## Journal of

# Family History 关抗

# **REVIEW ESSAY**

THE FAMILY AND MIGRATION: NEWS FROM THE FRENCH\*

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Remues d'hommes: Essai sur les migrations montagnardes en France

aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles

[Movements of Men: Essay on Montagnard Migration in France

in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries]

Abel Poitrineau.

Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1983.

Bordeaux et le sud-ouest au XVIIIe siècle: Croissance économique et attraction urbaine [Bordeaux and the Southwest in the Eighteenth Century: Economic Expansion and Urban Attraction] Jean-Pierre Poussou.

Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1983.

Structure and Mobility: The Men and Women of Marseille, 1820-1870

William H. Sewell, Jr.

New York: Cambridge University Press and

Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1985.

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from the early modern period to the present.

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General studies of the behavior of peasants and proletarians in Europe suggest that the family dimension of migration lies at the heart of decisions to move, choice of destination, and both work and social behavior at the new location. Migration itself is a key part of European family strategies—those implicit rules guiding the behavior of men, women and children (L. Tilly, 1979a). Offspring left home in order to preserve the patrimony or to help earn a dowry (Berkner and Mendels, 1978). As the process of proletarianization chipped away at peasant holdings, those from landless or nearly landless families emigrated to earn their bread (C. Tilly, 1984). Families and young people traveled to where they had heard work was available. found a place to lodge, and often were hired through contacts from home or relations.1

Yet in close studies of migration—that least knowable of demographic processes the family dimension is most murky. One would like to produce a film, perhaps the story of a shrinking patrimony and generations of many children, that tells of the children's realization that they cannot stay unless they will be their brother's servants. But French archives are ungenerous; they yield not film, but a few snapshots, and poor ones at that: illcolored polaroid shots of a wedding party, faded sepia death scenes from the public hospital, mug shots of convicted criminals, or, for the nineteenth century, the occasional census that serves as an aerial photograph. The population registers that are so helpful to students of migration in Sweden and elsewhere do not exist in France.

What, then, can one know about where and why French people relocated? What is the relationship between the archives' faded photographs and the kind of conclusions historians can draw? An answer is approaching with the publication of new works by Jean-Pierre Poussou, Abel Poitrineau, and William Sewell. Indeed, the goal of Jean-Pierre Poussou is to demonstrate the possibilities of a migration study for the pre-census era in his study of Bordeaux and its hinterland. He defines (and defies) the limits of what one researcher can do - even for a thèse d'etat, of which this 665-page book is a distillation. Poussou's central sources were more than 34,000 Bordeaux marriage acts, over 120,000 burial acts and registrations of death, and regional marriage contracts. In order to offset the shortcomings of each source, he examined the records in tandem, pairing marriage acts, which overcount permanent and successful migrants, with death registers -- particularly those from hospitals, which overcount temporary migrants and the least successful.

A complex portrait of the economy and population of southwest France emerges from the regional study that makes up half the book. From Poussou, we learn that during the eighteenth century (a) the agricultural economy was market-oriented, even for métayers (sharecroppers) and the notoriously poor people of Landes; (b) rural labor force requirements varied enormously by season; (c) rural salaries remained rigidly low in the face of rising prices; (d) natural increase expanded the population significantly after 1750; and (e) landholdings deteriorated, pushing peasant families below the minimum holding for independence. Rural poverty, in short,

By contrast, during the same period Bordeaux became a great port, enriched by international trade in such products as wine and sugar. Here too, labor force demands were intensely seasonal, but rising salaries and the promise—at least the possibility—of employment attracted

people among whom unemployment and underemployment were endemic. As a result, migration to Bordeaux widened and intensified during the eighteenth century. Nonetheless there was not a massive exodus from rural areas; rather, certain areas proved most susceptible to emigration: the city's nearby hinterland (a bassin démographique of a dozen cantons within a radius of fifty-five kilometers); the river valleys and mountain regions of the greater southwest; and other French cities, especially those of the Atlantic seaboard.

