
**Poor Women and their
Money: between Daily
Survival, Private Life, Family
Obligations and Social
Norms**

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Poor Women and their Money: between Daily Survival, Private Life, Family Obligations and Social Norms

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Abstract

This article examines the complexity and diversity of women's informal financial practices and circuits using data from surveys conducted in Senegal and South India. A micro level analysis reveals the subtlety and complexity of these practices and circuits: apart from economical constraints, these practices express, reproduce, update and sometimes modify the range of personal and social relations in which these women are embedded. Our analysis also reflects the burden of the current norms and institutions for women of the two social groups studied, particularly with respect to matrimonial alliances, property rights and access to the labour market. Moreover, our analysis highlights the ongoing process of interpretation, adjustment and, sometimes, circumvention of these norms, and it is precisely this incessant work of adaptation that explains the heterogeneity of the arrangements and trajectories that we observed.

Keywords: Money, Debt, Saving, Gender, Senegal, India

JEL classifications: B54, D14, O17, O53, O55, Z13

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1. Introduction

In both northern and southern countries, intra-household management systems have been the subject of numerous studies over the past three decades. Economists, sociologists and anthropologists have studied diversity of management systems and diversity of financial practices (which we define as who earns money? Who spends and for what purpose? Who controls money?). Among other issues (it is of course difficult to encapsulate the richness of the whole body of these works), two principle questions emerge. The first question relates to such management itself, addressing how individuals' incomes are shared, centralized or conversely, how they are separately managed. Such analyses have shown the existence of a diversity of management systems (for instance “pooling system”, “allowance system”, “independent system”, “doling out system”, etc.)². The second question addresses the potential implications of these practices for individual and family welfare. With regards to women welfare, one of the most persistent findings is the striking disparities between men and in terms of the control and access to money. As rightly pointed out by Jan Pahl [1989], three components of income flows within households should clearly be distinguished: access (who earns what and how much?), control (who decides to allocate what income to which expense) and finally spending (which can be only an executive function). Beyond the question of control (the outcome of which varies depending on the sociocultural context, social setting and position of women in the life cycle), the subjective factors of female income appear to be a persistent reality: in numerous cases women's incomes are underestimated, with the notion of a "top-up" salary proving remarkably persistent. As for family wellbeing, numerous and widely diverse studies (from large scale econometric analyses to far more qualitative and anthropological approaches) have demonstrated gendered use of incomes, their indispensability and a certain "feminine altruism". While explanations for this vary depending on authors and theoretical trends, empirical data converges on the point that women tend to allocate a greater proportion of their income to daily family subsistence³.

In bringing out the complexity and diversity of family arrangements, these investigations have brought undeniable progress. This has been both on a theoretical level (improved understanding of intra-household dynamics, too often regarded as a "black box") and from a political standpoint (reflection

² In economics, see for example Kabeer [1995, 1997], Johnson [2004]. In anthropology, see for example Guyer [1995], Guyer and Peter [1987]. In sociology, see for example Pahl [1989, 2000], Vogler [1998], Zelizer [1994, 2005]. For an interdisciplinary collective work, see Bruce and Dwyer [1988], Burgoyne [2008].

³ See for instance Chant [1985] ; Kabeer [1997] ; Haddad et Hoddinod [1995] ; Grasmuck et Espinal [2000] ; Mencher [1988] ; Lachaud [1998] ; Lundberg et Pollack [1994] ; Pahl [1989] ; Senauer [1990] ; Thomas [1990].

on how to optimize family allowances or to tackle poverty). Drawing on knowledge acquired over the past decades, our goal is to analyse the complexity and diversity of intra-family financial practices, favouring a double perspective: that of poor women. In brief, we shall show how these practices incorporate several dimensions: firstly that of security— quite simply of "making ends meet", and secondly an emotional and affective dimension linked to the nature of intra-family relationships and emotions. Finally there is the social dimension, linked to the norms in place on a local level. Intra-household economic transactions cannot be confined to material and contested domains where the stakes are limited to questions of control, ownership and appropriation. As is remarkably demonstrated by Viviana Zelizer [1994, 2005], when the economic meets the private sphere, it is not simply money, goods or services that are exchanged, but also feelings, emotions and status. All the members of a household are involved in a continuous and intensive process of negotiation of their respective relations and positions. Zelizer however states that regardless of whether it is a question of distribution, consumption, production or transfer of goods, any economic transaction is an opportunity to organize and reorganize the nature and significance of these relations, as well as the place and the status of all who are implicated.

Only a micro-level analysis of daily relations and real-life experiences can bring out the eminently social and affective elements of monetary and financial transactions, and how these shape intimate relationships. At the same time, the role of each individual – where here we are looking at the role of women – is partially conditioned by a set of institutions which serve to define social roles (legislations, norms and systems of representation combined) and financial roles are no exception [Fontaine 2001, 2001; Lemire et al. 2001; Johnson 2004]. As Laurence Fontaine emphasizes when she analyses the role of women in informal finance in pre-industrial Europe, the ability of women to play with time and money depends on complex equilibriums which bind social institutions, social roles, their cultural construction and the power that surrounds them and defines the women's place and their access to resources, being land, labour or capital [Fontaine, 2001, 2007].

