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Programa de  
Comercialización del IICA

**INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES**

Representation in Haiti

**Project: Analysis and Diagnosis of the Internal Marketing System for  
Agricultural Produce in Haiti  
(Document Nº 5)**

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17 LH/74

Original: English

**COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN RURAL HAITI:**

**A COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH**

**Port-au-Prince, Haiti**

**October, 1974**

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Representation in Haiti

Project: Analysis and Diagnosis of the Internal Marketing System for  
Agricultural Produce in Haiti  
(Document N° 5)

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COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN RURAL HAITI:

A COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH



Port-au-Prince, Haiti

October, 1974

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Representation in detail

Project: Analysis and Design of the Internal Marketing System for Agricultural Products in Haiti (Document No. 2)

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CONCORDIA ACTIVIDADES EN AGRICULTURA

A COMUNITAT-DESENVOLUPADA ATRAVÉS



1974-1975

October, 1974

**Project: Analysis and Diagnosis of the Internal Marketing System for  
Agricultural Produce in Haiti**  
(Document N° 5)

In 1973, the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences (IIIAS) in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Forestry of Haiti, initiated a project for the analysis and diagnosis of the internal marketing system for agricultural produce in Haiti. The project was approved by the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Forestry of Haiti and the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences. The project was implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Forestry of Haiti, the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The project was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences (IIIAS). The objectives of this project are:

1. Cooperation with national institutions to determine the problems (bottlenecks) of agricultural product marketing.
2. Create a broader understanding of the agricultural marketing system and show how the improvement of this system can help accelerate socio-economic development.

**COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN RURAL HAITI:**

1. Provide a series of studies on the marketing of human resources and institutional arrangements.
2. Provide a type of information valuable to the agricultural sector.
3. Finance several marketing assistance activities, all developed at the local level, and specific projects to improve the financing of the marketing system.

**A COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH**

The following report is the first in the series produced under the internal marketing project. It differs from the other reports in that it looks at the internal marketing system rather than only the agricultural marketing system.

**Département de l'Agriculture, des Ressources Naturelles et du Développement Rural**  
**Conseil National de Développement et de Planification**  
**Secrétairerie d'Etat du Commerce et de l'Industrie**  
**Institut de Développement Agricole et Industriel**  
**Interamerican Institute of Agricultural Sciences**  
**Ambassade du Canada**

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Administrateur de Projets

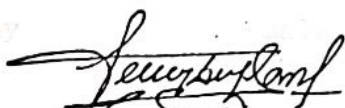


## PREFACE

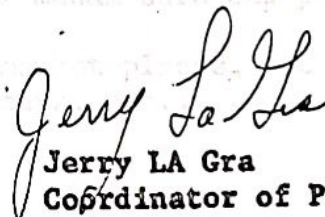
In 1973, the Interamerican Institute of Agricultural Sciences (IICA) inaugurated a Hemispheric Marketing Program as part of its new technical cooperation concept to strengthen national institutions active in the agricultural sector. One of the first activities initiated under this hemispheric program was an integrated project for the Analysis and Diagnosis of the Internal Marketing System for Agricultural Produce in Haiti. The institutions participating in this integrated project include Departement de l'Agriculture, des Ressources Naturelles et du Developpement Rural (human resources), Conseil National de Developpement et de Planification (financial resources), Institut de Developpement Agricole et Industriel (human and financial Resources), Ministry of Industry and Commerce (human and financial resources), the Canadian Embassy (financial resources) and Interamerican Institute of Agricultural Sciences (human and financial resources). The objectives of this Project include :

1. Cooperation with national institutions to diagnose the problems (bottlenecks) of agricultural product marketing.
2. Create a broader understanding of the agricultural marketing system and show how the improvement of this system can help accelerate socio-economic development.
3. Provide on-the-job training for the development of human resources and institutions in agricultural marketing.
4. Provide a base of information valuable to the agricultural sector.
5. Create a national marketing institution which will develop strategies, programs and specific projects to improve the functioning of the internal marketing system.

The following report is the fifth<sup>1)</sup> in the series produced under the integrated project mentioned above. It differs from the other reports in that it looks at the "internal trade system" rather than only the agricultural marketing system. This has proved to be a very valuable approach as it has served to broaden our understanding of the agricultural marketing system by identifying the linkages between the rural producer and the urban consumer and between the urban wholesaler and the rural consumer.



Verdy DUPLAN  
Coordinator of Project



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Coordinator of Project

1) See last page for listing of documents.



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 Coordinator of Project

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

abitâ	a rural person; someone living in the country
abitasîô	small rural community
â detay	retail
â gro	wholesale
bak	wood tray in which vendors set out their products
bal	ball; social gathering for dancing
batay kok	cockfight
boutik	small grocery store
chémê	road
commune	district under the administration of a mayor assisted by the local council
dâs	dances
dépo	warehouse; storehouse
dépo pèsônèl	storehouse where the owner is engaged in business
dépo piblik	depo where the owner is not engaged in business
dènyé jou	novena
gagè	arena where people gather to watch cockfights
gaz jon	kerosene
gro-mamit	US No 10 can containing 110.7 fluid ounces. Holds about 5 and a half half pounds of beans in Haiti
kamiô bwat	big trucks where there isn't any bench
kamiô bâ	truck with benches for transport of madam sara and passengers
kêkay	small articles sold frequently in market-places, such as pots, pans, forks and spoons, brushes, soaps, etc...
kléré	liquor made from sugarcane
komèsâ	general term for any kind of trader
kôtrôle	inspector from the Bureau des Contributions who supervise the work of the tax collector
krésô	watercress



lhuil doliv	olive oil, cooking oil
machâd	vendor
maché	marketplace
magazê	store
malâga	malanga (root crop)
mazoubel	other variety of malanga
met dépô	owner of the storehouse
pak	place where they keep the animals in the marketplace
patât	annual license
pèsèptè	tax collector
plâ	seed
pratik	permanent relationship, a regular customer
priè	prayer
proviziô	purchases for a week
proviziônè	woman who goes to the market to sell her products and buy articles for family consumption
rèjim	stalk
révâdez	retailer
savó lesiv	laundry soap
sèkrète	assistant to the driver in a car, his principal role is to collect money from the passengers
.....	a person who purchases stock for another person with the latter's capital
sèvis lwa	voodoo dances
sik rouj	brown cane sugar
sou marè	a person who purchases stock for another person with the latter's capital
tabak	tobacco
tonel	small house made with palms and bamboo. It has no wall
vân â kachèt	to sell in a place other than the marketplace to avoid taxes.
vèy	wake



## COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN RURAL HAITI : A COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH

## I. INTRODUCTION

This report is submitted in the hope that it will illuminate certain aspects of the internal trade system <sup>1/</sup> of the Republic of Haiti. It is a field report in the sense that it will not present a cogent theoretical argument nor refer extensively to the existing literature concerning marketing and commercial activities in Haiti. Rather, it will attempt to describe, as simply as possible, the distributive system for comestibles as it is related to the commercial activities and consumption patterns of a small group of rural Haitians. While there is a growing literature concerning certain essential sub-systems of Haiti's internal market system (e.g., systems of measurement, the systematic use of capital, a typology of market-places, the government tax system) (1,3,5), and an excellent recent paper describing the distribution of a single agricultural product (Murray & Alvarez in this series) (7), this paper will concentrate on the ways in which the entire system of internal trade (including the internal market system) is understood and utilized by the various types of social actors within

1/ The phrase "internal trade system" as used herein will refer to the system of distribution for comestibles ultimately consumed within the Republic of Haiti. This would include some essential imports such as laundry soap (savô lésiy) and kerosene (gaz jon) as well as local agricultural and husbandry products. Since many of these items may travel paths of distribution wholly outside the market-place, the phrase "internal market system" has been abandoned as misleading when used in reference to this overall distributive system. The purchase and sale of cash crops destined for foreign markets, and commerce in imported luxury items consumed primarily by the middle and upper classes, are excluded from the scope of this paper.

The Laubach orthography will be used for the transcription of Haitian Creole.



COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN RURAL HAITI : A COMMUNITY-CENTRED APPROACH

it. The various trading activities of the residents of a single rural community form the focus of the study. A description of their participation in the system of internal trade may shed some light on the system itself -- not as a fixed structural entity which may be adequately described by a set of statistics, but as a versatile tool which is employed strategically by rural Haitians in an attempt to realize a cash profit while inadvertently they carry on the essential task of distribution in an unmechanized, undercapitalized economy.

The research upon which this report is based was conducted over a 10-week period during the summer of 1974. The researcher lived in a community located in the approximate middle of Haiti's southern peninsula, about a 30-minute walk from the main road toward the north and about 50 minutes by foot from the site of the regional market center at Fond-Negres (Map). Because of the limitations of time and personnel, no attempt was made to gather statistically reliable data concerning commerce. Rather, the research was based on intensive observation and interviews with a small number of individuals involved in various trading activities. The data presented here, then, is based on a small sample; but in its very specificity it may suggest further lines for more generalized and generalizable research projects.