Poussou discerns a multiplicity of traditions and impulses creating distinct currents of migration into Bordeaux. Dominating immigration were waves of migrants from the immediate area who formed a solid tie between city and hinterland. In addition, a stream of increasingly poor montagnards sought seasonal work, and a trickle of elite foreigners and Protestants acted as a driving force behind commercial expansion. His intimate acquaintance with his sources (gained over some two decades, without the intervention of computer technology) allows Poussou to see that the motive for migration was often the interests of the family; he emphasizes the family's need to remove some individuals from the family patrimony, to earn cash to pay off younger siblings who would not share the family holding, and to amass a dowry.

Research on Bordeaux's marginal population produces a most interesting portion of the book. Although all migrants were clearly not criminals, it is true that most of the city's criminals were migrants. Criminality is only one possible response to poverty, Poussou speculates, and the most likely alternative for those without friends or family support. For unwed mothers who made déclarations de grossesse, he similarly concludes that the

lack of a marriage testifies to the difficulty of integrating oneself into Bordeaux. Yet Poussou argues that urban illegitimacy actually reflects regional trends rather than urban wickedness; he suggests that the ideal of a moral countryside should be re-examined along with that of the sedentary peasant.

In Remues d'hommes, Abel Poitrineau views the same world as does Poussou, but he stresses the montagnard leaving home in order to earn cash in the lowlands. Poitrineau's first focus is the convergence of difficulties that pushed people from the Massif Central, Pyrenees and Alps: natural increase exacerbated insufficient food supplies while price shifts penalized an ecosystem rich in animal products but poor in grains. The lowlands, "theater of innovation" for capitalism, by contrast, offered employment. The eighteenth century's increasing economic imbalance between mountain and lowland encouraged temporary migration, preparing France for the rural exodus of the nineteenth century.

Poitrineau depicts the temporary migrant at home, on the road and abroad; acquaints the reader with a society in which departures are a way of life; and shows the response of community, family and a tax-hungry state to temporary migration. A host of migrants—ranging from Auvergnat "Spaniards" who were able to earn a great deal, to miserable chimney sweeps from the Alps whose parents rented them out by the season all come into our view. To weave a tapestry of such richness and variety, Poitrineau draws on a broad array of archival documents: parish registers, notarial records, court documents, taxation records, hospital registers, church documents, passports, private letters and a variety of inquiries. The words of forgotten people speak plainly of the poverty that prompted migration, such as

those of a peasant woman who explained to a tax inquiry that "her husband, in despair at being crushed by debts and the taille [France's primary direct tax] abandoned all and went off to Spain, leaving his wife with two little children" (p. 5). The book closes with a collection of exemplary documents, including a complaint against an adulterous wife, a letter home, a peddler's inventory, and documents regarding a migrant found dead from exposure and hunger as he made his way home. Remues d'hommes is a rich and textured account of montagnard migration, appropriately underwritten by the Centre National des Lettres and published with Aubier's Collection historique. Poitrineau's major systematic studies lie elsewhere (Poitrineau, 1966).

Poitrineau's sources provide a window on families and migration. On the one hand, he presents familiar motivations for departures: to buy land, to redeem debts and pay taxes, to earn money to pay younger siblings' share of the inheritance or dowry, or simply to reduce the number of winter appetites. All of these motivations reflect family solidarity and concern with the patrimony of the kind reflected in systematic studies of migration (such as the work of Poussou; and Berkner and Mendels, 1978). On the other hand, Poitrineau testifies that migration was as well an avenue of escape from family pressures and obligations. Earning money to increase one's landholdings is rewarding only for the landowner; younger siblings, excluded from landholding, had good reason to leave and were less likely to return. Some wished to enjoy the fruits of their labors themselves, so they avoided going home to be fleeced by avaricious parents. Fathers departed for months, years, or forever, leaving behind wives and children to depend on local charity.

