When women support the patriarchal family. A historical anthropology of marriage in a Gécamines mining camp, D.R.Congo.

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Summary. *Based on ethnographic research among the ex-Gécamines workers of Panda (Likasi, D.R.Congo), this article studies the dynamics of the husband-wife relationship in a post-industrial context that has been long characterized by paternalism. It suggests that, though men and women living in this mining camp invoke the ideal of the Christian couple promoted during the colonial period to talk about their marital life, their relationship actually faced important changes after Congolese independence in 1960. Caused by the nationalization, and then by the dramatic decline of Gécamines, these changes directly affected three central dimensions of the colonial model of family, namely monogamy, the ideal of domesticity, and male authority. If men and women continue to appeal to this model, it is because, in times of growing poverty, it allows them to remind each other duties as docile housewives and responsible husbands, and to command respect as a virtuous Christian family in the face of the local community.*

During my first fieldtrip in Panda (Likasi, D.R.Congo) in 2006, I was struck by the importance of marriage and family values in the discourse of the former workers of Gécamines, the mining company that had built and managed this worker camp until the late 1980s. The issues of harmony, faithfulness, and cooperation between spouses were constantly coming back not only in sermons at church, but also in conversations with workers, their wife and children. Moreover, most ex-Gécamines employees, who were then aged between 50 and 70 years old, claimed to live according to the ideal of Christian marital life promoted by the company and the church since the colonial period. In the course of following fieldtrips in Panda, I however realized that this celebration of harmony, faithfulness, and cooperation between husband and wife was largely about how they attempted to rationalize more recent developments that were not entirely wished or expected. Their discourse about proper marital life was passing over a complex history in silence – a history closely associated with that of Gécamines social policy since the 1920s.

Founded in 1906, Gécamines – former *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* – first relied on male migrant workers hired for short-time periods. But facing a growing shortage of labour in the 1920s, the company decided to abandon this system and to 'stabilize' its workforce near the mines. It is against this background that, like Copperbelt companies in Zambia, Gécamines began to encourage Christian marriages and to promote the ideal of domesticity among its workers. In return, every detail of their family life was to be taken in charge by the company: housing, food distribution, schooling, medical care, leisure activities and so forth. At the end of the colonial period, Gécamines could give this scheme a positive assessment since nearly all its African employees were officially married to only one wife. Moreover, the more educated and the more skilled among them had espoused the ideal of domesticity, this ideal being associated with a 'modern' lifestyle.

After independence, this situation changed for two reasons. On the one hand, the nationalization of the company in 1967 was followed by the progressive relaxing of its control over workers' sexual and family life (Dibwe, 2001). On the other, Gécamines – once the most important mining enterprise of Congo-Zaire – went bankrupt for economic and political reasons in the early 1990s (Rubbers, 2006). Wage arrears began to accrue and all the social services once delivered to the personnel were

reduced to bare minimum. In this context, the revenues generated by workers' wives in subsistence agriculture and petty trade became of crucial importance, even though their contribution to the household budget proved generally insufficient to send all children to school, to eat every day, and to meet medical expenses.

In 2003-2004, voluntary redundancy was eventually made available to all Gécamines employees with more than 25 years service. Organized with the support of the World Bank, this redundancy program was a resounding success since employees were then due on average 36 months of wage arrears... A total of 10,000 workers (i.e. almost half of the workforce) aged between 45 and 65 years old volunteered for the scheme with the plan to work in agriculture, trade, or transport services. Unfortunately, age, debts, and unexpected expenses made difficult for most of them to improve their living conditions with the money received from the Gécamines (Rubbers, 2010).

How far the decline of social protection offered by Gécamines affected the husband-wife relationship for the generation of workers who took redundancy in 2003-2004? Why the ideal of Christian marital life promoted by the company and the church in the colonial period is still so important to them? Based on ethnographic research[1], this article attempts to answer these questions by taking as a point of departure three dimensions of the husband-wife relationship that were central to the colonial model of the family, namely monogamy, domesticity, and male authority.

