is to serve their husband, clean the house, cook the food and take care of children. The little work that they do [in selling] is not enough [to support a family].

Of the *madan saras* I interviewed, 79% (61 out of the 77 persons) reported that they are not always respected. Interviewees stated that they are viewed negatively as the 'middle man' and, as noted by Loudy above, blamed for high food costs. Other *saras* explained that they were despised because people see them as smuggling goods and avoiding taxes. It should be noted that most *saras* do not fall into the type 3 category, and they do not have the power to influence prices or make small surpluses after costs (DAI, 2013).

Madan saras, as the 'market connector' bringing goods from farmers to the townspeople, have received little or no support in terms of policy-making and development projects. Relying on the *sistèm pratik*, they hustle to make ends meet. In focus groups in Ouanaminthe and Grande-Rivière, 31 *madan saras* had 6–35 years of trade experience (10 and 11 December 2013). However, *madan saras*, especially those defined as type 1 or type 2, often hire someone, usually a male relative, to do the accounting, and others forgo doing any written bookkeeping at all (Small group interview, Limonade, 9 December 2013). *Saras* avoid formal bookkeeping often quite deliberately in order to remove the concentrated power over their business from the hands of men, who generally tend to be the literate ones (Interview, 13 December 2013). The *saras* I interviewed in Milot selling chocolate had diverse skill sets and education: one had a high school education and could have done her own bookkeeping but had chosen not to do so; others interviewed carried out 'head records' (Collins, Morduch, Rutherford & Ruthven, 2009).⁷ A *sara* named Charl from Kazimi, explained, 'Men can be mean with money. And this is why I make my own money' (10 December 2013). A number of type 1 *saras* in this study reported that making money reduced stress at home and also that helping the family enhanced their status in the family (Interview, small group of *madan saras*, Fort-Liberté, 9 December 2013). Despite this, activists have found that rural women, many of them *saras*, do not control their own money; again, this is why many

⁷ Collins, Morduch, Rutherford & Ruthven (2009) find that the micro-entrepreneurs keep relatively accurate accounting in their heads.

women will hide their money from men (Interview, Assosyason Fanm Soley d'Ayiti, AFASDA, 12 December 2013).

GBV in the markets

In interviews, all of the *madan saras* (50 persons) stated that they want to conduct business in an environment free from personal risks. Years of neglect of the transportation system and poor security have made moving from location to location risky, as badly maintained roads contribute to road accidents and poor regulation of licensing allows dangerous vehicles on the road to provide transport. Furthermore, vehicle breakdowns leave women passengers vulnerable to theft and sexual assaults. *Madan saras* are thus exposed to serious risks when they engage in commerce along the trade routes. But, on top of these dangers on the road faced by all Haitians, *madan saras* encounter gender-specific risks. Many of the *saras* interviewed revealed that drivers or officials on the roads, mainly men, often demanded 'extra' fees and extorted monies from them in addition to the fares they already paid. In the focus groups, *madan saras* reported that men travelling to do business did not experience the dangers the women did. This targeting of *madan saras*, then, is a gender-specific form of harassment that men impose on the women traders.

Saras reported that GBV against them as a group comes in several forms: verbal, physical and sexual. They are spat upon and insulted by clients and passers-by as a routine part of the work. They also are slapped, punched and mocked in public spaces with no recourse. In two focus groups (31 women), women traders explained that verbal and physical abuse is a well-entrenched aspect of the marketplace for women. The interviews thus clearly revealed that human risks that are violent and gender specific in nature are occurring within the work environment of *saras*: first during travel, and then at the depots and within the marketplace itself. *Saras* who fail to comply with the extortion requests of informal 'agents' are subject to GBV such as physical (slapping, pushing, pulling hair, spitting) and verbal abuse (cursing, name-calling, humiliating remarks), which can escalate to sexual crimes. *Madan saras* who travel in the early morning (often before dawn) and late at night in remote areas are jumped on and raped. Women are attacked in the process of doing business, on their way to farms to buy goods or leaving with their merchandise, and also in the markets. It is difficult to imagine how sexual and physical crimes can occur against women in Haiti's vibrant and lively markets, but they do. *Madan saras* reported that customers (people buying goods in the markets) and clients (persons they sell to) can become aggressive towards them during business transactions. The facts that *madan saras* are mainly female and that the crimes directed by them are usually by males make this GBV. One *madam sara*, Mimosa, a rice seller from Fort-Liberté, remarked in a focus group,

