

WOMEN FIGHT FOR THEIR SAFETY IN THE DOMINICAN-HAITIAN BORDER

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Abstract

Over a decade ago, migration scholars in Latin America and the Caribbean pointed to a change in international terrestrial cross-border relations as spaces of coexistence and cooperation, stating they now experience less conflict than before. However, although the Dominican-Haitian border is undergoing a thorough transition, it still shows a degree of violence aimed at specific vulnerable groups, all of which affects public security. This paper addresses the violence committed against Haitian migrant women who are in transiting the Dominican-Haitian border or have been displaced. While a more favorable legislative framework in both the country of origin and destination is urgent, there is also a dire need for a more sensitive public outlook on these issues in order to focus on the roles and responsibilities of two of the key players in this area: the migrant women themselves as holders of rights, and the competent authorities as guarantors of these rights. There is an imperative need for a radical change in current practices that tolerate, without much disruption in the island or beyond, the violations of human rights that take place along this border. I also suggest possible action strategies for key actors and supporters of these women in their migration process.

Keywords: Dominican-Haitian border, human rights, migration, vulnerable women

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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the 20th century, the so-called new vision of the border (FLACSO RD, 2002, eds. Lozano and Wooding, 2008) has maintained that cooperation should characterize the border space, thus deviating from previous conceptualizations of national boundaries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean as traditional areas of conflict (Beaver, 1988, ed. Lozano, 1992). However, this rhetoric (once seen as revisionist, now widely accepted) is not necessarily reflected in actual practice; for this reason, some scholars speak of areas in transition (Dilla, 2007) or of low intensity conflict (Murray, 2010).

Unlike some other borders in the region, the Dominican-Haitian border was officially opened only 25 years ago, after the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti in 1986 (FLACSO/INESA, 2003). However, in times of political tension or other crises, there is a tendency to either officially open or close some of its points; for example, between 2010 and 2011, relationships between transiting migrants and border inhabitants were disrupted by three events:

- The January 2010 Haiti earthquake, which resulted in mass displacement in several directions, including toward the border; many of the displaced were received in host homes, with mixed results regarding their rights (ACNUR, 2010).
- Starting on October of that same year, a cholera outbreak affected all Haitian departments and crossed, as would be expected, into the Dominican Republic. During early 2011, Dominican authorities increased the pace of Haitian repatriations claiming this was a measure of sanitary control although, months later, these measures were reversed without having contained the disease. An unexpected consequence of the temporarily increased border control was that migrant women had to make even more use of the informal crossing, with all the dangers “going through the hills” entailed.
- The violence that took place between April and May of 2011 after the presidential and parliamentary elections in Haiti had effects on the central border, leading to a decline in the presence of Haitian authorities and their operational capacity given that several of their facilities

in Belladère were sabotaged and officials fled. As a result of this violence, there was even more pressure on some social services on the Dominican side, especially with regards to public health (Petrozziello and Wooding, 2011).

Despite an even more volatile current border context and in the face of migration dynamics, we must acknowledge that not enough attention has been paid to this reality, which can be visited with great force upon some of the most vulnerable groups. Although displaced Haitian women in the so-called “tent cities” (the camps of Port-au-Prince and its surroundings) have received a lot of attention given the increase in studies related to violence against women, particularly of the sexual kind, little attention has been paid to an increasingly complex situation on the border (InterAction, 2010; IJDH et al., 2010; Refugees International, 2010; Schuller, 2010; Toupin, 2010). It is no coincidence that, when it comes to “who” can get media attention, what happens in Haiti also holds for the Dominican Republic: Santo Domingo (the capital) is more likely to get attention than a distant and abandoned border.

On July 12, 2011, young Rooldine Lindor, a Haitian university student, was raped and murdered in Santo Domingo del Este. Although the tragedy could have gone unnoticed given the general increase in crime in the Dominican Republic, it caused an unexpected outcry among the Haitian community in that country, as well as the Haitian government and even international media.¹ In spite of being in the process of appointing a new government, the fledgling Martelly administration pursued the case by sending Haitian parliamentarians to Santo Domingo to meet with their counterparts and judicial representatives focusing particularly on the Lindor case.²

The Haitian Press reported the death as “a slap” to Haitians in the Dominican Republic, while feminist groups and other actors in Domin-

1. The Dominican Ambassador in Haiti had to issue a press release on July 15, 2011, condemning the event and assuring that the alleged perpetrators would be prosecuted.

