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2007

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With the increase in female age at first marriage, changes in the age pattern of entry into sexuality, the increase in premarital births, higher levels of school enrolment, worsening conditions in access to formal employment and the generalisation of youth migration, many of the major demographic and socio-economic changes in Sub-Saharan Africa concern the period of youth and concur to define new forms of transition to adulthood.

While the events through which people assume adult responsibilities were formerly well-defined and subject to strong family and social control, the range of possibilities in the experience of youth is getting wider as this period of life is lengthening and as deteriorating economic conditions offer few opportunities to secure personal autonomy. The decline of the early marriage pattern that applied to girls in most African countries (Hertrich, 2002; Westoff, 2003; Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2004; Lloyd, 2005; Mensch et al., 2005), is making room for an increasing dissociation between the timetables of sexual initiation, couple formation and the beginning of parenthood (Bledsoe and Cohen, 1993; Mahy and Gupta, 2002; Lloyd, 2005). More broadly, it has lengthened women's period of pre-conjugal life and hence the opportunities for new experiences. Economic constraints and increasing migration behaviours delay residential, economic and family stabilisation (Antoine et al., 2001) and define new conditions in the living patterns of young people, which may now extend well beyond the family living space. While diversification in the experiences of transition into adulthood creates a new and challenging situation for the control of young people by their elders, it may also be a lever for modifying gender relations. Indeed, the events that take place during youth are involved in the construction of sex-specific identities, and how and when they occur give insights into the way young people will shoulder their roles as man and women during adulthood (Gage, 2000; Lloyd 2005). The analysis of transition to adulthood – including the nature and the timing of the events as well as the places and networks involved – thus provides the opportunity to examine the changes in the gender-specific pattern and in the social organisation of relations between generations.

While youth is a classical topic in anthropology[1], it only recently became a field of study in socio-demography. In the industrialised countries, research on youth began in the 1980s, at a time when lengthened education postponed transition into adulthood, and in a more gradual way, the stages of access to autonomy (sexual initiation, couple formation, starting in working life, residential autonomy) grew increasingly dissociated and reversible (Chamboredon, 1985; Goldsheider and DaVanzo, 1985, 1989; Kiernan, 1991; Galland, 1991; Bozon, 1996; Villeneuve Gokalp, 1996, Insee, 1997). In African demography, the issue of youth appeared only in the 1990s and mainly as a sub-topic of reproductive health (Bledsoe and Cohen 1993; Gage-Brandon and Meekers, 1993; Delaunay, 1994; Meekers, 1994; Westoff et al., 1994, Bongaarts and Cohen, 1998, Mensch et al., 1998). In the context of the AIDS epidemics, increasing female age at marriage, and weakening traditional controls over sexuality, adolescents (especially girls) have come to be viewed as a "population at risk", whose behaviour with respect to sexuality and fertility needs to be analysed. Until now, most of the studies concerning African youth have been related to this issue[2] and, as a result, they are mainly focused on the female population, on sexual, reproductive and marital behaviours, and often concerned by policy and health programme implications. A broader point of view on youth, including both sexes and a larger range of events in the transition to adulthood, has been adopted by the surveys conducted since the 1990s in several African capitals to analyse the process of urban integration. These studies have highlighted how the young generations go through longer processes before they reach occupational, residential and family autonomy, due to social and economic conditions that are now extremely precarious (Antoine, 2001; Antoine et al., 1998, 2001). In recent years, globalisation has emerged as a new issue through which youth trends in developing countries are examined, looking for possible convergences in the transitions to adulthood and the building of youth culture but also in the inequalities in

the preparation of young people to face the socio-economic constraints of globalisation (Brown and Larson, 2002; Fussell and Greene, 2002; Nsamenang, 2002; Lloyd, 2005).

This paper is concerned with the entry into adulthood in a rural population of Mali, little involved in schooling and economic modernisation. In contrast, noticeable changes are taking place in migration behaviours and the process of marriage. Our aim is to examine the meaning of these changes in the frame of the family inter-generational relationships and gender-relationships. Do these changes affect boys and girls differently? To what extent do they contribute to the building of a common experience and youth culture? Do these changes take place in line with family strategies or do they suggest a decline in the social control over young people and a reshaping of the place allotted to individuals in the family organisation? The timetables of events during youth as well as the social circumstances in which they occur will be analysed and compared between sexes in order to examine these questions.

I. THE DATA

The study covers two villages - Kwara and Sirao (Hanfwa'ui) - located, in south-east Mali, about 450 kilometres from Bamako. They belong to the Bwa ethnic group. The population was respectively 630 and 840 at the time of the last local census in 1999. Dirt tracks lead to the nearest towns, San and Tominian, about 30 kilometres away.

Data were gathered from an exhaustive life event history survey. First carried out in 1987-89, the survey has since been updated twice, in 1995 and 2000. During these follow-up surveys, the biographies previously recorded were updated, and those of new residents - i.e. immigrants and the children born since the last visit - were recorded. The biographies were updated up to the time of the survey for the residents and the men who had left on migration since the preceding visit, in which case the information was collected from their relatives residing in the village. The women who had migrated were also monitored as long as they were single.

In this study, we will focus on the individuals born before 1980 who were interviewed as residents during at least one of our visits. The selection effect of migration is thus controlled for: residents who emigrated between the survey rounds are followed until 2000 for men and until their marriage for women. There are 1,037 such biographies, 482 for men and 555 for women.

The biographical questionnaire serves to collect the complete marital, reproductive, migratory and religious histories of individuals. Initially designed for an ordinary, mainly events-based recording of facts, the questionnaire was enhanced in the middle of the first survey so as to capture the family control over individual events. More questions were then included with a view to capturing how the family was involved in the way various events, especially migration and marriage, were brought about. The building of the migration history and the marriage history are detailed in Boxes 1 and 2. With these two-step versions of the questionnaire, the analysis of the timetables of events is based on the total number of records while the more precise analysis of the family control is restricted to those related to the second version of the questionnaire. Given the limited number of records involved, the analysis of family control should be viewed mainly as a more in-depth and explicative contribution to the study. In this sense, the relevance of the results will be assessed on the basis of indicator convergence rather than of the statistical validity of the results.

Box 1. Migration history

Migration histories consist in recording all travel that extends over a minimum period of 3 months. The basic questionnaire was designed to collect information on the migration itself – migration order, destination, date, reason for travel (marriage, employment, visit, etc.) – and two items of information on the context (whether the migrant travelled individually or with other family members or friends; and whether the migrant knew anybody at his/her destination).

The revised questionnaire included additional questions on how the family was involved in the migration, from two different points of view, i.e. control over the departure (who took the initiative for the migration, and whether the family elder gave his agreement), and the economic gains for the family farm (what kind of earnings were brought back, and how much; what use was made of the earnings handed in to the *zu*). Answers to the latter questions were recorded for each labour migration, if the person interviewed was answering in person. Otherwise, particularly concerning people who were away on migration, the questions only related to family control over the last departure.

Box 2. Marriage history

The initial version of the questionnaire was designed to record successive marriages, how they ended, as well as a number of characteristics about the man and his wife – marriage order, marital status and religion at the time of the wedding, how many wives the man had at the beginning of the marriage, how the marriage ended, the dates when the marriage was concluded and ended.

In its second version, the questionnaire was designed to record not only marriages but also the matrimonial procedures initiated by the families, but interrupted before they had resulted in marriage. "*Potential marriages*" or "*marriage plans*" were thus recorded for non-single persons. Specific questions were asked on each marriage as well as each procedure initiated with a never-married woman[3], so that changes in family control over couple formation could be appraised.

The questions concerned the various stages of the matrimonial process:

- the *union decision*: the initiative for the marriage and the acknowledgement of the formal agreement from the girl's family, which is the formal signal for the traditional procedure to be launched;
- the *bridewealth*, both traditional (performing farming tasks in the girl's parents' fields, grain offerings), and modern (cash gifts or indirect money gifts through the purchase of millet beer from the girl's parents at a high price);
- the premarital transition period – referred to here as the "*entrustment*" period – in which the girl is placed in the care of a family designated by her future husband's family;
- the *length of the process*;
- the *social recognition of the union*: wedding celebration in the village, legal marriage, religious wedding.

Last, it should be mentioned that certain events that are usually viewed as stages of the process into adulthood were left out. Indeed, ages at school leaving, at access to employment or independent lodgings seemed irrelevant because school attendance is rare, wage employment does not exist, and access to independent accommodation is easy[4]. Age at access to family economic responsibilities, though recorded, was not included in the analysis either, because it occurs at a much later age and is definitely disconnected from marriage[5]. Lastly, age at first sexual intercourse was not recorded during the investigation, as the question is thoroughly unwelcome.

In addition to the life event history survey, a qualitative survey was conducted in January-February 2002 to record people's own views and feelings concerning events and intergenerational relationships during different periods of their life (childhood, youth, the beginning of marital life and the older ages). A total of 65 individual interviews were conducted with men and women belonging to three cohort groups (born before 1950, 1951-70 and 1971-83). Some results of this qualitative survey will be use to illustrate and complement the results from the quantitative survey.

II. THE CONTEXT[6]

1. Socio-economic and demographic characteristics

The social and economic characteristics are those commonly shared by Sahelian farmer populations. The economy is centred on agricultural self-sufficiency and family-based production. The Bwa have invested little in trade and cash crops. The school enrolment rate is low but the situation has improved since the early 1990s thanks to the policy of "basic schools" supported by the village communities. In the adult population, 28% of the men and 6% of the women born in 1950-74 had been to school (there were no schools at the time of the previous cohorts), but only 8% of the men and 1 woman had completed primary education. One distinctive feature is that, in a country that is more than 90% Muslim (Ballo et al., 2002), the Bwa never embraced Islam, but partly joined the Christian churches (about half the population surveyed).

From a demographic point of view, the natural growth rate is high in the region (over 3% per year), though it is partly brought down by migration. Mortality rates have definitely decreased since the 1950s, but under-five mortality is still high (about 1 child in 5). Reproductive behaviours have not changed yet and fertility remains high, at about 8 children per woman and 9 children per man.

