

Male Unemployment and the Struggle against Disqualification among Middle-Class Couples in Bujumbura

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ABSTRACT

The discussion on the existence of social classes in Africa is recent, and the different facets of the issue are under-researched. The challenges in defining them stem from the limits of statistical data and the complexity of the African context when it comes to the question of measurement. Nonetheless, these challenges do not prevent us from considering social classes as a reality in Africa, and particularly "the middle class" as a concept of focus. Using an ethnographic approach and focusing on unemployment, this study aims to show empirically how these boundaries are demarcated. If households with a regular income and living their normal lives worry about downgrading of their quality of life, it is amplified in those faced with unemployment, particularly when it affects the husband, traditionally considered the sole or main provider of household needs. A closer look at the experience of couples faced with the husband's unemployment, reveals that they do not give up their idea of belonging to the "middle class", and that the members close to the unemployed man, including his wife and relatives, resort to a variety of strategies to try to preserve the boundaries. This article analyzes how the discourse on the middle class feeds collective imaginaries, and how it informs the positioning of individuals in social space in the Bujumbura city. Similarly, the paper argues for a class analysis that focuses on the "household" rather than the "individual" category. This shift points out that the situation of unemployment makes visible the often-obscured role of women in this kind of analysis.

Keywords: Unemployment, middle class, woman, Burundi, head of household.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, the most basic global aspects of globalization can be seen in local contexts, although they can modify the configuration in which they are presented. Among the characteristic aspects of human societies is the question of inequality of condition. Under a learned euphemism, these inequalities are studied through the notion of social stratification. For Davis and Moore (1944), no human society escapes the reality of social classes, or at best stratification.

According to Llord, social stratification refers to the division of society into hierarchical social groups that are relatively homogeneous in terms of their functions, income, culture, standards of living and lifestyles (Llord, 2018: 241). This notion of hierarchy is also found in Rodrigues (2007), who indicates that it confers unequal opportunities for people to access goods in their diversity. The Burundian society doesn't make exception to this transhistorical reality. Despite the absence of systematic studies on the subject, the social stratification is not foreign to this society, and has been obvious since the pre-colonial period. The terminologies may have evolved, but inequality has always been a reality in Burundi, both past and present. This is illustrated by the use of the categories of poor, average/middle or rich (République du Burundi, 2006), which are mobilized to

describe an individual's belonging to one of these categories. These analyses are in line with the discourse commonly developed on Africa in relation to an emerging middle class.

Indeed, as in other less-developed parts of the world, the discourse often conveyed in analyses of Africa is that of poverty. The reference, in developmentalist lenses, to the notion of middle class marks a novelty in recent vocabulary and a paradigm shift. Africa is often portrayed as a continent plagued by mass poverty. This article focuses on this intermediate category, "average", which, in the literature, is apprehended through the category "middle class". The aim is to analyze how some households, which consider themselves to be middle-class according to the criteria often used to delimit class boundaries, mobilize to maintain their "position" in the social hierarchy, even though the resources they now have leave them very little space for maneuver.

The will expressed by some countries to live in an egalitarian society does not eliminate inequalities, and seems so far to have been impossible to achieve. These inequalities are transformed and updated as countries undergo transformations. In pre-colonial Burundi, occupying a position in the social space was linked to the family patrimony of land and livestock. These elements were unequally distributed according to the importance of the position occupied in society (Botte, 1974; Ghislain, 1970; Nsabimana, 1993). With colonization, the occupation of a position in this social space was subject to other criteria of appreciation. Indeed, with the introduction of the market economy, school, wage and urbanization, the value of traditional social objects was relativized, while others newly introduced directly acquired a higher value. Balandier (1965) sees these transformations as conditions conducive to the emergence of social classes. Rodrigues (2007) notes that towards the end of this period, social organization based on wage labor predominated in urban areas, and integration into the capitalist economy became the basis for defining social status in this globalized world.

This series of transformations gave rise to the emergence of a category made up of those who were called "evolved" or "élites". The latter are extensively described by Balandier (1965), Mianda (2002) and other anthropologists and historians interested in colonized countries. These "évolved" are far from constituting a homogeneous class. The notion of "evolved" was mobilized essentially to differentiate the shapeless mass of the peasantry from those agents who had adopted a lifestyle inspired and encouraged by the colonialists.

