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Markets and the role of women in Haitian society

Markets and marketing are a notable feature of Haitian life, whether in the city of Port-au-Prince (markets: [PH070](#), [071](#), [072](#), [073](#), [074](#), [075](#), [076](#), [077](#), [078](#), [079](#), [080](#), [081](#), [082](#), [083](#), [PH104](#), [105](#), [106](#), [107](#), [108](#), [109](#), [110](#), [111](#), [112](#), [113](#), [114](#), [115](#), [116](#), [117](#), [EH121](#), [PH162](#), [163](#), [164](#), [165](#)) (marketing activities: [PH085](#), [086](#), [087](#), [088](#), [PH093](#), [PH108](#), [109](#), [110](#), [111](#), [112](#), [EH125](#), [PH150](#), [151](#), [152](#), [PH156](#), [157](#), [158](#), [159](#), [160](#), [161](#), [162](#)) or towns, rural areas and along roads (see: Road Trip [PH805](#), [806](#), [807](#), [PH816](#), [817](#), [818](#), [819](#), [820](#), [821](#), [822](#), [823](#), [824](#), [825](#), [PH851](#), [852](#), [853](#)). Furcy has no market and nor does Brache.

Of particular importance is the fact that a great deal of internal trade is in the hands of women, both in wholesale and retail trade of rural products as well as of some imported goods. They also sell prepared food, biscuits and alcoholic drinks. The trade in coffee, livestock and most craft materials is controlled by men, who are also artisans (such as tailors, builders, drivers, tinsmiths. Women are seamstresses.)

The photographs show markets and marketing activities in Port-au-Prince, in Fonds des Nègres, in rural areas, and along roads. Women traders travel enormous distances, whether on trucks, with donkeys and on foot. Their means of transportation varies, in part, by the distance they travel, the quantity of goods they handle, their financial capacity, and to which category they belong in the vast structure of the internal market system. Some upper class women engage in wholesale trade. For example Mme. S., the wife of a diplomat, bought rice at harvest time and held it until prices had risen some month later, to resell in small quantities to local traders.

Urban markets are licensed and have a market head. Market sellers often have steady and preferred clients who may get a better price than strangers. Women who sell in the streets or house to house are called *ti machan* (small traders). They have clients to whose doors

they deliver produce and charcoal, but may go to several houses to find the best price as established by bargaining. Although most of the women are monolingual Creole speakers and illiterate (in the 1940s there was no standardized Creole orthography), they had a fine sense of costs and profits. Very young girls are given a start as traders by their mothers whom they accompany, although this practice is more widespread in rural areas than in the city.

Trading is a key element of women's economic independence. It takes them away from home and family, often for extended periods of time. This is in strong contrast to the lives of women in the neighboring Dominican Republic, but also strikingly similar to the economic life of women in several West African societies.

This collection includes numerous illustrations of a variety of markets and of sales activities.

Reference:

Mintz, S. M. "Employment of capital by market women in Haiti," in: Raymond Firth and Basil Yamey, eds. *Capital, Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964, pp. 256-86.