2. Liriano, Jonathan. “Diputados haitianos visitan el Congreso Nacional,” in *El Caribe*, September 2, 2011; available at <http://www.elcaribe.com.do/site/pais/nacionales/286658-diputados-haitianos-visitacion-congreso-nacional-.html>.

ican civil society came out in support of the Haitian student community, alarmed by what had happened. Some analysts believed that the murder of this young foreigner could have similar effects to those of the death of the Dominican immigrant Lucrecia Pérez in Madrid, which took place almost two decades ago and led to a sustained and unprecedented campaign for the rights of immigrant women in Spain.³

However, there are other social and geographical contexts on the island shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic (the second largest of the Caribbean), where the rights of Haitian migrant women are violated daily. Why does the violence against migrant women⁴ in these other contexts not receive due attention? Is it because they do not live in cities but in the interstices of the two countries on the island? Is it because they occupy a lower rank in the social stratification, because they do not have a positive immigration status, or because of the color of their skin? This paper seeks to expose the plight of Haitian women who live and work in high-risk situations while accounting for the deeply rooted socio-cultural reasons due to which they accept this kind of violence as part of their daily lives. We are specifically concerned with the border cities of Comendador (in the Elías Piña province, on the Dominican side) and Belladère (in the Central Plateau Department, on the Haitian side).⁵

Borders are complex places where a multitude of different actors operate and several interests are at stake. Female migrants in the Dominican-Haitian border move between traders and collectors, guards, smugglers, traffickers, pimps, bureaucrats and host families, employers, and their own partners and families. In this variety of contexts, migrant,

3. Haitian student organizations are seeking to commemorate the three-month anniversary of Lindor's death and have appealed to their allies in Dominican society.

4. Here, the use of the term "migrant" is derived from the use of "migrant workers" in CEDAW *Recomendación general No. 26 sobre las trabajadoras migrantes*, ratified in 2008; available at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/GR_26_on_women_migrant_workers_sp.pdf

5. This article is based on recent findings (2011) by the Caribbean Migrants Observatory (OBMICA, CIES-UNIBE/FLACSO) and authors Allison Petrozziello and Bridget Wooding, commissioned by the Dominican NGO "Colectiva Mujer y Salud," and supported by AECID and the IOM: *Fanm nan fwontye, fanm toupatou: Una mirada a la violencia contra las mujeres migrantes, en tránsito y desplazadas en la frontera dominico-haitiana* (Elías Piña/Belladère).

transiting or displaced women are exposed to various types of violence. They come from a country characterized by extreme poverty, and have been exposed to a kind of structural violence that triggers other types of violence, including domestic, physical and sexual (Farmer 2003). When they migrate they are exposed to other forms of violence depending on the situation in which they find themselves, whether on the mountain, in the market, or in the “Kay madam,”⁶ spaces characterized by “intersectionality” (this concept developed by feminist activists analyzes discrimination based on different axes of identity such as gender, social class, immigration status or ethnicity, among others; CAWN 2010).

Migrant women are rendered invisible in this environment, where they can be repatriated to Haiti without any respect for due legal process or recognition of the binational protocol that governs the matter since 1999; in the worst case scenario, they can be killed without ever showing in any national record. There are a number of factors that foster this kind of impunity, and perpetrators (mostly but not exclusively men), can be found in formal or informal crossings, family environments, the workplace comprised by the homes of others, area brothels, or the Monday and Friday border market in Comendador.

Beyond a favorable legislative framework, which is undoubtedly needed in countries of both origin and destination,⁷ and the need for a more sensitive public outlook, this article emphasizes the roles and responsibilities of two of the key players in this context: the women themselves as holders of rights and capabilities, and the competent authorities who should guarantee these rights. I also underscore the imperative need for a radical change in current practices that tolerate these violations, suggesting modes of action for some key actors, with an emphasis on those allies the women can count on during their migration.

6. In Haitian Creole, the term “Kay madam” refers to a family home or, literally, “the lady’s house,” where many migrants find jobs when they arrive in Dominican territory.