With the spread of wage, a category emerged between the peasantry and the elite, essentially made up of people living off wage-earning and referred to in available literature as the "middle class". The challenges of defining this class have not prevented the debate to roll. Thus, researches and reports have been produced on a massive scale in recent years. This should come as no surprise, as it seems to have always been the case. According to Bourdieu (1980), the power of naming has the magical character of bringing into existence an object that did not previously exist. This power is held by particular categories of people. To explain this power of naming, he points out that, in many (archaic) societies, one of the elementary forms of political power consisted in the quasi-magical power to name and bring into existence by virtue of nomination. In the age of modernity, this privilege is the business of professional producers of objectified representations of the social world or, at best, methods of objectification (1984). By an almost magical effect, the author points out, the mere fact that the category is produced in discourse can have effects on the way the social world self-represents and thereby on its action. Nallet (2014) expands this line of thought, finding out that the theory produces effect at the level of social reality through its intervention. It is in this way that the concept of the middle class is envisaged as an operative concept on the African continent.

Nonetheless, many researchers working on this concept in Africa find it difficult to delimit its boundaries empirically. Within this area, some researchers resolve to consider the "middle class" as a category yoking together people who find themselves in the "middle", people "neither rich nor poor" who have emerged from poverty but still remain very close to precariousness (Darbon, 2012). The lack of consensus on the definition of the category leads Melber (2016) to see the concept as a tool of little use as a category for analyzing social reality. Yet, this limitation does not prevent its mobilization. For Schielke (2012: 49), "even if the material conditions of the middle class are out of reach, the middle class remains a powerful idea among a very diverse set of social actors as a direction." This debate on the existence of the middle class does not remain abstract. It ends up populating and working on the imaginations of people who now find themselves compelled to

embody the content of this very discourse. Darbon and Toulabor (2014) are attentive to this discourse and point out that the process of the emergence of the middle class and that of its constitution as an operative category are mutually reinforcing.

The lack of consensus on the definition of the middle class in Africa does not prevent people from defining themselves as part of this class, despite its diffuse contours. Belonging to a class is, in a way, a matter of personal self-definition and the development of a whole series of strategies for positioning oneself in social space. (Paulus, 1968: 55) points out that "in the final analysis, social differences and class consciousness exist in the minds of the members of a society". It is from this self-definition, which may also be based on more or less objective elements, that people draw boundaries between themselves. These boundaries may be invisible from the outside, but everyone will claim to belong to a specific class, and will find reasons to perceive themselves as such. Categorization in terms of social class, however scientific or political it may be, necessarily generates a type of relationship that people have with each other.

In debates on the emergence of middle classes in Africa, Melber does not deny the existence of this category, but is skeptical about the infatuation the notion raises in some circles. He asks, "How can a middle class consolidate when unemployment remains a chronic feature of African society?" (Melber, 2016: 6). The question calls for moderation with regard to projections of the importance that middle classes were to take on in Africa. This author's concern also introduces that of social mobility, which is subsidiary to it. Lentz (2016) also echoes this concern. Rather than maintaining the analysis of social mobility between generations, she finds that this analysis can even be applied to an individual since, for her, the social position can change over the course of a lifetime as a result of contingent developments and the social security systems in place.

In defining the notion of social class, authors have relied on both objective and subjective elements, ever since the Weberian tradition. The objective elements often mobilized to include an individual in one or other class are, in particular, level of education, income and residence. Subjective elements include lifestyle, ideals, values, consumer tastes and so on. All these elements are often seen as the consequence of the level of education attained, and hence the paid work to which it gives access. The latter has historically constituted and continues to occupy an important place (Lentz, 2016). The author continues "research on the middle classes should indeed explore why and how such normative discourses become an attractive means of positioning oneself and expressing one's social aspirations." (Idem, p. 41). Galland and Lemel (2018) note that job loss, which often plunges individuals into poverty, may not be a sufficient condition for abandoning class membership. The apparent opposition between different social classes does not eliminate subjectivities in the way each person defines themselves. One explanation found by Paugam (2006) is that these classes are inscribed in local contexts that define in their own way the notions of poverty and wealth in relation to which subjects position themselves.

