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# ECONOMIC MIGRATIONS, HOUSEHOLDS AND PATRIARCHY IN AFRICA AND SOUTHERN EUROPE

Véronique PETIT<sup>1</sup> and Yves CHARBIT<sup>2</sup>

Migration, whether internal or international, is classically analysed in migration theories as a behaviour associated with social change, professional mobility, technological innovation and, more globally, modernity, the migrants being presented as entrepreneurs gifted with specific psychosocial characteristics. On the contrary, patriarchy is defined as a type of conservative social organisation; a certain number of institutions and practices based on law, custom and religion aimed at ensuring its perpetuation. For example, in West Africa, patriarchy functions to the advantage of the oldest men while the twofold seniority of gender and age allows them to control both women (through polygamy) and younger men (control over access to land), thus all the resources linked to production and reproduction. Opposition between migration and patriarchy appears radical and a source of conflicts: the changes brought about by the mobility of members of society hitherto subject to patriarchal authority undermines the latter and leads to backlashes from those who wield power in the society of origin. The reality is undoubtedly more complex, as the interrelations between migrations and patriarchy may or may not be a source of conflict, given the complexity inherent to both the domain of international migrations (historical narrative, evolutions of flows, measurement problems) and that of patriarchy (world diversity of family and societal organisations). For instance forced migration of refugees are governed by political factors largely exogenous to strictly patriarchal rationales. Indeed, forced mobility has very real impacts of on social organisations, on kinship and thus on patriarchy, but this is another subject. Besides, even assuming migration is a factor of change of patriarchal systems, it is evidently not the only one. Economic and political changes, new information technologies, the increased level of education, in which all favour the rise of individualism, can occur without any migration flows.

A few words are needed to explain three basic choices I made. First, this interdisciplinary paper deals with the structure and functioning of households and only as far as they are affected by economic migration. I have chosen the household as a dependant variable because even when the migrant is an individual the household he belongs to played a major part in the process of migration. As Faist put it, the meso level is crucial (Faist 2000). Second, examples are drawn from various countries located in southern Europe, northern and sub-Saharan Africa to show how the diversity of local contexts shapes the broad relation between migration and patriarchy. Third, the period under consideration is roughly the second half of the XXth century (1950's-2000's), when emigration flows were rooted in societies in which patriarchy had only partially been affected by the impact of globalisation. Referring to two partly intertwined paradigms, gender and social development, I start from patriarchy seen as an ideal model and briefly sketch the control it is believed to exert on demographic behaviours, notably migration (I). From a strictly demographic standpoint, migration leads women to become the heads of households in the absence of their husbands. The "sex ratio argument", largely verified empirically, is nevertheless quite debatable as a real explanation (II). Economic data are called at the bar to explore the internal functioning of these households. In particular, since migration is a possible response to poverty, are households managed by women more vulnerable than others and can one speak of the "feminisation of poverty" in Senegal (III)? Sociologically, massive emigration took place from the 1950's in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea and the induced dynamics of intra-family relations have been amply documented (IV). Last, the migrations of the Dogon (Mali) reveals the anthropological consequences of the double seniority of gender and age on households (V). I conclude with some epistemological criticism of the much too simplistic opposition between migration and patriarchy (VI).

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## 1. PATRIARCHY: THE IDEAL MODEL AND DEMOGRAPHIC BEHAVIOURS

The authority of patriarchy can be analysed as an ideal model that weighs on nearly all demographic behaviours. Decisions related to marriage (choice of spouse, place of residence of the new couple) are made in the framework of strategies of alliance in which the family's interests take precedence over the aspirations of young adults old enough to be married. Once the marriage is concluded, the new couple remains under the authority of the elders, and the horizontal solidarity between the spouses is much weaker than the vertical solidarity of the lineage. As for marriage and reproduction, since controlling the female body is a prerogative essential for ensuring male authority, women are totally bereft of decision-making power regarding fertility and contraception. This applies for the management of health in general, notably recourse to traditional healers or to "marabouts" chosen as a function of the patriarch's belief.

Neither education nor the pursuit of studies are decided as a function of the individual fates of the children, but once again according to what is perceived as being in the interests of the family. Girls are usually sacrificed to the benefit of boys, since in the patriarchal system their future is limited to childbearing. But not all the boys are necessarily educated, as the head of the family may decide to privilege the education of the one boy deemed to have the greatest potential, with the others being rapidly withdrawn from schooling to participate in the economic tasks of the economic unit represented by the family. In sub-Saharan Africa, the patriarch also decides on the placement of one or more children outside the family and sometimes for very long periods, for reasons of apprenticeship, religious education, and to contribute economically to the household. More generally, in poorly mechanised rural economies, family labour is vital for production, above all in self-subsistence farming, and the use of female and child labour without monetary remuneration is the rule. However, this control by men over this economically crucial resource has certain limitations, notably the possibility for women to cultivate separate fields whose crops belong to them; and the management by the wife, often grouped with the wives of other families organised in tontines, of a specific segment of economic activity (for example, selling the produce).

This ideal model must however be nuanced as changes have occurred in family structures and family organisation, and in particular the roles and links of kinship. Regarding sub-Saharan Africa, works have shown that the economic crisis that occurred after 1980 altered the bonds of solidarity between individuals and damaged the myth of the large, generous African family, confronted with a fall in the income obtained from solidarity within a kinship system that has become more selective and chosen (Dime 2007; Marie 2007; Leimdorfer and Marie 1997; Calves and Marcoux 2007). The same caution is necessary, as we shall see, when examining the case of migration and the relation between patriarchy, migration and one of the characteristics of family structures, the fact that the head of the family is a woman.

