Hugues Champeaux (Université de Namur)

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Séminaire recherche. Height, parental investments and marriage payments in sub-Saharan Africa.

Height, parental investments and marriage payments in sub-Saharan Africa

Co-autrice : Catherine Guirkinger

RÉSUMÉ

In sub-Saharan Africa, the bride price is traditionally practiced to formalize marriages. Highly criticized, notably in the aspects of the commodification of brides and the mistreatment of wives, this custom remains pervasive despite the attempts of some policies to ban or reduce its use. Mixing ethnographic and contemporary datasets, we assess that the bride price practice directly affects parents' incentives to protect their daughters. Using a new approach on height, we show that the females are taller compared to males in bride price than in non-bride price societies. Arguing that this feature is linked to a particular intrahousehold allocation of resources, we secondly show that parents practicing bride price strategically protect their daughters to maximize their return of bride price before marriage. Using geoclimate data, we find that parents in such societies who faced an income shock just before their daughter's entry into the marriage market seem to give priority to their daughters relative to their sons' nutrition. Females in non-bride price societies do not present any evidence of such a feature. These findings argue that bride price might contribute to explain the absence of son preference in the African context, despite a large prevalence of patriarchal institutions.

Hugues Champeaux

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