## II. ARENAS OF COMMERCE : THE NODES OF THE TRADING NETWORK

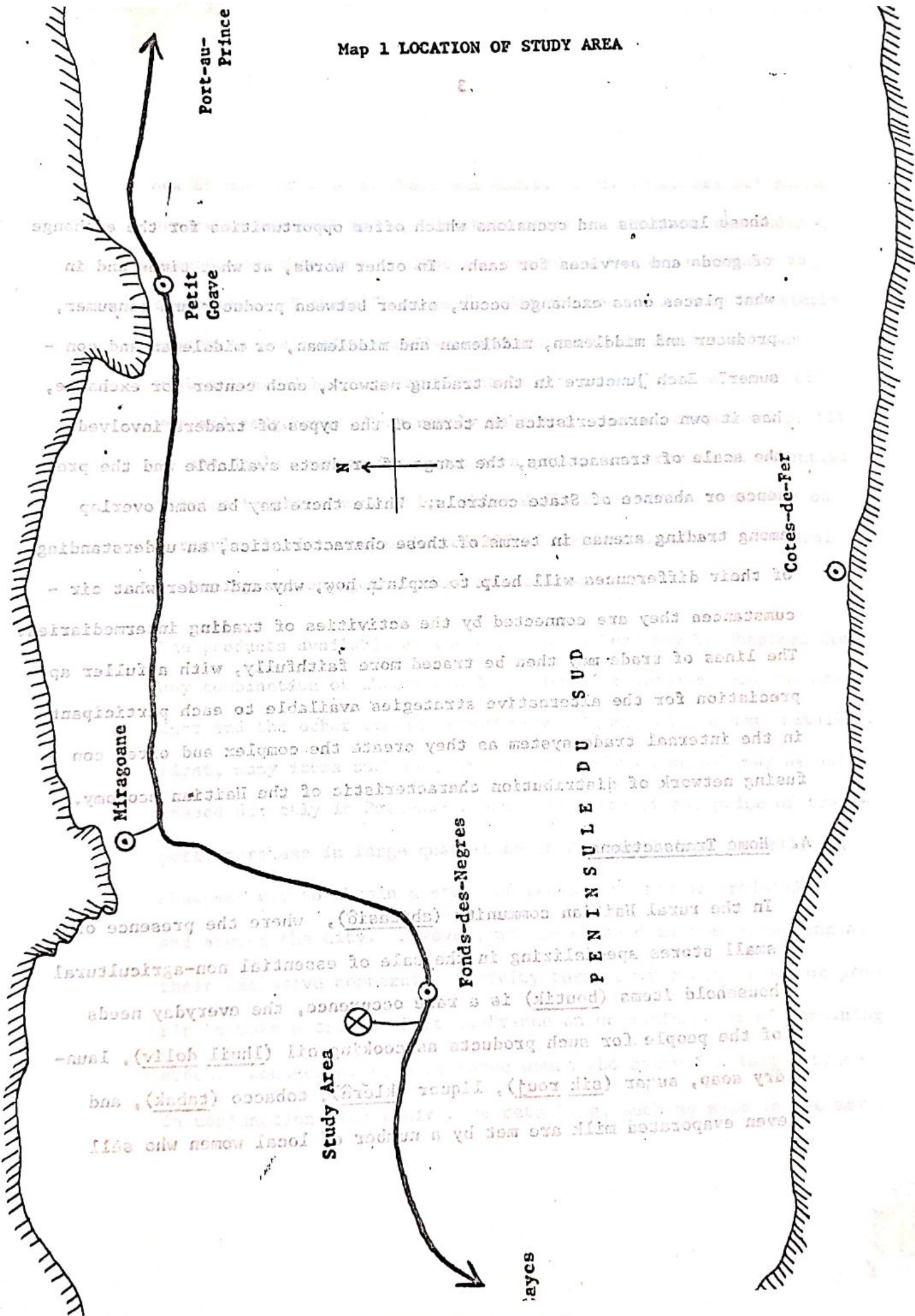
In describing the trading network our first task will be to isolate

---

1/ A US University graduate student in Anthropology fluent in Creole

Map 1 LOCATION OF STUDY AREA

GOLFE DE LA GOYAVE



aycs



those locations and occasions which offer opportunities for the exchange of goods and services for cash. In other words, at what times and in what places does exchange occur, either between producer and consumer, producer and middleman, middleman and middleman, or middleman and consumer? Each juncture in the trading network, each center for exchange, has its own characteristics in terms of the types of traders involved, the scale of transactions, the range of products available and the presence or absence of State controls. While there may be some overlap among trading arenas in terms of these characteristics, an understanding of their differences will help to explain how, why and under what circumstances they are connected by the activities of trading intermediaries. The lines of trade may then be traced more faithfully, with a fuller appreciation for the alternative strategies available to each participant in the internal trade system as they create the complex and often confusing network of distribution characteristic of the Haitian economy.

#### A. Home Transactions

In the rural Haitian community (abitasiô), where the presence of small stores specializing in the sale of essential non-agricultural household items (boutik) is a rare occurrence, the everyday needs of the people for such products as cooking oil (lhuile d'oliv), laundry soap, sugar (sik rouj), liquor (klérê), tobacco (tabak), and even evaporated milk are met by a number of local women who sell



one or more of them at their own homes. These women are not store owners in any real sense, for their stock is irregular and undisplayed, and they do not allot any considerable time or energy to the conduct of their "business". For the most part they are simply acting as small-time retailers operating out of their own homes with a limited but regular clientele composed of friends, relatives and neighbors. They rarely make more than a few pennies profit in any day's transactions, yet as a group they provide an essential service to the community by making daily necessities available on a regular basis. An estimated 20% of the households of one rural community are engaged in this type of commerce.

The products available at these retail outlets may be obtained from any combination of three possible sources, depending upon the product and the other trading activities, if any, of the home retailer. First, many items such as laundry soap and cooking oil may be purchased directly in Port-au-Prince. In spite of the price of transport, purchase in large quantities in Port-au-Prince is still the cheapest way to obtain a stock of goods imported or produced in and around the city. However, no one engaged in home retailing as their exclusive commercial activity turns over enough stock or profit to make a trip to Port-au-Prince an economical way of obtaining stock. Consequently, only those women who conduct a larger trade in conjunction with their home retailing, such as sale in the mar-

market-place or Madam Sara activities, and those who are fortunate enough to have a cooperative friend or relative engaged in such activities, can consistently obtain their stock in Port-au-Prince. Understandably, these more fortunate women are also those among the home retailers who realize the greatest returns on their investments, conducting either a larger trade in terms of volume/sale or a retail trade with a slightly higher profit margin.

As they increase their volume/sale ratio these women become intermediaries selling à gro as well as à déray (for example, a gallon rather than a quart of klérê, or a gro-mamit rather than a cupful of sugar). In fact, they often sell to other, smaller-scale home retailers. These smaller-scale traders constitute the bulk of the home retailers. They purchase their stock locally at the home of their larger-scale counterparts, in the market-place, or in wholesale stores (magazê) in nearby Fond-des-Negres. These women often limit their commercial activities to home retailing, but may also resell their wares in different areas when the opportunity arises.

Finally, goods offered for sale in the home may be the products of household land and labor. Tobacco sold à déray at home may come from the family's own harvest. Last season's harvests also provide one of the most important of home-sold items -- seed for planting (plâ) this year's crops. Many households will store away



enough of the previous year's crop -- of millet, corn, beans, etc -- to insure a surplus of seed when planting time comes around again. At the beginning of a particular planting season prices are usually at their peak, with demand outstripping supply, and the home retailer who has seed available is able to turn a quick profit in a matter of a week or two with no cash outlay.

Home retailing in this latter instance is made even more attractive by the fact that it is tax-free. Individual retail transactions are never taxed when they take place at home, and a yearly license (patât) for selling seed is either unrequired by the State or unnecessary because of the difficulties of effective control. Licenses are required, however, for most other products sold at home. In fact, some respondents reported paying a yearly licensing fee for each product sold at home. It was not learned whether this is by law or simply the local tax collectors interpretation of the law, but which ever it still leads to some interesting maneuvers designed to minimize the fees paid to the State.

It is believed, probably correctly, that a woman selling three products at her home will pay less in license fees than the combined total of three women each selling one of the three products. In one instance, at least, the eldest female head of a household held a patât for the sale of four products, only one of which she actually traded. Commerce in the other three was conducted by two other women, one a member of the same household and one a relative whose

home was in another community entirely. These two women thereby avoided paying the base fee for a commercial license of any kind, contributing only a part of the cost of a single "joint" license. Sales were made for the non-resident woman in her absence by anyone who happened to be around and was competent to conduct business

(This is more generally the case for all home retailers -- household members and/or relatives and friends may act for them, thereby maximizing sales at no cost to the businesswoman).