1. Monogamy

At the beginning of the 20th century, Gécamines was recruiting, like Copperbelt mining companies, single workers for short-term periods. It was the growing scarcity of immigrant labour and the low profitability of temporary work that determined the company to encourage its workers to marry in the late 1920's (Fetter, 1976; Higginson, 1989). The presence of village women in its buildings was central to its strategy to 'stabilize' the workforce: this presence was expected to boost workers' morale, who would be ready to stay longer in town and to increase their performance at work; it would allow the company to supervise the growth and the education of children; and it would indirectly force single men to abandon what was considered as a life of debauchery (Mottoulle, 1946)[2]. To facilitate the marriage of its workers, Gécamines went so far as to intercede directly in their organization with the help of the administration. When a worker wanted to get married, the company sent the request to the colonial officer in charge of his homeland so that his family takes care of finding him a wife (Dibwe, 2001: 55-61).

At the end of the colonial period, the number of marriages with women from the home area progressively decreased in favour of marriages between children of Gécamines workers. As families were living side by side in the mining camp, they could know all about each other's honour and respectability: "If the girl is living in the neighbourhood, papa Alphonse explained to me, we have the opportunity to know how she behaves, how her parents educated her". Generally speaking, girls living in Gécamines camps had good reputation because they were submitted to strong discipline from early childhood. Moreover, most of them had received a 'proper' education at school. By contrast with village women, they could speak some words of French, iron clothes, or cook some European food (*byakula cha bazungu*). They were '*évolués*' liable to share the 'modern' lifestyle to which the cultural elite (teachers, clerks, skilled workers) among workers aspired. For women, marriage with a Gécamines employee meant above all material security. While discussing with maman Béatrice for example, she told me: "We considered their work. If the man is a wage earner, then I can go to his place and live comfortably. If the man has no proper job, what I am going to eat? With a Gécamines worker, at the end of each month, we had something to eat at home".

The matrimonial policy of Gécamines was intended to form monogamous couples life-long in duration and fidelity. The moral entrepreneurs who conceived this policy feared that women migrating to the city become 'prostitutes', or that men take them as second wives. To impose the model of the Christian couple, they hence fought, through various means of control, prostitution, cohabitation, polygamy, and adultery in its own buildings. As a result the unique opportunity for workers to take a second wife was, during the colonial period, to have an affair with a '*supplémentaire*' in town – what Belgian authorities called 'camouflaged polygamy' (Hunt, 1991, 80-81).

After independence in 1960, polygamy, 'camouflaged' or not, became more common since the new government lifted the ban on this practice, and ceased to tax 'single women' in urban areas. In the heyday of Gécamines between 1965 and 1975, many workers took a second wife or a mistress downtown. In most cases, this partner was a single woman, a divorcee, or a widow expecting from her lover affection, material support, a social status, and sometimes children. At least he would assist her remaining economically self-sufficient and allow her being recognised as his 'wife'. Other workers in Panda preferred to go out downtown and have an occasional affair with some woman of easy virtue ('*femme légère'*). During a conversation with my research assistant, Papa André, an electrician, told us for example that he was then living in '*ambiance'* [an atmosphere made up of music, beer and women] as a musician:

> -**Papa André.** I was really...well...*kupungukiwa* [i.e. abandoned by the Holy spirit]...I was in 'ambiance'. I was doing the wrong thing. The music in the orchestra, beers, all that.
> - **Bernard.** Girls?
> - **Papa André.** Really I was not often at home. I did that but rarely because one must fear God. One must be clear. It was not an habit because, in the atmosphere of music, every time you see young girls, huh, women of easy virtue coming. But I controlled myself [he claps hands] because I knew it's a disease if you exaggerate. As I was the conductor, I had to give the discipline. Yet, me too, I pissed around. It was like that (Original in French, my translation)

Faced with this type of behaviour, few women seriously envisaged divorce. Being materially dependent on his wage as Gécamines worker, to divorce meant for most of them either to return and live with their parents, or to live alone and become the mistress of another man. Only those with less than three or four children could hope to re-marry and accordingly keep a status of married woman. Above all mothers feared to lose the custody of their children, given that children theoretically belong, in patrilineal societies, to the 'family of the father'. Their children might be neglected, or even maltreated, by their stepmother and, once at adulthood, they might themselves refuse to take their mother in charge: 'Me, Maman Clothilde told me, I cannot leave my children. Why should I leave them? If I know that where they stay, they are not at ease, I also will have no peace. And me, later, who will take care of me?' (Original in Swahili, my translation).