## 2. WOMEN HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD AND THE ARGUMENT OF THE SEX RATIO

Let us briefly recall the archetypal case of Botswana where international emigration grew swiftly, following the country's independence in 1966, for the most part tending towards South Africa. In 1982, 54% of international migrants went to work in the mines of South Africa, of which 83% were between 15 and 34 years old. Already in the censuses of 1940, 1964 and 1971, the proportion of absent men was about 25% versus 4% for women. In 1982, the average sex ratio for the whole population was 82 men for 100 women. The rural exodus to the cities also affected mostly men (59%). As a result, 36% of heads of all Botswanan households were women, and 8% of these households included no adult men. 91% of women heads of household declared that their only resource was the money sent to them by emigrant men (69% internal migrants and 22% international migrants), the remaining 9% lived on pensions and various forms of aid (Census 1982, table 14.1). 83% of *de facto* women heads of household were married. In a nutshell, to be head of a household was a direct consequence of her husband's emigration. This irrefutable relation between the migration of men and the frequency of households headed by women had long ago been theorized. The "sex ratio" argument was systematised by Antony Marino in 1970, although it had been mooted as far back as 1955 by Georges Roberts in a little known article on Barbados, by Michael. G. Smith in 1961 regarding the Cariatou and by Keith Otterbein in 1965. In brief, the argument explains the high proportions of

women heads of household by the shortage of men in the population. For example, in Barbados, the emigration of men has led to the feminisation of labour: "Women found themselves at the head of household units in one way or another, so that they had to seek jobs to satisfy their needs and those of their children" (Roberts 1955: 278-279).

But is patriarchal functioning really being called into question? Two major criticisms arise. First, the explanatory strength of the sex ratio argument is questionable; second it suffers from a major bias in research work. In a scathing response to Otterbein", William Goode mocked "this great intuition that if men were absent more women would be at the head of households" (1967: 226). It does not appear useful here to recount the controversy, though it should be underlined that Goode's objection missed the nature of the argument. A subtler opinion was expressed by M.G. Smith in his analysis of the situation at Carriacou. Since there was a severe shortage of men (649 men for 1000 women) the women had the choice of emigrating, of remaining their whole lives in chaste celibacy, or of accepting to be single mothers. He did not see the outcome as the result of a deliberate choice, but as the adaptation to a constraint which, through time, ended by becoming institutionalised (1961: 466-467). It is inevitable that men have extra-residential unions with women for the system to function. In addition, Marino added that with such a shortage of men, the levels of relatively high fertility in the Commonwealth Caribbean could be maintained only thanks to *de facto* polygamy (1970: 167). Last but not least, migration *did not* weaken patriarchy. The paradox is only apparent; migration contributed to strengthening it, since the scarcity of men bolstered their power over women. In short, the crucial explanatory variable is the system of unions, in which the demographic dimension is not central, in comparison to values and norms. In other contexts, with the same sex ratio, women could very well be socially obliged to remain alone. Such was the case in south Europe and North Africa, as we shall see.

The second objection stemmed from a research bias that had long prevailed despite facts that were perfectly well-known. Since 1947, the share of women in migratory flows has fluctuated between 47 and 49%. Therefore, it is apparent that nearly one international migrant in two is a woman. But in addition to this global figure, the sex ratio varies considerably according to region (women represented 42% of migrants in Asia in 2016 versus 52.4% in Europe and 51.2% in North America, for example). Certain were highly feminised (migrations linked to care for example, Filipino women to Spain, Caribbean to the UK, the flow from Cape Verde), while others were dominated by men (Algerian migrants in France at the beginning of the 1950s), or more balanced. This demographic composition can be explained by different factors: the freedom of movement given by each society to its members as a function of their status (linked to gender and age in particular), the attractiveness of certain sectors providing jobs, strengthened by migratory policies aimed at selecting certain migrants in the receiving country or by policies aimed at establishing certain occupations in the country of departure as a function of the gendered segmentation of job markets.

For a long time, the migrant was always perceived as a male in both common sense and scientific representations. Migrating women were only viewed as accompanying the male migrants, as "co-migrants" incapable of decision, autonomy, economic activity and benefiting from family reunification policies. Scarcely visible socially, still less economically, and given little political consideration whereas they contributed to demography and population dynamics, migrant women were for long minimised not only in quantitative statistical demographic and economic works, but also in qualitative socio-anthropological ones. Nonetheless, since the beginning of the 1990s this androcentric vision of migration has been subject to deconstruction and called into question (Zlotnik and Bilsborrow 1992; Green 2002; Zlotnik 2003; Dumitru and Marfouk, 2015. Dumitru 2017. Castles et al. 2014) pointed out five trends of this new migratory mode: globalisation, acceleration, differentiation, the politicisation of migrations and their feminisation. More than a statistical evolution that would have uncovered the existence of a large proportion of migrants in migratory flows, this process of feminisation of migrations is above all a change in the perception of researchers regarding the profiles of migrants, their roles, investments in the migratory experience and the diversity of situations (Catarino and Morokvasic 2005; Morokvasic 2008). Recent research questioned the effects of the migration of women on family roles, maternity and paternity, the care of children in transnational families, and the autonomy and emancipation of women due to mobility (Oso Casas 2008; Mondain et al. 2012; Lesclingland and Hertrich 2017). Finally, the original factor of the *functioning* of patriarchal systems being called into question by migrant women who escape

patriarchal domination has been totally obscured by research. However, from the standpoint of the structure of households in the strict meaning, the emergence of households managed by women in the countries of origin remains a useful quantitative indicator, as will be seen in the case of Senegal.