The section on migrants' marriage, titled "proof of a makeshift" (à l'enseigne d'un pis-aller) confronts the link between

migration and family most directly. Poussou points out that marriages were carefully weighed social and economic arrangements which gave unusually heavy responsibilities to wives; he writes that, nonetheless, the long separations endured by migrants and their wives rendered a close or peaceful conjugal life unlikely. Even more telling, he argues, are the marriages between montagnards and women from the lowlands; they show that fidelity to home village is a sentimental myth, because when men could settle in the lowlands, they did—and lowland wives never settled in the mountains.

In the work of both Poussou and Poitrineau, the vast majority of migrants examined are males, reflecting the fact that relatively few women were on the road in the eighteenth century. The upland migration streams to Bordeaux that would be female in the nineteenth century were dominated by males in the eighteenth. Nonetheless, both authors neglected the opportunity to analyze the role of female migration in the prerevolutionary era. Poussou's contention that males dominated migration streams is belied by the fact that the largest group of migrants to eighteenth-century Bordeaux - those from the immediate hinterland — were primarily women. Moreover, Poussou's sources underrepresent women: marriage acts undercount them because women often married in their home parish; hospital death records undercount them because female migrants would be cared for at their own home relatively nearby, or perhaps at their employer's home in the case of domestic servants. "They all were men" (p. 49), writes Poitrineau of those who left the mountains, yet women appear throughout his work, particularly those who labored as servants and textile workers in Lyon. Women clearly left the mountains as part of a massive outpouring in the worst of times. Poussou observes that mass female migration—particularly the desertion of agricultural areas—would not come until the nineteenth century. By contrast, women play an important role in William Sewell's Structure and Mobility: The Men and Women of Marseille, 1820-1870. The book pays particular attention to female migrants, not only because they left rural areas in greater numbers than in the eighteenth century, but also to redress the gender imbalance in studies of migration and urban life.

The questions and methodology of Sewell's study are shaped by the traditions of American quantitative sociology. Yet his concerns are those of an historian interested in describing social change rather than those of a sociologist testing causal hypotheses. He writes for historians as well, eschewing sociological terminology and avoiding multivariate analyses. He employs sources characteristic of French social history; indeed, they are used by Poussou. Marriage acts form the base of Sewell's data set; their bias is offset by the use of court records. In addition, he consults the 1851 city census. As in the work of Poussou and Poitrineau, migrants are the heroes and heroines of Sewell's tale, yet in his book, the city of destination, rather than the region or mountains of home, provides the backdrop.

The first half of Structure and Mobility describes the economics of Marseille and its transformation by an industrial revolution, public works projects, and a revolution in commerce. Sewell provides a picture of each neighborhood and of the changes it experienced as the city tripled in population from roughly 100,000 primarily native-born residents in 1820 to a largely immigrant city of over 300,000 a half century later. This section also analyzes the changing occupations of men and women. Finally, Sewell devises a

scale by which to measure occupational status based on literacy, the status of marriage witnesses, and brides' labor force participation.

The second half of the study relates mobility to the most significant changes of the nineteenth century-patterns of migration and occupation that shifted with the growth of industry and bureaucracy. Here lies Sewell's central argument that migration and upward social mobility are linked: migration is a liberating factor in history because it frees people from the constraints of home and allows them to take advantage of new openings in the marketplace. Sewell first chronicles the intensification and broadening of Marseille's attraction for migrants, then investigates migrants' occupational mobility. He finds that migrants were more upwardly mobile than native-born Marseillais. Although most sons of peasants became manual laborers, for example, they disproportionately entered the white collar labor force; daughters of peasants, whether they were literate or not, disproportionately married into it. In order to investigate the notion that migration causes social pathology, an idea most memorably articulated by Louis Chevalier (1973), Sewell investigates mid-century crime in Marseille. Among convicted criminals he finds disproportionate numbers of young transient migrants from the city's slum rooming houses. Sewell concludes that court records reveal a separate and seamier world for migrants than marriage records.