In response to the infidelity of their husband, women generally attempted to call him to order after having made a mess at the mistress' place. When all his money was going to his mistress, they could also lodge a complaint with the company administration in order to get directly his food ration and half of his wage. But women finally learned to accept the situation, even if their husband decided to take his mistress as second wife. Papa Kayembe, for instance, told me what the reaction of his wife was when she learned that he had given a daughter to another woman: 'Her reaction? Well it is always the same with all women [laughs]. They are jealous. It is difficult for them at the beginning. Then they progressively get used to it. But meanwhile there is something in the heart' (Original in French, my translation). This view was confirmed by a group of women in December 2010. For them, the infidelity of their husband was the result of an irresistible sexual desire [*tama*] that only a lack of resources could moderate. Once men answered this call of nature, they would come back near their wife: 'It's sexual desire huh, Maman Elisabeth told me. Because once they met this desire, they

always come back home. If men have money, they look for other women. And when they spent all the money, they come back again' (Original in Swahili, my translation).

The conditions making this compromise between husband and wife possible changed in the 1990's. Following the decline of Gécamines, arrears of payment began to grow while the salary itself was melting away because of hyperinflation. Furthermore the food ration was progressively cut and distributed irregularly. In these circumstances households in Panda depended more and more significantly on the activities of women in agriculture and trade. However their income was not sufficient to feed the family twice a day and to send all children to school at a time. Following the observations of papa Kashala, who was then a social worker in Panda, this pauperization process drove most vulnerable couples to separation. This was the case of papa André, who was not able to make ends meet in the early 1990's. Unable to cultivate because of his arthritis, he did electrical repairs for private individuals and played music in various events at week-ends. In 1993, his wife, who was criticizing him for his laziness, his extramarital affairs, and his irresponsibility as a father, left him with their children for her family home in another suburb of Likasi. Papa André, who now lives alone, explains the behaviour of his wife by the 'toxic' influence of her family and the 'calculative' character of women.

Divorce however remained costly for women. Declining living conditions led to greater insecurity, not to greater autonomy (Hansen, 1984: 234). Even if they contributed more and more to the household budget, most of them did not earn enough money to live alone with their children. It must also be said that the marital relationship was not, in their opinion, only dependent on material interests. Many women explained to me that, though their parents pushed them to marry a Gécamines worker for the comfort he could provide to them, love had slowly flourished between both spouses. Now that their husband is back at home, they are willing to forgive his past infidelities. Maman Marie-Louise:

> At the time of the redundancy program, I did not think to what my husband did to me anymore. On the contrary I thought to the good times we had together when we were engaged. I look at him with this love. But him, no. He does not care about those things. I try to do my best for him, everything that can please him. But him, he does not understand anything. Men are just selfish (Original in Swahili, my translation)

Now that they are again paid regularly, many Gécamines employees still have a mistress. Managers playing with me in the local veteran football team for example often took their 'chérie' [*bibi*] with them when we had a beer together in a bar downtown. For the generation of ex-Gécamines workers, this time is definitely gone: poverty, insecurity, and age forced them to abandon their extramarital affairs and to come back home. As Maman Elisabeth puts it with a blend of resent and irony, 'Many women say that men are faithful now. They cannot move. They only stay at home waiting that we cook for them. They eat and that is all' (Original in Swahili, my translation). Women in Panda often comment this process by telling stories about men coming back to their loving wife after having several affairs: she only, the moral of these stories goes, takes care of him in case of misfortune. In such stories, the home is presented as a moral space under the control of women to which men return at the end of a dissolute life. Like a prodigal son coming back to be enthroned as a constitutional king, the retiring husband is welcomed, served, and honoured by his dedicated wife; however he has no choice but to submit to the moral order she has created at home.