On the whole, studies of social stratification or social classes have focused on the individual. When it comes to the household level, would it not be better to abandon the traditional reference to the man and rightly appreciate the respective contributions of husband and wife? In a situation of unemployment, wouldn't it be appropriate to broaden the range of questions to get a true picture of the household in relation to the position it occupies in the social space? How can we reduce the tension arising from the inconsistency of status created by the spouse's unemployment? How do spouses organize themselves to take on the roles that belong to the Burundian family to maintain the position in the social space ? These are some of the questions this study seeks to answer.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data mobilized in this article come from field research carried out as part of a doctoral thesis. They were collected between 2018 and 2021, using an ethnographic approach (Olivier de Sardan, 2008). A total of 64 interlocutors, man and women, have been interviewed and tried to be in touch with their live conditions during fieldwork. Through the lenses of grounded theory, their production has enabled us to gain a better understanding of how some couples go about maintaining their place in the category to which they claim to

belong. To capture the diversity of experiences, the sampling was theoretical. It was built up as the study progressed, until the information was saturated. Criteria such as socio-economic level, duration of husband's unemployment, wife's professional occupation, level of education, age and standard of living were considered.

Several techniques were combined: observation of living conditions, repeated in-depth interviews with the survey subjects, and consultation of previous survey reports relevant to the theme. In some cases, all spouses were interviewed separately; in others, only one of them was interviewed. Most interviews were conducted at the spouses' homes. The data were analyzed within the framework of grounded theory, with symbolic interactionism serving as the analytical grid. The study focused on the couple rather than the individual, bearing in mind the contribution of each spouse to the maintenance of the couple. Indeed, this is what Seekings (2003) advocates. He finds that analysis of the position of the individual, in the African context, would benefit from looking not at the individual, but at the household, if not the family. Nevertheless, in most studies on Burundi, the position of the family often refers to that of the husband, considered as the sole or main provider of income, the present study aims to go beyond this framework and underline the importance accorded to the wife in family organization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The category "middle class" has no equivalent in most local languages. Seekings (2003) finds out that in South Africa, for example, the concept is not known, but this does not prevent people from comparing themselves and establishing differences that distinguish them. For Bourdieu (1979), class identification is not based on the idea of belonging to a given social position, but on the idea of differentiating oneself from others in a given social space. In this posture, he remains true to his theorization., For him, social classes do not exist. What does exist, he explains, is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in a kind of virtual state, as something to be done (Bourdieu, 1984: 28). What's interesting and as Kroeker reveals is that "Even when people don't use the term middle class as a self-description, their socioeconomic positioning still has an impact on their lives." (Kroeker, 2018, p. 9). This positioning leads to boundaries from which everyone will ultimately define themselves, ultimately giving substance to an idea that ultimately becomes reality. According to Bessin, "the repetition of these categorizations will gradually establish and substantiate group boundaries in people's minds, for a given time, moment and culture" (2009: 93). In this way, people begin to enter into this discourse and experience the realities it conveys.

Strategies for Positioning and Asserting One's Class

Belonging to a social class is locally determined by a number of criteria, which vary considerably. This assertion becomes clear when we consider the thresholds used to define the contours within which Africans can be counted among those belonging to the middle class. Internationally, a person is considered middle class if they can spend between 10 and 20 dollars a day; in Africa, this threshold is lowered to between 2 and 10 US dollars per person per day (African Development Bank 2012). Considering this threshold, there would be very few people to include in this middle class in Burundi. In fact, the World Bank's (2016) survey on the state of vulnerability in Burundi notes that around 50% of the non-poor population stagnates at a consumption level just above the poverty line, in the range of around US\$0.5 per capita per day.