Sewell also mines urban marriage records for their wealth of information about migrants. Using those from 1821, 1822, 1846, 1851, and 1869, he not only traces the change in geographic origins of males and females, but their social origins, literacy, patterns of intermarriage, family ties, and social mobility as well. Consequently, he is able to discern a selective

stream of regional migration in the 1820s that became diluted by a flood of rustics from farther afield as the century progressed. Because Sewell does not distinguish among migrants from the same department, one cannot know if there was a bassin démographique for Marseille like the one Poussou found for Bordeaux: however, an important (albeit increasingly diluted) proportion of migrants came from within Marseille's department, the Bouches-du-Rhone, which implies that there was a major source for new citizens close at hand. Within the overall stream of newcomers, several distinct groups of migrants emerge: Italians, who formed the bottom of the urban hierarchy; an array of foreigners from other countries; migrants from the province; and those who came from regions farther away in

Sewell takes careful note of migrants' family ties in the city using the parental residence as it is stated in marriage records. In the 1820s, when migration was primarily regional, 23 percent of the migrant grooms and 35 percent of the migrant brides had parents in Marseille; clearly, many families moved into the city with their children and grown children sent for their parents. These proportions decreased among people who moved to Marseille from greater distances. Information on marriage partners likewise shows that urban newcomers were not long alone in the city, for many married compatriots. Moreover, those most in need of a supportive network, namely women, rustics, and illiterates, most often had marital or parental ties. Structure and Mobility reveals little about family motivations for migration then, but it is rich in information about urban familial and regional contacts.

Both Poussou and Sewell relentlessly scrutinize their major source, the actes de mariage; each devotes a section to expli-

cating their shortcomings as well as reviewing their particular problems in the text for each analysis. Their caution is justified, because marriage records capture only a small, successful, and settled proportion of all migrants in the city. Marriage records are irresistably rich. providing information about birthplace. age, and occupation of bride and groom; occupation and residence of parents; and occupation, age and residence of wedding witnesses. In the hands of Poussou and Sewell, they yield a wealth of data about those who helped build Bordeaux and Marseille in the periods of expansion under study. Investigations of the less settled and criminal population in both studies reveal a stream of migrants that the marriage records miss altogether: transients, like Poitrineau's sawyers and peddlars.

An examination of these three studies together then, indicates that several distinct threads of migrations existed, among them: (a) the short-distance exchange between cities and their immediate hinterland; (b) the temporary departures of rural people for work in lowland areas; (c) the permanent departures of rural men and women; and (d) the relocations of people with resources from towns to a regional capital. These movements waxed and waned with shifts in the viability of small landownership, the employment of seasonal labor, industrial production, the organization of commerce, and the scale of bureaucracy.<sup>2</sup> Generally, the short-distance, artisanal, and seasonal montagnard migrations of the eighteenth century intensified and broadened in the nineteenth with an increase in permanent departures from the countryside and in career migrations of bureaucrats and professionals. Building on this work, students of migration need now to develop an overview and theoretical grasp of the multiple threads of migration that together wove regional and national networks.

On the whole, these studies elucidate the ties between the family and the sea changes transforming internal migration between 1750 and 1900. Most generally, they corroborate the increasing volume of migration that reflected demographic and economic pressures on the peasant family patrimony in the eighteenth century. Moreover, if Bordeaux's bassin démographique and Marseille's regional hinterland are at all typical, migration did not break family ties; rather, many individuals moved with and sent for family members. The three studies together give powerful evidence for chain migration, family migration, and intermarriage and travel with compatriots. Indeed, Poitrineau's description of the harrowing dangers of the road for the lone migrant alert us to the importance of kin and compatriots for protection and aid. Without such protection, studies of urban criminality clearly imply, people on the move were more likely to resort to theft and other crimes. Family, then, needs to be taken into account in several ways, for not only does it influence whether or not people move, but it affects where they move, with whom, and their fortunes at destination.