7. The Dominican Republic has a relatively robust legislation in terms of violence against women while, in Haiti, the Ministry for the Status of Women and their Rights (MCFDF in French) introduced a draft-bill in mid-2011 which, if approved, would give Haiti very advanced legislation in this area. Implementing these laws, however, is a greater challenge in both Haiti and in the Dominican Republic.

CONTEXT

Haitian women who are migrating, have been displaced or are transiting through the Dominican-Haitian border are especially vulnerable to violence. Many migrate spontaneously seeking to improve their quality of life; others were displaced by the January 2010 earthquake and, more recently, by the post-electoral violence that took place between April and May 2011.⁸ The region shows high levels of accepted violence against women—physical, sexual, economic, psychological, verbal, etc.—in addition to high risks of illicit human trafficking, including that geared toward forced sexual labor.

The Comendador border market is a major trading post for many Haitian women who are exposed to situations of “*macuteo*” (Dominican slang for extortion). A proclivity for violence against women (VAW) has also been detected in host homes where old women and girls displaced by the Haitian earthquake are living, as well as houses that employ migrant domestic workers, among others. Outbreaks of cholera on the border (2010-2011) led authorities to close it down on several occasions and segregate Haitian vendors from Dominicans in a provisional El Carrizal market as a public health measure. The result was a rise in the number of women who crossed the border through unofficial points and were exposed to theft, sexual violence and, in some extreme cases, murder.

However, VAW denunciation rates filed by Haitian survivors are very low, both given their lack of knowledge regarding their rights, the faulty operation of attention services on the Dominican side of the border, and the scarcity of these services on the Haitian border. From an institutional perspective, there is a marked lack of support networks, general health services, and attention for post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition, not enough attention paid to the rights of women at the local and national level; some authorities and service providers display discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes, and there is widespread impunity for perpetrators.

8. The so-called “feminization of migration” does not necessarily mean women are migrating more than men (though this may be the case in some contexts), but rather to the fact that they often migrate on their own and as the main family providers (UN-INSTRAW, 2008).

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative methods of research with the purpose of generating a deep understanding of the different contexts of VAW. Relevant literature, both theoretical and empirical, was reviewed prior to fieldwork, which was carried out during the second half of May, 2011. This entailed the close collaboration of the Dominican NGO *Colectiva Mujer y Salud* (CMS) which, after the Haiti earthquake, has made a special effort to extend services to the population, and the research team of OBMICA, which comprises multilingual researchers specialized in gender, migration, sexual and reproductive health, and development issues.

During fieldwork, the OBMICA research team carried out:

- 28 interviews with key stakeholders, particularly local authorities, institutions and organizations that provide care, guidance, prevention and support services to survivors of violence; 20 were carried out in Elías Piña, one in Jimaní, one in San Juan de la Maguana, and six in Belladère.
- 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Haitian women and girls with experience or knowledge of VAW; 16 were conducted in Creole and two in Spanish, with women and girls residing in or in transit through Comendador. Out of the 18 women and children, nine have resided in Comendador since before the earthquake, seven were displaced by the earthquake, and two are women in transit who live in Haiti and sell things on the border market. Eight of the interviewees are domestic workers, five are market sellers, four are foster daughters, and one is a housewife/hospital user.
- Work with two focus groups of Haitian survivors of VAW; 12 women participated in each of these groups. Participants in the first group were migrants from Belladère, Lascahobas, Mibalen and surrounding areas, live in La Pastilla and Galindo, and are market sellers and domestic workers. Participants in the second group were almost all displaced after the earthquake in Port au Prince and live most precariously: they are laundresses or do agricultural work for RD\$ 50 per day; almost all of them reside in the Los Corositos district.

- Observation visits to the border market, the border crossing point in Carrizal, and a nightlife district where several Haitian sex workers labor.

Some of the women involved were identified through previous contacts of the CMS; others were identified through “snowball sampling,” in which some people referred others. Interviewed women were selected through the qualitative research strategy of “purposeful selection,”⁹ in which certain activities, people and places are chosen (in this case, women who work in the market or in family homes, displaced girls who have been “adopted”) to provide information that may not necessarily be acquired randomly, especially on a subject as sensitive as VAW. All the names used in this report were changed to protect the identity of the interviewees and avoid aggravating the situations of violence to which they are exposed.