### **3. THE DEMOGRAPHY AND ECONOMY OF FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN SENEGAL**

In Senegal, as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, a growing proportion of households are headed by women; it increased from 19.4% in 2001 to 27.4% in 2011.<sup>3</sup> Can women heads of households be personally characterised by a socio-demographic profile that portrays vulnerability? What are the other factors of vulnerability of households led by women? Finally, are these households more or less vulnerable than, those headed by men? The indicator is the final household consumption<sup>4</sup>.

#### **3.1 Demographic and economic characteristics of women heads of household**

Unsurprisingly, 7 to 9 out of 10 widows and divorcee women are heads of household contrary to married ones (graph 1). In the rather brief span of time of ten year however, the proportions of female divorcees or currently married in a polygamous union registered as heads of households have increased significantly, whereas the categories of widowhood and monogamous marriage have almost not changed. A twofold societal change is undergoing. When families are broken by divorce, it is more and more common for women to become head of the household. Similarly, with the growing urbanisation, the lack of housing space may oblige polygamous households to split between two lodgings and the second wife may have declared herself as head of household.

Graph 1. Matrimonial status of women heads of household (Surveys of 2000/2001 and 2011)

The size of household is unfavourable to women. On average, male households have 2 more members. The smaller size of female-headed households may represent a factor of vulnerability, since the fewer the members of the household, the more living conditions will depend on the income of the head of the household. In male-headed households, which are larger, other members can contribute or substitute the head of the household in case of the latter's incapacity. They can even be the mainstay of the family during certain periods, such as the lean period between two harvests.

Other individual characteristics of women heads of household contribute to their vulnerability: they have less human capital and are more often poorly integrated in the job market (table 1). Their poor education, combined with cultural factors that confine them to their role at home, hinder their participation in the labour market. Not only are a large minority excluded from it, but those who work are restricted, for most part, to activities of little productive value. In particular, the rate of activity of women heads of household is substantially lower than that of men: 53.5% versus 76.5%. They are therefore characterised by a high rate of inactivity. Finally, they have the least secure and least well-paid jobs. 14.1% of women head of household are wage earners in the modern sector versus 21.4% of men and they earn three times less than men. In brief, women heads of household are more disadvantaged, whether in terms of education, jobs or income.

Table 1. Characteristics of head of household by sex

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<sup>3</sup> I follow here Charbit and Kebe 2007. I am indebted to Kebe for updating data drawn from the 2011 *Enquête de Suivi de la Pauvreté au Sénégal*. I also quote data from the earlier one (2000-2001). 6,594 households were surveyed in 2000-2001 and 12,120 ten years later. was based on the analysis of the data of the first survey.

<sup>4</sup> The methodology is described in Charbit and Kebe 2007.

### 3.2 More fragile female-headed households

Women's individual characteristics are exacerbated by the fact that their households are more fragile (table 2). Besides the absence of an active spouse, the secondary members of the household are to a great extent vulnerable person (young, old, etc.). Male and female members of male-headed households have almost the same age (23 years on average), whereas in female-headed households men are on average 8 years younger than women (18 years versus 26 years). Males heads of households thus benefit from a larger male population of active age. The economic participation of the members in women-headed households is not very high (table 2).

Table 2. Economic participation of members of the household by sex of head

Among those old enough to work, only 39.5% are active. Likewise, the unemployment rate is very high, insofar as 13.4% of active persons are awaiting work, so only a small number of people work and they must ensure the existence of all the others. In male-headed households, the rate of activity of all the members is close to 60%, and their active members are less affected by unemployment (7.7%). Further, the average income of the male head is 10 times higher than that of the other members of the household whereas this difference is much lower (ratio of only 2 to 1) in female-headed households, a factor conducive to a lesser authority in decision-making and the functioning of the household in comparison to their male counterparts.

### 3.3 Compensating factors

However, female-headed households make use of social networks to mitigate the meagreness of their incomes: participation in mutual and other forms of credit, especially gifts and donations from persons outside the household, provide them with supplementary resources. Exchanging gifts and donations is a common practice in Senegal and the most disadvantaged can often count on the support of better-off households and persons. This solidarity is generally practiced at the time of festivities and ceremonies such as marriages, baptisms, deaths and so forth. In most cases the help provided is financial, though gifts in kind are far from negligible as about one in ten households receive only donations in kind. Female households benefit most from this form of solidarity (85.9% versus 75.2%, see table 3,) and the amount of donations received is twice as high.

Table 3. Characteristics of gifts received by sex of head of household

A still more significant source resides in transfers linked to internal and international emigration. Female-headed households are characterised by a larger proportion receiving money from abroad (40.8% as opposed to 27.1%), essentially from migrants living and working in Western countries (Europe, USA, Canada), from which are sent the largest and most regular monetary transfers: 32.9% (29.3 + 3.6) as opposed to 21.7 (19.0 + 2.7) in households headed by men (table 4).

Tableau 4. Place of residence of migrant sending remittances by sex of head of household

The theory of reciprocal dependence between the migrant and their family explains the durability of the links despite distance and time (Stark 1991). Women heads receive far more often transfers on a regular basis: 57.7% versus 34.1% (table 5).

Table 5. Characteristics of remittances received by sex of head of household

Finally, does the balance eventually lean in favour of women? The distribution of households according to type, sex of head and prevalence of poverty shows (graph 2) that the prevalence of poverty is lower in households headed by women (34.7% versus 50.6%) except in the small category of single persons. In all other types, the vulnerability of women heads is certainly offset by the gifts contributed by other households and by remittances.

