

The Economic Component: Farming and Marketing.

The village chosen for study was La Hatte Cadette. (Though the term "hamlet" would be a more exact name for the community, "village" will be used throughout this paper.) La Hatte is located some two kilometers south of Thomazeau, on the northern side of the Cul-de-Sac plain. It is a large conglomeration of dwellings most of whose residents are related by blood or affinal ties. La Hatte was chosen for research after a month of examining all of the communities in the area of Thomazeau. La Hatte met the requirements of a community that appeared economically and socially representative of the communities in that area and which moreover had as of yet received no systematic exposure to family planning information.

The livelihood of the residents of La Hatte is representative of that of most of the population of Haiti in its basic outlines, peasant agriculture and a marketing system in which females play a preponderant role. The economy of the Haitian peasant and market woman has frequently been characterized as a technologically primitive economy in which capital is scarce and labor is plentiful. This characterization applies very well to La Hatte. A hoe, a machete, and a knife constitute the tool inventory of most of the farmers, and human labor is by far the cheapest and most readily available factor of

production. In the centuries since national independence the Haitian peasantry has evolved a system of agricultural production and distribution which relies heavily on a prodigal expenditure of man-hours for an extremely precarious level of cash return. Though the Haitian peasant is inextricably involved in a cash economy (in La Hatte much food is purchased during all of the year), the Haitian farmer rarely invests cash in any aspect of the productive process, and his market-woman wife invests the minimum feasible sum in her entrepreneurial distributive activities. What is invested by both men and women is their labor. The present-day resident of La Hatte grows up into an ongoing economic system that is predicated on the availability of domestic labor, and the central theme of this paper is that the actual fertility output of the local population, as well as their beliefs and aspirations, are geared to the labor-intensive character of local agriculture and marketing.

Though it will be the purpose of the research project ultimately to document this situation with figures, the broad outlines of the local economic system are now well enough known to give a general description of the individual roles of men, women, and children as well as a rough blueprint of the typical domestic "small-firms" formed by the intersection of these separate roles.

The first sine-qua-non for participation in this system

is access by the males of the domestic unit to cultivable land. As far as is known there are no households in La Hatte that do not own at least some land. But the majority of households also rely on the sharecropping of land as well. There are many households which let out part of their land to tenants, while at the same time share-cropping land of other households. This apparently contradictory procedure is motivated by the varying quality of land which any household will own as well as by the desire to diversify crops and take advantage of the several possibilities available in the local ecological zone. The majority of irrigated land in La Hatte is dedicated to the growth of sugar cane and sweet potatoes; the non-irrigated land (which in La Hatte paradoxically means land which is so wet because of a high water table and drainage problems as not to need irrigation) is devoted to rice, beans, and small onions. Other minor crops are also grown, but the above mentioned ones provide most of the cash which enters the households of La Hatte by route of agriculture.

The landholdings of any domestic group rarely take the form of a continuous plot. On the contrary the continuous process of parcelization brought about by successive generations of inheritance division have resulted in the situation of each farmer having his holdings scattered out into tiny plots, usually lying at quite a distance from each other.

The burden of agricultural labor is borne by adult

males with frequent help on the part of older sons, and occasional help at periods of peak labor demand--such as harvests--from the females in the family. Furthermore most of the men have recourse to cooperative labor during the year--long standing arrangements in which small groups are formed, all of whose members take turns working for a day at a time on the land of the various members, free of charge. Some farmers also resort to the hiring of day-labor for certain tasks; but this practice is the exception. As a rule money is not invested in labor. Even in the acquisition of the principal plants--e.g. sugar-cane-heads and stem cuttings for the planting of sweet-potatoes--the farmers acquire these free of cost on the farms of relatives and friends. In short the agricultural system requires the investment of little or no cash but much labor.

It is of obvious advantage to the farmer to have male children to help him. Not only can they help out on his own farm, but if they are old enough they can be sent to the farms of neighbors to take the place of their father on days when the latter is supposed to take his turn helping out on the plot of a man who previously helped out on his plot. Furthermore a man with sons is better able to take advantage of the occasional demands for hired labor; the labor is done faster by the man with sons, and the father of course pockets the money.

But there is an upper limit to the number of male sons any man can effectively put to productive use. The agricultural system of La Hatte is "labor intensive" only in

the sense that labor is a more important factor of production than capital. But it is not "labor intensive" in the sense that certain other peasant farming systems have been shown effectively to use more labor, whereby on a given area of land an increase in man-hours invested will result in an increase of yield ("involution" being the term commonly used). Neither the crops planted nor the available technological skills in La Hatte permit the farmers to increase yields merely by the addition of ever more man-hours of labor on their plots. There is little care given to the crops between planting and harvesting (one weeding and monthly irrigation). Thus though the presence of some male children is an advantage, there is a ceiling on the number that can be put to profitable use. Above this number the sons turn into semi-idle consumers. There are no local outlets into which their energies can be channeled to the financial benefit of the domestic group.

As has been mentioned, the women play a crucial role in securing cash-income for the family. It is quite likely that most of the income earned in a year by most domestic groups is brought in by the entrepreneurial activities of the woman, rather than by the agricultural activities of the males. These female activities are only indirectly related to the cropping patterns of their husbands.