In the last part of the study a “findings” workshop was held before producing the final version, both to validate the report and collect suggestions that would lead to research follow-up. The workshop comprised 22 local actors from Belladère and Elías Piña and 20 Haitian women. During July and August of 2011, researchers carried out two training workshops with the women; these workshops confirmed the findings and began to develop a basic agenda to improve the violence situation in the new market to be built in El Carrizal. At the same time, two working meetings with authorities and relevant local actors in Elías Piña were convened to detect cases of violence in the market and the border crossing, identify action points and strengthen the reference system in cases of violence.

Most of the interviews, as well as work with the two focal groups, were recorded in MP3 files; partial transcripts and summaries in Spanish were subsequently made to facilitate analysis. The findings were compared to those of related studies, so as to achieve a better understanding of the problem. Originally, the intent was to visit the village of Belladère, in Lascahobas Arrondissement, in the Central Plateau department of Haiti, to complement the information from a cross-border perspective. However, we were not able to cross the border during the fieldwork period given outbreaks of violence by political activists who

9. Maxwell 2005: 88.

disputed the results of recent elections there. In the month preceding fieldwork, they set fire to the Town Hall, the Prosecutor's Office in Belladère, and the old hospital, where two Haitian doctors and their children died. To compensate for this limitation, several key actors of the Belladère civil society were invited to Comendador; six of them were interviewed. We could not locate any state representatives for Belladère; Apparently, most had escaped to Port au Prince, which seriously hinders transiting women's access to attention in cases of violence.

We also undertook a special effort to identify and locate sex workers and migrant women who had been victims of sex trafficking. Unfortunately, access to these populations was limited, so the information gathered on these issues is restricted to that reported by others knowledgeable in the subject.

THE VULNERABILITIES AND CAPACITIES OF HAITIAN MIGRANT WOMEN

Interviewee profiles include cross-border and transit merchants on the Comendador border market; women displaced after the January 2010 earthquake, especially those living in host homes; paid domestic workers; girls displaced after the January 2010 earthquake who have been taken in as foster daughters.

Profiled migrant women have very low incomes; for example, domestic workers earn RD\$ 1000 - RD\$ 1500 per month, and many say that they are starving. Some have symptoms of poor health (e.g., extreme thinness, goiter) and several suffer from emotional trauma because of their experiences during the earthquake and other forms of violence.

As is often the case with terrestrial borders, there is ongoing movement between Haiti and the Dominican Republic (this includes drug and weapon trafficking and smuggling in general). There can be a tendency, in these migration dynamics, to underestimate the difficulties faced by the people crossing both formally and informally, especially given the gender-bias suffered by Haitian migrant women.

Illicit human trafficking is a punishable offense, but not necessarily a violation of human rights or VAW in itself, since many choose

to hire traffickers or bribe officials because they lack knowledge of or access to legal migration options. However, the secrecy in which traffickers operate creates opportunities for VAW, including deception by swindlers and drivers, rape on the road¹⁰ and human trafficking. This contradicts Dilla's statement that the border is only a place of passage for this kind of traffic without any more implications than the police and military tensions it generates (2008: 31). If we take into account the risks and the lack of protection human trafficking posits for migrant women, this means the border is a space for a range of potential violations of their human rights.¹¹

In this context, women and girls can choose between different options, but their actions are circumscribed by a wide spectrum of vulnerabilities. The tactics they employ do not radically alter their circumstances, nor do they evidence their situation to those who should guarantee their rights; this fosters civil insecurity exacerbated by gender bias.

Women are at a disadvantage, among other reasons, because they are traveling surrounded by structural violence and the intersectionality of the oppression to which they are subjected; given that violence is not addressed as a holistic problem in both societies on the island, breaking its vicious circle becomes very difficult. In a *sui generis* border context, there is a variety of perpetrators of violence against women (mostly men, both Haitian and Dominican).

According to individual interviews across two focus groups, women distinguished between the violence that occurs in private contexts and that which takes place in more public areas such as border crossings and the border market. According to Haitian sociologist Daniele Magloire (2004) and based on the results of the last Household Survey in Haiti in

10. Cassandra is a young woman who canceled her plans to pursue her city dream; she told us about the abuses of a trafficker who lived in her neighborhood: "There is a man who was going to the capital with a woman and when they got halfway there he raped her and left her there. That happens all the time because his job is to take people to the capital. That man lived there around Barraco; now I don't know where he lives. He is Haitian, about 25 years old."