2. Family and social structures

The family organisation is based on a social and political unit, the father's lineage, and an economic unit, the domestic group or *zu*. The lineage is the reference unit in the political, social and matrimonial relations with other groups. Attached to it are land ownership rights, as well as the political and ritual prerogatives in the village. It also serves as a unit for worship, especially ancestor worship. Lastly, matrimonial alliances are organised at lineage level: as an exogamous unit, all the matrimonial procedures related to finding a wife or giving a daughter away to another lineage are processed through it. The lineage, depending on its size, includes a varying number of domestic groups, which are farming and consumption units. The *zu* are quite large in size and their structure often complex: over half the population live in poly-nuclear families and belong to an economic unit comprising at least 10 members (Hertrich, 2001). Polygamy concerns about one fifth of the men and one-third of the married women. Transmission of authority within the lineage as a domestic group is based on gender, generation and age criteria: responsibility for the family group is incumbent on men, and among the latter on the eldest, namely the oldest among the men in the oldest generation.

One main feature of the Bwa social system is that the village community, as well as family institutions, play a prominent role (Capron, 1973, 1988a, 1988b). The importance of this role can be perceived through the social and political organisation of the village, collectively assumed by different lineages, but also through the way the village is structured in space and the importance of community practices, particularly of celebrations. Unlike the spatial organisation patterns of other West African populations, family units among the Bwa do not belong to any delimited residential space (compounds or groups of houses). On the contrary, the members of a domestic group usually live in variously located huts, often far apart and dispersed throughout the village. These huts are mostly small, open onto the street, and most of the daily activities are performed in that public space. Community life, maintained through interpersonal exchange and close relations between neighbours, is also enhanced by a wealth of festivities. The ritual ceremonies, whether traditional or Christian, the family ceremonies (weddings, funerals), the sessions of farm labour provided by groups of young people - as part of the bridewealth due by one of their peers or as a duty in an association -, are some of the many festive occasions in which the villagers participate. In addition to these special events, in every village at least one day of the week is devoted to drinking millet beer while the daily chores are set aside.

Social relations in the village are constantly maintained, thus building a sense of belonging and strong attachment of individuals to their village. Simultaneously, social relations are one way of ensuring permanent, diffuse but extensive social control over the community members, with little room for any private life. This community organisation ensures a high level of homogeneity in the village: economic surpluses are absorbed in drinking and festivities, and individual differentiation is frowned upon. It also conditions the pattern of social change: new behaviours are difficult to initiate but, once introduced, they spread very rapidly.

III. *YAROMU*, THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUTH IN THE VILLAGE

The Bwa have a word, *yaromu*[7], for the period of youth before marriage. It is viewed as a blessed time of life, when people have achieved physical maturity but are still free of responsibilities. It is a carefree period of enjoyment and leisure, in which peer relations prevail, including wooing of the opposite sex.

While physical transformations are considered as a source of personal turmoil and confusion for teenagers in industrialised countries (Lesko, 2001), the Bwa claim their physical development as a source of pride. The ability to accomplish new and difficult tasks is seen as proof of their maturity, the source of a new social consideration and the basis of the status of youth. For boys, these tasks relate mainly to field work (especially weeding), while for girls – who also mention the growth of breasts as a sign of maturity - the ability to prepare food and to provide wood from the bush appear to be the most important.

Entry into the period of youth is associated with a new way of life. Boys and girls leave their parents' house to sleep with friends, while still working and taking their meals with their parents. Boys live together in groups of 3 or 4 in empty huts in the village ("boys' houses") but girls remain under the control of an adult (usually an old woman, their own or a friend's grand-mother).

There is a wide range of entertainments between peers of each sex and between groups of boys and girls with, as a common feature, the high value given to sociability and fun. During the dry season, boys come in groups to chat with girls and invite them to their boys' house. On nights of the full moon, girls perform specific dance sessions ("*nabwo*") while in the old days, boys used to organise wrestling sessions. During the farming period, they set up labour associations, working for farmers and pooling their earnings to organise a party after harvesting. Boys club together to offer sessions of farm labour as part of the bridewealth owed by one of them. Christian communities are often joined during youth (but deserted a few years later), as they provide an additional opportunity for sociability and entertainment. These youth activities, that strengthen friendship and mutual assistance, also provide scope for competitiveness and self-assertion. In sporting activities (dancing, labour sessions, wrestling) young people, particularly boys, pit their strength against one another and express themselves both collectively and individually through promotion of physical strength.

Such public arenas are places for young people of both genders to judge, approach and "woo" one another. Girls watch and praise the boys' performances, and boys encourage and honour girls in similar ways. Personal affinities may appear and a young man will speak about his "*hazunu*" (his girl) to design his favourite, while a girl will refer to her "*yaro*". These boy-girl relations are not supposed to be serious and, in the past at least, were not intended to result in a marriage. They mainly take place within a group and are mediated by peers, with little room, if any, for privacy. Pre-marital procreation is strongly condemned and this lack of possible privacy, reinforced by community control, is a major obstacle to pre-marital sexuality.[8] Up to the 1990s, pre-marital pregnancies were rare and, in these cases, abortion or hasty marriage were possible responses to avoid social disapproval.[9]

So, youth appears as a time for games and "recreation" before marriage, with intense sociability and a wealth of activities. As the saying goes – "*Yaromu is much more than eating crushed millet*" (Leguy, 2001) – the period of youth cannot be compared with the ordinary way of life.

Though youth is perceived as a time of freedom, its features are integral parts of the social organisation of youth and contribute to the social control over the young generations by the elders. Indeed, while adolescents are involved in having fun with their peers, they are distracted from more serious affairs, particularly their marriage.

Marriage is a key component of social relationships between lineages and must be organised with a sound knowledge of this network and an accurate evaluation of the stakes involved: "*Marriage is not like a hunting party organised by kids, where anyone can go along*" (saying, Leguy, 2001). Traditionally it is up to the lineage authorities to plan marriages for the members, seeking wives for their sons and giving their daughters away. This requires much time and skill: matrimonial procedures are codified, comprising several stages that involve both material and symbolic resources. The procedure is formally initiated by the consent of the girl's family, requested by the young man's lineage. From then on, instalments of bridewealth, including farm labour, grain (and, nowadays, cash), are owed to the girl's family. The period of engagement ends with a symbolic kidnapping ("abduction") and the girl is entrusted ("deposited") to a family on allied or friendly terms with her husband's family, up to the wedding day and the beginning of cohabitation. This "family affair" is not based on direct discussion between lineages; relations are conducted through a social mediator, usually a blacksmith or a griot[10]. It also involves the community through the farming brideservice rendered by village youths, the ritual of the bride abduction, her accommodation during the entrustment period and the village ceremony of marriage. The complexity and formalisation of the marriage process is a mainstay of the elders' authority over young people's marriage; it demands specialised knowledge that is inaccessible to young men. As expressed by an informant "*how would it be possible for a young man to secure a wife without the help of his family?"*(Manahan, woman 46 years old)[11].

In this marriage process, the young people, the girls especially, are passive. While girls are supposed to be consulted before betrothal (Capron, 1973, 1988b), this step was often bypassed or limited to a token gesture. Several of our informants belonging to the older cohorts mentioned that they learned very late that they were betrothed and thought that the brideservices under way concerned one of their sisters. Others specified that it was inconceivable to question their family's plans. The late and limited involvement of women in their marriage processes is also supported by the results of dual data collection : women describe much shorter and less complex processes than their husbands, they have "truncated" information that relates more often to the final or later stage of the procedure (Hertrich, 1998). Boys are more involved, at least in an instrumental way, because they have to perform the farming brideservice with their peers, they are also invited to send their friends around for chat parties with the bride. The ritual of abduction will also be conducted by some of these friends. Though limited, this participation of the groom in the process has led the way for insidious changes in the organisation of marriage: initially required to abide by a family decision, young men are progressively finding opportunities to express their opinion on their elders' choice and finally to propose their own choice, while the preservation of the formal procedure and its management by the elders conceals any change on the public scene.

In any case, the relations between spouses-to-be are of a very different nature from those between girls and boys while they are enjoying their "youth". They are characterised by shyness and avoidance. Juliette (woman, 35 years old) recounts that during youth chat parties *"when it was said that such and such a boy was your husband-to-be, there was no fun between you, you just had to say "hello" and go away"*. This modesty foreshadows the remote, unequal relations that, as a rule, are established between man and wife.

As summarised in Table 1, the way of life of young people and the traditional management of their marriage belong to two separate fields, with contrasting features concerning the form and the spirit of the relations between the sexes. One might therefore expect changes in marriage processes to entail changes in gender relationships: if the socially constructed dissociation between freedom in youth and control in matrimony is disrupted, then the very nature of the relations between man and wife may also change. Indeed, if the personal affinities expressed during youth can be legitimated through marriage, the underlying relations based on feelings and equality are likely also to influence the relations between spouses.

Table 1

Contrasting features between the way of life of young people and the organisation of their marriage

***Yaromu*, the experience of youth**	**The organisation of marriage**
▪ A personal experience ▪ Care-free, entertainment ▪ Informal relations between peers: showing off, seduction ▪ Freely chosen and egalitarian relationships between boys and girls	▪ A family business ▪ A serious business ▪ Very formal and codified contacts between lineages ▪ Relations between future spouses dominated by modesty and avoidance

Our purpose is to examine these changes over the last 50 years, a period covered by the biographies of the cohorts surveyed. Changes in the marriage pattern have occurred in the past, as elsewhere (Caldwell et al., 1998), under the influence of colonisation and Christianisation. But in the second part of the twentieth century, another decisive change occurred that modified the conditions of social control over young people and the experience of youth itself: the development of youth migration.

IV. THE EXPANSION OF MIGRATION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE[12]

The Bwa are sedentary people, and strongly attached to their village. Yet migration has always existed, on a large scale for women who generally settle in their husbands' village after marriage, but also among children – as is the case for foster children – men and families, who may either go on temporary visits or leave the village for good, when a new village is created for example. Already among the older cohorts, it was not rare for young people to travel: 40% of men, and 50% of women born before 1945 had travelled for at least 3 months by the time they were 20 years old (Table 2). But youth migration substantially increased in the following cohorts, concerning practically all men born after 1960, and all women born in the 1970s[13].