Combining these two levels of observation seems particularly fruitful when reflecting on the complexity and diversity of the monetary and financial practices of poor women. Micro level analysis aims at demonstrating the inscription of monetary and financial transactions in all of the rights and obligations which bind members of a household, while macro level analysis shows the influence and weight of institutions in terms not only of their dynamics but also their inertia. This is particularly the case in terms of matrimonial alliances, access to resources and employment. Our own empirical analysis on the role of women, conducted in very heterogeneous contexts (South India and Senegal), shows remarkable similarities that deserve a common analysis. The monetary and financial practices of these women indicates a surprising complexity and diversity, including in those contexts where women are assumed to be excluded from financial management. The diversity of financial practices incorporates saving, borrowing and exchange practices, and sometimes sources of income. It also

includes diversity of monetary practices through the earmarking of funds. Last but not least, one also observes a variety of women-led financial circuits. The monetary and financial practices of these women equally reveal the heterogeneity of "woman" as a category and of positions occupied within a household, which vary depending on age and on the nature of blood and marriage alliances.

The first part of this article offers a framework for a socio-economic interpretative approach, underlining the variety of motives for action and the ambivalence of intra-household relations and money. The second part offers two case studies illustrating different "family models". It will not seek to offer a term by term comparison but rather demonstrate points of convergence, despite the specificities of each case.

The first case study examines small Senegalese retail traders from the area of Thies. Senegal can indeed be regarded as an *ideal-type* for the "lineaged" model where women enjoy relative financial independence and freedom of movement. The second case deals with South Indian peasant women, who are very strongly influenced by the "conjugal" model which condemns women, at least in theory, to a very high level of dependency.

2. Individual behaviours, family and money: three domains to re-examine.

Our interpretation assumes a very precise conception of three "subjects" which have been particularly mishandled in the social sciences: individual behaviour, family relationships and money. In each of these cases, social sciences have often tended to adopt dichotomous standpoints: *homo economicus* versus *homo sociologicus*, the family as a harmonious and cohesive space or, conversely, of domination and exploitation; money as a technical and neutral instrument, or conversely as a means for the reproduction of social relations. An analysis of daily practices makes a definitive break with these dichotomous and normative approaches inevitable. Those "practical" rationalities which come to exist in the context of daily action, combine personal interest, obligations, emotions and routines in varying ways according to context and whether in relation to men or women [Ferber and Nelson 1993]. Due to this plurality of motives for action, there is no "*unique self*", only a "*multiple self*"⁴. Hence while each situation incorporates specific motives for action, these motives are not restricted to a particular circumstance or category of persons (women or men for instance). The "multiple self" is therefore fundamentally a "*divided self*", a "*conflictual self*"⁵. We shall now look in more detail at the question of family relations and monetary practices.

⁴ On this notion of "multiple self", see Mauss [1993 [1950]], Elster [1986].

⁵ See here MacPherson [1984], Elster [1983], Sen [1993], Hirschman [1986].

2. 1. The Family: Conflicts, Cooperation, Compromise and Resistance

Taking the economic approach as opposed to the neo-classical model, which tends to consider the family as a place of natural social harmony and cohesion⁶, some feminist trends see the family as a space of systematic oppression and domination⁷. Here again, analysis of the family's "practical economy" invites us to rather consider it as a space of permanent cooperation and conflict, as much from a materialistic as a symbolic point of view⁸.

The family is a space of cooperation in the sense that it is about mutualising resources, building a common life and lineage together, or even preserving or maintaining a name, a reputation, or ancestral identity. The family is also a contested space, in the sense that there are questions of sharing resources, assessing one's own identity, asserting one's rights, maintaining one's self-esteem, etc. This permanent tension between conflict and cooperation nevertheless takes very diverse forms and expressions according to the context and the time in which it occurs, the place of women and the functions assumed by the family (reproduction/production), and finally on the degree of "individualism" and the value given to notions of freedom and individual autonomy. Existing literature opposes two ideal-types of "family structures" [Guyer and Peters, 1987; Kabeer, 1995]. The first, defined as "conjugal", is based on marriage bonds and on the superposition of the functions of production, procreation, consumption and place of residence. It is often associated with reduced geographical mobility in women and a clear separation between public and private spaces. Most of the financial obligations are the responsibility of men, as they are regarded as the principal breadwinners and they are in charge of securing the women and children's protection. Women have little or no financial obligations but, furthermore enjoy only very limited autonomy. The second type of structure refers to the "lineage-segmented" model based on dependency as opposed to conjugal bonds, and on the separation of the functions of production, procreation, consumption and residence. It is accompanied by higher mobility in women and a much less strict delineation between public and private spaces. Men and women have access to separate financial resources (historically, through separate forms of agricultural production), fulfil financial responsibilities on an equal basis and have a greater tendency to keep "separate purses".

These are only ideals-types for heuristic purposes. The described models are only *norms* of

⁶ Along the same lines as the work of Becker [1981].

⁷ See for example Delphy [1998].

⁸ See for example Agarwal [1994], Folbre [1986], Kabeer [1995], Sen [1990, 1993, pp. 228 *sq*], Weber [2002], Weber et al. [2003].

behaviour⁹. Nevertheless, whilst reality shows there to be a degree of flexibility and great variations, the social norms underlying both models sometimes exhibit a remarkable resistance to time, hence the interest in bearing them in mind in order to understand some traits of behaviour.