2. Domesticity

During most part of the colonial era, the city was regarded by the colonial elite as a place of perdition for women (Debra, 1949). Far from their customary environment, they were free to use their charms on workers, to seduce and corrupt them. And given the sex ratio, they were in a strong position to

get what they wanted or to take another partner. In the opinion of colonial moralists, 'detribalised' women in cities were idle, calculative, and profoundly immoral. To fill the vacuum left by traditional authority, the colonial administration undertook to establish a new tradition of subordination that would redefine men's and women's roles in non-customary areas: the nuclear family (Hunt, 1990: 450; Ranger, 1993). In this tradition, the place of women is at home: their role is to be a faithful wife, a dedicated mother, and a modern housewife

Finding its origin in the industrial revolution, this family model was exported to the Congo between the two wars to be imposed as the basic unit of the colony, itself represented as a patriarchal family (Hunt, 1990). The household consisting of the father, the mother and children was to provide a microcosm in which the values of work, order, and authority would be transmitted to the next generation. Beyond their concern for colonial legitimisation, most colonial moralists viewed such a family as 'natural', by contrast with the 'anomaly' of clan organization (Roussel, 1951: 74). Imposing the 'bourgeois' family would therefore allow them to return their individual authority to men and their human dignity to women. Once entrusted with the mission of creating a home, women in towns could indeed hope, in their opinion, to free themselves from their bondage in African traditional society – where they were supposedly treated like 'beast of burden' – and become 'modern'[3].

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Gécamines opened in its buildings *foyers sociaux* (training centres for women) on the model of those created by the colonial administration (see Taquet, 2006). In Panda for instance, where about 4000 workers lived with their family, four *foyers* were founded, each headed by a Belgian woman (Rademaekers, 1959). In such training centres, women could take courses in sewing, in cooking, in ironing, in childcare, or in writing and reading. They also took part in discussion groups about the proper attitude to have with their husband, the education of children, or 'beliefs' in occult forces. In theory, this training was optional. But the company strongly recommended workers to send their wife to the *foyer social*. In addition, social workers made regular surprise-visits to each household. During these visits they controlled that the house was well-ventilated, that beds were made, or that children were clean: if their report was positive, the hostess got a reward; if not, the company summoned her husband to take sanction against him.

Part of a disciplinary system that controlled every detail of workers' daily life (Fetter, 1973), the *foyer social* was intended to impose as taken for granted a new order of practices and signs, that of domesticity (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992). In so doing the aim of social workers was to give women a new meaning to their life in town. By teaching them the arts of domesticity, they tried to make them aware of their dignity as 'modern' women responsible of their home. If this role meant to submit to the authority of the husband, it also conferred power on him. The wife was in a position to demand that he remains faithful, that he cares for the family, or that he consults her for any decision of importance – in short, that he submits to all the duties expected from him in the Christian model of the family. The domestication of women would be followed, thanks to their collaboration, by that of men...

This project of domesticating women has of course been subjected to selective appropriation and implicit resistance (Hansen, 1992). To eat in different Panda households today, for example, is sufficient to notice that family meal is far from having been adopted by all: In most households, adult men, women, and children eat separately. But colonial observers agreed that *foyers sociaux* met resounding success, this success being understood as the expression of women's need to get together and of their desire to look 'modern' (Dutilleux, 1950: 113). Putting aside their contempt for what was in their eyes simple 'colonial mimicry' (Bhabha, 1994), this interpretation is supported by women living in Panda today. To take courses at the *foyer social* was for them the principal mean to appropriate colonial 'modernity' (*kizungu bazungu*). They could learn with white women the practices supposedly at the basis of their social superiority. The *foyer* also provided them with a place

for gathering, where they could share the results of their experiments and compete in their mastery of domestic practices.