Graph 2. Incidence of poverty by sex of head and type of household

### **3.4 Are women being empowered?**

To conclude, households headed by women are less exposed to monetary poverty than those headed by men because they benefit more from social networks (help provided by other households and transfers from migrants) that offset all the other factors of vulnerability. One should not however conclude that a process of empowerment is at work, understood as a greater autonomy vis-à-vis their partner, family of origin, the community to which they belong, society as a whole and also in terms of psychological, social, cultural, economic and political attainment. The stake is that of dependence. Gifts received by households are a source of income that undoubtedly permits reducing their difficulties, but these gifts cannot guarantee their regular functioning. And insofar as women are *obliged* to turn to networks of solidarity to satisfy the needs of their households, they risk finding themselves trapped in a relation of assistance. Although it is true that this is culturally and socially accepted, it does not contribute to increasing the autonomy of women heads of households. As for migratory transfers, they raise another problem regarding the possible change in the status of women linked to the reduction of poverty. If the money sent by the husband working abroad is controlled by third parties, their wives will not benefit from increased freedom in the decision-making needed for the functioning of their households. Thus everything depends on the cultural and social dimensions conditions associated with the micro economics of these households.

## **4. THE SOCIOLOGY OF ABSENCE: WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN**

As early as the 1950s and 1960s, millions of workers came from different family configurations in countries around the Mediterranean Sea (bachelors, husbands who had left wives and children, or who were accompanied or reunited later on with them) to settle in the industrialised countries of Western Europe. However the situations of the families that stayed in the countries of origin were given scant attention for a long time. Only in 1977 was an international seminar held in Ankara (Charbit 1979). In 1980 the Human Rights Department of UNESCO stimulated exploratory studies of a sociological nature in selected countries (Egypt: Kafagy and Zaalouk 1986. Greece: Tsilis 1986. Italy: Ginevra et al. 1986. Portugal : Wall 1981. Tunisia: Zamiti 1986. Turkey: Ulsan 1982).<sup>5</sup> The changes brought about by the migration of the head of the family varied according to the age of the women, their social background and place of residence, and they reacted differently to the departure of their husbands, showing the complexity of the interactions between migration and patriarchy. Almost at the same time, UNICEF entered the field and commissioned a synthesis (Charbit and Bertrand 1985, who also provide a rich commented bibliography of 241 entries), addressing demographic data, legal protection, education, physical and mental health problems of left-behind children and mothers. I borrow here part of their analyses of intra-family dynamics. The oil crisis of 1974 put to an end the flows of active workers to Europe, while family reunification was tolerated, notably in France. The so-called “Thirty glorious decades” (1950’s-1970’s) therefore provide a unique case study to analyse the relationship between migration of the breadwinners and patriarchy in the countries of origin.

### **4.1 Children and the absent father**

The same pattern was observed in various countries in spite of cultural differences (Spain: Mancho 1977. Greece: Amira 1977. Italy: Di Nicola 1974 ; Secondolfo 1974. Morocco: Guignard et al. 1981. Portugal : Barreiros Santos and Serra 1977. Tunisia: Chater 1977 ; Zamiti 1977. Turkey: Dilzis 1977. Yugoslavia: Ilic et al. 1979; Zuzul 1982). The absence of the father profoundly disturbed the children, who were anxious, insecure, suffered from problems of identity and complained of lack of affection. They exhibited a greater frequency of psychiatric symptoms than children of non-migrants. The often very long separation, from five to ten years, created an irremediable void. The children, who could not mourn, recreated a partly mythical father, a situation that plunged them into a state of unreality unfavorable to the construction of a solid identity. When both parents were absent the same

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<sup>5</sup> The method chosen was that of in-depth interviews of small samples of 30 to 40 women, with a common thematic guideline used in the different studies to maintain homogeneity of the entire survey: cause of departure of the head of the family, participation in decisions and reasons why the family stayed in the country, daily life (work, savings management, education of children, family relations, social life), difficulties due to the absence of the head of the family.

mechanism of idealization of the family took place to the detriment of grandparents in charge of the children. Children generally felt responsible for leaving their parents working abroad to improve their situation, hence an overt sense of guilt. But it was at least partly a transfer of guilt, when parents had stated that they had “abandoned” their children and invoked the argument that they sacrificed themselves. Such was the argument internalized by the children and re-expressed in the interviews.

#### **4.2 “White widows”**

In the absence of their husbands the women predictably became heads of the households and raised their children alone. Consequently, their responsibilities and workloads increased considerably: the education of children, managing savings, relations with different administrations, etc. But as the economic situation of the couple improved only after a period lasting from five to ten years or because the amounts of money transferred were too small, many of these women had to work. In Italy and Portugal, the families of migrants generally belonged to the lower social classes and most of the women worked in Portugal as farm labourers and in Italy as non-declared workers. In southern Italy, where hardly any modern industry existed and undeclared work was the main activity, women worked making clothes at home for paltry wages, sometimes helped by their children. In regions where social pressure was very strong, this form of work also allowed them to remain relatively close to the traditional image of the wife at home. In Greece, half the women of the sample worked and nearly all of them on their own farm. Many of them considered as a positive change to have been forced to take initiatives in areas traditionally reserved for men, but the traditional values of these patriarchal societies did not allow women to benefit from the social recognition befitting their new responsibilities. Still worse, in the absence of a man, they found themselves more isolated and marginalised than the wives of non-migrants. The very long absences of their husbands caused these women, to live long years of dissatisfaction and solitude as “*white widows*”. Many of them feared abandonment. Solitude, marginalisation and overworking very often led to serious psychiatric and psychosomatic problems, with major impacts on the children.