These differences in the setting of thresholds for determining middle-class membership do not prevent individuals from claiming to belong to it, as Budniok and Noll (2018) note in the Ghanaian context. They point out that, "due to the social, political and economic crisis prevailing in the country, many Ghanaians cannot be considered members of the middle class on an international level. Yet, education and employment have remained criteria of legitimacy for claiming to belong to the middle class" (Budniok & Noll, 2018: 124). The same is true of Lentz (2016), for whom both education and employment are constitutive of middle-class identities and their legitimization vis-à-vis the lower and upper classes. Bosc (2008) attempts to explain this finding. He points out what many researchers interested in the African context consider to be empirically intelligible. For him, as for many others, the middle class brings together, by definition, agents in an intermediate position in the social hierarchy. Consequently, its composition is closely linked to the "dominant"

and "inferior" groups of the historical period under consideration. It's not a matter of simple mechanical determination, but of situational perception and self-representation. As Goblot (2003) points out, it's those in the middle who best maintain class boundaries. This idea of difference is recurrent in the comments of the subjects we met. The differences often mentioned have to do with living conditions, consumption capacity, the ability to afford help and how much, and so on.

An Aversion to Consumerism that Poorly Conceals Envy

Popular wisdom states that if you cannot have what you want, you have to do with what you have. But human beings are far from content with a condition they feel does not suit them. They find disguised mechanisms to stay so, especially since in some traditions, envy is strongly discouraged. They do this through innuendo, especially when comparing themselves to others. Such is the case of Paulin (one of our interviewees), who develops this criticism: "to live happy moments is not to go to the lake where a bottle of Amstel costs five thousand Burundian francs (about 2 euros), a bottle of Fanta costs three thousand (one euro and a few centimes) and a full chicken fifty thousand (20 euros) or more. That is not it! That is wasteful, that is short-sighted!"

Although this interviewee criticizes the ostentation of some people, the rest of his remarks indicate the life he would like for himself and his family: 'to have a nice car, a nice house, good schooling for his children. He also claims his family's ability to afford the services of two domestic workers, which he finds is not affordable for many. As Darbon (2012) points out, according to the surveys, people claim to belong to the middle class by first building their identity in opposition to poverty and the poor, to whom they still feel too close; but also, by setting themselves in opposition to the rich, towards whom they develop an ambivalent relationship of both envy and aversion. The testimonies gathered from the other interviewees illustrate this envy with the expressed regret of not being able to afford the leisure activities that one could afford when one's husband had a job. Beyond the thresholds that are measured, the claim to a position in the social space also translates into a lifestyle, a mode of consumption and leisure. Often, it is a matter of conforming to what one deems appropriate for one's category. Sometimes, however, it is a matter of responding to a demand to fit in with the position one is supposed to occupy. Kroeker, O'Kane and Scharrer (2018) point out that one of the characteristics that distinguish middle-class strata from the poor is their latitude to spend at least part of their income on activities not directly linked to their immediate reproduction. This is what the couples of these husbands whose words are reported above are doing. Similarly, the aforementioned Paulin and Josélyne, a couple, despite facing financial difficulties, can afford sports sessions at the gym, other couples can afford private time even if it is without the children.

Keeping a Domestic Worker at All Cost

Belonging to the middle class imposes conditions that have to be met in order to keep one's membership, but this comes at a cost. While some subjects manage to do so at a lower cost, others can sink deeper, making the situation caused by unemployment even more damaging. The comments made by our interviewees reveal the mechanisms at work, some well calculated, others less obvious to them. One of the most common and seemingly banal of these mechanisms is to offer someone to do the housework, a service that not all categories can cope with. Some comments suggest that "being able to have domestic work done by someone you pay is a sign of social differentiation and distinction" (Andersen, 2000). Comments made on April 1, 2021 by respondent Christophe point in the same direction, "in the neighborhoods of poor people, many couples do the housework themselves. They schedule time for cooking and cleaning, usually in the evening when they come home, and in the morning, they both leave for various activities that bring in very low incomes, often on a daily basis". This man considers that he is not like those belonging to the lower category because, despite unemployment, he still has domestic workers.

In most so-called middle-class families, the existence of a domestic worker is often seen as an obligation. A middle-class life without domestic workers is inconceivable. In Burundi, when a curious visitor enters a home and finds the wife performing some domestic chores, the question is directly asked as to where the worker has gone. Discussions about such staff are part of women's daily lives, both in the office and in the neighborhood.