11. For a more detailed discussion of the factors contributing to trafficking in Haitian women, see OBMICA's 2010 study, *Mujeres en el camino: La trata de mujeres haitianas en República Dominicana tras el terremoto en Haití* (Wooding, Tejada, Santillán Idoate y Boyer).

2000, domestic violence is accepted and, often, even seen as justified.¹² Kathia, a survivor of domestic violence with a well-interiorized view of couple transactions, speaks of abuse in the following terms:

I would say that if the man goes to work and you don't cook for him, do not do his laundry and go around with other men, I'd say he'd be right to beat and insult you... [But he did it] because he likes to mistreat women. Because I didn't do anything, I haven't done bad things [infidelity]. When he goes out the laundry is done, when he gets home from work I cook at 12 and keep food for him. I'd say he thinks women have no value.

Aggressions committed by criminals or the armed forces cause more protests than those committed by regular citizens, according to focus groups in our study where discussing experiences of forced sex imposed by husbands lead to nervous laughter.¹³

Although women may not have a complete awareness of the full range of their rights, they have a sense of personal dignity (*Tout moun se moun*)¹⁴ and what constitutes violation in the public sphere. The interviews revealed attitudes toward Haitian women and the prevalent socio-cultural context in neighboring countries. They expect men to maintain the family and remain faithful; in return, they wash and cook for them, are sexually available, obey them (they do not go out on the street), and remain faithful (they do not prostitute themselves). Interviewees saw relationships as transactional: if he wants something with her, she expects to be given some panties, for example, or something to fix her hair.

When they find themselves in a precarious economic situation without the support of their husband, Haitian women sometimes resort to strategies such as sterilization (which is more feasible in the Dominican Republic, since the public health system is more easily accessed than in Haiti), prostitution (in which case the border area is the best because of militarization and the greater demand this implies), or finding another

12. Magloire, Danièle. 2004. "La violence à l'égard des femmes: Une violation constante des droits de la personne," *Chemins Critiques*, vol. V, n° 2., p. 92.

13. This agrees with Magloire (2004).

14. "Every person is a person" in Haitian Creole.

man to provide financial support (since their options have expanded having crossed the border, he may be Dominican). These strategies are not only ineffective to end economic violence in their daily lives, they sometimes put them at higher risk of suffering other forms of violence.

For Daphnee, for example, getting together with a Dominican to support her children was not an effective strategy; the new partner refused to take responsibility for the child when she was pregnant, and even when the baby was born. Currently, he only pays the rent of the house he shares with her. According to Daphnee:

I was so ashamed because when I gave birth he didn't even bring clothes for the child... it is at the hospital that they gave me some things... so far, he won't buy clothes for the child. I have another child with me and he won't buy anything, boy goes around barefoot because he doesn't have sandals to wear and I can't work because this child cries too much. I told to him and his children that I wasn't going to stay with him, that I was going to leave him.

However, Daphnee, who lost her family and home in the earthquake, has not been able to leave this situation of violence because she has no help and does not have anyone with whom to leave her children to go to work. She also believes economic and verbal violence from her current partner are preferable to forced sexual labor, which the people at the house where she lived in Comendador attempted to force her into.

The legal provision of “payment for milk” was established in the Dominican Republic in 2006, in Law 136-06, and in Haiti in 2007 within a legislative framework promoted by the Ministry for the Status of Women and their Rights (MCFDF in French).¹⁵ In spite of these measures, the possibility of demanding rights is slippery in such a weak institutional context (both in Haiti and the Dominican Republic); this difficulty is accentuated in a foreign country. Given these circumstances, it is remarkable that interviewed Haitian women actually recognize and denounce this situation as violence and are beginning to demand their rights, although the lack of support in terms of upkeep is

15. Wooding, Rivas and Séjour (2008).

only recognized as a violation of their children's rights and not a violation of their right to live free of violence.

Haitian women migrants who are on the border and who manage to leave their home to help their families are mainly found in three workplaces considered female labor niches: in the Comendador market as sellers; in others' homes as domestic workers; and in brothels, engaged in prostitution. In each of these three cases and considering their poverty, the color of their skin and their unfavorable immigration status,¹⁶⁷ their vulnerability to male abuse is evident: they are preyed upon by collectors in the border market (an exclusively male niche), customers, prostitution clients, or at the home of third-parties, where many times men assume that domestic workers must agree to sexual harassment or violence. For example, sexual violence is the most common type of violence reported by domestic workers in this study. This includes sexual harassment, offers of money in exchange for sex, and rape, usually by the employer or another male member of the household.