It might be noted here that the small scale of most of this home commerce should in no way belie its importance to the functioning of the total internal trade system. Even the researcher interested primarily in the large-scale trading activities of the Madam Sara would do well to remember that it is through small home retail outlets such as those described above that a good part of the rural Madam Sara's return trip commerce is ultimately distributed. And, as will become clearer below, the Madam Sara of the Fond-des-Negres region, in contrast to those studied by Murray and Alvarez (7), conduct a vigorous return trip trade which in turn encourages and supports their better-known function as suppliers of rural produce to urban consumers. In the absence of the rural, small home retailer who, (though sometimes quite removed in the trading-chain from the larger scale trader) must have a considerable effect upon the salability and profitability of commodities originating in Port-au-Prince, the



rural market for city-based goods might become constricted to the point that the Madam Sara's return trip trade was rendered either too time-consuming or insufficiently lucrative to be continued. Since a relatively high and certain profit margin on return trip goods often contributes much to the success of the Madam Sara's entire trading venture, the depletion or constriction of this market might conceivably discourage at least some travelling intermediaries from continuing with any of their commercial activities. <sup>1/</sup>

Also, as had been alluded to above, the Madam Sara who also sells at her home may in fact underwrite her trading expeditions and increase the volume of her commerce with profits derived from the relatively effortless and relatively high-return "sideline" which home retailing represents. It might also be speculated that the incipient Madam Sara might finance her first tentative forays as a travelling intermediary with the capital accumulated from successful home retailing. Though this was not specifically researched, it seems reasonable to assume that this relatively less complex less time-consuming and undercapitalized activity could well serve as a training and proving ground for the developing skills of the future travelling intermediary.

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<sup>1/</sup> Although the causal factors were different (having to do with rising wholesale prices for city-based goods rather than a constriction of the rural market), several instances have been observed in which a decrease in the profitability for return trip trade provoked discussion of the abandonment of trading activities, general discouragement with respect to the possibilities for continuing success and, in at least one case, the suspension of trips to and from Port-au-Prince.

Finally, for the Madam Sara who must temporarily suspend her travelling activities, for whatever reason, home retailing offers an opportunity to continue in some form of commerce, albeit less profitable, and maintain or increase her operating capital so as to be able to re-enter her more important role at the center of the internal trade system. <sup>1/</sup>

Thus, the interested researcher and policy-maker would do well to remember that the network of trade being described here is not simply a series of independent transactions linking producer to consumer, but a complex skein of relationships, opportunities and experiences each strand of which can never be adequately unravelled without reference to its totality.

Having concluded this discussion of home retailing, it might also be noted that another kind of transaction, at the opposite end of the distributive cycle, may also take place in the same location.

That is, of course, the sale of agricultural produce from the producer to an intermediary as the first link in a chain which ultimately leads to the urban consumer. While Murray and Alvarez (7) have emphasized this type of transaction as an important aspect of the Madam Sara's activities, it seems to be of much less signi-

<sup>1/</sup> This possibility raises more complex questions concerning the relationship of Madam Sara activities to rural fertility rates as mediated by the opportunity costs of childbearing, an issue mentioned by Murray and Alvarez (4, p.35) but as yet inadequately explored.



finance in the community under consideration here. In any case, this problem will be more appropriately reviewed in conjunction with a fuller discussion of the community's Madam Sara.

#### B. Public Occasions

Similar to home retailing in scale, retailing at public and semi-public occasions differs in several important respects from the type of commerce described above. The rhythm of Haitian rural life is punctuated by a continuing series of weekly and special events which draw large crowds together for the purposes of recreation and/or worship. Weekly events include Sunday worship at the local Catholic church and cockfights (batay kòk) held regularly every Friday, Saturday and Sunday afternoon at privately-owned local arenas (gagè). Special events include secular vodu dances (dâs) popular music dances (bal), wakes (vèy), novena (dènyé jou) and voodoo services (sèvis lwa; priè). The presence of a considerable number of potential consumers (up to 250-300 people may attend such events) in a particular place at a particular time encourages the commercial interests of local small-time retailers (revâdèz). It is not uncommon to find 25-30 machâd setting up their trays (bak) on the periphery of a gagè or the coconut palm leaf and bamboo shelters (tonèl) which characterize a party or a sèvis lwa at a private home.

Some of these occasions provide an opportunity for the sale of staple crops (rice, millet, corn, beans) and such necessities as sugar and cooking oil. Adult women of the household will often replenish their weekly supplies of such basic commodities on off-market-days by sending a child to the church or cock-ring to purchase needed items. A greater bulk of the trade on such occasions, however, appears to be focussed on the immediate needs of the participants and spectators at the event. In effect, many machâd limit themselves to the sale of refreshments to those who have come to worship, wager, or simply watch. Such refreshments include kléré, biscuits, candies, soft drinks and even prepared meat, especially pork. Tobacco and cigarettes are also available.

The bulk of the machâd involved in this trade are professionals who regularly frequent weekly cockfights, church services, etc... This may be their sole commercial activity or an adjunct to their retail trade at home and/or in the market-place. Furthermore, such public occasions provide the casual machâd with a suitable arena for the sale of an unexpected but small surplus crop or the meat from a dead or butchered animal. Such retailing is in many ways preferable for the casual amateur in that it requires less travelling and is less competitive than market-place trade. Also, it may be conducted at almost any time during the week. The sale of prepared meat in small quantities, in particular, is especially



attractive, for it often insures a greater cash profit, albeit at the expense of a high labor input, than the sale of an animal to a butcher or révâdèz.

Items sold at such public events are generally purchased locally, usually in the market-place or at the home of a large-scale home retailer. Staple crops and tobacco may often be part of the household's own harvest. Biscuits and candies of a certain type are produced in quantity by a few local businesswomen and sold à gro to machâd who later market them at such events, often sitting right next to the producers themselves. A smaller proportion of the items come directly from Port-au-Prince, since the Madam Sara of the community are rarely if ever involved directly in this commercial activity.

The taxation system seems ill-defined, at least in the minds of these révâdèz, as well as generally ill-enforced. There are no taxes on individual or daily transactions. Community members explain this by pointing out that these events take place on non-State-controlled land, in contrast to the public markets. Yet the case of the Port-au-Prince depots to be described below raises some questions about this explanation, since the depots are privately owned yet, perhaps the most heavily taxed centers of the entire internal trade system. Regardless of the status of the law

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1/ The market tax was eliminated by Presidential decree on Sept. 11, 1974

concerning these daily transactions in the interior, however, it is clear that enforcement would be almost impossible and, at present, is non-existent. Yearly patat are probably required yet rarely held by these women, except for those whose commercial activities are wider ranging and include regular sales of the same types of products in or near the market-place. Again this situation is probably attributable to enforcement problems.

### C. The Markets

The market-place itself is certainly the best-studied and perhaps the most important of all Haitian commercial institutions, at least with respect to rural life. Market-places are sites at which large numbers of people regularly gather expressly for the purpose of purchase and sale. Almost the entire range of produce, livestock and material possessions characteristic of Haitian rural life are offered for sale in the market-place throughout the course of a year. Agricultural produce at all stages of processing from freshly harvested to dried, salted or cooked; livestock and animal products; manufactured goods; cloth and clothing; leather and shoes; herbs and remedies -- all are to be found in any reasonably sized market-place on any given market day. It is primarily in the markets and their immediate environs that the rural Haitian woman



buys what she and her family will consume in the course of a few days or a week (provizio), and where she attempts to sell at a profit much of what her family has produced and will not or can not consume themselves. This is the core, the *raison d'etre*, of every Haitian market-place. Yet around this core of activity related to the daily needs of the Haitian household has everywhere grown a mass of other commercial pursuits. These have flourished because the Haitian market is not simply a location, but an event -- a specified, regular period of time during which people congregate for the purpose of satisfying their consumer needs by purchase and/or for the purpose of making a profit by sale. The extent to which various kinds of commercial activities have grown in particular market-places is what differentiates them one from the other and determines the degree of their importance relative to the larger distributive network governing the flow of goods between rural and urban areas throughout the country.

Since the community under study is located almost directly between a major regional market center of recognized national importance and a smaller local market-place, both types will be examined. It will be shown, however, that the local market-place, when properly viewed, is by no means as unimportant in the national picture as has sometimes been claimed or implied in the literature.

<sup>1</sup> Daily market taxes were eliminated by presidential decree on September 11, 1974. For more information on the tax system and how it functioned, see Document 4 in the same series "Analyse du Système de Taxation..."



The basic tax system for these two southern markets is fairly simple.

There are two kinds of fees imposed upon marketing activities :

<sup>1/</sup>  
 yearly license payments and daily taxes (1). Yearly licenses are required of all retailers (révâdèz) dealing in other than agricultural produce, including retailers of tobacco. The retail trade in agricultural produce is carried on by members of the primary producer's household as well as by local révâdèz, and hence enforcement of licensing requirements is difficult in terms of distinguishing professionals from casual sellers. It is not known if the small-scale sale of agricultural produce requires a license by law, but it is clear that a great percentage of women engaged in such trade do so without a license. Larger-scale travelling intermediaries dealing in any commodity (agricultural or non-agricultural) are required to obtain a yearly license. Licenses are renewable each October and fees seem to vary with respect to products sold and scale of commercial activity.

Daily taxes are of two types: taxes on sellable stock and taxes on pack animals used to transport stock. Taxes are levied on all sellers operating within the market-place on the market-day, and in some instances on those selling along the major paths leading to the market. Individual transactions are not taxed; rather, a woman offering produce for sale will be taxed according to the estimate value of her stock. Daily taxes for sellers of non-agri-

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<sup>1/</sup> Daily market taxes were eliminated by presidential decree on September 11, 1974. For more information on the tax system and how it functioned, see Document # 4 in the same series "Analyse du Système de Taxation..."



cultural products seem to be fixed in the same way. Buyers are not taxed in general, but the Madam Sara buying wholesale in the market-place must pay a tax levied on her purchases. Taxes on beasts of burden entering the market are fixed according to the type of animal (donkeys: .30 gde.; mules and horses: .40 gde.).