Many prefer to lie and explain themselves away, saying that the domestic went in the countryside because s/he was ill, that s/he had an emergency at home, that s/he left and that they are looking for someone else, and so on. Could this work be done by the husband, even if unemployed, is unimaginable. This alternative is energetically evacuated by this woman who expresses herself as follows: "For example, yes, I told you about the children's duties, but still, can he (the husband) clean the house or go into the kitchen to build the fire and prepare food? Frankly, I do not see my husband doing that! My God, stop thinking about it. He can try to do some activities, washing his clothes, he can do that... But really, there are some activities that he would never do! Cleaning the house? What an adventure! My merciful God! No, really, I cannot imagine it for a moment". It is worth mentioning here that this couple had just moved into their new house, which was almost complete. The furniture has been kept somewhere, as there is not enough space for it; the living room is furnished with a few chairs and stools. The floor is not paved and the walls are still brick without any cover. So, strictly speaking, no cleaning work is required.

But, like other types of employment, domestic work also presupposes the existence of minimal conditions for its exercise. As this man explains, some domestic workers find it difficult to be hired in families going through difficult times. Even when they agree to be hired, some of the people I spoke to stressed, they are often discouraged by the friends and neighbors of the family hiring them. In this way, it becomes difficult for families faced with unemployment to keep their domestic workers, who prefer to work in households where they face less constraints. As a result, the wife or another family member is obliged to take on this domestic work. When the man is obliged to intervene, the study reveals that his domestic work is carefully prepared so that those around him do not notice it at any point. As Lecomte (2001) points out, domestic workers' living and working conditions are closely linked to the living conditions of the home in which they work. This can be one of the reasons why domestic workers frequently change employers in search of something slightly better. When the living conditions tighten on a family, the domestic worker may leave even before their bosses chase them away.

Class Ethos and its Social Demonstration

Despite the experience of often difficult living conditions for a couple whose husband is faced with unemployment, couples who are confronted with it do not renounce their membership of the non-poor class. Indeed, Kroeker et al (2018) emphasize that the middle class is an aspirational class, not a fixed status. But this apparent struggle is nuanced by a despair that runs through their words. Almost everyone we spoke to seemed powerless to turn things around without help from someone else. The efforts they make are reflected in the actions described in the following paragraphs.

Concern for Social Reproduction and Self-improvement

Some families find themselves in difficult situations as their income dwindles. These situations become more complicated in countries where there is no social security system, or where it only concerns a small proportion of the population, as is the case in Burundi. In the country, the social protection that seems to preoccupy the authorities is healthcare coverage, but even this is only available to a handful of people, with other types of social protection virtually non-existent (Republic of Burundi, 2015). The recent adoption of a national social protection policy is not going to change the situation overnight. In this context, protection seems to be sought elsewhere than in the institutions usually known for offering these services. Those who can afford it are investing in the future, trying to educate their children within the limits of their possibilities. These people cling to education, which they see as a gateway to success, despite the difficult times facing the country. "When it comes to schooling, you can realize that it is no longer possible to keep your children in the same school and then be forced, with a heavy heart, to change schools. That is when the real problems start, because until now, children have not been directly affected by their father's unemployment." Fridolin (one of the interviewees) said.

While he courageously said it, other parents preferred to keep it a secret. You have to use other stratagems to find out more. How do you organize schooling for children from these troubled households? Some resort to

support from relatives at home or abroad; others sacrifice basic needs, but only decide to change their children's school as a last resort. However, investment in education is becoming less and less profitable. Diplomas are no longer a guarantee of a better future (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964). It nevertheless retains an important valence, as the few who manage to break through owe their success to their education, even if it is supplemented by a number of other channels. Some schools are more likely, than others, to offer a pathway to success.

Chances of gaining access to educational capital are sometimes limited by starting conditions. In Burundi, Joint Ministerial Order n°620/630/04 of July 17, 2018 divides educational institutions into categories A, B, C, D according to the conditions under which pupils are accepted. This measure follows private initiatives for some schools that already applied the staggering of school fees according to the means available to parents. Due to insufficient state subsidies for schools, some of them had already established categories in the payment of school fees for children attending the same school. So far, we don't know what feeling this creates among pupils who know they're sitting on the same benches without having paid the same amount, or whether a parent's unemployment can justify the discount in payment.