In Elias Piña, domestic work is one of the main occupational options for migrant women. According to the explanation of the provincial prosecutor:

The cost of domestic service has increased. Now, a Dominican will not willingly work for 4,000 or 5,000 pesos. On the other hand, people who are passing, who are illegal, tend to be more vulnerable as employees. For this reason, many prefer illegal foreign labor, because they understand that, for example, illegal women will not demand benefits.¹⁷

Therefore, extra-legality creates conditions in which female migrant workers may suffer a variety of abuses. Not surprisingly, the domestic workers interviewed in this study, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, reported abuses of various kinds, including unfair dismissal, withholding of payment, wages well below the minimum, extended workdays, accusations of theft and, above all, sexual violence.

16. Technically, the new 2004 general immigration law of the Dominican Republic recognizes border workers, but since regulations for this law were recently approved (October 2011), this recognition is somewhat academic has yet to be applied in practice.

17. Interview carried out at the Office of the Prosecutor in Elias Piña, May 18, 2011.

Even in cases where the worker is received as “one of the family,” this same informality and pseudo-affective relationships, especially with the lady of the house, can inhibit the worker from claiming her labor rights or denouncing any cases of abuse. Haitian domestic workers are particularly vulnerable in the workspace because of the invisibility of their work along with their immigration status, language barriers and extant prejudice against them (Wooding and Sangro, 2011).

THE INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

The reference system—also known as the “critical path”—encompasses all those institutions and organizations meant to preventing or intervene in cases of domestic violence and VAW. This system provides the steps that must be followed by a woman caught in a situation of violence to find support, as well as the institutional response that she receives.¹⁸ According to Law 24-97, this route begins with the police, then moves on to the Prosecutor’s Office and the medical examiner, to then be addressed in court. However, this process has been amended by the Criminal Procedure Code.

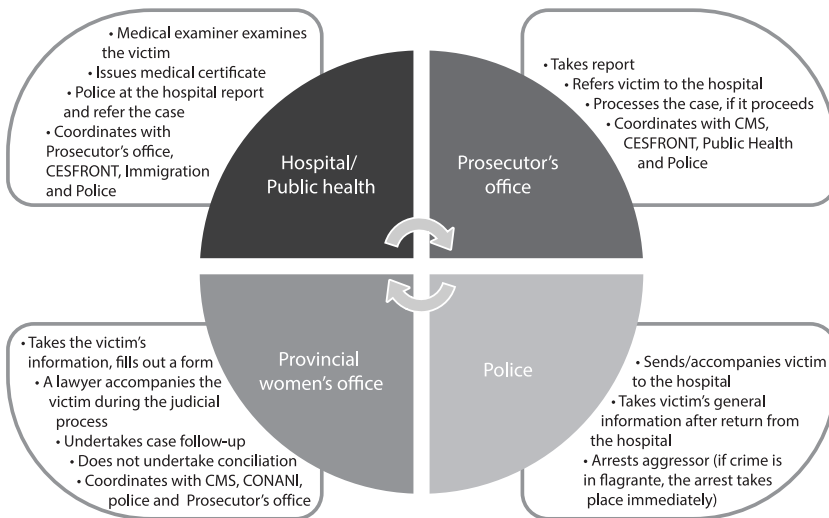
In Elías Piña, the reference system involves several state players (the police, the Prosecutor’s Office, the Hospital, the Provincial Directorate of Health and the Provincial Office for Women) and some non-state others such as the CMS, the Jano Siksé Frontier Network and Plan International. The following chart contains information raised through interviews and meetings, within the framework of this study, about the current workings of the system of reference in Elías Piña.

Additionally, CMS provides legal assistance and emotional support to survivors who come to their office; the Jano Siksé Frontier Network monitors cases of human rights violations and accompanies the victim in her search for conflict resolution. Plan International also has a project of domestic violence prevention which imparts awareness-raising workshops in the neighborhoods of Comendador, as well as in other municipalities of Elías Piña.