Where is the documentation? Rich, unsystematic information about family ties and motivation clearly can be culled from French court and tax bureau records, as Poitrineau has done. Marriage records yield a very clear view of the tie between parent and child for a segment of the migrant population. The hospital death records employed by Poussou in order to acquire a view of poor migrants, along with the civil death records used by Pitié (1971) to see where those who joined the rural exodus ended their days, both offer copious information about some part of the migrants, but nothing about

the ties that bound migrants to other people. The censuses from 1872 and later that list birthplace have the advantage of including almost the entire population in question, but they have severe limitations as well. Censuses reveal only relationships among people living in the same household, but even the presence of parents reveals nothing about the process or timing of migration; inferences from such household groupings, then, must be made with care (Moch and Tilly, 1985). We are back to the film producer's problem of desiring to make a movie, but possessing only a few still shots. There is no one complete source, primarily because migration is a process, and French documents, with the exception of marriage records, capture historical actors at only one point in their lives. As a consequence, Poussou and Sewell were able to draw few firm conclusions about family and migration. Without population registers, we can never know for France what students of migration know about the volume and patterns in migration in parts of Germany, Italy, Belgium and Scandanavia (Guttmann and van de Walle, 1978; Hochstadt, 1980; Kälvemark, 1979; Kertzer and Hogan, 1985). French sources capture only a residue of the voluminous movement revealed by population registers. Nonetheless censuses and marriage acts in particular preserve a wealth of information that can be mined systematically, as Sewell has demonstrated in his account of parental residence based on marriage records.

The problem of a theoretical understanding of migration in history, particularly as it touches on the family, is stickier and more widespread than the problems of French sources. Certainly the link between family and migration is sufficiently clear so that migration can no longer be dismissed from family history as the micro-mobility of adolescents (Stone, 1981:62–63). Like-

wise, reconstitutions of sedentary families cannot be said to represent the whole (Poussou, pp. 38–39), for moving out—for at least some members of the family—has been part and parcel of family decisions for centuries. The net outcomes of European migrations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are a familiar and faceless urbanization and population concentration, but the logic and process of these migrations remain less clear. Here, families can help us to make sense of migration, to decode the behavior behind changes in geographic mobility and shifting population distribution.

A dual focus will elucidate the process of migration and the role of the family in it. The first, as mentioned above, is to understand the multiple threads that combined to produce population redistribution. Temporary migrations for agricultural work, for example, were distinct in motive, auspices, and patterns from permanent departures from the village and distinct as well from the relocations of schoolteachers and bureaucrats, which so increased during the nineteenth century. The second focus is on the family as a sponsor of and unit of migration, for the work of Poussou, Poitrineau, and Sewell has shown that the family affects migration in many ways. The family encouraged out-migration of non-inheritors and temporary cash-earning forays of children; but it also attempted to keep children returning home and, in addition, family groups themselves decamped and regrouped. The role played by the family in temporary migration, permanent emigrations, and in career moves was certainly distinct. Most generally, the family sponsored temporary migration of some of its members, acted as an agent and participated in chain migration systems, and influenced the destination preferences of professional migrants (whose actual destination was in the

hands of an employer, such as the postal system). When these distinctions are sorted out by systematic analyses, as Sewell has begun to make, the process of migration will be better understood. In addition, we shall have a much clearer understanding of the intimate connection between patterns of human movement and the social, institutional, and economic history of Europe.

To recognize the centrality of the family to migration is not to be naive about the quality of family relationships or to take a normative pro-family stance. Family influence does not signify that migrants necessarily experienced love and protection; many did not stay with their family of origin or procreation, did not manage to support themselves, and were not able to stay on the right side of the law. On the contrary, many people chose to leave parental homes that offered little hope of success, to turn their backs on poor mountain villages where a wife and children were more a burden than an asset, to allow a state bureaucracy to move them far from home ties, and to move far afield with their companions in work. Many migrants failed - attacked by thieves, damaged in work accidents, taken by illness - or resorted to crime or prostitution in the absence of a supportive community. Even the presence of family and a supportive community could not protect migrants from betrayal, illness or injury (Moch, 1983: 147-148, 161-162). On the other hand, the migration flows that historians can discern mask individual determination, talent, and effort. A focus on family provides keys to migration behavior, then, but the assumption of success, warm family relations, complete dependence on kin, or continued family ties should not follow. It is simply true that during the economic changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries families constituted the central social and

economic unit; they offered most French people nearly their sole resource. It is not out of sentimentality that Robert Frost wrote that "Home is the place, where, when you have to go there,/They have to take you in" (Frost, 1964:53).