This permanent tension between conflict and cooperation expresses itself firstly as *compromises* and *negotiations*, the content and the outcome of which are dependant upon family members' social, economic and political resources. These are property rights (formal and informal), control over assets and income, access to common resources, social networks outside of the private-domestic sphere, involvement in some kind of collective action (mutual aid, associations, unions, etc.) and finally outside support from the State or other initiative (Charities, NGOs)¹⁰.

This permanent tension between conflict and cooperation also manifests itself as material and symbolic *resistance*¹¹, the nature of which varies greatly again according to the degree of patriarchy and dependence to which women are subject. The stronger the dependency of women, the more subterfuges the resistance can take, whether it be indirect resistance, sometimes collective (for instance popular songs). However it can also often be strictly individual and restricted to instances of cunning, shrewdness, and various forms of "treachery". As we shall show later, hidden monetary and financial practices are a favoured means of resistance and circumvention.

2. 2. Women-led Monetary and Financial Circuits and Practices: between dealing with Uncertainty and Social Obligations

Georg Simmel, and others before him such as Karl Marx or Max Weber, described forcefully and with precision how the use of money, by measuring all things with a single measure, not only abolishes hierarchy and statutory privileges, but also dissolves social bonds and founds a society based on calculation and cold rationality. However through the analysis of monetary practices, the conception of money as impersonal and anonymous in nature, ultimately appears as an illusion. The functional and security aspects of money are very real. Beyond giving the possibility to access goods and services, the possession of money allows a completely different type of relation to time: anticipation and projection into the future are henceforth possible. Keynes [1969, p. 295]. Nevertheless, it is

⁹ The "conjugal conjugal" model has been observed in areas as diverse as Europe, North America, North Africa, the Middle East, most of the Asian countries including India, as well as some South American areas. The "lineaged" model is present in the Caribbean, some parts of South America, and especially in West Africa.

¹⁰ See, on this subject, the frame of analysis suggested by Agarwal [1994].

¹¹ This term supersedes the one suggested by J. Scott [1990] in order to reflect the mistrust and practices of circumvention used by dominated individuals against those dominating them. A number of researchers have used this concept of resistance into a gender perspective. See for instance, voir Agarwal [1994], Hood [1983] Hochschild [1990], Kabeer [1995], Uberoi [2006].

essential to take into account the social significance and social implications of money. Money, and particularly the use to which it is put, is above all a social construction, overlying pre-existing relations of rights and obligations upon which it can impact but not dismantle¹². Going back to Viviana Zelizer's [2005] position, we are making the assumption that transactions and monetary and financial practices are at the core of the permanent tension between conflict and cooperation that punctuates family relations. Whether it is income, budget or assets management, modes of saving, loans or even reciprocal gifts, all of these practices fully engage in the permanent process of redefining and renegotiating family relations and the positioning of each individual (man or woman).

Financial practices and circuits are observably diverse within family groups, but also at their peripheries, which is sometimes unbeknown to them (more or less extended circuits linking family members of matriarchal lineage, or exclusively female local circuits of close neighbours). From our empirical observations (see below), we submit that this variety stems from the multiplicity of motives informing the actions of individuals as well as a permanent tension between cooperation and conflict. Some practices indicate the will to assert individuality and the (often implicit) refusal to submit to the collective order, and may be interpreted as a form of resistance. Conversely, others arise from (frequently imposed) solidarity and reinforce existing bonds.

The impact of money on the status, power and autonomy of women is therefore considerably complex. Sometimes, not only is access to money only provided for in theory by the law (as a result of norms and legislations preventing women from controlling its use) but its use (sometimes deliberate on the women's side) may reinforce the bonds of dependency. Conversely, taking as model what has been observed in ancient Europe [Fontaine, 2007], the existence of financial circuits and mutual aid systems, often strictly feminine, gives women the chance to circumvent the numerous prohibitions aimed at restricting their access to the financial and economic sphere.

3. Circulations, Divisions, Negotiations, Compromise and Resistance: two Case Studies.

We shall now examine the two case studies. Both selected examples have the merit of representing *ideal-types* of family configuration. The first concerns small Wolof retail traders from the area of Thies in Senegal. The Wolof society is typical of the "lineaged" model, which imparts to women relative financial autonomy as well as some kind of access to the public space. It is, however, advisable to analyse this in the light of today's socio-economic tendencies: the increasing involvement

¹² Besides the already mentioned work of Zelizer, see also Aglietta and Orléan [1995, 1998] Bazin and Sélim [2002], Blanc [2000], Bloch and Parry [1989], Guyer [1995], Servet [1984, 1995, 2006].

of women in some commercial activities, increasing instability of marriages but the pervasiveness of polygamy and more generally, the questioning of so-called community affiliations (without necessarily any rupture). The second example deals with India, a typical case of the "conjugal" model, denying all forms of autonomy and strongly impeding women's mobility, which is the case of the South-Indian lower caste peasant women studied here (Paraiyar community). Renowned for being more "free" than anywhere else in India, partly due to playing an economic role that has always been, and remains key, these women nevertheless enjoy only extremely limited financial autonomy, while often being responsible for balancing the family budget.

In both cases, the modes of management, nature of expenditures, diversity of saving and borrowing practices and ultimately participation in diverse financial circuits are a powerful indication of how women are positioning themselves with respect to their surroundings namely their husbands and sometimes co-wives (in the Senegalese case), their neighbourhood and extended family. This positioning is the result of subtle compromises between social or material restrictions imposed on them, and their own aspirations and interpretation of the norms. Then, according to their background and trajectory, there is a more or less narrow scope for manoeuvre, enabling some women (especially in India) to circumvent these restrictions through diverse illegal practices.