Given that education no longer offers much chance of success in life, and given the scarcity of jobs, many people are venturing onto other terrain. But these are fields that offer fewer guarantees than a diploma, due to Burundi's characteristic instability on both the security and financial fronts. When it comes to entrepreneurship, everyone tries their luck, but very few succeed.

A Desire to Preserve Autonomy and Control over the Situation

Couples confronted with the difficulties caused by one spouse's unemployment face many deprivations (Paugam et al., 2014), but they do not want to flaunt them in the open, nor do they want to drop down a rung and let themselves be plunged into the lower category, even in their appearance. "As far as we are concerned, we use what little income we can get. It is not necessary for everyone to know about the life you lead. There are even those who will say that the situation at home is not to be pitied, and we resolve to live life according to our possibilities. If the situation becomes untenable, we approach someone and ask for an amount of money, which we will pay back".

As one respondent insisted: "Ubukene ntibukugure, literally, 'Do not let poverty buy you'. In other words, "you have to resist in order not to stagger because of poverty". The couple faced with these difficulties, often considered by many to be temporary, resists. Saying this, this respondent, an agricultural engineer who started out in teaching before being recruited in other sectors, refused to return to his original position. During the interview, he repeated that he would return to work in a sector that did not degrade him, in order to maintain the standard of living he had achieved. Rather than accepting to call himself unemployed, he chose to call himself a "consultant", a strategy that seems to be commonplace. Many of the people we spoke to disagreed with this name, because of the inferences it opens up. They say there's no need to flaunt one's life in the public arena. "No one needs to know about our lives. We don't need to approach anyone to tell them about our lives". All the respondents confess that when they are obliged to confide in someone, they do so cautiously.

This kind of statement suggests that belonging to a class, especially the middle and upper classes, is a constraint. Even when living conditions change in objective terms, the desire to maintain one's position in the social space becomes a burden, sometimes an enormous one. In the urban environment, this is facilitated by the relative anonymity that characterizes it. This anonymity benefits people who would like to keep the life they lead a secret, and the slightest risk of disclosure can make them very uncomfortable.

The situation is sometimes made more difficult by the fact that unemployment often comes as a surprise to couples who have already embarked on a cycle of loans, making it impossible for them to repay them. For most of the couples we interviewed who had taken out loans when their husbands were made redundant, many of these were spent on building. Having one's own home is one of the achievements to which people who claim to be middle-class aspire. Owning one's own home prevents others from interfering in family affairs,

but that is made difficult by the country's lack of a housing policy. The “rupangu” (a plot of land in which there is more than one inhabited house) is disturbing for a couple who would like to live independently (Courtois, 2016). In rupangu, it's as if each has the right to know the other's business. This leads many people to seek their own home at all costs. Unemployment of the main breadwinner jeopardizes this project. The latter can only be pursued when the wife has the income to support the family and commit herself to it. Very few people are able to do this, given the country's wage structure.

Players with Unevenly Distributed and Gendered Involvement

Couples whose husbands find themselves unemployed claim to belong to the middle class and resist the downgrading analyzed above. At the very least, they want to maintain the same position in the social arena. Despite the very limited options available to couples faced with this difficult choice, the couples I met during my survey deploy a series of strategies. Some are supported by their relatives, while others have to rely on their own efforts.

Family: An Uncertain Form of Social Protection

In a context where public authorities are unable to provide social protection for citizens, the only frameworks on which individuals, like couples, can rely remain largely family frameworks. Even if the winds of individualism are blowing everywhere, the individual, like the couple, remains part of a social universe to which they are attached by a series of duties and rights. In delicate situations, it is up to family members to step in and support the individual or couple in question (Paugam, 2006). Even if the actor of mobility is the individual, Budniok and Noll (2018) note that in the African world, social mobility and social reproduction are achieved in the context of the extended family. This is what some respondents report when faced with the difficulties caused by unemployment: "We spent three months without paying rent, we eat badly. When the situation becomes untenable, I send a text message to one or other of my cousins or friends, and one of them, for example, will send me 100 dollars, or two hundred, and that way I can deal with emergencies". For others, relatives come into play. A brother or uncle asks if the school fees has been paid, others help with rent payments and so on. The intervention of family members ensures that the couple doesn't have to move house immediately because they can't pay the rent; family support also prevents children from being withdrawn from school for lack of school fees. The same support enables the individual concerned to maintain contact with the social environment.