These general remarks hold for both the large regional market - center and the smaller local market -- in theory. In practice, however, as will be pointed out below, the possibilities for complexity and variation within this system are staggering.

### III. RURAL MARKETS STUDIED

#### A. Fond-des-Negres Market

The market at Fond-des-Negres is located on the main road through the southern peninsula, about halfway between Port-au-Prince and Les Cayes. Because of its location it has developed into a major regional market center -- certainly one of the largest in all of Haiti. Tuesday is the major market day at Fond-des-Negres and each week its market-place becomes the nexus of trade networks often stretching as far west as Les Cayes and as far east as Port-au-Prince, and Pont l'Estere north of the capital.

The market-place itself is in no way clearly delimited, and any

see the document in this same series "None of influence of the Fond-des-Negres market".

estimate of its size or the number of people involved in trade within it on any given day can at best be a loose approximation.

The central market-place area is about 8,000 square meters in area.

This figure includes an area somewhat larger than 1,000 square

meters which serves as the market's pak, an open field where pack

animals may be tethered. A large ravine, formed within the last

15 years, cuts right through the market-place, depleting its total

surface area by perhaps 500 square meters.

Certainly the bulk of individual transactions by number take place

within this central market-place area. In the course of a single

market day as many as 2,000 - 2,500 people may pass through the

market-place for the purpose of either purchase or sale. The peak

hours of activity within the market-place fall between 8 a.m. and

10 a.m., with a tapering off until 1 p.m. or 2 p.m., after which

time trading virtually ceases.

A fuller understanding of the scope and range of commercial acti-

ivities which have grown up around the Fond-des-Negres market day,

however, must begin with the realization that commerce is by no

means limited to the area designated as part of the market-place

itself (maché). All the types of transactions represented in the

market-place also may occur on any one of a number of paths or

roads (chémé) leading to the market.<sup>1/</sup> This is particularly true of

1/ See the Document in this same series "Zone of Influence of the Fond-des-Negres market".



the main road through the south. While the market-place occupies a stretch of about 180 meters along this road, the road itself, for at least a mile in each direction, is filled with people moving to and from the market-place and conducting transactions all along the route. The same may be said of the two other major pathways leading directly to the market from the north and, to a lesser extent, of the countless smaller routes that feed into the main road from all directions. In fact it might be speculated on the basis of numerous interviews with locally-based Madam Sara and a consideration of the objective advantages of buying on the paths rather than in the market-place proper, in terms of price differentials and tax avoidance, that some of the most important trading with respect to the national distributive network takes place wholly outside the market-place per se.

It must be reiterated, then, that the Fond-des-Nègres market is not simply a market-place but, perhaps more importantly, it is a market day. That is, the presence of the market-place at Fond-des-Nègres insures the regular weekly occurrence of an opportunity situation in which commercial transactions may be readily consummated. It is a time when people are prepared to buy and sell in any of a number of different locations, often without ever enter-

ing the market-place itself. While these provisions and around the market-place, they are often engaged in selling

Perhaps the best way to understand the significance of the Fond-des-Negres market, and perhaps rural markets in general, then, is not to focus on the market-place but rather to look in turn at each of the types of personnel it engages in commerce, and the nature of the commercial transactions which they conduct.

### 1. Proviziônè

By far the greatest number of people involved in trade on any given market day are simply rural inhabitants (abitâ) engaged primarily in the purchase of weekly provisions. These people are drawn from a radius at least as far as a one-hour walk from the market-place, and perhaps from even greater distances. Rare is the household in the community under study which is not represented by at least one female member in the market-place every Tuesday. These women buy the necessary items for their household's weekly consumption, such as sugar, oil, salt, matches, etc., and any food crops which may be desired but are currently unavailable as part of the family's own harvest. Small amounts of salted or spiced pork (kochô salé; adwi) are often purchased for use as flavoring for the bland daily staples such as millet and ground corn (mais moulu).

While these proviziônè constitute the bulk of purchasers in and around the market-place, they are often engaged in selling



as well. At least 75% (and probably more) of the women observed carried some produce, no matter how little, to the market-place for sale. Often, the day before market day is spent almost entirely in preparing this produce for sale (e.g. husking and drying beans, digging ginger or grinding dried corn). The profits from the sale of a few mamit of ginger or beans, or one or two stalks (réjim) of plantains help to underwrite the cost of a week's provisions. Occasionally, especially in the weeks after harvest and a few weeks before planting, larger amounts of particular crops and seed will be brought to market.

Though each of these sales, viewed separately, may appear to be insignificant, it is no exaggeration to suggest that a considerable proportion of the Madam Sara's stock is made available to her by way of these small sales of a few gro mamit at a time, either by direct purchase or through one or more intermediary steps. In sum then, these seemingly minor sales of home grown produce by household members, prompted by the need for cash to purchase weekly provisions, form a substantial part of the base upon which the all-important trade of the Madam Sara is built. This suggests that a study of rural consumption patterns and cash needs over the course of a year might be a useful adjunct to a study of seasonal crop price and availability.

lity variations, and could contribute much to our understand -  
ing of the seasonal dynamics of the Madam Sara's trade.

Furthermore, while these women (proviziônè) are by no means  
full-time professionals, they are certainly not intimidated in  
any way by the market-place nor are they incompetent in bar -  
gaining or other aspects of commerce. In light of these facts,  
Murray and Alvarez' generalizations concerning the relative  
unimportance of home sales to travelling intermediaries or  
their agents in the chain of distribution from rural producer  
to urban consumer may need to be re-evaluated -- at least for

certain regions of the country. For Fond-des-Nègres and its  
environs, in any case, the important role played by the pro -  
viziônè may be due to the immediate presence of a large region-  
al market center, and the competence in trading this presence  
demands of the entire rural female population. This in turn  
leads to a relative devaluation of the importance of the Madam  
Sara's agents (sou-marê; Murray & Alvarez' sékrète (7)) and an  
increase in the importance and scope of market-day activities  
throughout the area.

To return to the proviziônè, however, she may buy and sell  
either in route or in the market-place proper. Her particular  
decisions will be made on the basis of convenience and price,



and in some instances, the presence or absence of tax officials (pèseptè) at any given time in any particular location. Although she will often enter the market-place proper to make some purchases, or simply to see some friends from another community, the weight of her load or the wish to avoid taxation may induce the proviziônè to sell long before she arrives at the market.

<sup>1/</sup> The zones of taxation are not limited by the market-place proper. They extend for some distance along each of the paths leading to the market, and in fact two different commune are responsible for taxation on two sections of the road leading west from Fond-des-Nègres into Virgile. The proviziônè carrying a large amount of produce may set out for the market-place very early and attempt to sell her entire stock to a Madam Sara or her agent on the path before entering the tax zone. But by 7 a.m. this kind of transaction is hard to find, and while a few women may find buyers en route, most enter the tax zone before starting to sell.

Once she enters the tax zone, however, there are numerous ways by which she can avoid paying taxes. First, to be taxed a woman must be seen. Many women manage to sell their stock so rapidly and so discreetly that they are never even noticed.

Coverage of the paths by tax officials is far from 100% effi -

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1/ The market tax was eliminated by Presidential decree on September 11, 1974.

cient. Secondly, to be taxed a woman must stop and rest her load. This is unavoidable for certain kinds of produce which must be measured, yet other items such as stalks of plantains may be sold from "head to head". That is, the seller and the purchaser never actually stop to transact the sale, It is conducted while walking side by side and the load is simply transferred from one head to another. This, claim certain informants, is an effective way of avoiding taxation.

Women may also establish various kinds of alliances to avoid paying full tax charges, either with other women or with the pèséptè (tax collector) themselves. First, a woman may leave the bulk of her stock at the home of a friend near the market-place and sell only small quantities at a time. If she is taxed, then, it will only be for a fraction of what the State requires on the basis of the actual volume of her stock. Further, sales may actually be made in the home of a friend (ván à kachèt). This is especially effective if the proviziônè wants to sell her stock all at once, rather than spending all day selling à déray (retail). In such cases the house owner often receives a consideration in the form of money or stock.

A group of proviziônè may band together and select one woman to "front" for them. They will hide most of their stock and



set out a small portion of it only, with one woman selling for perhaps three or four others. The tax fees, consequently reduced, are shared.

Supervisors from the Bureau des Contributions<sup>1/</sup> make spot checks on the activities of the pèseptè, but apparently not very often. In their absence the pèseptè is free to make any number of different kinds of arrangements with proviziônè in order to turn a little profit for himself at the expense of the State. Many proviziônè have established a working relationship with a particular pèseptè, often initiating such a partnership with a small gift of agricultural produce. It should be remembered that the pèseptè in this case are locals, related to and acquainted with the greater majority of the women whom they are required to tax. Their dishonesty in these matters, while providing them with a little spending money, also serves to maintain and reaffirm the texture of their everyday relationships with family, friends and neighbors. Thus, unlike the Port-au-Prince pèseptè (see below), who is a stranger to those he taxes, the Fond-des-Negres tax official is not likely to attempt to benefit greatly at the expense of the women with whom he deals. Understandably, these two types of abitâ covertly band together so that both will benefit, ultimately at the expense of the State.