This analysis relies for a large part on our own field investigation conducted in 1997 in Senegal (Thies area) and from 2003-2004 in India (Tamil Nadu). In both cases, our analysis is basically qualitative in nature, the objective being to dissect the complexity of practices and financial circuits. In Senegal, we followed about fifty women over a period of six months, combining discussions and observations within their homes, in their work places (at the market or in the street for itinerant sellers) and in their social circles (especially tontines' meetings¹³), mostly held at one of their houses or at the market). In India, we carried out similar work with about sixty women, but most of the time we limited ourselves to home investigations, as women were seldom available at their work place (agricultural employment) and had limited social spaces within their close neighbourhood. The difficulty of collecting reliable figures is important to stress. Incomes are irregular and are often from multiple sources, debt usually is considerable but spread out, whilst savings are difficult to quantify as they mainly consist of goods in kind. It is also crucial to take into account the clandestine and hidden dimensions of many practices, as well as the actual reality behind the figures represented, and categorization systems which are often very different from those of the researcher. Nevertheless, an intensive, often painstaking work of reconstitution combined with follow up research over time allows for the calculation of a few figures, which of course must be regarded as rough estimates.

¹³ Tontine is the French term for Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs): members contribute a fixed amount of cash to a common fund at regular intervals (in our case study, usually weekly or monthly). The total amount is allotted to each of the members in turn.

It should be emphasised that it is not in any way a question, here, of comparing both "models" on a term by term basis, as an infinite number of other factors serve to differentiate the two contexts. Here we shall simply outline a number of the specificities of each situation and highlight their points of convergence. In this we shall examine the diversity and complexity of the monetary and financial practices, and explore how these express the different pressures and contradictions that punctuate the daily life of women, as much on the level of family relationships as the more general level of norms and institutions.

3. 1. The "lineaged" model: The example of Senegalese small retail traders

The Wolof society of Senegal is typical of the "lineaged" model whereby the basic unit is not the family but a nucleus consisting of the mother and her children (the so-called uterine family). Historically, in many African societies, this unity had its own name, its own space, sometimes its own belongings, and enjoyed specific rights to resources according to lineage [Gastellu, 1985]. In the Senegalese Wolof society, this relative independence is manifested not as a right to property, but in the right to make use of a separate plot of land as well as its products and revenue [Diop, 1985, p. 160 sq.]. This gender based role division was often hierarchical, such that the activities reserved to women were of meagre added value compared to that of the men (particularly cash crop *versus* crop livestock). This notwithstanding, the practice had the advantage of endowing women with a degree of financial autonomy, as they were relatively free to use their produce and income generated as they pleased. This division of labour meant responsibilities were variously distributed: fathers bore economic responsibility and that of the protection of the family, and particularly the duty of accounting for "daily expenditure" with respect to the family food supply. Women were accountable for the duty of procreation and for the education of children [Diop, 1981].

As has already been the case in other parts of the African continent over several decades, the erosion of community norms has brought increasingly individualistic practices which have various contrasting effects for women. In terms of property rights, Senegalese women have since gained a recognized right to inheritance and individual property, but this right still remains very theoretical, and its application in practice is far from automatic. Marriage continues to be a shared norm (permanent spinsterhood is still exceedingly rare). However unions have come to take place later, and with more autonomy of choice for individuals (there is a clear decrease of "arranged" marriage). As an institution marriage is also becoming increasingly fragile (in Dakar one marriage out of three ends up as divorce [Pilon and Vimard 1998]), with an increasing number of separations initiated by women [Bop, 1996]. Conversely, the practice of polygamy remains surprisingly stable at around 30% of unions. At the same time, the extent of women's financial responsibilities has tended to increase. Since the early eighties, Senegal has been hit by an economic crisis which has both affected activities reserved for

men (such as employment and export agriculture) as well as disrupting the division of tasks along gender lines. Fewer and fewer men take on the role of protector and there is a notable increase in the participation of women in the labour market [Baumann, 1999].

Such evolution of practices, which applies as much to access to property and matrimonial alliances as to economic activities, does not happen without friction. At the core of this evolution is diversity of monetary and financial practices, as well as that of feminine circuits. At the same time, this plurality is indicative of daily pressures, including an increasingly burdensome daily life due to male disengagement, the ambiguity of the connection to the family (spouse, possibly co-wives) and finally to the broader kinship, which is an unavoidable source both of support and protection and of constraint and subordination.

In view of the principle of "separate purses" which continues to prevail, the right of women to control their income is usually uncontested. On the other hand, the question of financial responsibilities (who pays what?) is a source of permanent negotiation. If "tradition" forces men to take charge of the expenses for food, health and the children's education, this pattern is then little respected in practice, although with some important exceptions. According to our observations, less than one family out of two adheres to the tradition, and other studies give similar broad estimate¹⁴. Even when men do contribute, this is frequently only partial. On the whole, food, health and education amount to 10 to 40% of the women's expenses. When men contribute, their actions vary considerably: some men give very sparingly while others give support in regular instalments; some pay little attention to the details of expense while others insist on seeing the bills and even go as far as to verify their accuracy with the shopkeeper, or even pay themselves (at the beginning or the end of the month for example) to avoid that their wife "eat the money". Conversely, there are many women who embezzle part of the sums, not necessarily for their personal use but more often to invest into the many financial circuits in which they are involved.