This support is fragile, however, as it is difficult to sustain. Family contributions dry up at some point, and the couple or family concerned is forced to rely on its own efforts. "The first few days weren't hard for me, people really supported me. Some of them would come to the house and when I wasn't there, they'd leave a bit of money, others would call me on the phone and give me ten thousand, twenty thousand, the better-off ones could give me a hundred thousand or even five hundred, and the family's needs could be met without any major worries". This assistance could save him from a rapid decline. To define someone who belongs to the middle class, Darbon (2014) indicates that we assess whether he can last for 6 months without changing his living conditions. These six months would correspond to a period when the person can use their redundancy pay, depend on savings they have built up or various forms of assistance.

One of our respondents said that being unemployed could be compared to being hospitalized. During the first few days of hospitalization," he points out, "people come to visit, they come with a little something, but as the period goes on, people forget about you and all you're left with is your own immediate family.

When Wages Are a Decoy for Measuring Social Stratification

In a survey of household living conditions in Burundi, it was found that over 90% of wage earners earn less than 500,000 fbu a year (around US\$310) (ECMVB 2015, p. 41). While there may have been an intention to downplay the amounts perceived among those surveyed, there is reason to say that they are not far from reality. This makes it difficult for a couple or a family to explain their financial organization. It may be possible to

find out how much they earn, but few families know how much they spend, and where the money comes from. This gymnastic is a bit of a mystery, as Courtois (2016) points out.

One of the options open to a couple facing unemployment is to "muddle through" Ayimpam (2014). Here, the figure of the wife seems to be more present than that of the husband. One woman, a secondary school teacher with three children and an unemployed husband, reports that to supplement her salary, which is becoming insignificant in relation to the family's expenses, she "gets by". At the same time as working full-time in the civil service as a teacher in a state school, she also works in a private school to supplement her income. Like many other teachers too, she looks after a group of pupils on a tutoring basis, and each pupil pays some amount per month. According to a colleague of the lady's, the couple also run a store. In the end, it's the combination of income from these different sources that keeps the couple going. The wife in question slips an anecdote into the exchange, saying that her children had asked her to rest at midday so that she could grow up. The children thought that their mother, who is short, wasn't growing because she didn't rest during the day, as they did.

Other couples set out to develop a commercial, livestock or farming activity to supplement the income of the one who remains employed. One of our interlocutors regrets that her husband is not enterprising enough in this area, and explains: "As he has the time, he could go up the hill a few times to grow potatoes or set up a banana plantation. With the harvest, you could go a few days without going to market or selling the produce and earn a bit of money that way; but he doesn't think about it. You men are less creative in this respect". If this woman's husband doesn't succeed, others try to initiate such activities to compensate for the reduction in income caused by their loss of employment. Some couples set up stores at the entrance to their plot (Seekings, 2003). These stores are often controlled and supervised by the wife, with the exception of a few rare cases of men taking part in this kind of activity. Since the family does not have enough income to finance these activities, it often resorts to debts (Darbon, 2012). But this is a very risky approach, since when these activities don't pay off, the family finds itself stuck.

An activity that seems to attract more men than women is that of "Brokers". One of the respondents' main occupation is to connect a potential client with someone who either has a house to sell or rent, or other objects he would like to put on the market. This activity is unregulated for these people. This resourcefulness also applies to some activities which the people involved find hard to name. But we can see that it is through these "elsewhere" that people miraculously hold on in a way that they themselves may find hard to explain.

Concern for Honor and Persistence in Incongruity

The notion of honor is dear to Burundians. Many people are ready to do anything to safeguard this attribute in their environment. Couples whose husbands are unemployed do everything in their power to get rid of anything that might taint them. On the one hand, the fact that a member of the couple is unemployed is only communicated to a very small circle of people: "In the neighborhood, since we had just moved, they didn't know whether he was unemployed or not, and he himself didn't tell anyone. The neighborhood found out a little late, when they realized he was staying at home". On the other hand, even when the situation is known, the family prefers to take out a loan rather than ask for help.