Domesticity cannot be reduced in this context to mere ideology concealing male domination. To paraphrase Gaitskell (1983: 254), it was a model of relations Gécamines women struggled for, rather than against. To follow this model gave them dignity, prestige and power over their husband. The *foyer social* became accordingly a place of competition for prestige between women and households. In this competition, the Christian mother staying at home to care for the family ('*maman'*) was opposed to the woman having openly different partners ('*ndumba'*). Households with a long urban experience used also domesticity to claim a 'civilized' status by contrast with 'savages' (*basenji*) freshly arrived from the village (see Ferguson, 2002: 555). For papa Makumbi, there were indeed, in the colonial period, two categories of person in Gécamines buildings of Panda: 'townsmen' like him, and 'villagers'. The category of 'towsmen' included clerks and teachers who had adopted a domestic lifestyle and were recognized as 'modern'. As for the category 'villagers', it referred to new recruits, the illiterate 'bumpkins' who had kept the habits of the village. In such households, papa Makumbi told me, father, mother, and children were *still* eating separately, not during a family meal. Worse, the wife could *still* refuse to do the laundry for her husband.

After independence, *foyers sociaux* however went into a slow decline. First, social workers ceased to visit households. According to papa Makumbi, Congolese social workers, who replaced Belgian women in the 1960s, did not have sufficient legitimacy to pursue their work of control. Secondly, as recruitment in rural areas was abandoned by Gécamines, classes at the *foyer* progressively emptied. At that time, most Gécamines women were grown up in the city, where they had received a proper education at school; female schooling in Congo-Zaire is, since the colonial period, entrusted with the mission to make good housewives out of girls (Masandi, 2004). Eventually *foyers sociaux* were looted during the pillages of 1991 to be left only with empty classrooms.

Retrospectively, only those who were promoted to the rank of managers after 1960 had the opportunity to fulfil the ideal of 'modern' domesticity. Their wage and the numerous advantages in kind associated with it allowed them to enjoy a middle-class lifestyle and to spare their wife the obligation to work. Today they often recall this time when they were living 'like Whites' with nostalgia. As for workers, they were virtually condemned to cheap domesticity given that, if their wife did not raise some additional income, they could only get basic consumer goods such as furniture, dishes, or clothes. To acquire the prestige goods given to managers by the company (a TV, a fridge, or cooker) necessitated for them to save for months. In the first half of the 1990s, the situation became even more difficult as wages were not only hit by hyperinflation, but also paid irregularly by Gécamines. To make do with this money had become impossible. Workers started to sell everything in their house, from their radio to their table and chairs. Then, the minority of women who had stayed at home were then forced to cultivate, to trade, to brew beer, or to work as a tailoress.

After the redundancy program in 2003-2004, most women in Panda continued these same activities. Assisted by their husband or not, they cultivated a small plot of land or ran a small business at home. Now, to take local metaphors, they are commonly recognized as the family's 'locomotive' or 'engine'. This is the case, for instance, in papa Valentin's family, his wife having left home to work as a caretaker in a Catholic school for girls in Lubumbashi. With the help of her oldest son (a doctor in South Africa), she takes in charge the school fees of her eight dependent children, who live with her by another family in Lubumbashi. As for papa Valentin, he lives alone in Panda to cultivate and assist his wife by sending her some food.

This recognition of women of this generation as the family's 'locomotive' shows that their situation has changed since the decline of Gécamines. Now they have no more the opportunity to stay at

home to look after the housekeeping. They earn their own revenue, which is of vital importance for the family, even though it does allow them neither to be self-sufficient, nor to significantly improve their living conditions at home. It remains to be seen, nonetheless, how this new economic power affected the husband-wife relationship, especially in the control over the household budget and the distribution of housework.

3. Male authority

A common view among men in Panda is that the growing contribution of women to budget households has profoundly changed the balance of power between husband and wife. The superiority of men, formerly at the basis of the Christian family model, would have been undermined by the fall of their wage. Now women would become aware of their economic power, and begin to assert their point of view in family affairs. Generally speaking, men denounce the female ambition to 'wear the trousers'[4], and warn against the peril to which claims to male-female parity expose the values of the Christian patriarchal family. In scientific guise, this view is articulated by the Congolese historian D. Dibwe (2001: chap.4), who suggests that male and female roles were reversed in the 1990s, and that this reversal lead to an 'unhealthy climate' in Gécamines households.