<sup>1/</sup> For a detailed description of the Bureau des Contributions (Internal Revenue Office) and its system of market taxes, see Document # 4 in this series "Analyse du Systeme de Taxation ..."

The methods used by pèseptè are varied, but all depend on the mechanics <sup>1/</sup> of the taxation system. Basically, dated tickets, each worth a specified amount, are distributed to each pèseptè.

He is expected to distribute the tickets and leave them with the market women. The torn ticket is the woman's receipt. At the end of the day the pèseptè must submit all unused tickets and money totalling to the value of the tickets he has supposedly distributed. Now, it is left to the individual pèseptè, in the absence of his superiors, to determine the amount of the tax and to decide who is to be taxed.

Each pèseptè has a group of "friends", and there is an understanding among pèseptè that such relationships are not to be interfered with. On any given Tuesday a pèseptè may simply not charge a "friend" any tax at all. Or, he may charge considerably less than required by law and customary procedure. In both cases, of course, the pèseptè receives a small consideration of cash (.10-.50 gde) -- "just enough to have a drink" as it is explained by the women of the community. All of these "little drinks" must make the pèseptè quite drunk by the mid-afternoon or, as is more probably the case, quite a bit richer in his abstention.

In the former case, no ticket has been given out and no money

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<sup>1/</sup> For more detail on the mechanics of the taxation system, see Document 4 in this same series "Analyse du Systeme de Taxation des Produits Agricoles dans les Marches Haitiens".



needs to be accounted for. In the latter case, even if a ticket for a fraction of the tax is given out and torn, this money has been collected in addition to the pèsépte's own profit. This latter strategy is especially important on the route leading west from the market-place into Virgile for, as has been pointed out, here there are two commune operating different sections of the road and each able to tax the trader. If the trader passes the second group of pèséptè (in Virgile) on her way home and can not display a properly validated receipt for taxes paid she is liable to be taxed again by an "unfriendly" pèséptè, or at least asked to buy an additional "little drink" for a second pèséptè. To avoid this unnecessary expense she obtains a stub for a fraction of the required tax from her friends among the Fond-des-Negres pèséptè.

Friends in Virgile become important when the tax on pack animals is considered. Also required is a friend's home near the market where the animal can be left. The animal never enters the market-place and is hence not taxed in the pak (animal park), and on her return trip the pèséptè who would normally demand proof of payment in full of the animal tax simply demands a small amount of cash and allows the machâd to pass.

In yet another variation a pèséptè simply gives the woman a ticket for the appropriate amount (this probably being a safe-

guard against spot-checks by his superiors), but when the time comes for collecting the tax in the late morning or afternoon he simply collects the untorn ticket and one-third to one-half of its value for his own pocket. He then retains the untorn ticket to submit at the end of the day and has made up to 1.50 gde. clear profit.

On days when the superiors (kôtrôle) are out checking the pèsép-tè, the machâd may be obliged to pay her full tax. However, the pèséptè still may make a weekly profit, for they arrange with the machâd to pay them slightly more that week so as to be left with no tax at all for the next few weeks. Finally, some machâd return their torn tickets to the pèséptè who purportedly re-use them on market days and during the week to collect monies for which no accounting need be made.

Needless to say, the machâd are as content with all these arrangements as are the pèséptè. Both parties to the deception benefit. While not all tax collectors are dishonest, and not all women coming to the market have friends among them, in fact the cultivation of a series of friendly stable relationships with particular pèséptè and friends living along the route to the market-place is considered an important aspect of successful trading. Often a woman will explain her preference



for a particular market or a particular route in terms of who she knows and how she expects to avoid paying her full taxes.

## 2. Révâdèz

Still other women of the area come to the market-place as révâdèz, rather than simple proviziônè. Their primary occupation with respect to market-place commerce is the purchase and resale of a wide range of comestibles used by local abitâ (inhabitants). The révâdèz selling out of her home (home retailer) or at public occasions may simply come to the market to buy her weekly stock. Others may purchase on the paths, in other local markets or, less commonly, at the homes of producers, and simply enter the Fond-des-Negres market-place for the purposes of sale. Finally, some may conduct both buying and selling operations within the market-place proper.

The révâdèz may deal in almost any kind of product, yet the révâdèz dealing in agricultural produce is a much less common sight in Fond-des-Negres than in Port-au-Prince. This is because the market for agricultural produce, at least those crops which are locally grown, is pretty well exhausted by the activities of the proviziônè. Nonetheless, some révâdèz are engaged in the sale of produce imported from other regions (e.g. rice from Port-au-Prince at certain times of the year) or pro-

cessed grains (e.g. ground corn).

By far the greatest number of révâdèz to be seen in the Fondes-Negres market-place are engaged in the sale of household necessities of the same kind as those sold by home retailers. These include sugar, cooking oil and laundry soap as the three most important items in terms of everyday consumption needs. Révâdèz are to be found along all the paths leading to the market-place as well as in the market-place itself.

While it may be said in general that the révâdèz buys â gro (wholesale) and sells â détay (retail), deriving her profit from both the differential between wholesale and retail prices on the one hand and the disparity of wholesale and retail measures on the other (see Murray & Alvarez (7)), it must always be remembered that â gro and â détay are most certainly relative terms. That is, some révâdèz may buy sugar, for example, by the sak (15-16 gro mamit) and retail it by the gro mamit and a series of successively smaller measures. Others, however, may in fact only purchase one or two gro mamit at a time and retail only in smaller quantities. The existence of this latter possibility allows many an undercapitalized rural woman to begin a successful trading career, ultimately perhaps leading to the assumption of Madam Sara activities.



Yet there is also a paradox hidden here -- one which, in its solution, offers some interesting insights into both the Haitian market mentality and the mechanism which operates within the market-place with respect to the fixing of retail prices.

When one observes a group of 8-12 women sitting in a line and all selling the same product at the same prices, what is one actually seeing? Let us continue with sugar as our example.

First of all, one or two of the women in the group may have purchased their stock by the sak (sack) directly in Port-au-Prince, or perhaps through a friend or relative whose business regularly takes her to the capital. These women, even after paying transport costs, have obtained their sugar at the lowest possible prices. Another few women will have purchased their sugar by the sak in Fond-des-Negres, either from a wholesale outlet (run by komèsâ [see below]) or from a Madam Sara in a strictly commercial transaction. These latter révâdèz have paid slightly more per sak than their more fortunate counterparts who have direct connections to the capital. This price differential simply represents the profit margin of the intermediary who transports the sugar from Port-au-Prince to Fond-des-Negres.

Now, the remainder of the révâdèz often find themselves sitting

next to their suppliers. That is, this third group purchases its stock of sugar by the gro mamit from the women with whom they are in apparent competition at the level of transactions involving measures smaller than the gro mamit. These women, of course, pay the highest price per gro mamit of stock, since their buying price includes a small profit margin for the révâdèz with the sak from whom they purchase.

The question immediately arises, of course, as to why all of these women, operating in what has been described as a system of "free and open competition" should be selling the same quantities (gro mamit) of sugar for the same prices. Why does the woman who is able to purchase in larger quantities at a lower price per unit not sell at lower prices in order to eliminate her competition?

The answer is two-fold. When asked about this apparent paradox, the sak buyer replies that if she were to act in this way, then, the mamit buyer would "not be able to live", and that it is better for everyone to make a little profit than for one to make all the profit at the expense of her compatriots. This response, given consistently by many women who were questioned, clearly must give rise to some reflection concerning the often-espoused view of the Haitian marketwoman as a purely indivi -



dualistic, fiercely competitive economic actor. Obviously, some forms of competition are acceptable while others are not.

This conclusion, however, tells us more about the rules and politics of trade among friends and neighbors than about some illusory, underlying altruism governing the economic behavior of rural Haitians. For behind the informants' responses lie another set of truths -- perhaps not quite so obvious but probably even more telling as an explanation of this phenomenon. First, the sak buyer, while not eliminating her competition, is still operating at a higher profit margin on small-quantity sales and is hence enjoying an acceptable if not absolute advantage over the mamit buyer as a return on her larger investment and trading connections. Secondly, it should be clear that following the elimination of her "competition" the sak buyer's market for sales by the gro mamit would be severely diminished. That is, she would be forced to sell more and more of her stock in smaller quantities. As Mintz has pointed out, the Haitian marketwoman would generally rather turn a small profit quickly than a large one over a longer period of time -- reinvesting her capital over and over again rather than keeping it tied up in slow moving stock.

This phenomenon, whatever its most reasonable explanation,

holds important implications for an understanding of the price mechanism at the retail level of trade, perhaps for Port-au-Prince as well as Fond-des-Negres. Retail prices to the consumer are set, at least in part, with reference to an acceptable profit margin for the révâdèz who buys the smallest quantities at the highest prices per unit volume for resale. This principle, if generally operative, must result in inflated retail prices <sup>1/</sup> for all goods sold by small-time révâdèz, whether actually handled by them or not. The price-setting mechanism then operates not only with respect to prevailing production costs, seasonal availability and resultant wholesale prices, but is also substantially affected by factors generated at the very lowest level of the retail trade itself.