1. The dramatic increase in youth labour migration

This extension of migration is closely linked to increased economic migration. Two phases can be distinguished. The first one, from the mid-1960s, concerns mainly men. The increase in male labour migration became visible from the 1945-1959 cohorts (40% before age 20) and then continued to expand rapidly, until it affected almost all members of the cohorts born after 1960 (80 to 90%). From the late 1980s, labour migration extended to women and became generalised as rapidly as for men: at age 20, over 80% of the women born in 1975-1979 were affected, as against 60% among the 1970-1974 cohorts and only 20% among the 1960-1969 cohorts.

Table 2
Migration before age 20. Indicators by sex and cohort.
(Cohort table data)

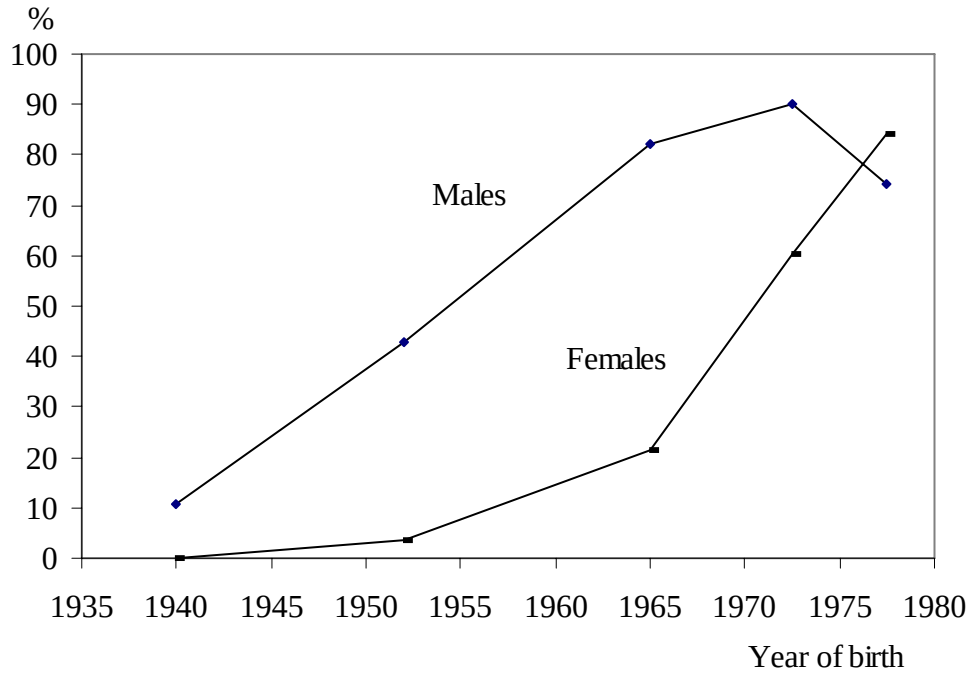
Indicators	Cohorts				
	< 1945	1945-59	1960-69	1970-74	1975-79
All types of migration: Percentage of individuals who have experienced at least one migration before age 20					
Men	37	56	90	97	91
Women	49	69	82	90	94
Labour migration					
Percentage of individuals who have experienced at least one labour migration before age 20					
Men	11	43	82	90	74
Women	0	4	21	60	84
Average number of migrations for employment purposes before age 20 (1)					
Men	0.2	0.6	1.4	2.3	1.6
Women	0.0	0.1	0.3	1.2	2.1
Migration away from the Bwa ethnic area (2)					
Percentage of individuals who have migrated away from the ethnic area at least once before age 20					
Men	20	35	74	84	78
Women	9	18	43	66	85
Average number of years spent away from the ethnic area between age 15 and age 20 (3)					
Men	0.2	0.4	1.1	1.1	1.5
Women	0.1	0.4	1.1	1.1	2.2
Numbers					
Men	100	97	98	84	98
Women	115	114	126	85	113

(1) Average number of migrations per individual among the whole cohort (migrants and non-migrants).
(2) Including all types of migration (labour, family transfers…)
(3) Average number of years per individual among the whole cohort (migrants and non-migrants).
Source: Life event history survey, individuals who were interviewed as residents during one or other visit (1987-89, 1995 or 2000)

2. Converging migration trends among young women and young men

While labour migration remained a male-specific behaviour for 25 years, it is now an almost systematic component of transition into adulthood among both sexes (Figure 1). During the last decade, girls have been catching up with boys: they are as much concerned by labour migration as boys and experience even a larger number of moves (2.1 as against 1.6 among the 1975-1979 cohorts) (Table 2). Moreover, for both sexes, this trend is associated with an expansion of the living space of young people outside their ethnic area (Table 2). Among the younger cohorts, 8 individuals in 10, of both sexes, have lived in a different social and cultural environment from their initial one before the age of 20, versus 2 men in 10 and 1 woman in 10 among the older cohorts. Though moves by young people are usually temporary, they define a new framework for the relationships with the family and the village communities: the life in the village takes a sequential shape and an increasing share of the period of youth is spent elsewhere. Among the young cohorts (born in 1975-79), about half of the period between age 15 and age 20 is spent outside the ethnic area for girls, and nearly one-third for boys. While the village environment was traditionally the main, if not the only, reference in the building of young people's lives, it is now only one reference among others.

Figure 1
Converging experiences of labour migration among men and women
Percentage of individuals who have experienced at least one labour migration before age 20
(cohort table data)



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The expansion of young female labour migration, in some cases over several decades, has been observed among different populations of West Africa, such as in Senegal (Delaunay, 1994; Enel et al., 1994; Gugler and Luwar-Ene, 1995, Linares, 2003) or the Dagara in Burkina Faso (Ouedraogo, 1995), while the phenomenon is more recent or just emerging in others (Le Jeune et al., 2004; Petit, 1998). While economic stress is probably a reason for female labour migration, as it is for males, most authors consider that is has also to do with gender issues, expressing women's aspiration to greater autonomy and a broader living space (Adepoju, 1995, 2002; Antoine and Sow, 2000, Findley, 1997; Findley and Williams, 1991; Gugler and Luwar-Ene, 1995; Makinwa and Afolayan, 1995).

Though young female labour migration developed late in the Bwa villages, it has expanded very fast and gained high value for adolescents. Among the young cohorts, both men and women report migration as a key experience of their youth. Moreover, many associate the transition from childhood to adolescence with the ability to leave the village and experience labour migration. "*When you begin to speak with your friends about plans to go to Bamako, to large cities, then you feel that you are grown-up, that now you are a young woman*" (Sianwa, woman, age 24). The few who did not migrate, usually for family reasons, regret it and consider that it is a real gap in their life: *"I missed it [going in the city]; until now, I still feel hurt about it…"* (Judith, woman, age 23).

As a common feature of the early adult years for both sexes, migration may also contribute to building a new youth culture. It broadens the scope of socialisation, offering alternatives to the models and values transmitted by family and village communities, giving information and openings into the world that are not available in the village through formal education. Through this informal socialisation process, migration gives young people the

opportunity to build their own representation of the world, away from the traditional family environment (Gauthier, 1997; Timera, 2001).

But does the growing similarity between the migration timetables of both sexes denote that migration has the same meaning and is experienced in the same way by men and women? Does it mean that a "sexless" period of life is under way (Sauvain-Dugerdil and Dieng, 2001)?

3. Gender-specific experiences of migration

a. Gender-specific activities and gender-specific destinations

Though economic migration affects girls as much as boys, the nature of their migration noticeably differs. Among young men, labour migration has been strongly dominated by a particular type since the 1970s, namely migration to Fulani areas. Young boys leave to work as herdsmen for Fula cattle-breeders for several months, and are paid in heads of cattle. This type of migration makes it possible for families to acquire draft oxen at no monetary expense.

It is with this type of migration that young men, starting from the 1960-69 cohort, obtain their first migration experience – two-thirds of men have migrated at least once by the time they were 20 (Table 3). On the other hand, it is totally absent from female migration experiences. The second stage in men's migration practices, which continues until around age 30, consists in migration to urban centres. Before age 20, only half the male members of the young cohorts are affected, compared with over 80% of females.

Table 3

Percentage of individuals who have experienced at least one labour migration by age 20. Migration to Fulani areas and other labour migration.

Indicators	Cohorts				
	< 1945	1945-59	1960-69	1970-74	1975-79
Percentage of individuals who had experienced at least one labour migration, outside Fulani areas, before age 20					
Men	9	20	37	59	53
Women	0	4	21	60	84
Percentage of individuals who had experienced at least one migration to Fulani areas before age 20					
Men	1	29	66	73	55
Women	0	0	0	0	0
Numbers					
Men	*100*	*97*	*98*	*84*	*98*
Women	*115*	*114*	*126*	*85*	*113*

Source: life event history survey, individuals interviewed as residents during one or other visit (1987-89, 1995 or 2000)

This difference in type of migration between young men and women is also observed in their activities. When young men migrate before age 20, they work mostly as herdsmen or farm labourers (80%), whereas almost all girls (90%) work as domestic servants for families (Table 4).

Men and women have different jobs, thus reproducing the same division of labour as prevails in the village, with women active in the domestic sphere and men working in farming.[14]

In addition, the migration experiences of Bwa young women and men take place in different geographic areas. They are mainly urban for women (70%) whereas there is greater geographic diversity for men (Table 4).

Table 4
The characteristics of labour migration before age 20. 1970-79 cohorts.

Indicators	Men	Women
Type of activity		
Herdsmen or farm labourers	78	0
Services	13	9
Domestic servants	2	91
Workers	7	0
	100	100
Place of migration		
Foreign countries	3	2
Urban areas	37	70
Boo area	33	27
Elsewhere in Mali	27	1
	100	100
Initiative and agreement		
Individual initiative with the *zuso*'s agreement	67	49
Individual initiative without the *zuso*'s agreement	18	43
Non-individual initiative	15	8
	100	100
Whether left home alone		
Alone	63	42
With somebody else	37	58
	100	100
Whether knew anybody at place of destination		
Yes	65	72
No	35	28
Earnings derived from migration		
None	9	36
Cattle (migration in Fulani areas)	44	0
Cattle and money (migration in Fulani areas)	10	0
Money	25	30
Goods for personal use	3	21
Money and goods for personal use	9	12
	100	100

b. Individual expectations and household logic

Migration almost always results from an initiative taken by young men and women alike (Table 4). However, more girls (43%) than young men (18%) steal away without an agreement from the family head.