#### **4.3 The mother-child relationship**

The marginalisation of mothers had major repercussions on their children’s education, especially that of young boys. In Turkey, at an age when they are usually initiated by their father “*outside*”, those whose father was absent and with whom they could not go out with, were refused activities in keeping with their age while others escaped supervision of any kind. These women who underwent moments of absence, anxiety and even depression, were unable to mitigate the absence of the father, a source of reassuring and protective authority, and were no longer able to control their families. An Italian study showed that the children in almost all the cases examined, declared that the maternal image was not enough to ensure family cohesion. This powerlessness even strengthened the negative image that some women had of themselves: “*I’m incapable of being a mother ... my children will turn out badly*”. In some cases, this lack of authority led the sons to fill the vacuum. Some Tunisian and Italian mothers complained about the aggressiveness of their children, which could go as far as physical violence (Chater 1977). The absence of the father therefore resulted in the fragmentation of the family, unable to obtain economic or other forms of compensation. A Tunisian study of women consulting psychologists underlined the difficulties of mothers in coping with the imbalances caused by the departure of their husbands (Zamiti 1977). Some of them wanted to substitute the father and wield strict authoritarian control over their children. These were generally women who had driven their husband to migrate. The father was rarely mentioned and only by way of emotional blackmail. This excess authority led to all sorts of inhibitions in the children, misguided aggression and functional disorders. These women, who fluctuated between constraint and resignation, found it hard to bear the absence of their husbands, sometimes projecting the responsibility of the situation on their children, and sometimes dowsing their aggression in an effusion of kindness. This climate of uncertainty led the children to become withdrawn and subject to psychomotor retardation.

#### **4.4 Is the extended family a compensatory factor?**

It had long been thought that the extended family, such as the *zadrugas* in Yugoslavia, could be a compensatory factor capable of mitigating the absence of the male heads of households. A woman



could therefore count on her family or family-in-law for different forms of aid, including the children's education. For the latter this meant the presence of a man who, without being able to wholly take the father's place, nonetheless fulfilled the most important roles: image, authority, initiatory role. In Algeria where a strong patrilineal system prevailed at least until the 1990s, the mother and children lived under a "personal" roof, thus close to cousins, uncles and grandparents and often under the roof of the paternal grandfather, so that the child, whatever their age, was not deprived of the image of the adult man in the family, even if the father returned only once a year. The role of the paternal lineage in the child's education was very clear at the time of enrolment and throughout the school year. Enrolment was performed by the father on his return home in the country, and if not then most often by the mother, brothers and sisters, or even a cousin or uncle. The child's education was overseen by the mother, an uncle or cousin, or an elder brother. Thus, a male figure intervened alongside the mother in the education of children in 35% of cases, so paradoxically the father's absence resulted in strengthening the family's control over the child's education. However, tighter controls did not result in better school results when a cousin or uncle oversaw the child's education, certainly because it was a family obligation and a burden, to which they did not genuinely commit themselves.

Finally, these studies of psycho-sociological and sociological orientation show, within the specific context of economic immigration during the boom period (1950-1973) and then recession (1974-2015), the need to clearly identify the real actors and to avoid essentializing patriarchy and migration. The behaviour of left-behind mothers and children was a blend of changes caused by migration with increased responsibilities, and submission to more severe social control due to the absence of the man. In parallel, men of the paternal lineage of all ages embodied the patriarchy of the country of origin and very concrete roles in defence of patriarchy conferred to them. Of course many individual factors are involved, warning against putting forward only one scenario of the evolution of behaviours.

#### **4.5 Patriarchs abroad**

But the story would not be complete if the situation in immigration countries was not taken into account. A weakening of patriarchy also occurred in European immigration countries. The historical pattern of immigration since the 1950s induced a threefold devaluation of the father. In the 1950's and 1960's, as a recently arrived migrant workers, men come to Europe alone discovered economic exploitation, different forms of discrimination in daily life and sometimes racism. They experienced "La plus haute des solitudes" (The deepest solitude) described by the novelist Tahar Benjelloun (1977). Then, as time passed, isolated workers married or brought their families over (for example, in the framework of family reunification), and a breach often widened between them and their children. If the latter were born or had been educated abroad, their knowhow and mastery of the language in daily life endowed them with an authority their fathers lacked. Lastly, when the Oil Crisis of 1974 occurred, the dismissal of large numbers of foreign workers aggravated the economic fragility of the family and fathers, now old and unemployed, found themselves in the domestic sphere usually reserved for women.

In most cases the mentality of migrating men changed, and they displayed weaker links with the values of patriarchy, especially when married with a woman of the country of settlement. One of the consequences was the importance given to the education of girls by fathers living abroad. They were faced with models different from the ideal type of the patriarch, especially in Sweden where equality between men and women is firmly entrenched. In France, these men massively employed in subaltern jobs in the metalworking industry or in construction, wanted their children to benefit from the French republican model which holds education to be the key to social mobility. On the contrary, the negative experience of life abroad mentioned above sometimes resulted in a quest for identity, an over-positive perception of the country of origin and the reassertion of patriarchal values, while children living abroad, often bi-national, have been faced with the sometimes painful contrast between their own identity and the devalued identity of their father and mother.

### **5. THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF DOGON WOMEN HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD**

Up to now, I essentially focused on the relation between international migration and patriarchy, international migration creating the greatest distance possible with the values and functioning of patriarchy in the migrants' societies of origin. However, once again, a research bias is introduced by viewing migration solely from the standpoint of the industrialised countries. It is nevertheless vital to avoid narrowing the analysis. First, the migrants are only taken into account once they have arrived to seek work and a wide range of complex processes in the country of origin are ignored, notably the motivations of the rural exodus which often preceded international migration. This bias is increased by the separation between specialists in international migration and those of internal migration. Second, rather than taking a purely positivist view, imbued with western rationality, and sticking a stencil of interpretation on reality in view to strengthening his research problematic and hypotheses, the researcher should adopt a comprehensive Weberian view: how to explain the migrants' behaviour within the values and norms of their countries of origin? For instance, international migration is only one of the possible responses to poverty, in the same way as seeking employment and non-demographic responses such as pursuing multiple activities (Charbit and Petit 2011). Obviously, the importance and nature of the resources used by households will vary as has been seen in the case of Senegal. But the very choice of response cannot be interpreted in terms of economic calculation and cultural and social dimensions cannot be ignored. In other words, anthropological analysis is the only means of showing the link between patriarchal structures and the rationale intrinsic to internal and international migrations. The Dogon of Mali are a *cas d'école*.