When the men fail to or sparsely assume their financial obligations, women, of course, express their complaints, which evokes continual negotiations on the subject. But this game of negotiation (a great part of which takes place implicitly) is far more complex than a simple incident of conflict where anger is simply unloaded on the other. The stakes are instead higher in terms of defining the position of each individual (man or woman) and the overall nature of the family bonds, particularly in terms of the couple's relations, father/mother/children's relations, and relations between co-wives. For some women, male financial responsibilities are an irreductable and non-negotiable part of his obligations. It

¹⁴ Several surveys conducted during the nineties show that Senegalese women heads of households (i.e. assuming all the financial charges) represent one fifth of homes [Bop 1996]. Other surveys show that women bear an average of 50% of family spending [Starr, 1998].

is a question of honour, as much theirs as their husband's and children's. As one of them told us, financial independence is good for "underground fighters", a reference to women who sell their body, and it seems their number is increasing [Robin, 2006]. Others feel downgraded to the level of "servants" for their husbands. There is sometimes fierce haggling, whereby women grant a loan with interest to their husbands, with rates high enough to be the envy of the most avaricious moneylender. Conversely, others deliberately refuse "to beg", or even demand financial responsibilities, in order to "hold their head high" but also at times as a means of negotiating certain forms of freedom. Some women state that it is necessary to "tame" her husband. If these women's freedom of movement is undoubtedly greater than that of Indian women, it is still far from being total. It should be noted that private realities of practice are sometimes quite different from public appearances, and that behaviours are very heterogeneous: some women do not hesitate to ridicule their husband in public for shirking his duty of protection, whilst others feign financial dependence in order to preserve her husband's dignity.

In polygamous households, the existence of conflict between co-wives is also reflected by particular financial practices. Doing as well or outdoing her co-wife (wives) to attract the favour of the husband is a daily concern. The domains of procreatio¹⁵ and sexuality are key sources of rivalry. But there is also competition in the domestic sphere of food preparation. Indeed, even when the husband takes on the costs involved, some women do not hesitate to supplement with their own pocket money in order to garnish the "sauce". Rivalry is also expressed through appearance (cosmetics, jewellery and clothing costs account for between 10% and 30% of their expenditure), and the permanent preoccupation over appearance can sometimes turn into an obsession. The commercial activities of women are frequently punctuated by this fierce competition, with some women deciding to start a business on the very day their husbands decide to take a second wife. Jealousies are also fanned in the service of such rivalry, for example with women showing off clothes and jewellery purchased from their own income, while claiming they were given to them by their husband.

When interviewed on their spending priorities, women are likely to evoke "family" costs, a generic term covering hospitality, mutual assistance and family ceremony expenses (marriages, births, deaths). According to our observations, such expenses account for 20% to 40% of total expenditure, and sometimes much more for some women. Some ceremonies are solely the responsibility of women, especially ceremonies of birth (*ngente*), where the amounts spent are substantial (the equivalent of several months or several years' salary). If social pressure partly explains the size and highly ostentatious nature of festivities - some speak of "feminine potlatch" [Moya, 2003] - these events are

¹⁵The number of children remains a marker of social status.

also key stages in the women's paths towards the affirmation of their social position, both within their lineage and in their immediate environment.

How do women manage to assume all their obligations, while mostly coping with limited and above all very irregular, income¹⁶ (an average of between 40,000 and 120,000 CFA francs annually, which amounts to between 60 and 180 euros)? Multiplying the sources of loans, dividing up the forms of savings and diversifying tontine practices are all techniques used, giving rise to a plurality of monetary circuits, which are most often strictly feminine.

The level of debt among women is often considerable, but it is difficult to reconstruct given the tangled state of debts and claims in which women are intertwined. "*Sab bukki*", "*sulli bushidô*" (take a hyena, bury a hyena) or "*sab-sul*" (dig, bury) is how women describe this permanent juggling which consists of getting into debt in one context in order to settle another deb¹⁷. They also compare these juggling practices with "drawers", where to open a drawer they must first close another one. Ceremony finance also gives rise to the "flux and reflux" of extremely complex liquid assets which are entirely controlled by women and involve donations to cover donations which sometimes extend over several generations [Moya, 2003].

Only a diversity of borrowing and savings practices can match the variety of demands and temporalities faced by women. Women rarely have cash savings. Avoiding cash hoarding allows women to partly evade requests for money from their entourage, whilst providing readily convertible goods in the face of any kind of contingency. Livestock, grain, goods, jewellery, seeds, housing and fields for the most affluent, are the most widespread forms of savings. Tontine savings are also very common. The majority of the women encountered participate in at least one tontine, and most of them hold two, three or sometimes more concurrent memberships. In the simple tontine, members contribute regularly (on a weekly or monthly basis) and each member in turn receives all the contributions, or "lot". The amount of lots varies from 500 to 100,000 CFA francs (between 0.75 and 150 euros), the average being in the range of 5,000 to 20,000 CFA francs (between 7.5 and 30 euros). Motivations are often various and evolve depending on the participants and situation. Forcing themselves to save regularly and hence protecting themselves from the demands of the entourage, as well as against one's own temptations, seems to be a priority.