Young men relate better to the economic rationale of the family. Their migration is often seasonal; they leave during the dry season, a slack period in the agricultural calendar, and come back when the agricultural season is due to begin. The girls often leave for a year or more and do not come back to take part in collective labour.

Moreover, young men hand in most of the earnings they have made from migrating, whether cattle or money, to the household head or *zuso*, thus contributing to the domestic economy. Young women very seldom contribute their earnings to the domestic group, as they come home with clothes and kitchen utensils. They may give some money to their parents, but then in small amounts meant for petty personal expenses such as tobacco or soap (Table 4).

The different ways in which men and women are integrated in the household scheme also emerges when they explain their migration in the interviews. They report the same main reasons: access to money and goods, opening onto the world, sharing the same experience as their friends. For both sexes, urban migration appears as an answer to new expectations that the household system cannot satisfy. Youth self-interest migration expresses a redefinition of the individual status in the collective logic (Timera, 2001) but which differs between men and women.

Men are mostly concerned to secure their place in the family and in the village. Migration gives visibility to the possibility of different individual contributions to the household economy that did not exist when common field work was the only source of income. A competitive spirit and a sort of pride impels men to migrate and to bring back as much as their brothers and friends. Moreover they can expect to be consulted for the use of the money or the possible future sale of the cattle they have brought back, and then to be involved in the household decisions. Most of the interviewed men associate migration with economic investment, either for the household, or for personal activity, such as small livestock breeding (poultry, pig or goat).

This is never the case for women, who emphasise the learning aspect of migration. They want to learn *bambara*, the national language, that will give them *"two ears"* to be able to understand two languages. They want to see how other people live so that *"their eyes will be opened"*. Employed as domestic servants, they expect to gain knowledge – and know-how – about cooking and housekeeping. They also learn to take care of themselves and become "*clean*". They want to come back with clothes and kitchen utensils but also to make progress and be *"broadminded"*.

The very nature of migration is different for men and women. This does not escape family heads who express opposite judgements about them. *"When they come back, girls have nothing for the family. It is not the same with boys: they buy new clothes but they never forget their families"* (Focus group, men, age 50+). The reprobation concerning girls focuses not only on economic aspects but also on their possible emancipation and the loosening of family control over their sexuality and marriage. The recent expansion of girls' migration might entail a much deeper challenge to the relationships both between the sexes and the generations than was the case for boys twenty years previously. The knowledge they picked up while in town enables them to assert themselves in a more personal way when they are back in the village, and possibly to have more of a say in building their future life, particularly where their marital and reproductive life is concerned. Analysing first marriage patterns will afford insight into these questions.

V. CHANGES IN MARRIAGE TIMING AND MARRIAGE PROCESS

1. Age at first marriage and spouse matching

As in most sub-Saharan African populations, marriage is almost systematic among Bwa, for men and women. Unless affected with some serious handicap, no one remains single for life.

The general marriage age pattern is that of a moderate gap between male and female age at first marriage, about 4.5 years (Table 5), much smaller than elsewhere in Mali (about 9 years at the national level). Women get married somewhat later and men much earlier than observed at the national level and more generally in Sahelian countries.[15] Unlike other societies in the region, family heads very seldom take advantage of their position to secure

young wives for themselves, at the expense of younger men of the family who then remain single for a longer period of time. It is unthinkable for a man to marry a young woman who could be his own son's wife.

Table 5
Median age at first marriage and percentage of first marriages with a never-married husband/wife

Indicators	Cohorts				
	< 1945	1945-59	1960-69	1970-74	1975-79
Median age at first marriage:					
Men	22.6	21.7	21.5	22.9	23.5
Women	17.9	17.6	17.6	18.6	19.2
Difference in years	4.7	4.1	3.9	4.4	4.3
Percentage of individuals who contracted their first marriage with a single person:					
Men	72	77	88	*85**	*84**
Women	63	69	67	80	*81**
Percentage of never married at the last survey-round:					
Men	4	0	5	26	62
Women	0	1	0	13	27
Numbers					
Men	*100*	*97*	*98*	*84*	*98*
Women	*115*	*114*	*126*	*85*	*113*

* Provisional result: over 20% of the persons interviewed were still single at the time of the survey.
Source: Life event history survey, individuals interviewed as residents during one or other visit (1987-89, 1995 or 2000).

This feature persists over time. But changes have occurred in the ages at first marriage and in spouse matching. Two stages are observed, corresponding to those of migration trends (Table 5).

The first stage, up to the cohorts born in the sixties, is concomitant with the expansion of labour migration among men. The median age at first marriage decreases for men and does not change for women, resulting in a reduction of the age gap (3.9 versus 4.7). At the same time, male first marriage with a single women, already common (70%) becomes quite general (90 %). Access to a wife becomes more flexible: it occurs earlier and especially with young, single women, who are traditionally the main focus of family control. As a result, in the vast majority of cases, both man and wife are entering marital life "in step".

The second stage relates to the cohorts born in the seventies and is simultaneous with the expansion of female labour migration. It is characterised by more pronounced changes than the previous period. Entry into union is delayed for both sexes. The median age at first marriage increases by about 1.5 years for females and 2 years for males between the 1960-69 and the 1975-79 cohorts. This increase in male age at marriage exceeds the previous decrease and men of the youngest cohorts marry later than those of the oldest cohorts (23.5 versus 22.6). The matching pattern between singles remains about the same, but the age gap between male and female age at first marriages slightly increases.

This recent trend is no doubt linked to the generalisation of female migration. Family heads have less control over the girls when they are far from the village and less scope to organise their marriage. Moreover, migration nowadays provides a means for young women to decide the time of their marriage. As most of the girls migrate, and usually for longer periods than males (more involved in seasonal migration), villages appear nearly "empty" of young women. When a young woman comes back, she is rapidly spotted and, if she stays for

more than a week, this is interpreted as a sign that she feels ready for marriage. In fact, most get married in the following months (Lesclingand, 2004b).

However, such changes, as well as girls' participation in labour migration, would probably not have been so extensive without a prior trend towards increasing tolerance of young people's behaviours, that of young women especially, , i.e. a weakening of family control over young people, including their marriage. The decrease of male age at first marriage and the changes in spouse matching that occurred before the current reversal can be viewed as part of such a long-term trend. Analysing the different steps involved in matrimonial procedures related to marriage between single persons gives additional insights into this topic.

2. Family control over couple formation: matrimonial processes[16]

As stated previously, the organisation of marriages is considered as a traditional task of the lineage authorities. They have to provide a first wife for each of their dependants within reasonable time limits. This includes seeking a possible wife-to-be, launching the formal protocol to request and receive the consent of the girl's family, and following the process with bridewealth until the wedding and the spouses' cohabitation. On the other side, they give their agreement (or otherwise) for the marriage of the girls of the family.

The formal components of such procedures are still widespread, but noticeable changes have occurred during the last decades.

a. Is marriage becoming a private matter?

The decline of family authorities in couple formation is obvious from the statistics describing how the two lineages are involved in deciding on the marriage – how the bridegroom's family is involved by taking the initiative, and the bride's by giving the agreement that launches the matrimonial process (Table 6).

Young people increasingly intervene to suggest a wife of their own choice: this situation was not rare in the older cohorts (one-third of marriages) but it has become most common among the youngest (half the unions). This trend is strictly associated with the declining influence of the extended family, while the involvement of the next of kin (including the father, mother, brother and grandfather) has remained stable (about one-third of marriages in all cohorts). Initiative for marriage has narrowed down to the young man and his close relatives; it is becoming a private matter.

Table 6
Marriage decision-making: initiative and mode of access to a wife
First marriages of men with a never-married woman

Indicators	Cohorts			
	< 1945	1945-59	1960-69	1970-74
Initiative of union (kinship between the initiative-taker and the husband-to-be)				
Oneself	34	44	56	52
Close relatives (father, mother, brother, father's father)	35	35	29	36
Other	31	21	15	12
	100	100	100	100
Mode of access to the wife				
Initial consent of the girl's family	90	83	71	63
No agreement before the ritual abduction	10	17	29	37
	100	100	100	100
Percentage of procedures involving the initial consent of the girl's family among partner-initiated marriages	80	73	64	65
Number of persons interviewed	*30*	*35*	*41*	*35*

Source: Life event history survey, ever-married men interviewed as residents during one or other visit (1987-89, 1995 or 2000)

The weakening of lineage control over marriage decisions appears also through the increasing number of marriages that bypass the request for formal consent of the girl's family associated with a regular marital process. This situation concerns one-third of persons in the young cohorts, three time more than in the oldest (Table 6).

However, bypassing the requirements of the traditional decision-making process does not necessarily mean that the girl's family has opposed the marriage. If there was no initial request to the girl's family, negotiations and conciliation are usually started just after the ritual abduction, and a couple will seldom settle down unless an agreement has finally been reached. However, using that method, which usually results from an agreement between the partners[17], means that the family is presented with a *fait accompli* that it will have to endorse.

Moreover, individual initiative does not mean shunning family circles; young men usually tell their family about their plans; the family then takes over, launching the traditional procedure. Still, such a move is not considered as inevitable as it used to be: among the younger cohorts, one-third of the marriages resulting from individual initiative were concluded without any formal procedure, as against only one-fifth among the older cohorts.

b. A simpler bridewealth system and a shorter process

Bridewealth is one important component of the matrimonial process, not so much because of its economic value, which is small compared with other populations in the region, as because it marks the advancement of the process over time. Provision of farming labour or gifts of grain after the harvest are a sign that the engagement for matrimony is progressing and give it a concrete dimension.

These traditional forms of bridewealth are still widely used: in all the cohorts, 6 to 7 marriages in 10 had involved provision of farming labour or grain (Table 7). However, the payments are definitely not as large as they used to be. Gifts of grain are tending to decline, and farming services that extend over several years have grown rare. Nowadays nobody provides farm labour for 3 or more years, though this was the case for 30% of marriages among the older cohorts; farming services now usually cover a period of one year only.