18. Shader (1998).

The testimonies of the interviewees confirmed the decision taken by many women not to denounce the violence against them. Some immigration status-related motives for not reporting include:

- They cannot speak Spanish (they only arrived recently).
- They do not know the system and, therefore, do not know where to go.
- They believe that they have no rights because they are Haitian.
- They come from a very weak institutional context.
- They fear repatriation: their own (which, according to the Prosecutor, is not carried out), and that of perpetrator (which is done in coordination with the Directorate-General for migration and CESFRONT)



We have the example of Nicole, a 25-year-old migrant who suffered domestic violence at the hands of her partner, a Haitian national; when she arrived in Elías Piña she never denounced him, because she had recently arrived and did not speak Spanish. She says she did not know where to go, and had no family to support her in that town. Another example is Jorelyne, a 16-year-old domestic worker who has not de-

nounced the labor abuses or sexual harassment perpetrated by her employer because she does not speak Spanish or know her labor rights. Bibine did not denounce her employer for lack of payment because she believes she does not have any rights, being Haitian; she says: “I didn’t go to the police because I am Haitian and she is Dominican.” In situations of violence, they simply change employers, hoping to receive better treatment in another house.

As for fear of repatriation, it should be noted that survivors fear their own as well as that of the aggressor who, once back in the home country, can be released. In the first focal group, Kettia said: “I would like to know why... when a Haitian does something here, they do not take him to prison, but to Mibalén.” If we consider that the Colonel in charge of CESFRONT has complained that sometimes there are no Haitian authorities to receive the returnees (thereby showing the weak institutions in the neighboring country), deportation can equate to the aggressor’s unconditional release; in these circumstances, the victim has no protection against potential future attacks since, given the porosity of the Dominican-Haitian border and the corresponding ease with which people enter and leave both sides, it is likely that the aggressor will return, angry about the deportation and with an increased desire for “revenge.”

Other migrant women decide not to report violence for reasons similar to those of Dominican survivors:

- Family and/or social pressure.
- Religious beliefs.
- “Learned helplessness.”¹⁹
- Fear of the aggressor.
- Economic dependence.
- Lack of confidence in the capacity of institutions to protect them or solve the situation.

19. According to Quiroga et al. (2009: 83), “learned helplessness” is a state of resignation in which women who have been victims of violence “give up” and end up assuming aggression is an unavoidable punishment and fate.

Mirlande, a migrant²⁰ who survived 30 years of sexual, verbal, economic and physical violence as well as attempted femicide, never lodged any complaint against her husband. She decided not to report anything due to fear of her aggressor; she was also pressured by her children, until she agreed to emigrate to live with one of them rather than report to the authorities the extreme abuse to which she was subjected. According to her:

I did not denounce him because my kids didn't want me to. They told me: "If you put him in jail, the load will be on us; he does not have anyone because his family is from the hills. Leave him when you can no longer live with him. When you're up you'll have a sense of guilt, and we would have to bring him food. If you see you cannot live with dad, leave him and go live with one of your daughters... You know that when you have children with someone you don't run to the police, because there are a number of things this person can do to you; you think about it and don't take this person to court... There is a whole bunch of things they could do to you... You don't do a bunch of bad things to him because of your children, because tomorrow your children are going to see what their mom did.

A factor that complicates institutional response is the growing militarization of the border, which has intensified in recent years. In September 2006, the Dominican Republic established, by presidential decree, a new Specialized Armed Forces Unit for Border Control (Cuerpo Especializado de Seguridad Fronteriza Terrestre, CESFRONT) with mixed results, leading to some confusion regarding their responsibilities and role vis-à-vis those of long standing authorities in the area. On the Haitian side and in recent years, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has expanded its mandate to increase its presence on the Haitian-Dominican border (same as before the 2010 earthquake), also

20. Mirlande's extreme case calls into question whether she is a migrant or a candidate for asylum. In some countries, she would be able to request asylum on the basis of continuous persecution and life threats, along with the absence of state protection in the place she fled.

with mixed results.²¹ In addition, in accordance with what was observed by medical anthropologist Paul Farmer, soldiers are practically the only salaried male workers in some areas of Haiti and so become prospective partners for poor women who seek to improve their situation and that of their families in the conditions of power asymmetry that often occur in this type of relationship.²²

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Haitian women come from a fragile culture, especially regarding the enforcement of their rights; the difficulties they face in their migratory path hamper the exercise of said rights in the country of destination, in part because they don't know them and also because of the weak state of governmental institutions in the Dominican Republic.