To be sure, women have gained more power over the use of incomes. They can use directly the money they earn to buy food, to pay school fees, or to meet medical expenses. In a context of poverty, they also think they have every right to demand their husband's income for the family: when children are withdrawn from school, men can hardly continue to keep their own money for going out (beers, girls and so on). By using money for family expenses, women however continue to fulfil the role expected from them in the model of the Christian family – a role taught in courses of 'household economics' for girls since the colonial period. According to this role, the wife administers the household budget with the consent of her husband. In the case he demands money, she owes submission to him: 'If my husband asks me money for a beer, Maman Clothide explained to me, I give him that money. We must always pay respect to our husband' (Original in Swahili, my translation).

This (asymmetric) cooperation between spouses in the making of the household budget is often deceitful in practice: men are used to keep part of their salary for an affair, or for having a beer with colleagues; women do not always show the money they earn in order to devote it to the family budget. But officially such cooperation is held up as the hallmark of educated Christian couples. Accordingly all my male informants claimed that, being good and responsible men, they collaborated with their wife since their marriage in the 1960s. As papa Albert puts it, 'Since we are Christian, we manage money together'.

The change in the balance of power between husband and wife is even less noticeable when it comes to housework. When I asked men if they were doing some housework, all answered that it was their wife's duty. Though they used to cook, to do the laundry, or to wash the dishes when they were single, to be free of these female tasks is now a sign of their status as married men. Women told me that, now that their husband has retired from Gécamines, they ask him more often to assist them in the housework. But their husband would generally refuse on the ground that he paid the dowry. This was made clear during a conversation with maman Elisabeth and maman Marie-Louise in January 2011:

> - **B.R.** Is your husband sometimes doing some housework?
> - **Maman Elisabeth.** Parity...[laughs]. No. Some days when I finish washing dishes, giving a wipe, I ask to my husband: "Papa Bony, could you cook your own meal? I am tired. I have done everything". Now listen to the answer of my husband: "No, no, I came to marry you, I gave all to your family. It is not you who married me". [Maman Elisabeth speakings] "It is now time to assist each other. I have done everything. We are

already old now". [Her husband speaking:] "It is me who has come at your place to marry you". [Maman Elisabeth speaking:] "Thus I must do everything?" You see, he does nothing as he is among those who retired from the company. I give him to eat, I give him to drink, all that. We, women, we are too charitable.
- **Maman Marie-Louise.** You can come back very tired from the field, but you must still bring him a bucket so that he can wash himself. You give him food first, and only then, you end up washing the dishes (Original in Swahili, my translation)

All my female informants told me that they accepted this situation on the ground that they had been educated as docile housewives. As maman Marie-Louise puts it, 'This is the way we, African women, we have grown. We were always taught that the man is above, and the woman under. It is like that' (Original in Swahili, my translation). From early childhood girls are indeed expected to assist their mother in the housework. At school they are trained in various skills associated with domesticity. And once married they receive regularly teachings in groups of prayer about the respect they owe to their husband. Even Congolese translators of soap TV series do not hesitate to introduce comments about the proper behaviour of women if an actress behaves badly... All these institutions and media contribute to instil in women what we could consider as a 'habitus' of restraint, deference, and care (Bourdieu, 2001).

As quotations above make clear, women in Panda are aware that they themselves reproduce male domination through their everyday practice and discourse. How to make sense of the fact, then, that this critical conscience does not conduct them to change their behaviour? I would suggest that, if women are not entirely satisfied with their lot, they defend patriarchy not only to avoid conflict with their husband and to preserve family life in times of hardship, but also to re-assert the model of Christian marital life to which patriarchy is closely associated with. Celebrating this ideal of marital life allows them to expect their man to be a faithful husband and a responsible father. As already mentioned above, this strategy to regulate men's behaviour has been facilitated by their aging as well as by the decline of their salary and their retirement from Gécamines: Now that they are back home with no proper income, they are more than ever before under the control of their wife, even though they remain officially the 'pater familias'. If this interpretation is correct, we are dealing with the pursuit of the project consisting in domesticating men (a project to which women began to take part during the colonial period), not with a reversal of the power balance between husband and wife as such.