Concurrently with the old forms of bridewealth, money has been introduced into the Bwa matrimonial payment system. It circulates in two ways: direct cash gifts and the purchase of large quantities of millet beer from the girl's family. Over half the marriages among the 1945-59 cohorts already involved monetary benefits of this kind. However, the amounts paid are small[18], under 10,000 CFAF in half the cases. Unlike the situation in other African populations, monetary payments are not so unaffordable as to keep young men from marrying. Nor can they be interpreted as demands by means of which family authority is reasserted in the realm of matrimony. This is corroborated by the fact that these new forms of payment are usually intended to benefit the bride (in 3 cases out of 4, according to the data gathered from women).

As the bridewealth system has become simplified, the length of the marital process has became shorter (Table 7). Processes that extend over 3 years and more, which used to be the majority of cases, are now exceptional (10% versus over 60% formerly). Two men out of 3 in the 1970-74 cohorts married a single woman without any matrimonial procedure being launched at all, or using a process lasting less than one year. Waiting time for access to a wife is being reduced, as can be observed at every scale: whether marriages involving only a formal procedure are considered, or all first marriages contracted with a single woman, or whether first marriages with a widowed or divorced woman are included (these were more common among the older cohorts and the duration of the process is nil by definition), the average time invested in the first marriage procedure is three times shorter among the youngest cohorts than it was among the oldest ones.

On the whole, it turns out that the components of the bridewealth system that have declined are those that benefited family officials, providing them with both economic profit (farming duties) and symbolic profit (as they ran the matrimonial process over a long period of time, providing visibility and legitimacy to their competence and authority). On the other hand, the changes tend to benefit the young people: the men because the procedure for securing a wife is easier and shorter; and the women who are mainly concerned by the new forms of payment.

Table 7
Bridewealth and length of the marriage process
First marriages of men with a never-married woman

Indicators	Cohorts			
	< 1945	1945-59	1960-69	1970-74
Traditional forms of bridewealth				
Percentage of marriages by years of farm labour:				
0	43	32	39	50
1	7	40	44	35
2	20	11	10	15
3 and more	30	17	7	0
	100	100	100	100
Average number of farming labour years	1.9	1.2	0.9	0.6
Percentage of marriages involving gifts of grain	53	66	44	38
Percentage of marriages involving either gifts of grain or farm labour	63	80	63	63
New forms of bridewealth				
Percentage of marriages involving direct cash gift	10	54	51	65
Percentage of marriages involving purchase of millet beer	11	21	15	12
Percentage of marriages involving one or other	13	57	51	65
Percentage of marriages according to the length of the process:				
no process with initial agreement from the girl's family	10	17	29	37
under 1 year	10	9	15	26
1 year	3	14	22	17
2 years	13	23	10	9
3 years and more	64	37	24	11
	100	100	100	100
Mean duration (in years) of the process:				
The processes launched with agreement from the girl's family	3.7	2.8	2.1	1.3
All marriages contracted with a never-married woman	3.3	2.4	1.5	0.9
All marriages contracted with a woman, whatever her marital status	2.1	1.6	1.3	0.7

Source: Life event history survey. Ever-married men interviewed as residents during one or other visit (1987-89, 1995 or 2000)

c. Is the formal recognition of marriages being challenged?

Analysing the events that mark the end of the process and give it public recognition provides another means of appraising how social control over matrimony, in its most concrete dimension, is weakening.

Table 8 gives measurements of the occurrence of 3 events – entrustment, wedding celebrations and civil registration. The proportion of marriages for which traditional mediators – caste men, either blacksmiths or griots – intervene in the management of the process (on the occasion either of the request for an agreement or of the post-abduction conciliation) is also mentioned in the table. It seems that this type of mediation is not being challenged, as it was involved in 6 marriages out of 10.

On the other hand, the formal ceremonies that mark the end of the matrimonial procedure have significantly changed.

As a rule, even when the traditional process was implemented, the girl was abducted as a ritual sign that the period of engagement was at an end. She was then "deposited" with a trustworthy family for about a month, while the families held their last meetings and organised the "fiancée's party", through which her change of status was made public. Those two stages were gone through in virtually all women's first marriages (9 out of 10), even when a girl was abducted without any previous agreement from her family, up to the cohorts born in the late 1950s. But they have been in rapid decline since then: 30% of the marriages of men born in 1970-74 involved no entrustment and 40% were not celebrated. A substantial proportion of individuals now start married life without any public ceremony sanctioning their marriage.

Table 7
Mediation and social sanction for the marriage
First marriages of men with a never-married woman

Indicators	Cohorts			
	< 1945	1945-59	1960-69	1970-74
Percentage of marriages mediated by a caste man	57	55	56	74
Percentage of marriages involving entrustment	93	91	85	71
Percentage of marriages involving a celebration	93	94	73	56
Percentage of marriages with a civil registration	31	29	18	29
Numbers	*30*	*35*	*41*	*35*

Source: Life event history survey. Ever-married men interviewed as residents during one or other visit (1987-89, 1995 or 2000)

Decline of wedding celebrations in the village has not entailed any increased use of public institutions. Only a minority of couples have civil weddings, and then often several years after cohabitation.

The recent but spectacular decline in formally sanctioned marriages is probably revealing of deep changes in the marriage institution. Tensions due to a redistribution of responsibilities in the realm of matrimony are underway for a long time, as shown in the changes affecting most components in the process. Nevertheless, as a rule, marriages were still formally celebrated. Though family officials have accepted the increasing interference of young people in the choice of their own spouse and have brought their own demands for benefits down to lower levels, until recently they have managed to preserve the formal structure of the procedures and continue to run them themselves (Hertrich, 1996, 1997b). Recent changes suggest that even the management of that formal aspect of marriage procedures is slipping out of their hands.

This shift has probably to do with the extension of girls' migration. Several hypothesises can be put forward:

- The wedding ceremony is considered as a celebration in honour of the bride, that provides her with a large amount of cooking utensils and clothes, thanks to the contribution of the village community. Nowadays, girls have direct access to these things through migration. When they get married, they have a "trousseau", which was formerly offered by the groom's community. From this point of view, the wedding has obviously lost part of its necessity. However, no direct link appears at the individual level between migration and the wedding ceremony: weddings are no more frequent among girls with no migration experience (Lesclingand, 2004b).
- Migration might have raised the "value" of girls and contributed to increasing the cost and hence decreasing the frequency of the ceremony. Such a trend has been observed

elsewhere when the female level of education increases (Nagashima, 1987; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994), resulting in higher bridewealth and the postponement of girls' first marriage. Such an interpretation does not appear to be relevant in the case of the Bwa. Though field observation suggests that wedding costs have risen, the simplification of the bridewealth system and of the matching patterns shows that family requirements for their girls' marriage have not increased for girls with migration experience and that they therefore do not constitute an obstacle to female marriage.

– Neither can the decline in wedding ceremonies be explained by unions formed at the place of migration. This new trend is emerging, but it concerns only a small number of girls: among the women born in 1970-79 who experienced labour migration before their marriage, 11% married during their migration.

Finally, trends in girls' migration and wedding ceremonies seem to be linked above all indirectly through people's perceptions of migration and marriage. On the one hand, family authorities have the impression that they have lost control over their girls when they are far away and, though still rare, the possibility that they might begin their marital life outside their sphere of influence is perceived as a threat: they prefer not to organise their marriage rather than bear the shame of being unable to go through with it. On the other hand, the marriage ceremony has lost its necessity: it is no longer required to supply the women with cooking utensils, and as they become frequent, uncelebrated unions also gain legitimacy. At the same time, the meaning of the wedding ceremony is changing. It was a community festivity, owed to each wife-to-be, managed by the husband's family who made do with what was available. No longer systematic, the ceremony is also becoming more expensive and more private. It is one main way through which social differentiation is becoming obvious in the village. As an illustration of growing privacy, we note the introduction of invitation cards and radio announcements for weddings in the most recent years. This clearly contrasts with the community-based festivity and is far from affordable for most families.

3. The pre-marital dynamics of matrimony

Data on marriage processes show a weakening of lineage control over young people's first union. However, does this really mean that families are moving out of the matrimony sphere? Are first marriage processes less frequent, less codified and shorter because family officials are more inclined to let young people develop their own matrimonial plans, or is it because they are growing less efficient in carrying out the plans they have initiated themselves? One way of analysing this is to examine not only the first marriage procedure but all the procedures launched, whether they have successfully resulted in marriage or were interrupted before the marriage was concluded.

Men may have diverse and complex experiences before their first marriage. Some may start conjugal life without having undertaken any engagement procedure, by marrying a widowed or divorced woman, or by taking a single woman without the prior consent of her family. Others may implement several different processes (with different women) simultaneously. Moreover a man's first marriage does not necessarily imply the end of his marriage processes. Matrimony plans initiated during youth may end (in a break-off or a polygamous marriage) only after the first marriage, and new ones may be launched after marriage. Given those various parameters, many different scenarios may be played out.

Various indicators on such "pre-marital matrimonial life" are given in table 8. The indicators on the more recent cohorts should be viewed with caution, as not all members were married yet at the time of the survey.