The Dogon represent a little less than 5% of the population of Mali. I studied the subgroup that lives in the arrondissement of Sangha on the cliffs of Bandiagara, located in the loop of the Niger northeast of Bamako. In 1991, during our fieldwork I numbered 21150 individuals in 1991 of which 19.7% were migrants, but women head of household were strikingly rare (Petit 1998): 13 out of the 1314 heads of household and about 8 women Dogon heads of household out of 10 were elderly or widows. It is clear that the absence of men in no way systematically led women to accede to the status of head of household. My hypothesis is that the distribution of gender roles and the strong hierarchy of age classes explained that despite a very low sex ratio, the function of family head remained reserved for men. In addition, since the families were not nuclear, as long as a man related to the man that had migrated remained, he could replace him or those that were absent. Furthermore, because the absent men were relatively young and did not necessarily have the status of head of household, they could still be associated with the household of their father or with that of a brother. Let us now examine the situation of the rare Dogon women heads of household. Two elements are decisive in understanding the low proportions of women heads of household: the status of women and the topographical environment. Other factors should be mentioned to account for other types of migrations, for example those of the young (Petit 1994; 1998).

### **5.1 The place and status of women in society**

Available anthropological work and by my own field observations showed that women could not become heads of family except in very precise and temporary situations. In a socially "normal" situation, the head of household was obligatorily the eldest male of the individuals present in the family. The gender relation prevailing over the age relation, a woman was statutorily a junior, outside any consideration of age. As Calame-Griaule observed because a woman never belonged to her husband's family, she remained a stranger, even after several years of marriage (Paulme 1940). One of the recognised freedoms of women was that they could break a union and start a new one or leave to re-join their paternal family. This freedom of movement in the social domain was incompatible with the status of head of family and she had little chance of becoming a head of household. Death also shows the statutory dependence of the Dogon woman. She could remain within the family as a widow or accept to marry, according to the custom of levirate marriage to the brother (as defined by the classificatory kinship) of the deceased husband. She could however decide to leave the family by returning to her father or remarry with a man outside the family of her deceased husband. In fact, the option chosen by the woman undoubtedly depended on her age and thus on her capacity to bear children. As long as she was fecund, she would seek to remarry quickly. If she was elderly or had reached the menopause, she was likely become a second or third wife by levirate marriage. Otherwise, she would remain a widow and her children would be bound to maintain her. Even if she had no children present or living in the family of her husband, she would not be driven away since that would

amount to a lack of respect. If her son became the head of the household, she was sure that her place would not be contested.

Thus, for the Dogon woman, being the head of a household necessarily corresponded to a temporary situation. They occupied this position rather like a regent, in a situation of expectancy. The time needed to settle a succession could take longer than usual if the man called on to become the head of the family was a migrant, not to mention that he could refuse to return to the village. Women therefore only decided by proxy, as the real power lied elsewhere as normal attributes of the head of the household, especially economic and political power and women fell under the control of other men in the family under the gaze of the village elders. The brother of the wife's husband controlled the household's resources. The grain that feeds the family daily was stored in a male granary, traditionally that of the head of the family, and the woman only supplemented this food in case of need from her own reserves (Bouju 1984: 133-134). The "male granary", *gê ana*, was the largest of all the granaries. It could hold from 80 to 120 baskets of ears of corn, i.e. from 1600 to 2400 kg of grain. Having ownership over it is an assertion of power, that to feed people, make them one's dependents and control their fates. Women never owned these reserves.

## 5.2 The effect of the topographical environment

Another variable, the topographical position of the village of residence, was crucial in access of women to the status of head of household. In Dogon country, there is a contrast between the plateau and the escarpments. The former benefits from natural conditions that permit market gardening, notably onions, and from the impacts of tourism. On the other hand, the latter area suffers from isolation, topography and water resources hardly favourable for the development of market gardening which, with tourism, is the only source capable of generating monetary income. These economic differences have strong impacts on family structures. Firstly, 68.1% of the migrants came in 1991 from escarpment villages, which gathered only 55% of the total population. Secondly, the families were smaller on the escarpment, 13.4 people on average versus 32 people on the plateau, and they were above all composed of elderly persons and children. Families on the escarpment were often composed of a single household and the average age of this family is older than on the plateau. Despite the small sample available to us, the fact that all the women head of family lived on the escarpment meant that the sociodemographic situation (size and composition of family, origin of migrants) of the escarpment villages brought together the conditions that facilitated the accession of women to the status of head of household (tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Distribution of heads of household by sex and topographical milieu

Table 4. Characteristics of households by sex of head of household and topographical milieu

These women, most often widowed and elderly, found themselves at the head of several people with lesser status, children and other old persons. Such a situation was socially tolerable as it did not completely call into question the functioning of a society based on the twofold hierarchy of age and gender. On the death of her husband, a wife could therefore more easily find herself at the head of a small family unit for want of men since they had often gone to settle definitively or temporarily in farming villages in the plain region. The seat of the large family, the *gina*, remained in the village of origin in the escarpment region, where the family fetishes were kept. The migrants on the plain always returned to the escarpment for the festival of *boulo*<sup>6</sup>, for the *dama*<sup>7</sup>. But the economic power increasingly lied in the villages of the plain, where the production of millet was most abundant. Those who had left for the plain frequently provided millet to the elderly remaining in the village and ensured their survival between harvests. The shift in authority was clear. A woman could "manage"

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<sup>6</sup> The *boulo* is a festival held every year in May, before sowing, and is aimed at preserving fertility of nature.