¹⁶ We were not able to judge the poverty of the family insofar as we did not collect data on male income, a significant part of which is contributed to family expenses. For more details on income, we would refer the reader to earlier publications – full reference provided if the paper is accepted.

¹⁷ On this point see also Ndione [1992].

3. 2. The "conjugal" model: the example of the poor peasant women in South India

Today in India, the "conjugal" family model still represents "the ideal, traditional and authentic form of Indian family life" [Uberoi, 2006]. Its principal components can be summarized as follows¹⁸: patrilineal lineage, "patrilocal" residence (the new bride comes to live in the place of residence of her husband), primacy of the relationship between the husband and his own parents over the conjugal relationship and lastly, marriage is conceived as union between families rather than two individuals. This tension expresses itself in a particular way among the low caste peasant families of this study (Paraiyar community in Tamil Nadu). Traditionally, Paraiyar women enjoy greater freedom of movement than the upper castes as a simple pragmatic response to the necessity to work. The practices of seclusion are not in force, but women still remain subject to a strict control of their sexuality and mobility, "feminine morality" remaining an essential criterion for the honour of the family, the clan and for the lineage. Traditionally, women are excluded from access to property and inheritance. Recent legislation relating to inheritance (2005) at the federal level provides for the equal rights of children from both genders, but its implementation is proving problematic and is hardly compatible with current practices which relegate women to a permanent status of dependency. Women are excluded from having access to property, but they benefit from a certain form of protection (at least presented as such) from their family (parents, brothers, uncles) through the dowry at the time of marriage¹⁹, and then in the form of regular material help throughout their lives.

Even if they show some disparities, all the women that we met belong to poor families: agricultural employment represents the main source of work, and the average annual income for the whole family is approximately INR 40,000 (about 700 Euros)²⁰. Officially, meaning if one limits oneself to what is being said in public, men are held to be the main suppliers of income, including in the poorest environments where women have always pursued productive activities [Kapadia, 1996]. Men are also still officially in charge of pooling the income and taking the main financial decisions, sometimes with the assistance of the household or lineal elders.

Nevertheless, in reality actual modes of financial management are far from the normative discourse. If

¹⁸ And this in spite of a diversity of practices and family configurations: let's insist on the fact that it is a *norm* [Uberoi, 2006, p. 30 sq].

¹⁹ The dowry brings a certain security to the bride (knowing that in actual practice, she seldom controls the usage of possessions acquired in this way), as it generally includes some durable material goods (gold in particular). But taking into consideration the important amount that it represents (several years of salary), it is obvious that it contributes a great deal to the discrimination towards women and to the famous problem of "missing women", as well as to the preference for male children. About this subject, see for example the work of Ch. Guilmoto [2004].

²⁰ The amounts are not comparable with those given to Senegalese women inasmuch as it is a question of the income of the whole household, while the data collected in Senegal concerned only uterine unity (women and children).

the pooling system is the most frequent (occurring in almost three quarters of the families we met), sharing of responsibilities in terms of managing and controlling income varies greatly. Balancing the daily budget, sometimes including significant expenses related to the life cycle is often the responsibility of women. Whichever mode of management is chosen, three quarters of the women consider themselves responsible for balancing the daily budget. This type of responsibility proves very ambiguous: it is both a source of moral pressure since resources are limited, as well as a source of (relative) power, since it is also a question of arbitrating and sharing the income among the different members of the family. The choice of the manager, man or woman, is the result of compromise and negotiation (more or less implicit). Some women officially refuse any responsibility or only reluctantly accept it, or even deliberately feign naivety with respect to financial matters in order to show submission to the patriarchal order, while conducting many activities in secrecy (to which we shall return). Conversely, some women are in charge of the entire income, including that of their husband, but this apparent privilege is only a very small compensation for the disengagement of the husband in other areas (irregular employment, adultery, chronic alcoholism).

Apprehending the social stakes of management is often more complex, as it is difficult to extract from all the rights and obligations and the conflicts that punctuate intra-familial relationships. Oppositions and rivalries are ongoing between men and women, older and younger family members, but also among women, especially those of age to procreate and their elders, those linked by consanguinity and those linked by marriage. Daily conflicts not only relate to the distribution of family chores but also to freedom of movement, the education of the children, and the status accorded to each family member, this being closely related to financial responsibility. Daily quarrels often reflect long term conflicts threatening the family unit (problems of inheritance and its distribution) as well as threats to the family reputation due to deviant behaviours (love marriages, divorces, adultery, illegitimate children, alcoholism). Managing and controlling the income is perceived either as an obligation, a right, a privilege or a sanction. Without doubt, the elders are the most powerful (relatively), and the cohabitation of distinct generations leads to strong female hierarchies based partly on their unequal capacity to control money. Some women find themselves pushed to enormous financial responsibilities by their husbands and/or their in-laws (for example, to finance a family ceremony, the cost of which represents several years of salary) in reparation for behaviour that sullied the family's honour. On the other hand the skill of management (ability to save, to borrow, to seek help from her original family, to acquire inexpensive goods) is undoubtedly a resource allowing women to better negotiate some freedom, especially freedom of movement.

In contexts where prevail the pooling system, the existence of clandestine financial practices, for men as much as for women, is probably a normal aspect of day to day family life that can not be overlooked and which allows all members to preserve some space for freedom²¹.