Table 8
Male pre-marital experience:
procedures launched, disrupted procedures and premarital itineraries

	Cohorts			
	< 1945	1945-59	1960-69	1970-74
Percentage of men, by number of procedures (whatever the result)				
- 0	17	17	23	31
- 1	60	57	64	59
- 2 and more	23	26	13	10
	100	100	100	100
Percentage of men, by number of disrupted procedures				
- 0	66	53	74	74
- 1	28	36	26	26
- 2 and more	6	12	0	0
	100	100	100	100
Percentage of men, by number of procedures that resulted in marriage				
- 0	36	42	36	48
- 1	58	58	64	52
- 2	6	0	0	0
	100	100	100	100
Mean number of procedures:				
- whatever the result	1.1	1.2	0.9	0.8
- resulting in marriage	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5
- disrupted	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.3
Percentage of procedures that resulted in a break-up	37	52	29	33
Types of premarital itineraries				
- the first procedure resulted in a first marriage	43	38	49	40
- the first procedure did not result in the first marriage, which resulted from a later procedure	17	19	13	12
- the first procedure did not result in the first marriage, which did not result from any procedure	23	26	15	17
- no procedure was launched before the first marriage	17	17	23	31
	100	100	100	100
Median age:				
- at the beginning of the first process (or if none, at first marriage)	18.4	18.9	18.6	20.9
- at the beginning of the first process related to the first marriage (or, if none, at first marriage)	22.4	21.6	18.8	21.9
- at first marriage	23.1	22.4	21.0	22.7
Numbers	*47*	*53*	*47*	*42*

Procedures with girl's family agreement, that started before the man's first marriage.
Source: Life event history survey, ever-married men interviewed as residents during one or other visit (1987-89, 1995 or 2000)

The results confirm that families have increasingly given up the task of organising their members' marriages. The number of formal matrimonial procedures initiated by families to secure a first wife for their members has gone down by 25% between the cohorts born before 1960 and the next ones. The proportion of men who have experienced no procedure at all with an unmarried woman has almost doubled from the older cohorts (17%) to the younger ones (31%). The change is all the more spectacular as it coincides with an increase in the proportion of single women among men's first wives: the marriage-market, on which control was once strictest, is now wide open.

Weaker interference of the family in couple formation has mainly entailed a simplification of men's first marriage procedures. Among the older cohorts, families frequently (in 25% of cases) initiated several procedures (whether simultaneously or successively) to secure a never-married first wife for their members; this very seldom happens

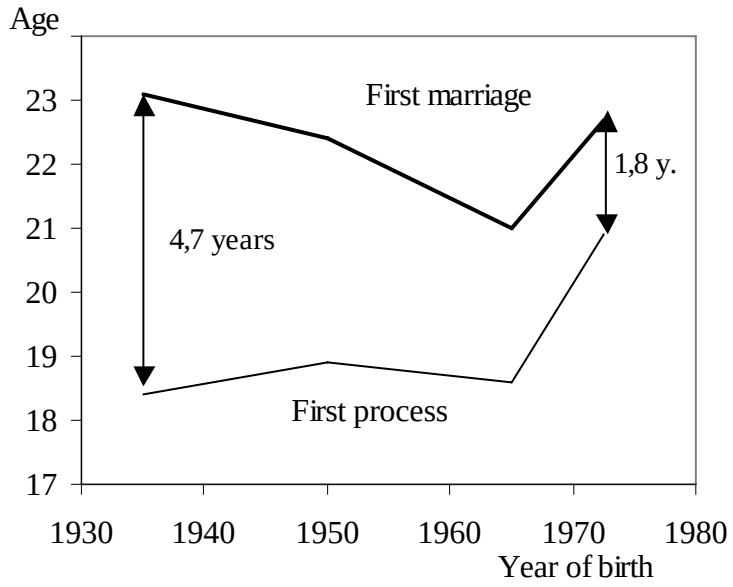
among the young cohorts (10% of the men). On the other hand, the proportion of men on behalf of whom only one procedure was launched has remained stable (about 60%). Though there has been no obvious increase in the risk of the procedure being disrupted (the failure rate is about 1/3), the fact that fewer men have been through several procedures means that break-off is becoming a less common experience among the young cohorts (1/4 of the men born from 1960 are affected versus 40% of the older ones).

The complexity of first marriage procedures was certainly an important dimension of family control over matrimony: considering the formal turn given to procedures, but also the uncertainty over the outcome of a procedure after it has been launched, it was next to impossible for a young man to get access to a young woman without getting his family involved. The management of matrimony matters was too complex and specialised a field of competence for young men to grasp, so that they kept away from it, “playing out their youth” while leaving it to their fathers to seek a young wife for them, or if none turned up soon enough, trying their luck with married women who might be willing to divorce to marry them. The simplification of matrimonial practices, as shown both by the evolution of formal procedures, simplified pre-marital experiences and first wives being increasingly secured from the group of never-married women, thus proves not only to be a sign, but also one major cause, of the family’s weakening authority. If young people no longer need to rely on their family’s competence, then it loses its usefulness and becomes irrelevant.

The evolution of the pre-marital schedule provides another illustration of how the practical details for a first marriage are growing simpler and more efficient. The duration of pre-marital life, as measured through the difference between the median age at launching of the first procedure (or at first marriage if there was no procedure) and the median age at first marriage, has steadily decreased: from 4.7 years in the past down to 1.8 years today (Figure 2). At first the difference was reduced because men were contracting their first marriage at a younger age, then, among the cohorts born in 1970-74, because fewer first procedures were launched (Table 8). The shortened pre-marital period is also marked by growing importance of the time devoted to the first marriage process : it was about 15% of the pre-marital period for the cohorts born before 1945, and over 40% for the 1970-74 ones.

Lastly the simplification of the pre-marital period also suggests that a new way of “securing a wife”, with greater personal involvement, is developing. If such is the case, the relations within the couple are very likely to undergo profound changes too.

Figure 2
Median age at first process and median age at first marriage. Men.



VI. YOUTH EXPERIENCE PATTERNS

As the stages of the process leading to first marriages get simpler and migration expands, the experience of youth has substantially changed from one cohort to another. To give an overall view, Figure 3 shows the male survival curves related to the first labour migration, to entry into marriage (the first process, the process related to the first marriage, and the first marriage) and to entry into parenthood (birth of the first child).

It summarises the two main changes observed in youth experience: first the postponement of the marriage processes and the shortened time devoted to matrimonial matters (curves 1 to 3), second the key role of labour migration in the transition to adulthood (curve 5). These trends also mean increasing responsibilities and self-management by the young people themselves. In the older cohorts, over half the period of youth (age 12-24) spent before the first event and this one, the launching of the first marriage process, was under the control of the families. Among the cohorts born in the seventies, the period of "idleness" during youth is shorter and the first event, migrating for a job, is part of individual life and responsibility. The entry into marital life which begins later but faster has also largely moved under the control of the young people. While it was considered as a carefree time of life, the experience of youth among young cohorts seems to require and lead the way to much more personal investment and autonomy.

Though the data are less detailed, transition to adulthood for women follows the same trends as those described for men (Figure 5). The shift due to labour migration came later but was even more radical for women than for men. However, though the trends show similarities, there is a major difference between male and female experiences, according to the period of youth spent before first marriage. Women live through half the 13 years of their lives from age 12 to 24 as wives and over one third of them as mothers, whereas these figures are only about 20% and 10% respectively among men (Table 9). Much more than men, women are still bound by reproduction imperatives.

Figure 3

Transition into adulthood among men. Cohort table data on the first labour migration , the first matrimonial process, the process related to the first marriage, the first marriage and the birth of the first child. Percentage of individuals who have not experienced the event at given ages

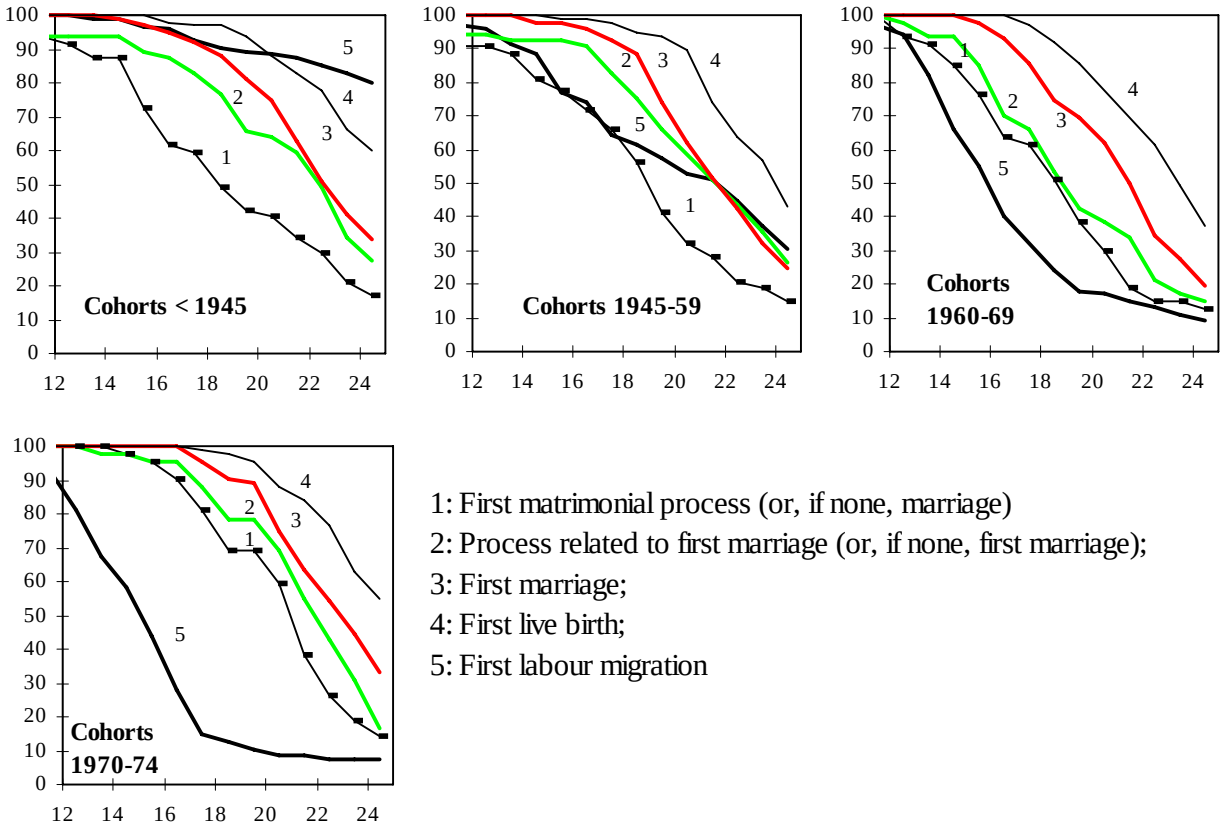


Figure 4

Transition into adulthood among women. Period data on the first labour migration, the first marriage and the birth of the first child. Percentage of individuals who have not experienced the event at given ages