<sup>7</sup> The *dama* is a funeral rite practiced a certain time after death whose purpose is to cause the soul of the deceased to leave the world of the living where it continues to stay.

children and other old people, but what was important for the future and the present of the family had moved elsewhere.

In brief, the possibility for a Dogon woman to be the head of a household depended only very marginally on the sex ratio. It was accepted only in exceptional circumstances, when family structures were the weakest or the economic situation dire and only as a temporary solution with limited attributes, because it obliged the group to go against one of the structural principles of its culture.

## **6. CONCLUSION: A FAR TOO SIMPLISTIC OPPOSITION**

I started from the commonly accepted opposition between the patriarchal system, which “pub-counter ideas” assume to be conservative, and migration, also considered solely as a dynamic of modernity. To depart from such sketchy and simplistic views, demography, microeconomics of the household, sociology and anthropology have provided problematics, concepts and data. Finally, I would like to propose an epistemological discussion concerning each of the disciplines and their respective contributions to our knowledge of the structure and functioning of households.

Demographic and microeconomics quantification remains a unique contribution, notably for evaluating the feminisation of poverty. However, the limits of quantification become apparent immediately one sets aside measurement and tries to evaluate empowerment. But another criticism can be mentioned. The implicit assumption of demographic methodology is that everything occurs within the closed circle of the family living in a dwelling and that the male head of household is an all-powerful actor who exerts his domination over his wife and children. This is the western image of the patriarch holding absolute authority over the members of his family and of a largely autonomous individual who makes all the decisions “as a good father should”, according to the Napoleonic Civil Code. In the liberal society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the head of the family was assumed to be a totally autonomous and perfectly rational actor who pursued his economic interest according to utilitarian logic. In European history, and in that of non-European societies, this vision privileging individualism is sociologically and historically misleading. First sociologically, since patriarchy tends to perpetuate a social order that consecrates the predominance of the eldest men over their social juniors, the decisions are doubtless taken individually by each head of family but in conformity with what is common to the entire group of men in a dominant position: the system of values, norms, and sanctions deemed normal with respect to the members of the community under their domination. Secondly, historically, since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC in Athens, the separation between the public and private spheres has been one of the pillars of political order. The man was preeminent in the former while the woman dominated in what the Romans would later call the “*domus*”. Under these conditions the authority of the patriarch is most often visible outside the domestic group, but the dynamic of the relations between husband and wife can give rise to mechanisms of influence of the wife over the husband, inspiring him discreetly but decisively regarding the decisions he takes. Likewise, in polygamous households in West Africa, the first wife plays a preeminent role in decisions concerning the domestic sphere and probably has an influence over the husband. What is more, the man is bound to respect precise rules regarding sexual relations with his spouses, with the practice of what is called “taking turns”.

As for sociology, taking into account the complexity of the relations between migration and patriarchy implies considering migrant workers living abroad as representatives of patriarchal groups. In 1981, Boucebcı, analysed the changes that had occurred in Algeria in extended families and in village communities, and observed that despite the strength of tradition, internal migrations and urbanisation had led to the reorganisation of family relations to the detriment of the group. The emigrant was no longer the delegate of the village group but an individual who attempted to survive and who merged in the world of negotiated labour. “The emigrant has become an almost anonymous member of a community whose administrative structure reflects an entity, the State, a body difficult to assimilate with the image of a father and relay an ancestral message. For the emigrant in a situation of cultural conflict, the calm reassurance retransmitted by the group remaining in the country no longer exists, and the latter ensures less and less its role as referent of the historic and cultural identity dreamt individually and collectively by the migrant group. This induces a distortion of the link between the emigrant and the family, both sources in the second degree of a multiplication of risk for the mother and child”.

Boucebci's reflections of 1981 are premonitory since they foresee the obsolescence of the entire discussion of the supposed radical opposition between migration and patriarchy, brought about by globalisation and which affects both patriarchy and migration. Well before the advent of the Internet, the broadcasting of television in rural households from the 1960s onwards and even more so with the generalisation of parabolic antennas, considerably narrowed the gap between patriarchal and other societies. American telefilms, those produced by Bollywood, not to speak of the Brazilian *telenovelas*, all widely diffused around the world, have in some way placed a foot in the doorway of households and obliged all their members, both the men who embody authority and the others, to discover different modes of family functioning. In scenarios oozing fine sentiments, young adults fallen in love regularly come up against parental authority of a far less coercive nature and are aided by persons who play the role of mediators within the families. Regarding migration, the fall in the cost of transport has facilitated mobility, notwithstanding the barriers represented by restrictive immigrations policies implemented in Europe in particular. At the same time, new information technologies have contributed not only to the circulation of physical persons but also to that of ideas and models. The revolution of mobile phones, access to hitherto forbidden information, especially pornography, and more generally fascination for "Western" consumption, have had increasing stronger effects on the young. Thus, direct experience of migration, which called patriarchy into question, had been replaced by another mechanism based on the interiorization of models of behaviour deemed more prestigious than those experienced every day.