Not only do most of the women contribute in a substantial way to the family income²² but they also utilise many techniques which allow them to circumvent the rules of income centralization and to exert a right to oversee expenses²³. Some of them secretly run various types of income generating activities: small clothes and jewellery home-businesses, sale of local products, various types of services (housecleaning for better-off families, money-lending, etc.).

When the women are expected to give their whole income to their husband, some of them don't hesitate to hide a part of it which they will use as they please. Others put aside some of the allocation they receive for daily food expenditures, or they adjust the stated price of the food items. Others discreetly "borrow" some rupees from their husband's pocket. Along with this illicit management equally come clandestine modes and practices of saving (three quarters of the women concerned). About 70% of women claim to secretly save some cash. Jewels are a favoured medium of saving. Not only are they one of the rare belongings that women have at their disposal, but the men's ignorance on the subject, especially in terms of the appraisal of value, gives women a good space for manoeuvre. Close to 60% manage part of their jewels (purchasing, pawning, and sometimes selling) without the family's knowledge. Tontine practices are less widespread than in Senegal, probably because of the financial dependency of women and their restricted mobility. About 40% of the women met are members of a tontine, or sometimes, though rarely, two. The price of the lot varies between INR 500 and 10,000 (between 18 and 175 Euros). In 20% of cases, the tontines operate in an entirely clandestine way among neighbours.

Finally, one observes a diversity of borrowing practices, some of which also take place secretly. The most common method (almost 80% of the women) is the *kaimathu* ("exchange from hand to hand"): these are very small amounts set aside for assuring daily survival, which circulate daily among neighbours, as cash or in kind. Shopkeepers, itinerant bankers and pawnbrokers are solicited for slightly more substantial amounts. In the first instance the transactions happen at home, which

²¹ See for example Blumstein and Schwartz [1985] from investigations conducted in the United-States, [Pahl 1989] for Great-Britain, Bruce [1989] for several examples taken from the South, Kabeer [1997] for Bangladesh, and Agarwal [1994] for South Asia.

²² According to our investigations, 60% of the women contribute more than 20% to the family income, usually from 20 up to 60%. Our data confirm those of Kapadia [1996] and Mencher [1988] also carried out in Tamil Nadu among lower-castes.

²³ Here again, we find the same observations as Laurence Fontaine [2001] about European pre-industrial women: limited by legislation in their financial practices, while having heavy responsibilities in term of family expenditures, women have no other choices than to imagine any means of circumvention.

guarantees discretion. For the second case, the resort to an intermediary, often a woman from the surroundings who has the privilege to be able to move around, allows the circumvention of mobility restrictions. The movement of jewellery (intended to be pawned) is also part of this feminine solidarity (three quarters of the women regularly exchange some of their jewels within their circle).

Secrecy levels vary greatly from one family to another and from one transaction to another. Depending on whether they are trying to secure some freedom of use or to preserve masculine honour, women hide their activities more or less conscientiously. Many transactions take place discreetly while being perfectly tolerated, with men and elders deliberately closing their eyes, and this type of non-intervention is a probable means of securing patriarchal norms.

As for the use of funds saved, accumulated or embezzled in this way, the amounts remain limited (an average of INR 4000, that is to say 70 Euros, however this amount represents nearly a third of the annual income of women). As is the case in the Senegalese context, it is above all the intensity of the financial circulation which seems to be a decisive factor: the majority of women, as we saw, actively participate in several financial circuits, most of them strictly feminine and limited to circles in physical proximity, with further ones spread out in relation to the original family. These clandestine practices also serve to help the women to balance the family budget when it is under their responsibility. Whatever the amount of the allowance they receive, which sometimes represents a very small portion of the overall income, the rest being allocated to the men's strictly personal expenses (tobacco, alcohol, gambling), they are expected to secure the daily food supply and to respond to unforeseen demands (health problems, visitors or unexpected ceremonies). In case of shortcomings, the women are readily accused of bad management or of being spendthrifts. To assume this role of manager without complaint nor "begging" is often a question of personal honour, which partly explains the many stratagems previously described. In order to face the penury and inadequacy of income and expenses, permanent juggling between various sources of income, savings, loans or reciprocate gifts, is the only alternative. Women compare their role to a "tightrope walking" exercise aimed at adjusting a sadly malfunctioning "set of scales" that are condemned to be permanently out of balance. Here again, we can observe the same paradox as that common for 19th century industrial European or American working-class families, where women are forced to financial dependency while being fully responsible for the management of the budget [Fontaine 2001; Perrot, 1991]. This heavy responsibility, which Michelle Perrot speaks of as a "budgetary matriarchy" above all concerns the obligation to manage uncertainty and shortages, regularly driving them to "deprivation in times of shortage" [Perrot, 1991, p. 101] but also, as John Stuart Mill highlighted, to acts of cunning and ruse [Mill 1975 [1869], p. 68].

4. Conclusion

At the conclusion of these two case studies several theories have emerged.

1) The diversity of monetary and financial practices described here reflect the permanent tension these women face in terms of the requirement for daily survival and long term social obligations, between the absolute necessity to make ends meet, to balance income and expenditure and the desire to preserve their dignity, their relationships with others, to meet expectations and expectations, to respect commitments, formal or informal, implicit or explicit.