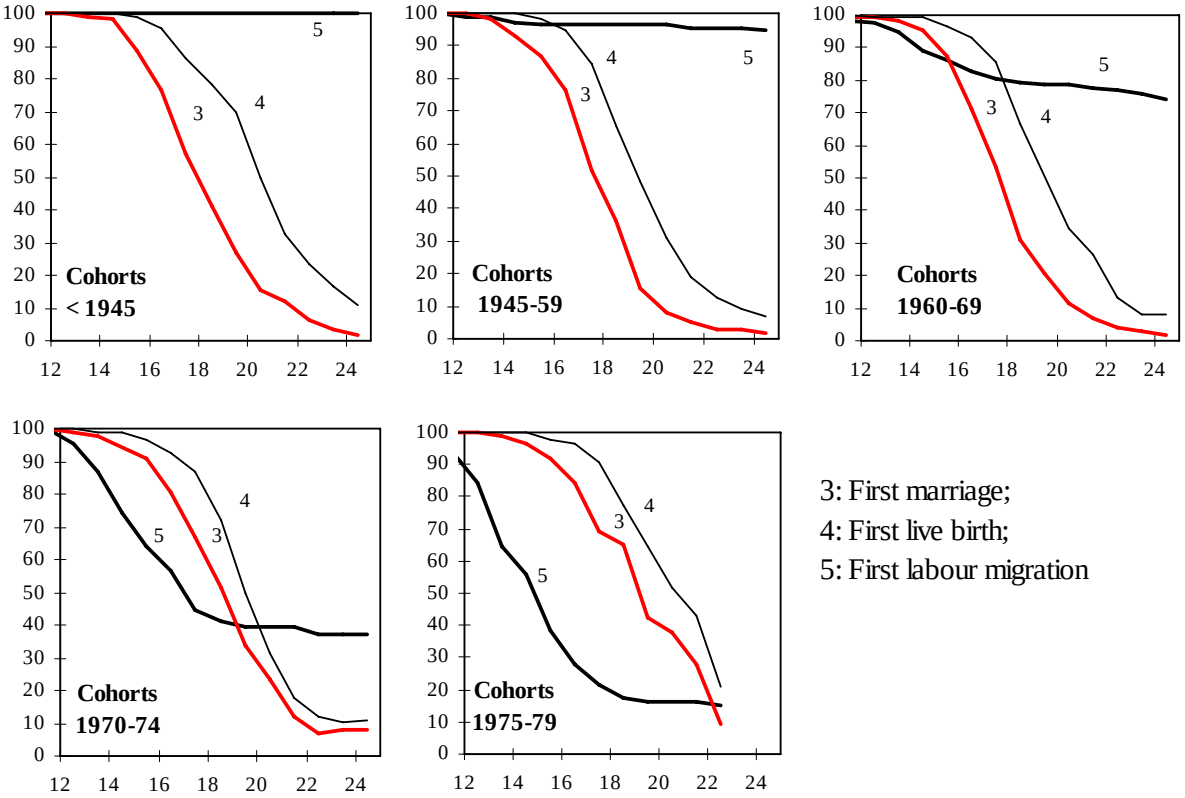


Table 9

Period of youth spent before different events: first labour migration, first marriage, first birth. Percentage of the 13 years extending from the year of the 12th to the 24th birthday spent before the occurrence of the event (Period data)

Percentage of period of youth spent before:	Cohorts				
	< 1945	1945-59	1960-69	1970-74	1975-79 *
First labour migration					
Men	92	66	40	31	49
Women	100	97	83	56	34
First marriage					
Men	81	77	73	83	85
Women	52	48	49	55	61
Birth of the 1st child					
Men	91	88	85	91	91
Women	70	63	64	63	70
* Estimation					

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In Mali Bwa country, among the older cohorts, the period of youth was a time of leisure, free of any responsibilities, and it was spent at the village. Meanwhile, however, family officials were busy preparing young people's future marital life. Young people left the job to them, and even if they had wanted to take part, they would have found it difficult to do so. The procedures were complex and not so easy to carry out, so it was virtually impossible to marry any young woman without calling upon the elders' competence.

The way the period of youth is organised has completely changed over the last fifty years. Young people now spend only part of their life at the village, and labour migration is now an inevitable component of the transition into adulthood. Virtually all members of the young generations have lived part of their adolescence in town, where they are faced with social and cultural environments as well as ways of life that are different from those in their original environment. The way first marriages are organised has also undergone substantial change. Family officials are still in charge of organising marriages, but no longer as a rule, and matrimonial procedures are now much more flexible. The elders' interference is not as compulsory as it used to be: young men can now bypass the regular procedures for access to wives to secure a young wife for themselves without calling on the competence of the "elders". In fact, more and more young women are now starting married life with a man who was also single.

Girls' migration as a challenge for social control over marriage and youth

There were two phases in the evolution, with a turning point occurring in the late 1980s (1960-69 cohorts).

The first period is characterised by expansion of labour migration among young men, with no significant change among women. Simultaneously, control of families over young people's first marriages became looser: matrimonial processes were shortened, traditional bridewealth payments became smaller, and initiative for marriage was increasingly taken by young men or their close relatives. As the process grew more flexible, men's age at first marriage also decreased. However, there was no challenging of the formal organisation of first marriages: matrimonial procedures were still codified and implemented by family officials. Gender and generation relations were not fundamentally brought into question.

The change seems to have occurred in much greater depth since the 1990s. The period is characterised by expansion of labour migration among girls, but also by families definitely loosening their grip on marriage management. The change in the components of matrimonial procedures, which had started in the previous period, is still ongoing, but the involvement of families in their formal implementation is being challenged. An increasing number of marriages are now contracted without regard for the order of the procedures, and about half the persons interviewed from the young cohorts started married life without their marriage receiving social sanction through a public ceremony. Looser control over matrimony has also resulted in simplified and shortened pre-marital matrimonial life: fewer procedures are initiated by families to secure a wife for their members, complex patterns are falling into

disuse and fewer people are experiencing the breaking up process. Lastly, both sexes enter a first marriage at increasingly later ages.

The impression is definitely that families are withdrawing from their traditional field of competence – couple formation. In the eyes of young people, the past generations no longer appear as necessary referees to start in married life. Also, the village community is no longer the only venue for the period of youth to be played out; it is now spent in diversified contexts, in which young people are confronted with ways of life different from those in their original environment.

Changes in youth experience and gender relations

Do those changes imply growing similarity between young men and women in terms of experience and status? Could they cause changes to occur in gender relations within married couples?

In its form, the expansion of female migration closely resembles a later reproduction of the development of male migration. Migration is likely to have caused both sexes to live through similar experiences, so that they could build a common "youth culture", though they did not experience it together, unlike the period of youth experienced at the village. Yet, those migration experiences differ widely from one gender to the other, in terms of both the characteristics (place, type of activities) and the relations with the family. Male migration, though basically resulting from individual initiative, is still quite well integrated in the existing family order. Whether young men migrate to work as herdsmen among the Fulani, or in town, they benefit the domestic economy by diversifying its sources of income. The family organisation is not basically challenged, nor are the relations between the generations. Women's migration could have a more subversive effect. Girls, much more often than boys, migrate without the family officials' agreement (this is known as "stealthy migration"), clearly for reasons of individual expectations, and the income they make, however small, is never handed back to the family. Institutional officials in Mali argue, based on press reports, that girls' migration is a social issue, due to abuse from their employers and the risks related to pre-marital pregnancy and unprotected sex. In fact, the fear is that control over girls' sexuality could be lost. But while in town, girls also build up a material and symbolic capital through which they will be better valued when they return to the village, not only by their peers but also by young men. From then on, they are in a position to assert themselves in a more personal way. Lastly, experiencing relations with others without the codified limits imposed at the village may equip them with skills and critical judgement that will be useful in their future married life.

Youth migration, a factor of change in rural areas

Studies on sub-Saharan Africa converge to highlight the role of education and urbanisation in demographic change. The related differentials are usually high. Moreover, in many countries, especially in western Africa, changing trends are mainly, if not only, observed among the urban and educated populations (Locoh, 2003; Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2004). By contrast, rural populations seem to stand apart, as if framed in permanent patterns.

Is this impression of inertia a reality or is it partly fallacious, resulting from the choice of methodology and questioning adopted in surveys?

Mali is typically a country where changes in reproductive and family-related behaviours are concentrated among the urban and educated minorities (Coulibaly, 2003). However, the survey conducted in Bwa country provides evidence of consistent changes in a rural area which, by usual socio-economic and demographic standards, belongs to the most traditional framework. These changes have been identified thanks to a specific, small-scale and prospective survey that gives the opportunity first to record additional and in-depth information on individual events (marriage and migration processes), and second to avoid the bias of selectivity generated by the usual retrospective records. The data are certainly not representative at the national or regional level but they show processes that are probably under way in other Sahelian populations.

The extension of youth migration, for both sexes, stands out as a main issue, from both methodological and theoretical points of view.

From a methodological point of view, migration, if selective, might undermine results provided by retrospective or cross-sectional data. This is the case in the villages surveyed where youth labour migration is specific to single people. The percentage of never-married among the young people present in the villages, might appear to indicate an earlier age at marriage than registered by the prospective survey, and even a decline of the age at first marriage when comparing indicators based on cross-sectional data or retrospective data, while the trend actually observed in the complete cohort is a postponement of the first marriage (Figure 5). Temporary migration of young people exists in many African societies and may distort usual measures in the same way as observed in Bwa villages. Though national censuses and surveys usually apply a broader definition of resident than we did (including persons absent for less than 6 months versus 3 months), we cannot rule out that the changes in first marriage patterns in rural area are more important than suggested by the national data and that the gap between rural and urban indicators is smaller or even narrowing. This concern is especially relevant to trends of female indicators because girls' labour migration is much more recent than boys' and still spreading in several regions, and also because female indicators are still the reference for examining changes in the entry into marriage, sexuality and parenthood.