Perhaps it is best at this point to emphasize that at least two aspects of the domestic division of labor

reported for rural Haiti do not apply to La Hatte. (Since much of the literature on Haiti ignores numbers, one wonders just how typical they were even for the regions in which they were reported). The first concerns that type of domestic cooperation occurring where the woman markets the crops which her husband and sons grow. The vast majority of the women of La Hatte do not do this. The sugar cane is automatically dispatched to the HASCO ("Haitian-American Sugar Corporation") mill in Port-au-Prince and the sweet potatoes are usually bought by wandering female middlemen, frequently before they are even harvested. The woman of the house has little say in the marketing of these principal crops. What she does market is beans (occasionally rice). For the past two decades the women of La Hatte have been periodic migrants to Port-au-Prince. Leaving La Hatte with a small amount of capital (often coming from the sale of the family cane or sweet potatoes mentioned above), the woman will purchase beans in bulk in one of the depôts of Port-au-Prince or a distant market (Ti-maché, Croix-des-Bouquets, Ti-tâê, Duvalierville being the ones most frequently mentioned), and will retail them on one of several street corners a few blocks north-east of the Croix-Bossale market section of Port-au-Prince ("Bo Saint Joseph").

Over 80% of the women under 50 described themselves as "komèsât pwa," bean sellers. At any given moment only

part of this group will actually be in Port-au-Prince. Information to be presented in the following section will indicate that at any given time most of the women will be in La Hatte; but other information indicates that the typical businesswoman will spend six months out of the year in Port-au-Prince. At any rate, the principal point being made here is that, though the woman depends for part of her capital on money stemming from the sale of her husband's crops, she is not generally a marketer of these crops herself.

The second supposedly typical domestic phenomenon, which does not apply to La Hatte, concerns the economic function of polygyny. In the traditional description the man is depicted as having a dispersed "harem" in which the women are strategically deployed around his fields, each woman being attached to one of the plots. In La Hatte there are only six cases of men who concurrently have more than one woman, and in none of these cases, according to present information, is it a question of agricultural strategy. The few marginal economic benefits that the polygynous arrangement appears to bring concerns cooperation in child-rearing (where one of the women, selling beans in Port-au-Prince, will leave her children with the other woman and send weekly supplies from Port-au-Prince), and in not all of the cases do the co-wives get along well enough to establish this type of cooperation.

In short, though the women of La Hatté play an essential role in the acquisition of cash for the household and in that sense fit the picture generally painted of the rural Haitian division of male and female labor, the fashion in which they make their contribution differs somewhat from the role they have been reported to play in other parts of Haiti.

Just as the male can use the help of a certain number of sons in his agricultural activity, likewise the female's entrepreneurial activities are enhanced if she has the help of at least one competent daughter in Port-au-Prince. It must be understood that each woman carries on her own business in complete financial independence. Though she may team up with two or three other women for the renting of a small room in which to sleep at night and cook once a day, and though she ^{may} trade small favors in the course of a day's business activity, each market woman is basically on her own.

Much time is consumed in the search for beans to buy wholesale. Perhaps 40% of a woman's active hours are spent searching for, transporting, and temporarily storing stock. While engaged in these activities she is consuming capital and missing out on sales opportunities. If she has a daughter, on the other hand, a very convenient division of labor can be set up, whereby the daughter is retailing on the street corner, while the mother is off scouting for stock. (Or vice versa).

But as in the case of male children, there is a ceiling on the number of daughters that can be used in Port-au-Prince profitably. The higher cost of living in Port-au-Prince and the availability of goods heighten the danger of wasting valuable capital. Unless the girl can be put to profitable use, she will be a tremendous liability in Port-au-Prince.

When the mother is in Port-au-Prince it is also extremely convenient--though not absolutely necessary--for her to have another daughter back in La Hatte to cook, keep house, and wash clothes for her husband and sons. There are households with no such extra daughter where the man actually does the cooking and even carries water. But the preferred and more convenient arrangement is for there to be another daughter who stays home.

This in broad outline is the general pattern which the domestic units in La Hatte must follow in order to participate effectively in the local economy. There are many variations on this basic theme. There are many strategies for the placing of surplus personnel (e.g. school for boys and sewing classes for girls); for the recruitment of missing personnel ("borrowing" children from collateral relatives or even "purchasing" children from willing mothers in Port-au-Prince); and for cooperation between different domestic units in the

same residential compound ("lakou"). But here we are interested only in presenting the essential features of the micro-economics of life in La Hatte.

To repeat: there is a minimum level of personnel below which domestic units are hard-pressed to participate effectively in this economic system. There is a maximum level of personnel above which the household will find itself burdened with non-productive semi-idle consumers. Exact investigation will be aimed at producing figures to support this claim, but on the basis of the general picture presented here, it is difficult to envision a household of La Hatte functioning at peak efficiency (in an economic sense) with fewer than five or more than seven economically active members.

Family size has important repercussions on the economic activities of the group in question. Personnel level is one component of an ongoing economic system; it is a component which cannot be altered without having repercussions on the functioning of the entire system. Conversely, the system itself will have mechanisms for achieving and maintaining the necessary personnel level. These mechanisms manifest themselves under the rubric of demography.