FROM GENDER BASED-VIOLENCE TO

WOMEN’S VIOLENCE IN HAITI

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the conditions, incentives, and rationale that induce women victims of sexual violence to join armed groups and to become involved in community violence. Drawing on in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus group discussions collected during over one year of fieldwork in Haiti, the findings presented in this study reflect an attempt to deepen the understanding of women’s decision-making processes, the interplay between gender-based women and women’s violence, and, ultimately, the extent to which female aggression, committed in a context of armed violence, should be interpreted as a survival strategy or a deliberate choice for retaliation. Based on the empirical evidence collected, the three major factors that motivate women and girls to engage in criminal and community violence included their need to protect themselves and their families, their resentment toward state negligence and denial of their plight, and their dysfunctional desire to attain personal and social respect through retaliation. Important implications for legal and policy interventions may be derived from such an analysis. If women’s violence is to be understood as a survival strategy within the coercive context of armed violence, the current Haitian legislation that provides solely for girls’ and women’s prosecution for the offense of association with armed groups, is at the very least inadequate. Conversely, according to international humanitarian and human rights legal norms, specific programs, along the lines of those implemented in other countries affected by armed conflict, should be effectively designed to dispel women’s anger and resentment towards forms of community reconciliation as well as to adequately reintegrate them into society.
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