The following table summarizes the identified types of violence faced by migrant women in the border context of Comendador-Belladère.

In terms of an institutional response, we analyzed both the reference system in cases of VAW, as well as the ongoing efforts to improve the situation of violence in the market and border crossings. Several gaps and difficulties regarding responses to VAW cases were detected. On the one hand, the Prosecutor's Office and the police reported that Haitian women hardly ever lodge complaints, that they drop cases and that it is difficult to locate aggressors given the informal conditions in which they live. On the other, the interviewed women reported indifference and discriminatory treatment by police. The Hospital and the Provincial Directorate of Health limit themselves to issuing a medical certificate for the abused victim; they do not orient her or refer her to other institutions, neither do they raise statistical information. Finally, the Provincial Office for Women has very little reach within the Haitian community; the women, in turn, are unaware of its existence.

21. On September 28, 2011, Haitian President Michel Martelly announced plans to restore the army given the imminent departure of MINUSTAH, possibly in October 2012. If this happens, the armed forces (3,500 men) will undoubtedly be present at the border, which would affect women's safety given that, instead of benefiting from soldier's protection, they often become the objects of their aggression.

22. Farmer (2003), *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human rights, and the New War on the Poor*, University of California Press.

TABLE 1:
Types of violence against women migrants, both in transit and displaced

CONTEXT	TYPE OF VIOLENCE	PERPETRATORS	SURVIVORS
Home	Physical, sexual, verbal, economic	Partner	Haitian women (migrants, both in transit and displaced)
Official border crossing: Carrizal	Improper "toll" charges, physical and verbal violence, sexual harassment	CESFRONT and guards	Women in transit
Unofficial border crossing: "through the hills"	Theft, robbery, sexual violence, homicide	Swindlers, accompanying party (family), criminals (Dominicans and Haitians in the hills), Motorists	Haitian women (migrants, both in transit and displaced)
Street	Sexual harassment, rape	Dominican and Haitian men (known or unknown)	Migrant women Displaced women
Market	Verbal, physical, sexual, "macuteo"	Collectors (all four types), sellers and collectors (only physical and verbal)	Haitian women merchants
Domestic work	Labor rights violations (lack of pay, unfair dismissal, excessive hours, pay below the minimum wage), sexual harassment, rape	Employers, men in the household	Domestic workers (migrants and displaced women)
Human trafficking	Deception, sexual violence, trafficking	Swindlers, drivers, complicit authorities	Haitian women (migrants, both in transit and displaced)
Sexual work	Forced sexual work, rape, physical violence, theft	Haitians and Dominican Swindlers, clients (Dominican and Haitian men), complicit authorities	Haitian women (migrants, both in transit and displaced), particularly young women
Repatriations	Violation of rights recognized in the Binational Protocol of Understanding of 1999 Theft of belongings	Cesfront DGM	Haitian women (migrants, both in transit and displaced) suspected of being in an irregular situation
Girls and adolescents	Domestic abuse Risk of abuse and exploitation Sexual violence	Members of host families Men in foster homes	Foster daughters <i>Restavèk</i> , young displaced women

Some efforts to improve the situation in the market and border crossing are underway. The Jano Siksé Frontier Network has done an outstanding job of calling on the relevant authorities and taking steps to improve the situation. There is also hope that several recurrent problems can be solved with the construction of the new market place, scheduled for the next few years. It is of crucial importance that migrant women organize themselves with the support of civil society, so that their voices and their interests can be heard and represented in consultations regarding the new project.

This study underscores the need for a radical change in current practices that tolerate violence against migrant women in all its manifestations, noting possible action points for some key players, including potential allies in the women's migration path. Finally, it should be noted that it is not enough to empower women regarding their rights or make states responsible for improvements to civil security, specifically in regards to VAW in the Dominican-Haitian border. First and foremost, states must devise other economic opportunities so that migrant women can straighten power asymmetries in gender relations at home, the street, and the workplace. The states must also sign and ratify Convention No. 189 (ILO/UN 2011), advocating a decent work agenda for everyone, with emphasis on domestic workers, and, in particular, migrant women working in this field.

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