But the most important reason why women continue to defend patriarchy, and the ideal of Christian marital life associated with it, is that it gives them some dignity as proper 'mamans' in a social milieu with no other model of virtue and respectability for them. Any expression of insubordination towards men, of refusal to comply with their duties as housewives, or of defiance towards established family values would owe them the condemnation of all the members of their generation. Today, their desire to show that they live according to the ideal of Christian marital life is inseparable, for women, from their ongoing commitment in the church, which has replaced the *foyer social* as the major locus of female competition and solidarity in Panda[5].

In this religious arena women indeed find support for moralizing their family as well as a place to compete around family values. To become a *Maman catholique* (a spiritual movement) allows a woman to spread the word of Jesus Christ to begin with her home. To be a *Mulinda amani* – literally a peace keeper, one of these women making sure masses go smoothly – is considered as a privilege demonstrating women's virtuous behaviour as wives and mothers. And to belong to the spiritual movement 'Single women with Jesus' is a mean for single women, widowed or divorced, to avoid being likened to women of easy virtue. In this context, this is no surprise that men are also encouraged to take part in the activities of the parish, the appointment to a position of responsibility being subjected to considerations of morality. To be elected as the president of a 'Living community' for instance, a man must meet at least three criteria: he must be faithful to his wife; he cannot be accustomed to alcoholic drinks; and he must be renowned as a virtuous person who creates harmony

around him. To attend to the Church seems therefore as much a mean to make one's domestic life publicly consistent with Christian morality as a profession of faith in God (Martin, 2003; Maskens, 2009).

4. Conclusion

To sum up answers given in this article to the questions rose in the introduction, the decline of social protection offered by Gécamines has brought at least three changes in the husband-wife relationship for the generation of workers who took redundancy in 2003-2004: the return of men at home after a life with the opportunity to have several sexual partners; the increasing difficulty of households to fulfil the ideal of 'modern' domesticity; and the new economic and social power that women have gained over their husband. However, the inhabitants of Panda continue to celebrate the model of the Christian (patriarchal) family promoted by colonial authorities. In a context marked by the end of paternalism, men invoke this model to remind women their duties as docile housewives, and women to remind men their duties as responsible husbands. More generally, both men *and* women seem to find in this model a resource to normalize their family life and to redeem themselves some dignity despite their growing poverty. In the words of Bourdieu, the ideal of Christian marital life seems to be used by men and women of Panda to make virtue out of necessity, to put the law on their side – 'Practical kin make marriages; official kin celebrate them' (Bourdieu, 1990: 168).

At a comparative level, this history of the husband-wife relationship in a Congolese mining town shows striking parallels with the one experienced by miners in Zambia, which has been well-documented by historians and anthropologists (Mitchell, 1957; Epstein, 1981; Powdermaker, 1962; Parpart, 1986, 1994; Ferguson, 1999). Concomitantly with their British counterparts, Belgian missionaries and social welfare officials campaigned to impose the model of the Christian marriage from the late 1920s onwards: they took measures to encourage monogamous marriages and to control women's freedom; and they taught fidelity, subordination, and domesticity to women in training centres. A particular role was also played, very much like in Zambia, by the emerging urban elite in the adoption of this family model by the African population. Only the control of tribal elders and natives courts over women seems to have been less important in Congo than under indirect rule in Zambia.

Following Ferguson's argument about Zambian miners, we could argue that, until the late 1980s, actual marriages among Congolese workers rarely came close to the Christian ideals of monogamy, domesticity, and proper family life. During the good times of Gécamines, men had often extramarital affairs, or entered into polygamous marriages. This is one of the reasons they could hardly offer all the comfort of 'modern' domesticity to their wife. In these circumstances, most women engaged in agriculture or trade to earn their own money and to top up what their husband was giving to them for the family budget. Where Ferguson's observations differ from my own is when he suggests that, in Zambian households, marriage stability is low, women are also adulterous, and more generally the husband-wife is characterized by suspicion and hostility. With a few exceptions, ex-Gécamines workers in Panda were all married to their present wife since the 1960s. Women's infidelity is hardly tolerated: the only person who told me his wife had been unfaithful to him in the 1970s divorced with her. Generally speaking, when discussing about their marriage, men and women spoke more of cooperation and love than of suspicion and hostility.