Migration is a central piece of those changes in nuptiality and fertility that shaped the demographic transitions. For the countless French people who left one area permanently for another, migration triggered a shift in family strategy; as the nineteenth century progressed, the French increasingly abandoned peasant strategies, departing their rural homes to adopt the proletarian strategies of a wage earner at a new, often urban, location. In cities like Marseille, newcomers did not adopt the coalminers' or textile workers' family strategy of early marriage and high fertility (Haines, 1979; L. Tilly, 1979b); rather, migration to such commercial cities increasingly fostered a pattern of late marriage and limited fertility among newcomers who wished to educate their children (Banks, 1982; Tilly and Scott, 1978; Moch. 1983). Migration, then, offered the occasion for demographic as well as occupational innovations between generations, for changes in the timing of marriage and the frequency of childbearing. On the face of it, urbanization and fertility decline are linked, yet the consequences of migration for fertility and nuptiality patterns are unclear.3 So the demographic puzzle remains, because the responses of migrants to situations that allowed for altered patterns of family formation and childbearing are not yet understood.

Certainly, many newcomers in French cities remained attached to people and even to property in the countryside. The fact that new urbanites were related and acquainted with their rural compatriots warns us against creating strict urbanrural dichotomies, or believing in the

fallacy that urban people were profoundly different from their rural relatives. Indeed, the understanding that rural people of the same region were part of the same family provides one clue as to why the decline in European fertility was more a decrease by region than one led by the "modern" city and followed by a later one in "backward" rural areas.4 In the case of fertility studies, the perception of a rural-urban dichotomy (like a traditionalmodern dichotomy) distorts the historical process. This is even more true in migration studies, where such a dichotomy is particularly tempting. The temptation originates partly in the sources, which are themselves split, giving one either information about home or destination, but rarely about both. In addition, migration, by its very nature, invites a differentiation between home and destination.

Migration must be analyzed, like fertility, as a demographic process. It respects particular traditions, yet responds to changing circumstances and ideas, as does fertility.5 Consequently, whether and where people migrate depends not only on their location, but also on their personal and economic resources. A systemic perspective knits the process together. It enables the scholar to understand the movement and behavior of the migrants to French cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the heroes and heroines of Poussou, Poitrineau and Sewell: the man who followed his village tradition of peddling and countered his misfortunes by stealing food and goods; the young woman who hired on as a domestic in the nearby town until she wed; the young man from the Auvergne whose family sent him out-with relatives and compatriots—as a sawyer every year; the peasant son who, faced with a poor and uncertain future in the 1860s, found steady work as an urban clerk. It remains to be seen what role families

played for each of these migrants. Poitrineau and Poussou have shown us circumstances that pushed them from home and Sewell has elucidated their parents' presence in the city. When we have a systematic understanding of the role of family for the variety of migrants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we will see both migration and the family in a light that is more revealing of historical processes. We will be able to perceive the close links between migration and the historical transformations that prove it to be a sensitive indicator of social change.

## **NOTES**

- 1. See, for example, Chevalier, 1950. For a study of migration streams, see Moch. 1983.
  - 2. See C. Tilly, 1978.
- 3. For attempts to sort out the nuptiality of migrants, see Sharlin, 1978, and Moch, 1981.
- 4. For regional demographic regimes, see van de Walle, 1974 and Knodel, 1977.
- 5. For an excellent example, see Schneider and Schneider, 1984.

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