Last, the presumed opposition between patriarchy and migration is far too dichotomous from an anthropology point of view. Indeed, the patriarchal system can itself stimulate migration by designating who in the group of social juniors has the right to emigrate and by organising this emigration in the community, thus displaying its power and authority (examples: Petit on the Dogon, Sayad on Algeria; Timera on the West Africa). This social control of migration has been analysed as an initiatory rite: by travelling far from their society and country, the young must prove their courage, moral strength, endurance, and their capacity to assume and complete their project, the success of the enterprise guarantying them a number of rights on their return (access to the matrimonial system and to land). Initiatory rites aim at reproducing, under the control of the Elders (thus already initiated) who supervise the rituals, the social system through a series of physical and moral trials, and at transmitting an ensemble of knowhow and knowledge. The society of origin seeks to control the migrant from afar, by activating a value system strongly marked by notions of respect, honour and shame, that structure social and family links. This seems to echo various theoretical frameworks and concepts (migratory chain and networks, economy of debt, moral economy and notably the so-called migratory contract). But this appealing convergence between anthropology and socioeconomic theories of migration is vitiated, as migration corresponds more to a rite of separation. It allows individuals male and especially female migrants to acquire an economic capital that they can convert into a social and for men at least a political capital and migration sometimes jeopardises social order. Whereas the Elders hoped to control the energy, ambitions and claims of the young, migration can in time become an instrument of social subversion by generating (new) social disparities and by modifying the trajectories of success and access to power.

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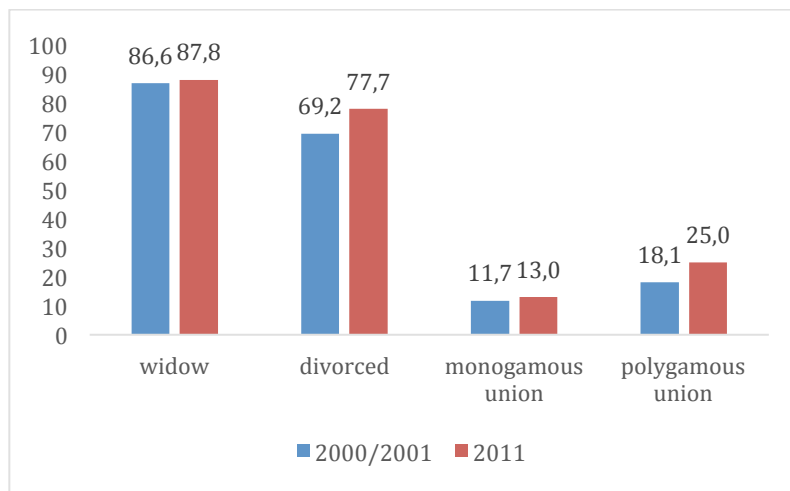
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Graph 1. Matrimonial status of women heads of household (Surveys of 2000/2001 and 2011)



Source: see note 2.

Table 1. Characteristics of head of household by sex

Characteristics of head of HH	Female	Male
Percent with secondary education	13.6	19.2
Rate of inactivity	53.5	76.5
Percent wage earners	14.1	21.4

Source: see note 2

Table 2. Economic participation of members of the household by sex of head

	Female-headed HH	Male-headed HH
Proportion of members active	39,5	59,9
Proportion of members unemployed	13,4	7,7
Proportion of wage earners	14	21
Ratio of income of head/income of members	2/1	10/1

Source: see note 2

Table 3. Characteristics of gifts received by sex of head of household

	Female-headed HH	Male-headed HH
Percent HH receiving gifts	85.9	75.2
Percent receiving gifts in nature	89.3	80.3
Percent receiving gifts in cash	85.9	75.2

Source: see note 2

Tableau 4. Place of residence of migrant sending remittances by sex of head of household

	Female-headed HH	Male-headed HH
Africa	7,7	10,7
Europe	19,0	29,3
America	2,7	3,6
Other	2,5	2,5
No transfer	68.1	53.9

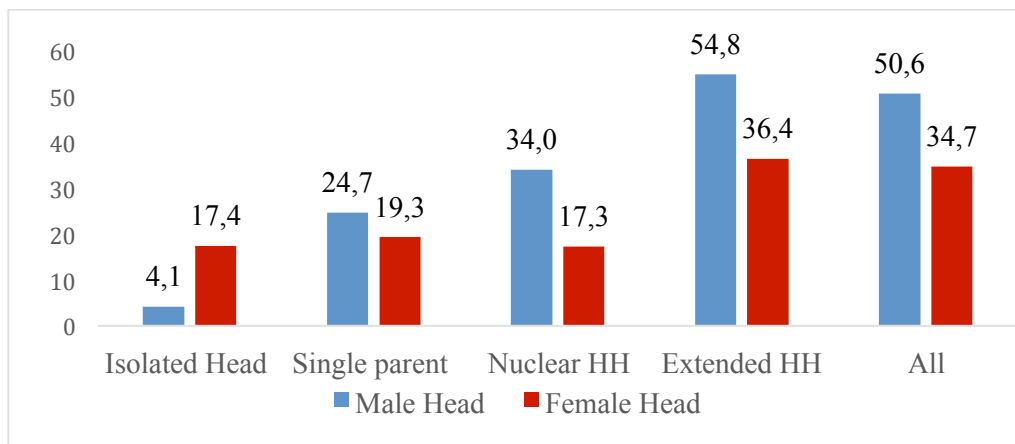
Source: see note 2

Table 5. Characteristics of remittances received by sex of head of household

	Female-headed HH	Male-headed HH
Remittances in % of total income	20	10
% of HH receiving remittances	40.8	27.1
% from Europe and North America	31.9	21.7
% HH receiving regularly remittances	57.7	34.1

Source: see note 2

Graph 2. Incidence of poverty by sex of head and type of household



Source: see note 2