This broad contrast in marriage patterns between Zambian and Congolese copperbelts could be attributed to the much more important degree of control exerted by Gécamines over its workers' marital life. At a very general level of analysis, it could also find its origins in diverging traditions of descent. In Panda, all my informants were coming from patrilineal societies in Northern Katanga and

Eastern Kasaï. By contrast, the depiction of urban marriages in Zambia by authors such as Epstein, Parpart, or Ferguson reminds me of interviews I had in 1999 with Bemba people, who are matrilineal: they had married and divorced at least twice in their life and, during a brief journey in a Bemba village, several conflicts had broken out about married men and women having extramarital affairs. Bemba people, who live across the border between Congo and Zambia, are one of the largest groups in Copperbelt mining towns[6]. On this basis, one could suggest that (Congolese) men and women with a patrilineal tradition adopted the model of the Christian family with more ease: it had some relation with gender roles in their society, and it implied that children remained in the family of the father. By contrast, (Zambian) women with a matrilineal tradition had probably more reasons for resisting this family model and struggling to escape male control in town[7].

Besides these differences with the Zambian case, my own research suggests taking into account the generational dimension of the husband-wife relationship and the recent changes affecting family dynamics in Congo. For the generation of ex-Gécamines workers, the 1990s seems to represent a partial break with the past. In a context marked by the decline of their living conditions, these men must forget all about extramarital affairs, and come back at home near their wife. For the same reason, women have not, however, the opportunity to achieve the ideal of 'bourgeois' domesticity; on the contrary, they must work even harder to make a living for their family. Though this economic commitment has given them more power and influence over their husband, they do not for all that claim autonomy or ascendency towards him. For various reasons mentioned above, they continue to defend the tradition of the Christian patriarchal family invented during the colonial period. Having said that, this tradition is now more and more put into question by the generation of their children: some girls tend to consider the deference that their mother shows to their father as out-of-date; others adopt a lifestyle openly in contradiction to the behaviour expected from them by the family, the school, and the church since the colonial era – a behaviour made of submission, respectability, and religious piety. But the emergence of this oppositional culture in the new generation is another story...

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[1] This paper is based on five ethnographic study trips made to the mining camp of Panda (Likasi) in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010. During these trips, I conducted detailed more 80 interviews with key witnesses, managers and workers, and wives and children. I was also able to develop a closer relationship with five residents of Panda, and to observe them, talk with them and accompany them about their everyday activities. Names of interviewees have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

[2] The presence of women was also central to the strategy to moralize the colonial minority. During the same period, colonial authorities decided to condemn cohabitation with African women ('*ménagère'*), and to

encourage the migration of European women. In a context of growing colonial presence, they feared that 'racial' promiscuity would eventually lead to put colonial domination into question (Stoler, 1989; Lauro, 2005).

[3] From a historical point of view, it is impossible to give a single picture of the traditional role of women in the societies from which the Gécamines was recruiting its workers. These workers were coming from a large number of groups in Katanga, Kasaï, Kivu and neighbouring colonies (Northern Rhodesia, Rwanda, and so forth). To paraphrase J. Fabian (1979: 172), the Gécamines did not *find* a common tradition; it had to create one. In all cases, it seems that women were neither entirely dependent on their husband, nor confined to their house.

[4] This expression is not entirely innocent here since virtuous women are expected to wear loincloth in Congo. At several occasions in recent years, women wearing trousers have been verbally and physically attacked in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi. For an analysis of such attacks with respect to women wearing miniskirts in Zambia, see Hansen (2004).

[5] Fabian (1971) already noticed in the 1960s that the Catholic Church was the centre of social life in Gécamines mining camps.

[6] Various studies about this matrilineal group in Zambia suggest that divorce rates were high even before colonization (Moore and Vaughan, 1994).

[7] On the problematic relationship that matrilineal ideology and practice has with nuclear family life, see, of course, Turner (1957).