It should be pointed out before concluding this discussion of the révâdèz that in certain respects her activities may come to resemble those of the Madam Sara. If her trade is fairly large and her operating capital is sufficient, she may travel in order to procure part or all of her stock. Though her trips are usually less frequent (often monthly), she may journey to the capital to buy a few sak of sugar, a couple of gallons of oil, and/or a barik (40 gro mamit) of rice or some other crop unavailable locally. In order to finance these ventures and,

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<sup>1/</sup> If this is not the case then the profit margin for retailers at this level must be extremely low.



so as not to waste a trip into town, she may also transport certain local agricultural products for sale in the city, thereby entering directly into the chain of distribution which brings rural produce to the urban consumer. While her activities in this connection are significantly smaller than those of the Madam Sara, it might be suggested that in their sum they make a significant contribution to the flow of goods from the countryside to the city.

Other révâdèz, especially those dealing in tobacco or eggs, establish trading connections to the west. The Plaine d'Aquin is a major source for the tobacco consumed in the immediate area of Fond-des-Negres, and eggs, which will be seen to be an important part of the Madam Sara's trade as well, are usually purchased on Thursdays on market-day in l'Asile.

State fees for the révâdèz include a yearly license (patât) which most women who operate in the public market-place and on the paths around it purchase each year in October. The system of daily taxes -- and tax evasion -- is similar to that described in detail for the proviziônè. The most common forms of evasion include the pooling of stock among women, the hiding of stock and, of course, a friendly relationship with one or more pè - séptè.

### 3. Madam Sara

The Madam Sara is the central and most important link in the internal trading system. Her activities serve to bulk the produce of numerous small-scale rural farmers, to transport such produce as efficiently as possible given Haiti's existing system of roads and transportation, to break bulk and thereby initiate the distributive process which ultimately delivers agricultural produce to the urban consumer, and finally to perform the same services for the complementary flow of necessities from the capital into rural areas. These two streams of commerce are clearly interdependent, regardless of whether or not a single Madam Sara engages in both types of trade, for it is precisely the need for cash to purchase basic household necessities which prompts the rural farmer to produce for an urban market. In the absence of a steady flow of such commodities from the city to the countryside at "reasonable prices" the whole nature of rural production and trade would be different.

In fact, it became clear over as short a time as 2 1/2 months that steadily rising prices for such essentials as sugar and oil can affect decision making by certain abitâ concerning production and, more directly, affect the trading activities and



plans of some Madam Sara (see note p. 6). Since these changes were not a specific object of study, it can only be suggested that some very important issues may be raised and illuminated by a research project designed to investigate the nature of this interdependency in the distributive network, and the effects of inflationary price jumps on both national distribution and rural production.

The general characteristics of Madam Sara trading activities have been described by Mintz (6) and, more recently, by Murray and Alvarez (7). In an attempt to avoid repetition, comments will be limited to a few observations concerning the specific activities of Madam Sara in and around the Fond-des-Negres market-place, especially insofar as these differ significantly from those reported by Murray and Alvarez (7).

There are two types of Madam Sara who engage in trade in and around the Fond-des-Negres market-place each Tuesday -- those who live in the surrounding area and those who travel long distances by truck to reach the market. It is not only in provenance that these women differ, but also in terms of their basic operating procedures and their relationship to the market-place itself.

a) Locally-based Madam Sara

More extensively studied in this research project were the locally-based Madam Sara. These travelling intermediaries make their homes in the area and are, for the most part, native to the region if not to the particular community in which they presently reside. In this respect they differ from the Madam Sara studied by Murray and Alvarez (7), who apparently operated in regions other than their own and were thus absent from their homes for extended periods of time. These local Madam Sara make regular trips to the capital, either every week or every fortnight. They travel on the brightly painted trucks with benches (kamiô bâ) which unite Haiti's rural areas with the capital along each of the country's three major roads. Each Madam Sara usually has a preference for a particular truck based on her regularized relationship with the driver and/or sékrète (money collector), and the truck's dependability in making the trip without a breakdown. Since the trucks follow fairly regular schedules, weather and road conditions permitting, women usually take the same truck into Port-au-Prince on the same day each week. The preponderance of trips to the capital are made either on Tuesday afternoon-Wednesday morning after the market at Fond-des-Negres, or on Friday or Saturday following the series of local markets held on Thursdays and



Fridays in the area. These women spend only 2-3 days in the city, selling all their stock and, in many cases, buying stock for resale at home. They spend the rest of their time at home engaged in amassing stock and reselling products transported from the city. Being at home most of the time, they have little or no need for the host of agents known as sékrètè mentioned by Murray & Alvarez (7) as an important part of the Madam Sara's successful operation.

In amassing their stock for a trip to Port-au-Prince, these local Madam Sara rarely if ever enter any market-place. The Fond-des-Negres market is simply a market day for their purposes, rather than a market-place. These women rise well before dawn on market days, in order to encounter proviziônè carrying large quantities of produce to the market. They often complete their buying before 7 a.m. on Tuesdays. Buying far from the market-place on the paths leading to it has certain obvious advantages. First of all, competition among buyers is less severe and hence prices may be slightly lower than those prevailing later on in the day in the market-place. Also, the prevailing prices may be as yet unknown to the seller and she may be induced to sell at an even lower price. Considerations of convenience also influence the seller to take slightly less

for her produce, as well as the fact that no tax need be paid if the transaction takes place far from the market itself.

Women who are en route at this early hour are expecting to sell to a Madam Sara rather than à délay in the market. Sales are quite easily and rapidly consummated. Although pratik (4)

relationships seem to play little part in many of these transactions, there are some instances in which a Madam Sara will regularly meet a seller along the road in order to purchase her stock.

In any case, the existence of a regional marketing center in the immediate area brings the primary producer (or his mate)

out of his community and, if not to the market-place itself,

at least onto the many paths leading to it. This makes it un-

necessary for the local Madam Sara to scour the countryside

looking for stock or to employ agents (sékreté or sou-marê) to

make purchases at the homes of producers. These sales do

exist, of course (especially for a few crops including taro

[malâga mazoûbèl] and watercress [krésô] which are sold before

harvesting, by the plot), but certainly account for only a

small percentage of the Madam Sara's stock. Buying early in

the day, on paths rather than in the market-place itself, is

the primary modus operandi of these local Madam Sara.



They transport their newly acquired stock to their homes or, in some instances, to a depot along the main route to the city.

These depots should not be confused with the Port-au-Prince depots to be described below. They are simply small shacks which may be locked, constructed by local truck owners for the convenience of Madam Sara who reside in the interior. Stock may be stored in these depots free of charge by regular patrons of the depot owner's trucks, and are sometimes used as well by local women who are taking other trucks into the city. Although only one of these depots, about a kilometer west of the Fond-des-Negres market, was known to the investigator, informants claim that there are several along the route through the south. They might provide an ideal location for encounter with and study of locally-based Madam Sara and their stocks.

It might finally be noted here that while the local Madam Sara specializes her trade in the sense that she trades along only a single geographical route, her activities are in no way limited to one or even a number of particular crops. The Madam Sara centering her activities in the Fond-des-Negres market will buy and transport any item which in her estimation will yield a satisfactory profit upon resale in the capital. Although she may regularly carry such a sure-profit item as eggs, she will, and usually does, carry any crop produced in the region which,

under prevailing market conditions, appears to insure a suitable return on her investment. This diversification in terms of produce will be seen more clearly in the case studies.

b) Non local Madam Sara

Madam Sara arriving at the Fond-des-Negres market-place by truck from other areas for the purposes of procurement and/or sale of stock may number well over 100 on any given market day. They come from as far as Pont l'Estere in the north-east and Les Cayes in the south-west, although the greatest numbers seem to come from Port-au-Prince in the east and l'Asile in the west. The range of variation in their provenience, their buying and selling activities, and the variety of their stock might best be seen in a series of case studies. In general, however, it is clear that what is bought and what is sold in the Fond-des-Negres market-place depends on the regional price differentials for each particular crop or commodity. Among these, certain differentials are stable the year round, so that such "cold"-climate vegetables as cabbages, shallots and garlic produced in the Kenscoff area will constantly flow westward from Port-au-Prince to Les Cayes, rising in price as each transaction between intermediaries takes place. These crops often simply pass through Fond-des-Negres, where they are sold di-



rectly to non-local Madam Sara who will transport them further westward to their home regions. The same unidirectional flow is true of all manufactured goods emanating from Port-au-Prince, including sugar, cooking oil, laundry soap and kékay (sundry items such as facial soap, toothpaste, needles, thread, buttons, starch and blueing). Likewise charcoal, pork, chickens and eggs will constantly flow eastward toward Port-au-Prince, originating either further west than Fond-des-Negres and changing hands between non local Madam Sara in the market-place, or being sold to Madam Sara by local producers and/or smaller scale intermediaries. Other crops, harvested at different times in different parts of the country, and thus varying greatly in regional prices at any particular time, may flow either eastward or westward, to, from and through Fond-des-Negres as the price differentials and local demands dictate. Rice and many varieties of beans are among such crops.