I love the work I do. Ah yes ... we [madan saras] have lots of fans. People see what we are doing. They know we are working. ... We are the ones who make markets [come] alive because we go to the farms to get the stuff, and then we travel to the big markets [such as Croix des Bossales]. But no one knows the way we also have to suffer. No one knows this. (Mimosa, 9 December 2013)

Madan saras like Mimosa are uncomfortable talking about the GBV that occurs in their day-to-day work, because violence against women is felt as personal shame. They have

come to value their professions, and, to some, disclosing the GBV they experience would diminish the work they do. This study in no way seeks to undermine the work that *madan saras* are doing; rather, it exposes how unsafe the marketplace is for women to do business. However, discussing such experiences in public is not something that is locally accepted. Collecting material on this issue was thus difficult and required that I use local Haitians from the region and country as research assistants (Hossein, 2014c).

As traders, *saras* are required to travel long distances, and in Haiti, such travelling is precarious. *Saras* leave their homes in the very early hours of the morning or the middle of the night and use isolated roads. The women normally travel in small groups to minimise the risk of attacks, but this does not always work. The fact that these women are easily violated is directly due to the modes and type of travel they must undertake to do their jobs. It is true that any person takes a risk when they travel on poorly kept roads, where it is highly likely that accidents will occur, resulting in the loss of goods (Food and Agriculture Organization/World Food Program, 2010), but *saras* are also victims of assault and rape. An essential part of a *sara's* job is to travel to remote, unlit areas to buy goods from farmers and manual types of transport (e.g. donkey, horses or tricycles) are the only options available to many village-based *saras*. This form of transport not only limits the amount of goods they can carry but also leads to women using insecure modes of travel alone in places where they can encounter violence and assault.

Women activists interviewed reported that the *saras* experience this violence not only when travelling in isolated locations but also in the public marketplace. It became apparent from the focus groups and interviews that *madan saras* feel powerless, and many *saras* clearly stated that they have not disclosed crimes against them because of the fear of retribution by the perpetrators, whom they have to see every day. These women are mothers and daughters who feel that public revelation of the assaults they have encountered would bring shame and embarrassment on them and their families. In one focus group, a middle-aged married *madan sara* divulged,

Most people think they know what we go through ... [nervous laugh] ... they do not [know anything about the difficulty we experience as women]. Just as you [pointing to me as the interviewer] wear a hat to go to work, we [referring to madam saras in the group] must wear a [female] condom because we know rape will happen [to us]. It is a matter of time. It is better I am ready. (Interview, small group of madan saras, Limonade, northern Haiti, 9 December 2013)

It is worth noting that when the woman above made this comment, all the other *madan saras* in the room nodded in agreement. *Saras* know that they will be raped in the operation of business, either when they are travelling or at the markets as they sell their goods. Policymakers are also aware of the gendered risks against *madan saras*, yet they do not address GBV in micro and small business policies. The *saras* interviewed said, 'We learn to cope with things,' meaning that the GBV in the marketplace has become 'normalised' in their everyday business lives (AFASDA Interview, 12 December 2013). Knowing that violent crimes will happen to them, they make a conscious decision to protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases.

Madan saras in the focus groups said they were usually attacked at bus and shared taxi depots. Car breakdowns and waiting for taxis and buses are also common scenarios

that put women traders in unsafe environments. There are no security protocols at the taxi depots, and so women are left waiting on their own. In focus groups, *madan saras* stated that although they often travel in groups and bond together in lit areas, these tactics to ward off male attackers are not always an effective deterrent to men. Youth, gangs and male passengers touch, assault and rape *madan saras* not only in these isolated environments but also in plain sight in the common areas of a bus depot. In the focus group sessions, *madan saras* admitted that they will turn away when they hear other women being attacked for fear that it might happen to them if they intervene. They also stated that others (those who do not work in their trade) perceive the violence they endure as something they bring on themselves by working on their own.

Violence against women entrepreneurs also takes place in the public marketplace. In Port-au-Prince's Croix des Bossales and Croix des Bouquets, although *madan saras* worry about theft of their goods and cash, they mainly fear assault to their persons. Men in the market – clients, passers-by, as well as ‘informal’ security guards (i.e. gang members) – extort money from women *saras* as a pretext to force them to do sexual favours. *Saras* reported in the interviews that the men use the demand for goods as an excuse to beat or sexually abuse them in public spaces. *Saras* in one focus group explained that women who protest or refuse the attackers will be beaten up and possibly killed as an example to others. The humiliation these women undergo to do business has far-reaching effects on them – both in their private and in their social lives. But it was not clear from this study how the women are able to compartmentalise the abuse in the workplace and live their own lives at home. While some of the *saras* have learned to build up defence mechanisms, there are no formal policy alternatives to protect them (AFASDA Interview, activists, 12 December 2013).