2) Such diversity of monetary and financial practices and circuits takes various forms: juggling with endless borrowing practices, multiple saving schemes, earmarking funds (to affect such income, such loan or such savings to such use), participation in various circuits, often specifically feminine. This diversity is expressed in spaces which are as varied as their context. In India, where the financial independence of women and their mobility continues to be severely restricted, practices are mostly clandestine and limited to the fringes of the private-domestic space, while in Senegal collective practices such as tontine are more widespread.

3) This diversity of monetary and financial practices and circuits firstly has a purely functional virtue: to balance out insufficient or irregular income, sometimes unpredictable, with unavoidable expenditures, some of which are also unpredictable. The terms vary - Senegalese women speak of "drawers" while Indian women evoke the term "balance" - but the principle remains the same, namely the matching of incoming and outgoing money.

4) This diversity is also a way to reconcile a multiplicity of motives for action. At times these are to maintain one's distance, to circumvent obligations deemed oppressive or unjust, but it is also to better assume those which they consider priorities. Therefore this diversity has an eminently social virtue. It can be understood only with respect to all the rights and obligations in which women are involved, and especially how they perceive and interpret them. Far from dissolving into a simplistic logic of seeking personal interest or compliance with tradition, every monetary transaction is the result of compromise and negotiations (often implicit) [Zelizer, 2005]. It sometimes reflects interdependence, sometimes conflict, sometimes resistance and circumvention. The multiplicity of sources of loans and bonds of debt also includes this dual element, functional and social. For those women called to secure the balance of the family budget with not only limited but sometimes poorly controlled resources, diversifying sources of loans and "manipulating credit" are the only way to break from "squaring the circle" [Fontaine, 2007]. Multiplying the bonds of debt and credits (as poor as they are, most of the encountered women are also creditors) also has a highly social function: to build, strengthen and reaffirm a solidarity network.

5) Echoing the assumption of Laurence Fontaine [2007], we finally suggest that the creation of specifically feminine financial circuits and resorting on occasions to various tactics of deception and circumvention is the only way to reconcile the contradictory orders which many women face. They

must balance a budget without the right to access and control sources of income, although depending on the context and institutions in force, this injunction is manifested in a more or less stringent manner.

This diversity is also a way to reconcile a multiplicity of motives for action. At times these are to maintain one's distance, to circumvent obligations deemed oppressive or unjust, but it is also to better assume those which they consider priorities. Therefore this diversity has an eminently social virtue. It can be understood only with respect to all the rights and obligations in which women are involved, and especially how they perceive and interpret them ("women" being fundamentally heterogeneous as a category). Far from dissolving into a simplistic logic of seeking personal interest or compliance with tradition, every monetary transaction is the result of compromise and negotiations (often implicit) [Zelizer, 2005]. It sometimes reflects interdependence, sometimes conflict, sometimes resistance and circumvention. The multiplicity of sources of loans and bonds of debt also includes this dual element, functional and social. For those women called to secure the balance of the family budget with not only limited but sometimes poorly controlled resources, diversifying sources of loans and "manipulating credit" are the only way to break from "squaring the circle" [Fontaine, 2007]. Multiplying the bonds of debt and credits (as poor as they are, most of the encountered women are also creditors) also has a highly social function: to build, strengthen and reaffirm a solidarity network.

Analysis on a micro-scale reveals the subtlety and complexity of practices and their social insertion. Our analysis also reflects the burden of current norms and institutions for women of the two social groups studied, especially with regard to matrimonial alliances and access to property and employment. Moreover, our analysis highlights the permanent process of interpretation, adjustment and occasionally circumvention of these norms, and it is precisely this incessant work of adaptation that explains the heterogeneity of the arrangements and trajectories that we observed.

The issue of a reflection on money and finance, namely to confirm the need for a socio-economical approach to behaviour, family relations and money, is not purely theoretical. It is also political: to better consider the fight against female poverty and gender discrimination. The main measure advocated over the past few decades, whether by multilateral institutions or social movements, is to promote women's access to employment and to the field of activity known as "commercial", with microfinance being the main vector. It is assumed that by exchanging their work strength on a "market" (implicitly assumed free of all social, political, and cultural considerations) women could finally become free from patriarchal and hierarchical oppressive structures. Most of these policies also assume that poor women play only a minor role in the financial sphere. While most are effectively excluded from the formal sphere, their involvement in the informal sphere and their expertise in terms of management, savings and credit are beyond doubt. From both these presuppositions, two major

pitfalls ensue. Firstly, a purely functional conception of the monetary instrument leads to significantly overestimated emancipatory virtues. Secondly, to deny the diversity of pre-existing informal practices leads to the offer of financial services which are often poorly adapted to the diversity of needs. Besides, a close analysis of the effects of microfinance brings to light contrasted effects²⁴.

These effects greatly depends on women's actual access and control over the money. However women's access to money, in as much as the control they have over it, exists in the form of *social constructions* composed of the social norms in effect at a particular time at the scale of a given society or community, but also of the compromises and negotiations taking place at the intra-household level, as described here.

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²⁴ See for instance Fernando [2006], Kabeer [2001], Mayoux [2001], Molyneux [2002], Rankin [2002]. With respect to the south-Indian context, Holvoet [2005] finds positive results provided that credit is combined with financial and social group intermediation. Garikipati [2008] finds that while lending to women helps their households diversify and strengthen their coping strategies, it may have a perverse impact on their own relative status since they lack of command over household's productive assets.

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