Madam Sara coming to Fond-des-Negres by truck arrive late Monday night or early Tuesday morning. They may come to buy and sell, but often will only buy. A few restrict their activities to selling only. In any case, their actual participation in market-place commerce sets them apart from local Madam Sara. These outsiders spend their entire day within the market-place proper, conducting transactions with proviziônè, small -

scale local intermediaries, manufacturers of charcoal and clothing, and other non-local Madam Sara, usually those arriving at Fond-des-Negres from the opposite direction. They also usually employ one or more sou-marê (agents), who purchase for them. These agents are local abitâ, most often those not well-off enough to conduct commerce on their own. They buy for the Madam Sara outside of the market-place, but again it must be stressed that their duties most often take them onto the paths rather than to the homes of primary producers. While these agents may buy from friends and neighbors at their homes the bulk of their buying takes place on the routes leading to the market-place on market day. They less frequently purchase in local markets and paths on other market days during the week. Their services are remunerated in two distinct ways. First, most of their buying for a particular Madam Sara is on short-term credit. They buy in the morning and, upon delivering the stock to the Madam Sara, collect the money with which to pay for their purchases later in the afternoon. The Madam Sara usually specifies a price for each item, and the skillful sou-marê makes her own profits by purchasing for less from the producer without informing the Madam Sara. The Madam Sara seems to know this, since they are receiving a valuable service and not paying more than they have previously specified, they seem



not to mind the sou-marê's subterfuge. In addition most Madam Sara will give their agents a few gourdes each week in consideration of their services. Finally, they may bring gifts of old clothing and the like for their favorite sou-marê. While this system of buying through agents is not essential to the success of the Madam Sara, it greatly increases the amount and range of stock which she can amass in a single day, thereby increasing the profitability of her venture. It is perhaps even more important for the sou-marê themselves who most often would have no other opportunity to engage in profitable commercial enterprises within the internal trade system because of a lack of capital.

The non-local Madam Sara is also subject to State taxation: In addition to the annual license required of all travelling intermediaries, and the tax on sales of any kind <sup>1/</sup>, these non-local Madam Sara must pay a tax on their purchases in Fond-des-Negres as well. As they amass their load before putting it on a truck for their return trip, a pèsèptè (tax collector) issues them a tax ticket based on the estimated value of the stock purchased. Not being locals, and operating openly within the market-place, these women have little opportunity for tax evasion. Very few seem to have managed to establish a workable relationship with

<sup>1/</sup> See document #4 in this same series "Analyse du Systeme de Taxation des Produits Agricoles dans les Marches Haitiens". The market tax was eliminated by Presidential Decree on September 11, 1974

the pèseptè. It should be noted that in many instances the same stock is taxed twice by the same commune (in Fond-des-Negres) since the seller as well as the Madam Sara is subject to taxation.

4. Komèsâ may be thought of as large-scale businessmen and women dealing in items which are rarely handled by the majority of Madam Sara. These include cloth, cloth remnants, ready made clothing, agricultural implements flour and store goods such as batteries, canned goods, etc... Komèsâ are often operating with much more capital than even the most successful Madam Sara and often own their own trucks (kamiô bwat) and/or stores.

Both local and non-local komèsâ are to be found in Fond-des-Negres on market day. Some locals may have wholesale or retail stores very near the market-place. Others, along with non-locals, often own stalls within the market-place where they display their wares and conduct their business. These komèsâ were not actually studied in the course of this research project, but a fuller understanding of their activities would certainly fill out any overview of the internal trade system. Since they may in fact be selling some small portion of their

1/ See document #4 in this same series "Analyse du Système de Taxation des Produits Agricoles dans les Marchés Nègres". The market tax was eliminated by Presidential Decree on September 11, 1974.



goods, especially flour, in wholesale batches to travelling intermediaries, more information concerning them might also shed light on the activities of at least some small number of

Madam Sara.

Before closing this section it should be noted that on Fridays the Fond-des-Negres market-place becomes the site of a smaller local market oriented mainly toward the needs of the proviziônè

and the commerce of the révâdèz. No non-local traders are involved in this Friday market. Both in terms of actual numbers

of participants and volume of trade, this local market is considerably smaller than Tuesday's regional market. It is, how-

ever, an important market in terms of the small-scale trading activities of local abitâ and the daily needs of local house-

holds. Moreover, it should be of some concern to us here because, while non-local Madam Sara are not present, local Madam

Sara find the occasion suitable for pursuing stock along the paths that lead to the market-place. Here again it is simply

the occurrence of the event, rather than its scale or its location which ties it in to the national trading network.

B. Birelles Market-Place

Of greater importance than the Fond-des-Negres Friday market is a

small local market-place in the interior north of the main route  
 goes through the south. This is the market-place called Birelles, lo-  
 cated at Bouzi. Market-day at Birelles is Thursday. While the  
 market-place is physically smaller than Fond-des-Negres and situated  
 in the interior, its organization may be compared with that of the  
 Fond-des-Negres market held on Fridays and mentioned above. Its  
 tax structure is identical to that of Fond-des-Negres, though admi-  
 nistered by a different local branch of the Bureau des Contributions.  
 Similarly, the ploys used to avoid paying taxes are similar to those  
 used in Fond-des-Negres. It may be distinguished from the Fond-des-  
 Negres regional market on Tuesdays in terms of numbers of people  
 involved, range of commodities available, total volume of sales and  
 average volume/sale -- all being considerably smaller at Bouzi.  
 The absence of non-local traders is also a distinguishing feature.  
 Prices too are generally lower, and it is this fact which helps  
 make Birelles more important than the Fond-des-Negres Friday market  
 in terms of national distribution.

Local Madam Sara are attracted to the paths leading into the mar-  
 ket-place in the hopes of obtaining stock at considerably lower  
 prices than those in Fond-des-Negres. Yet in purchasing on the  
 paths leading to Birelles they are establishing the first link in  
 a chain of distribution which will ultimately unite urban consumers  
 to rural areas which may be too remote to be consistently tied to



the regional market center at Fond-des-Negres and its national trading networks. That is, these Madam Sara are in a sense extending the drainage basin of the stream of agricultural produce which constantly flows towards Port-au-Prince. In so doing they are serving the needs of rural producers and urban consumers alike. And, again, it is the opportunity which the market-place at Bouzi provides for the Madam Sara to find and purchase stock which makes it more important in the national picture than the terms "local" and "interior" might initially suggest.

#### C. L'Asile Market-Place

The market-place at l'Asile should also be mentioned since it is of importance not only to the trading activities of Madam Sara, but seems to be the original point of accumulation for a large percentage of the eggs and poultry that leave southern Haiti destined for consumption in Port-au-Prince.

Market-day in l'Asile is Thursday. It is approximately six and one-half hours away, on foot or by mule, from the Fond-des-Negres market.

Many Madam Sara or members of their family attend the market every week. They leave the community Wednesday afternoon, spend the night in l'Asile, buy early in the market-place proper and along the paths, and return before sundown on Thursday. Eggs and poultry are the

primary commodities purchased, though a successful trip will also include the purchase of citrus fruits and/or avocados, which are apparently more plentiful and less expensive in l'Asile than in Fond-des-Negres. All of these goods are destined for sale in Port-au-Prince, rather than in Fond-des-Negres. Goods originating in l'Asile and sold in Fond-des-Negres are carried by Madam Sara based in l'Asile rather than those from around Fond-des-Negres.

The familial "agents" who often purchase for community Madam Sara at l'Asile also buy their own stock, usually in smaller amounts. Their remuneration derives from the fact that the Madam Sara then transports and sells their stock for them in Port-au-Prince, retaining the net profits on her return.

#### IV. THE DEPOTS AND DEPOT AREA (Port-au-Prince)

Although a more extensive and complete study of the Port-au-Prince depots (dépo) appears as the second paper in this series (2), a few general comments concerning the particular dépo used by Madam Sara from the Fond-des-Negres area will help to round out our picture of the community's trading activities.

Only one dépo was studied extensively. It is located on Rue Courbe, several blocks north of Marche Vallieres. The dépo is "specialized" in the sense that it is used by Madam Sara all coming from the area



around Fond-des-Negres. The Port-au-Prince-based Madam Sara buying in Fond-des-Negres seem not to operate out of dépo when they re-sell their stock in the city. They probably prefer to avoid storage fees by keeping the bulk of their stock at home and selling in the market-place(s) nearest their homes or directly from their homes. The Fond-des-Negres based Madam Sara, however, use the dépo as an essential part of their trading activities, especially when they have no relatives living near enough to the downtown market-place to provide a convenient storage area for their stock.

The Madam Sara, usually arriving in the capital late in the evening after a full day on the road, are dropped off at the dépo by the trucks. As their stock is unloaded, and often even before, they are literally surrounded by a crowd of potential buyers, predominantly composed of their regular pratik customers. The customer with pratik always seem to be aware of which trucks are carrying their suppliers and when they are scheduled to arrive. As Locher (2) has pointed out, this may be one of the reasons why particular dépo (and particular trucks) have become specialized in terms of regional and regular individual patrons. After one or two hectic hours of trade, interspersed with supervising the unloading and stockpiling of her load, the arriving Madam Sara may already have sold up to half of her stock to pratik customers. The next day or two are spent selling to additional pratik and other unfa-

miliar customers. If a pratik is expected, however, stock will be saved for her and offers from non-regular customers will be refused.