This concern to safeguard honor is also apparent in the way these couples try to conform to social norms, particularly in terms of contributions to parties and other forms of participation. For example, even if the couple's income is reduced by a significant amount, it is rare for them to take part in a ceremony without contributing. If there is no contribution, it's often only the wife who participates. The husband figures he can't take part in a party without a contribution. As the norm is for the contribution to bear the name of the husband, the "head of the family", the wife is obliged to respect and take care of this presentation: "He knows that when we have something to contribute, it's an honor for the family, and I can't claim loud and clear that I'm the one who gave the money. It's up to him to address the contribution to the person concerned". As mentioned above, membership of a social class is defined not only by objective conditions, but also by an important subjective dimension. Class membership is defined by some class ethos. This is reflected in the way people belonging to a particular class act. Couples faced with unemployment, unable to define their belonging objectively, try to

do so by mobilizing a symbolic ethos that unfolds above all through their presentation. This means respecting some codes, such as the need to present oneself well as a couple in public.

In other situations, the wife has to arrange all the folklore around a party or everyday life: buying clothes for her husband, renting a car to get around during ceremonies to keep the same impression on others. Goffman (1975) points out that, especially in the case of a "relegatable" or potentially relegatable individual, this behavior is justified in an attempt to save face.

CONCLUSION

Positioning oneself in a social space requires constant effort in a rather less propitious context, marked as it is by some ties. The individual who acquires a job makes plans and dreams of realizing them, but obstacles stand in the way. In today's context, access to income is a gateway to other social goods. As a result, the deprivation of this income, imposed by unemployment, reduces personal and family prospects (Galland & Lemel, 2018). The data produced from the survey of couples whose husbands are unemployed highlights the delicacy of the situation to which they find themselves exposed.

While it's true that these couples lose some assets such as income, they nonetheless retain their level of education, which places them in a well-defined position in the social space. Budniok and Noll (2018) pointed this out in the case of Ghana; it is also the case in Burundi. This situation of imbalance between the capitals one holds creates what Galland and Lemel refer to as "status incoherence" (2018 : 57). This imbalance, like all other forms of imbalance, creates a tension maintained by the social context of solicitations of all kinds at a time when the couple is struggling to satisfy its own needs. Given that the article focuses on unemployed couples, it's clear that the latter are no longer the only players in this social game, but are part of a couple that is itself part of a network of alliances. They try to deploy strategies to reduce the gap between social expectations and their ability to meet them.

The fact that the household level is included in the analysis, rather than the individual, nuances analysis of social stratification, which often take the individual as the analytical category. This analysis also ignores the role played by wives in couples, even when the couple is bi-active. This role becomes decisive when the husband is unemployed, because it can no longer be ignored. Moreover, the analysis of social stratification would benefit from being relational. This relational aspect of analysis should not be limited to the possibility of convertibility or exchange rates of social objects, as envisaged by Bourdieu (1984). It also concerns the way in which the individual defines himself in relation to others, but also the way in which he is defined by these others. In effect, this definition by others constitutes a mirror that reflects the image we expect of ourselves, and consequently plays a part in the way we define ourselves in social space.

In the case of unemployment, the running of the family falls almost entirely to the wife. Not only does she have to maintain the family, but she also has to take care of the way she presents herself to the outside world, in order to maintain her honor and autonomy, and thus resist the danger of losing the prestige that had been conferred on the family. This is how wives become involved in multi-activity. Some of them keep their jobs in the formal sector, but also take on private-sector employment; others go about their usual activities, but also run a business, an agricultural activity, and so on. Some of those interviewed pointed out that men, like their wives, are not sufficiently involved in this resourcefulness. Burundians therefore largely agree on the relevance of the adage : "he who misses the chance to prosper is mistaken in his choice of wife" or "He who misses the choice of spouse never prospers". This essentializing discourse stands in stark contrast to the representations of the venal woman that flood patriarchal literature.

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