Beyond their local markets, these women also face violence when they cross borders into the Dominican Republic. *Madan saras* reported that they must pay bribes to state officials (e.g. police, custom officers) and unofficial agents. These men misuse the informality of this sector to benefit personally, and in the process, they hurt women who cross the borders. The *madan saras* are harassed, physically assaulted and raped at the borders to the Dominican Republic and at police stopping points in the country, whether they comply with demands for bribes or not. At a focus group in Ouanaminthe, one *sara* explained, ‘If women are unable to make the fees required [these are bribes], then we are expected to pay the men with a [sexual] favour’ (10 December 2013). If they comply, then the officials are less likely to confiscate their goods or cash.

In all these cases, women traders are directly targeted for violence as they undertake tasks essential to their livelihood in a way that male traders do not experience. But GBV discourse ignores the violence against women in the markets, and the *madan saras* are responsible for protecting or defending themselves. One *sara* explained to me in a focus group session, ‘No one can judge me. I try to do what I can.’ Violence against Black women in business has thus become a way of life, and the women resort to ways they know they can survive and make a living.

Conclusion

The contribution of this work to Black feminist literature lies in its revelation of how Black women use personalised economics and networks to cope with the pain they

endure as they try to make a living in the marketplace. The violence of the marketplace is thus an aspect of Black women's lives that can be incorporated into this theorising.

Poor women in Haiti are recognised as the *poto mitan* (Kreyol term meaning 'pillar of society') because they cobble together resources to help their families and communities (Mintz, 2010). *Madan saras* persevere in violent markets to make a living. The *sistèm pratik* that for centuries *madan saras* have used to personalise economics has institutionalised how markets operate in the Haitian context. Women traders connect buyers and sellers. But in doing this work, they experience violence in the business world. Although society recognises the contributions of *madan saras* and women traders, there is little openness about the daily insults, beatings, rapes and sexual abuse these business-women endure (Cassagnol, 2014). The GBV that *madan saras* experience in business is thus ignored by policymakers, and Haitian women are left to contend with these risks on their own.

Because GBV is missing from policy-making discourse, development projects are not equipped to counter these incidents of gender-specific violence in order to improve business practice. Furthermore, human rights and women rights activists argue that there is not enough research exposing the violent crimes within the marketplace. A senior manager in a non-profit organisation remarked,

It is a dirty little secret [the violence against madan saras] that nobody wants to talk about.

We know saras are raped in broad daylight but we close our eyes, we ignore it because we want our cheap stuff. (Cap Haïtien, December 2013)

The GBV inside the marketplace is widely known; yet no leader has taken up the issue to stop the violence against women who work in the markets. In spite of the personal risks, women from low socio-economic groups manage to buy and sell goods. Although there is legal protection for women against harassment in the workplace, women who engage in sales in the open markets have no such recourse. Perhaps it is their class status that keeps the *saras* from forcing 'GBV in business' as a policy issue. But as it stands, GBV in the marketplace continues to occur against poor women entrepreneurs who have no recourse to make it stop.

On a more positive note, however, in October 2012 Yanick Mezile called for recognition of the work of the *madam saras* (Borns, 2012). This inspires hope that Minister Mezile, who has lived experience as a child growing up in Jérémie, might be willing to address the violence within markets that affect the work of women traders. One route would be to count the work of *madan saras* as business people and include them in small business associations (such as the Haitian small business association or women's business association). This would exert pressure on mainstream business associations to ensure that safety of women who work in business is embedded in all kinds of operations of business. As it currently stands, however, it is unacceptable that markets are viewed as levelled playing fields without understanding the GBV experienced by Black women traders trying to make a living.

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- Individual interview, Bank manager, Cap Haïtien, Haiti, 12 December 2013
- Interview with Rosna, *madan sara*, Grande-Rivière, Haiti, 11 December 2013.
- Interview, Non-profit senior staff person, Cap Haïtien, Haiti, 10 December 2013.
- Interview, Charl, *madan sara*, Kazimi, Cap Haïtien, Haiti, 10 December 2013.
- Interview, Casima, *madan sara*, Limonade, Haiti, 9 December 2013.
- Interview, Director, Haitian non-governmental organisation, Port-au-Prince, 5 October 2011.
- Interview, small group of *madan saras*, Ouanaminthe, Haiti, 10 December 2013.
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