After most or all of her stock is sold, the Madam Sara will begin purchasing stock for sale and personal use following her return home.

Purchases of agricultural produce are most often made in other dépo,

while commodities such as cooking oil, sugar and klérê are purchased

in any of the conveniently located wholesale outlets (magasê) to be

found in the depot area. The Madam Sara buys this stock early in the

morning on her day of departure, paying for its transport from the

point of purchase to the central truck station below the Marche Croix-

des-Bossales. This way she avoids paying for double transport (point

of purchase → dépo/dépo → truck stop) and perhaps avoids storage

fees in the dépo as well.

As Murray and Alvarez (7) have pointed out, storage fees are paid in

the dépo on the basis of sheer volume of stock, rather than estimated

value. In the dépo studied, payment of this fee also included rights

to sleep and sell within the dépo. Except for making purchases, the

Madam Sara using this particular dépo rarely left it for the two or

three days during which they were in the capital.

The taxation system for produce sold within the dépo is structurally

organized in the same way as that employed in the Fond-des-Negres mar-



ket. Pèseptè are issued tax tickets in given amounts, expected to distribute them, collect taxes in the amount of the tickets issued, tear the tickets as a receipt for the Madam Sara, and finally remit all funds so collected to their superiors along with any remaining unused tickets.

Abuse of this tax system seems to be even more widespread and on a larger scale in the Port-au-Prince dépo than in the Fond-des-Negres market. Moreover, the form and consequence of these tax abuses are quite different from those common in Fond-des-Negres. These differences stem directly from the fact that the relationship between the urban pèseptè and the rural Madam Sara is one of stranger to stranger, rather than that of fellow community members. Thus it is that the urban pèseptè, in a position of superordination, is inclined to steal not only from the State in a series of petty subterfuges, but on a grander scale directly from the Madam Sara.

The technique is quite simple. The Madam Sara is initially asked for an inordinately high tax, supposedly based on the value of her stock. This initial demand may be as high as 15 or 20 gde. After much argument and bargaining, the Madam Sara "succeeds" in lowering the tax demand to 8 or 10 gde. Upon payment she receives a torn ticket for .50 gde or 1 gde. It is this amount which the pèseptè remits to the State, and which is probably closer to the tax which the State prescribes for the given value of stock. The remainder, often as much as

Text  
7 - 9 gde. is simply "for the pocket" of the pèseptè.

The Madam Sara, and all the personnel involved in dépo activities, are fully aware of the pèseptè's dishonesty, but are in no position to make this practice known to the proper authorities. They are either intimidated by the bureaucratic structure in general, ignorant of its workings, or cowed by individual pèseptè into a stoic acceptance of things as they are. Some pèseptè have even managed to convince the Madam Sara that the system is to their benefit -- that taxes collected honestly could be even higher than those paid presently. I would suspect that this is probably not the case. Nonetheless, in a series of five or six visits to the dépo in the course of two months, this investigator failed to discover even one instance of honest tax collection!

Finally it might be added that although daily taxes are noted for the dépo described in both papers in this series (2, 7), Madam Sara studied in this particular dépo were taxed only once during the several days in which they sold the same stock in the capital.

Selling at the dépo is primarily wholesale. The bulk of sales are made to large-scale révâdèz who in turn conduct most of their trade with smaller-scale révâdèz and street vendors. After two or more transactions then, the produce distributed through the dépo reaches the urban consumer. The intermediation chain may be short-circuited however,



and sales in the dépo include transactions with small-scale vendors and individual consumers. This is made possible by the fact that a Madam Sara may be forced to sell damaged, low-quality or slow-moving produce à dépay (retail) in order to sell it at all. Though this strategy is not preferred by Madam Sara, it was eventually used in every case studied, at least for small amounts of leftover produce remaining after the bulk of stock was sold to wholesale buyers.

There are two additional kinds of personnel who may be found selling at the dépo. In turn, they are both potential buyers of part or all of the Madam Sara's stock. These are the dépo owner (mèt dépo) and a group of large-scale resident revadez who operate directly out of the dépo. While Murray & Alvarez (7) have adequately described the interposition of the mèt dépo in the chain of distribution during times of scarcity, discussion with informants indicate that this is not the only time during which the mèt dépo may purchase stock. Taking advantage of the full cycle of supply and demand, the mèt dépo also finds it profitable to buy stock during periods of relative glut. During such periods particular produce is slow-moving and the Madam Sara is willing to sell wholesale at reduced prices. The mèt dépo is able to purchase stock cheaply and wait out the market glut, eventually selling in the next period of relative scarcity at a considerable profit. He can afford to wait out the market because he is not subject to storage

fees, nor is he pressured to return home as are the Madam Sara, since he is in effect operating out of his "home". Further, the mèt dépo seems not to be taxed on a daily basis, but rather once for each quantity of stock he purchases. These intermittent yet consistent activities on the part of the dépo owner indicate that perhaps a rigid characterization of dépo as piblik or pèsonèl may be more misleading than descriptive of the actual dynamics of dépo commerce.

Another kind of market cycle works to the advantage of the large-scale révâdèz operating out of the dépo, although her activities are certainly affected by the supply-demand cycle in much the same way as those of the mèt dépo. This other market cycle involves the presence and absence of rural Madam Sara in the dépo through the course of a week. As stated above, Madam Sara from the Fond-des-Negres region usually arrive in the city either on Friday or Tuesday evenings. Thus, the dépo under study is crowded with sellers and stock from Friday evening to Sunday morning or from Tuesday evening to Thursday morning. On these days the supply of any given commodity usually exceeds demand, trading is brisk and competitive, and prices are probably slightly depressed as a result. On Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday however, there is a relative dearth of Madam Sara and stock available in the dépo. Under such conditions demand may exceed immediate supply, and though trading is slower, prices are probably slightly higher. The



resident révâdèz who purchases stock from Madam Sara on a regular pra-tik basis is thus virtually assured of making a reasonable profit on her commerce. She is able to sell at competitive prices when the Madam Sara are present since she need not recoup any transport costs. Further her storage fees seem to be slightly lower than those for Madam Sara, perhaps based on her continuous patronage of the dépo. When the Madam Sara have left the dépo her profit margin may even increase slightly, since she may be in a position to "corner" the daily market and demand higher prices for her stock. Her customers are the same types of machâd who purchase directly from the Madam Sara.

V. CONCLUSION

Following this description of the loci of trade and the activities of the various personnel operating within them, the careful reader should be able to trace the possible pathways of distribution for almost any produce or product moving between rural and urban areas. It should be clear that there are numerous alternative courses at both ends of the chain of distribution leading from producer to consumer, while the important middle link in the chain is forged by the activities of both rural and urban Madam Sara -- bulking and breaking bulk in the streams of commerce which flow into and out of the capital, and transporting the greatest quantities of goods over the greatest distances as they

move from their source to their destination. (No attempt will be made to diagram this distributive network since its complexity can only produce confusion when reduced to a simple line drawing.)

Two general points have been stressed in the course of this paper :

1. The internal trade system can not be understood entirely as a system per se, but may be profitably viewed as the net result of the commercial activities of various types of trading personnel as they move through a series of spatial locations and periodic opportunity situations, making choices which determine particular paths of trade based on their assessment of convenience. These choices, made by buyers and sellers, producers, consumers and intermediaries, are further related to the production and consumption patterns of rural communities. One way to generate a comprehensive understanding of the internal trade system is to study the various commercial activities of the members of one such community. Though this report pretends to no such comprehensive understanding it may perhaps serve as a starting point for future research which will enhance our present knowledge of Haitian internal commerce.

2. It has been stressed time and time again throughout this report that though the market-place and the Madam Sara may loom large in any study of internal trade, a concentration on them to the ex -



clusion of other aspects of the system can only be misleading. Neither of these phenomena can be adequately understood out of the context of their peripheries. In the case of the market-place these peripheries are physical and geographical. They consist primarily of the roads and paths leading to the market-place proper. These routes must become the locus of intensive study before the distribution chain terminating in the capital can be fully understood. For the Madam Sara the periphery includes all of the smaller-scale trading activities which move stock into and out of the Madam Sara's sphere of trade. Further, a truly complete understanding of the Madam Sara herself must be based on an analysis of even those aspects of rural and urban commerce which only indirectly affect her activities in terms of the availability of markets, capital and trading experience. Two important areas for future study would seem to be the current and future effects of inflationary price rises for non-agricultural household necessities as they exert an ever more unavoidable influence on the Madam Sara's activities; and the nature of small-scale rural commerce as it relates to the Madam Sara's potential for finding markets, amassing operating capital, and providing a training ground for future travelling intermediaries.

This report has defined the Fond-des-Negres market not as a location but as an event. A "happening" where people (at least one

member from each rural family) from a large geographical area are brought together to engage in commercial activities, obtain information, and to satisfy their consumer, and perhaps other personal needs. Understood in this sense, then, regional markets become more than a place to sell agricultural produce and buy industrialized goods.

Projected over a national basis, regional market days thus become a meeting place for a very high percentage of Haiti's population. This fact has interesting implications for rural development as regional markets and regional market days (in urban-rural markets) could become an effective way of communicating with the rural population in diverse development activities.



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