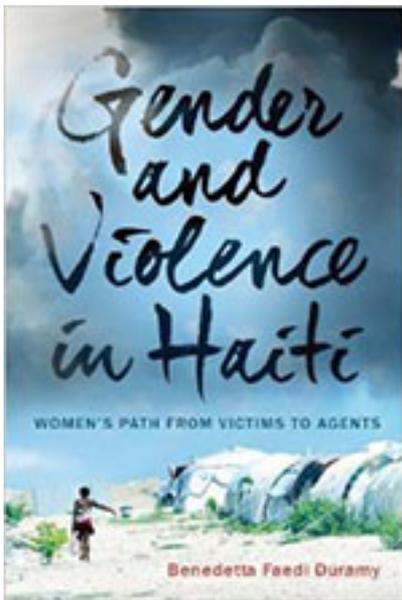


***Gender and Violence in Haiti. Women's Path from Victims to Agents* by Benedetta Faedi Duramy**

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Benedetta Faedi Duramy. *Gender and Violence in Haiti: Women's Path from Victims to Agents*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014. 172 pages. \$78.00 cloth, \$25.95 paper.



Benedetta Faedi Duramy's *Gender and Violence in Haiti: Women's Path from Victims to Agents* is a concise, alarming, and much-needed contribution that will benefit academics working on Haiti and women's rights, specialists of human rights, and practitioners of humanitarianism. The book could alternatively be titled "Nowadays they have simply exhausted their hopes, but..." (117), a citation that refers to how women in Haiti's most densely populated urban spaces describe their current situations with regards to violence, especially overtly gender-based violence (i.e. various types of rape and child abuse), since the disappointment of the promise that former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide represented for so many of the country's most economically destitute and/or its intellectuals. As such, its message pertains to scholars and those actively on the ground: activists, anthropologists, diplomats, and/or humanitarians.

Faedi Duramy's thorough study, composed of "150 in-depth interviews and ten focus group sessions" (10), reveals that she has chosen to locate her work in the pragmatic space of the actual realities on the ground, keeping a purposeful distance from critical theory and existing polemics. Additionally, she genuinely has a very real understanding of the shortcomings of what both the international community and the Haitian government can provide; still, she maintains a hopeful perspective on how human rights law and its institutions, along with the grassroots movements that strive to have their voices heard, might, with the right strategies put into place, improve the situation of Haitian women living in a state of poverty that is extremely and

dangerously gendered (41). The first chapters introduce the reader that is completely unfamiliar with Haiti to a general sketch of its historical, social, and political contexts. The middle chapters use a comparative lens to read the gender-based violence taking place in Haiti in the past decade against a more general backdrop of human rights law. It is here that her work provides an insightful inventory and history of the politically armed groups, militias, and gangs, as well as the political dynamics among them (62-77). For most persons working in and on Haiti, even for Haitians and Haitianists who are not working on a daily basis in the most impenetrably insular (and thus violent) urban areas, Faedi Duramy's inventory is extremely helpful to understanding what has "really been going on" and who the actors and players in the past decade in the urban areas have been. The final part of her book offers recommendations at varying levels (to the national and local governments; international humanitarians; and diplomats) as to how to better articulate a strategy to reduce gender-based violence in Haiti's most impermeable urban areas.

If I use the word "impenetrable" or "insular," it is because what Faedi Duramy describes is the absolute helplessness of any law-abiding entity to intervene effectively to improve the lives of victims. In fact, the situation is such that any "help" more often than not places the victim in further and more serious danger. So, although Faedi Duramy seems reticent to state it outright, her data and their organization palpably point to the certainty that women in Haiti, especially in certain areas of Port-au-Prince, Cap Haïtien, and Gonaïves, live in zones of "armed conflict" (92). Faedi Duramy's book carries forward a tradition of transnational intellectual work that considers milestones in human rights institution-building, especially as they should be informed by women's lived experiences.¹ Although not explicitly mentioned, Faedi Duramy uses critical frameworks that have and are being implemented by human rights practitioners and activists working to prosecute and denounce abuses, create truth commissions, and form care networks for victims of gender-based crimes against humanity in other parts of the world. The violence that Faedi Duramy observes is a result of myriad causes: a recent history of a decades-long family dictatorship, foreign military intervention, and natural disaster. To this end, Haiti is not "at war" in the conventional sense of the term, whereby various factions, more-or-less indigenous or claiming indigeneity to a given geographic space, take up arms against each other, as, say, in the Balkans and Central Africa. Rather, Haiti's war zones are a result of the complex relationships among many "do-gooders," such as foreign governments trying to restore peace. Moreover, following Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2013), even Haiti's earthquake may be seen as a result of violence. In this context, some may find it ill-founded to employ the legal terminology associated with "crimes against humanity" to address the chaotic violence of Haiti's "Republic of N.G.O.'s," and yet, even if Faedi Duramy's data and the interviews she has conducted reflect only a partial truth by comparing Haiti's most densely populated areas to "zones of conflict," her argument must be taken seriously. Most importantly, given the transnational character of most diplomats' and humanitarians' careers, framing Haiti's situation within an arena of internationalist discourse—regardless of one's opinion as to Haiti's "republic of N.G.O.'s"—is a pragmatic necessity for Faedi Duramy to reach any

professional who, for better or worse, is obliged to globetrot from assignment to assignment.

Because Faedi Duramy steers well clear of any discussion of the neocolonialist tendencies of the “global north” with regards to its engagement in Haiti, I fear that many a scholar will dismiss her book as initially too cursory or not well-versed in the issues that dominate contemporary transnational/postcolonial studies. Despite her choice to ignore these contexts, her book is extremely important to understanding what many continue to disavow as an over-aggrandized, even exoticized claim that the situation for women in Haiti is literally terrifying. Instead of engaging in debates or theories, Faedi Duramy offers extremely concrete and concisely analyzed research, which indisputably reveals that, within certain significant urban areas, women are confronted with an abhorrent reality where rape is used as a strategy of “armed conflict” (92). I thus urge all those working in and on Haiti not only to read Faedy Duramy’s book, but to read it in the context of her professional path. With a doctoral degree from Stanford Law School, and now as an associate professor of law at Golden Gate University, much of her previous and current research has been conducted for, thanks to, or in cooperation with humanitarian efforts (i.e. U.N.’s Stabilization Mission in Haiti, a.k.a MINUSTAH, and the World Health Organization), as well as local grassroots groups and the University of Port-au-Prince (i.e. Mouvement des Femmes Haïtiennes, Solidarité Fanm Ayisyèn). As such she is pragmatic: she has convincingly identified and argued an immense problem and is urging all parties to take seriously the problem of gender-based violence in Haiti.

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Notes

¹ See Elizabeth Heineman’s edited volume, *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones From the Ancient World to the Era of Human Rights* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) or Gina Athena Ulysse’s *Downtown Ladies: Informal Commercial Importers, A Haitian Anthropologist and Self-Making in Jamaica* (University of Chicago Press, 2007); and in literature Slavenka Drakulic’s *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* (Penguin Books, 2001), Mukoma Wa N’Ggugi *Nairobi Heat* (Melville International Crime, 2011), or Haitian writer Kettly Mars’s *Savage Seasons* (forthcoming Bison Books, 2015) or *Aux frontières de la Soif* (Mercure de France, 2013).