From a theoretical point of view, the survey conducted among the Bwa also highlights the need to investigate the alternatives to formal education used by individuals to improve their status and get skills of empowerment in their family and social networks. Sajeda Amin et al. (1998) demonstrated the strong impact of girls' participation in the garment manufacturing industry in Bangladesh on their transition to adulthood. Through their job, Bangladeshi young women are able to escape early marriage, and to experience a time of adolescence in a social setting outside their family home. Despite harsh working conditions, they gain self-confidence, skills of negotiation with men, and access to different sources of information, all of which enhance their position during their conjugal and reproductive life (Amin et al., 1998). The migration of Bwa girls presents comparable features, though oriented to a mainly informal labour market. In particular, Bwa young women see their migration as a learning experience, an investment which is evaluated in terms of life understanding and personal

status, as much, if not more, as in terms of economic contribution. Migration also appears to provide means for girls to decide the time of their marriage (i.e. their return to the village) without directly confronting theirs elders. As a further result, the generalisation of girls' migration creates an effective obstacle for the families to continue planning and organising marriages.

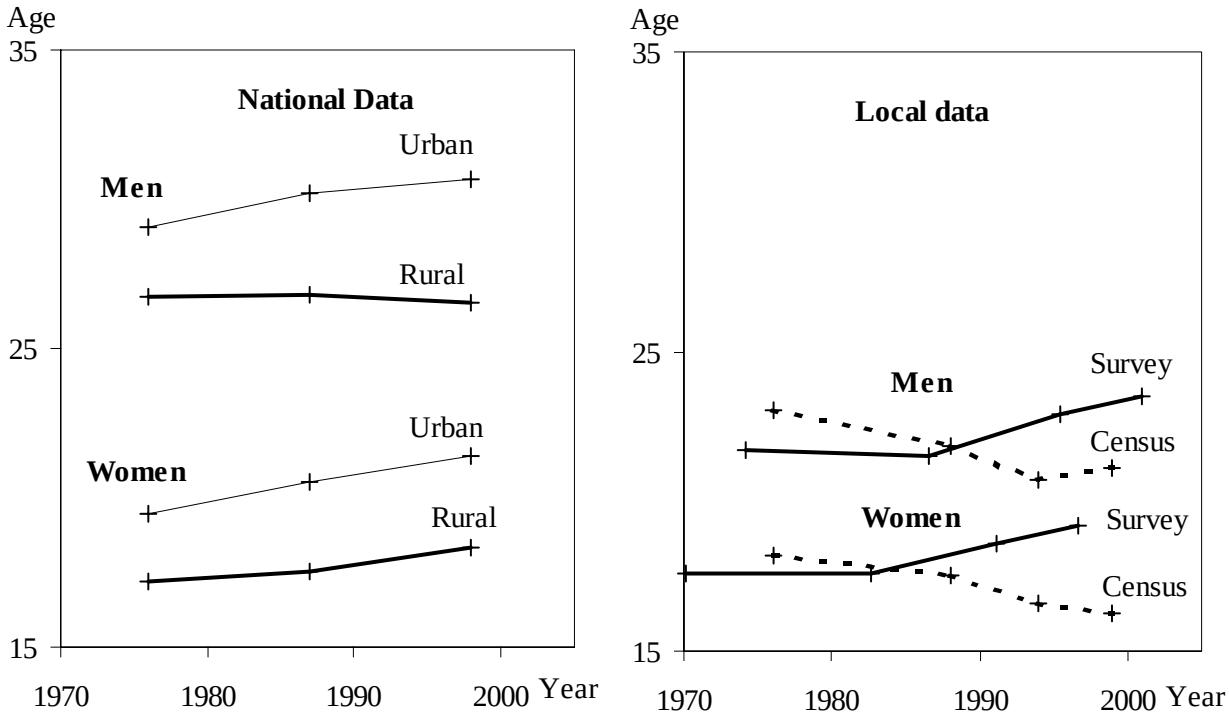
Girls' labour migration has developed in Western Africa during the last two or three decades, at various levels depending on the population. Mainly documented by small-scale studies, it is probably a key issue for investigating the levers of demographic and gender changes among rural and uneducated communities, which still constitute the majority of the population[19] in sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 5

Median age at first marriage in Mali and in the survey area.

Mali: rural and urban indicators based on national census data (1976, 1987, 1998) related to residents (including persons absent for less then 6 months) . Source: République du Mali, 1985, 1990, 2001.

Survey area: comparison of indicators based on cross-sectional census data (1976, 1988, 1994, 1999) related to residents (including persons absent for less then 3 months) in 7 villages and cohort indicators based on a life event history and follow-up survey (2 villages). The cohort indicators are mentioned the year the cohort reached the median age at marriage.



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Summary

Relations between women and men in sub-Saharan Africa are still subject to strong normative rules and social controls, but recent developments point to changes occurring in gender relations, particularly in the stages of the transition to adulthood — a reduction in the age difference between men and women at first marriage, a development of female migration, and increasing dissociation between the timetables of sexual initiation, couple formation and the beginning of parenthood… This paper analyses the emergence of this 'time of youth' in a rural population of Mali. Are the timetables and stages that characterise this period the same for both sexes? To what extent are social controls on youth declining? These questions are examined with a focus on youth migration and on marital processes, using a follow-up life event history survey. Results show converging trends in male and female experience of migration and a substantial decline in family controls on marriage. They are clearly associated with changes in the relationships between generations; they may also be promoting new, more egalitarian, relationships between men and women.

Résumé

Alors que les rapports entre hommes et femmes sont encore fortement codifiés et socialement contrôlés en Afrique sub-saharienne, des évolutions récentes laissent à penser que des changements se dessinent dans les rapports de genre, en particulier dans les étapes qui marquent l'entrée dans l'âge adulte: réduction de l'écart entre l'entrée en union des hommes et des femmes, essor des migrations féminines, dissociation des calendriers d'entrée dans la vie sexuelle, dans la vie conjugale et dans la vie féconde. Cet article analyse l'émergence de ce "temps de jeunesse" dans une population rurale du Mali. Ce temps est-il marqué par un calendrier similaire et par des étapes de même nature pour les deux sexes ? Les changements dans le passage à l'âge adulte sont-ils révélateurs d'une évolution du contrôle social de la jeunesse ? L'analyse met l'accent sur la mobilité des jeunes et sur les modalités d'entrée en union, en utilisant les données d'une enquête biographique à passages répétés. Elle met en évidence la convergence des expériences des jeunes hommes et des jeunes femmes dans la pratique migratoire et un recul notable des contrôles familiaux dans la formation des couples. Ces changements sont révélateurs d'une transformation des rapports entre générations et annoncent peut-être une redéfinition, sur un mode plus égalitaire, des rapports entre sexes.

Translated by Zoé Andreyev and Catriona Dutreuilh

The authors are grateful to Caroline Bledsoe, Michel Bozon, Thérèse Locoh and Victor Piché for their comments on previous versions of this paper.

[1] For a recent overview of the anthropology and sociology of youth, see Bucholtz, 2002.

[2] Some three-quarters (4,078 out of 5,636) of the titles indexed by *Popline* with a reference ("subject") to the notion of youth ("adulthood" or "adolescence" or "youth") and to sub-Saharan Africa also included reference to reproduction or health ("fertility", "sexuality" or "health").

[3] Women's remarriage is more a result of personal initiative, and requires no social approval; such cases were characterised in the survey mainly from an events perspective.

[4] Access to independent accommodation usually occurs at the time of the first marriage with no constraints involved, as young couples build their own houses themselves.

5 The average age at the access to economic responsibilities is around 35, about 12 years after the first marriage (Hertrich, 2001).

[6] See Hertrich, 1996, for a more detailed presentation of Bwa society.

[7] *yaro* = young man, *mu* refers to a condition, hence *yaromu* = condition or manifestation of youth.

[8] Other constraints upon youth sex include the prohibition of sex in the bush which is severely punished and the acquisition by several lineages of specific rituals that promise death to teenagers who have sex with their spouses-to-be.

[9] Very few cases of children born of single mothers – they are referred to as "street children" and taken into their mother's lineage, since they have no father – were identified at the village, but there are more and more of them as girls are increasingly migrating, and the fact is beginning to get an amount of visibility.

[10] Blacksmiths and griots are two endogamic minority groups, with technical specialities (woodwork, ironwork and pottery for blacksmiths; leatherwork and hair plaiting for the griots who are also musicians). Both groups also have social responsibilities in funerals, and in traditional rituals, and they are solicited as mediators in disputes and in the management of formal relationships between lineages. Under the rule of endogamy, they have a position of neutrality in inter-lineage relationships, especially those concerning marriage.

[11] All names are pseudonyms in order to preserve anonymity.

[12] See Lesclingand, 2004a, 2004b, for additional and detailed results on female migration.

[13] The increase of migration in the last fifty years, analysed here on the basis of the life event history survey, has been ascertained in previous publication (Hertrich, 1996) using additional data: genealogical materials on the one hand, and intercensal migration rates on the other hand.

[14] The cattle young men bring home are one way of diversifying the incomes of the *zu*.

[15] At the national level, between the 1976 and the 1998 censuses, the median age at first marriage rose from 17.4 to 19.0 for women, and from 27.2 to 27.7 for men (Hertrich, 2001).

[16] As stated earlier, the analysis of the marriage process and of premarital life is focused on the data collected in a sub-sample of ever-married men. Men's declarations were selected because women, specially in the older cohorts, are less involved in the marriage process and have a poorer knowledge about it. The median ages at marriage in the sub-sample are somewhat different from those calculated in the whole population, but trends are the same (see Tables 5 and 8). Last, indicators concerning the 1970-74 cohorts should be considered with caution because some of these men (26 %) have never been married and thus are not taken into account for analysis of the marriage process.

[17] Abduction is used in other West-African populations as a means to bypass families' agreement. See for instance the case of the Moba Gurma from Togo (Pilon, 1994).

[18] They are far below the bridewealth recorded among other African populations - which sometimes amounts to several hundred thousand CFA francs. See for example Enel et al., 1994; Guigou, 1992; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994 ; Locoh, 1994 ; Nagashima, 1987.

[19] The urban population is estimated at 36% in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2003, and is even lower in the Sahelian landlocked countries (18% in Burkina Faso, 22% in Niger, 32% in Mali) (UNDP, 2005).The percentage of women aged 25-29 old completing four or more years of schooling is estimated at 48% in western/central Africa, and below 30% in the Sahelian landlocked countries (21% in Burkina Faso, 27% in Niger, 25% in Mali) (Lloyd, 2005).