

# HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION AND SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

NORTH WESTERN PORTUGAL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY\*

by

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## INTRODUCTION

When Rowland in 1981 published his attempted classification of households in two parishes from the province of Minho (north western Portugal), using Hammel and Laslett's tabulation, all that was known about social characteristics of family formation in the region was derived from Poinsard (1910) and Descamps (1935). According to these students of Le Play, who had visited Portugal in 1909 and again in the early 1930s, a system of family organisation based on stem families appeared to be a feature of the north western part of the country. Further work carried out on this subject by anthropologists and sociologists before the 1970s appeared to support that view (Dias, 1955; Callier-Boisvert, 1968; Willems, 1962).

It was also established that Portugal was far from being an homogeneous country. Geographers like Ribeiro (1963), ethnologists like Dias (1955) and demographers like Livi Bacci (1971) had all contributed to the emerging picture of a country marked by very deep regional variations. In most cases, and notably in sociological and demographic studies, these variations appeared to be polarised in the provinces of Minho and Alentejo. These were the two contrasting 'worlds' that co-existed in Portugal.

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Rowland's findings appeared to lend some support to the previous assumptions. He stressed that in spite of the statistical predominance of 'simple family households' in the parishes analysed, their most important feature was the relatively high percentage of 'complex households', which suggested the existence of a pattern of patrilocal residence after marriage, either patrivirilocal or patriuxorilocal. His analysis also used a comparative framework, both with other regions of Portugal and, in broader terms, with other regions of Europe. Minho was seen as clearly distinct from the areas where the 'North West European' pattern of household reproduction prevailed and akin to some 'Mediterranean' regions. This situation contrasted with that observable in southern Portugal where a pattern of neolocality associated with very low proportions of 'complex' households seemed to prevail (Rowland, 1981).

Further studies by Rui Feijó stressed the idea that the structure of households in north western Portugal was to be characterised by a substantial weight of extended and multiple family households and that a significant number of people were part of a complex household at some point in their life cycle (Feijó, 1983).

At that stage much effort was devoted to applying the methodology developed by the Cambridge group to the Portuguese material, and to discussing the general characteristics of Minho in wider comparative terms. The accumulation of a wealth of evidence referring to the composition of households in Minho provided solid ground for a more detailed analysis. Nunes (1986) focussed not on the broad features that might be regarded as characteristic of the province's pattern as seen from the outside, but rather on the region as a 'field of differences', that is, on the variations which occurred within the geographical boundaries of the province. This does not necessarily imply a thorough revision of what had previously been established, but it calls for a deeper discussion of the methodology involved and casts light on the social processes underlying the pattern of household reproduction.

This paper aims to (a) present a summary of the evidence and debate on household composition and household reproduction in north western Portugal, (b) discuss variations both between parishes and among different social strata within the same parish and (c) draw some implications for future work, stressing the theoretical need to consider the scope of variation as well as its causes.

#### SOURCES

As a cautionary it must be stressed that the evidence upon which this paper is based has been collected from heterogeneous sources which are not strictly comparable. It represents, in condensed form, the sum of published data.

The confessional rolls are now quite well known as a source and they provide evidence for two parishes, Oliveira and Urgeses. It should be noted that only from the 1870s onwards do these sources provide information for the whole population and a more or less consistent recording of age and marital status. Earlier rolls omit children under seven and do not give information on ages, thus requiring linking with parish registers to fill in the gaps.

Most of the studies quoted here are based on militia listings ('*Livros de Registo das Companhias de Ordenancas*'), which are a less accurate source as far as the female population is concerned. The picture these listings yield is biased against household complexity and must be regarded as showing maximum levels of 'simple family' households. Rowland's attempt at correcting the 'raw' figures for missing females is also shown for the two parishes he analysed.

Another limitation of all available studies is their 'snapshot' character; any inference on longitudinal processes from these cross-sectional data should thus be seen as tentative, and prone to the usual criticisms directed to this type of analysis. Both the work of Brettell (1984) on listings for the same parish at different points in time and research in progress by Nunes on consecutive yearly listings show that the overall distribution of households by kin composition at one place is very likely to change over relatively short periods of time, and that inferences from cross-sections are hazardous. We shall try to take these points into consideration when discussing the available evidence.

Rowland (1984) has made use of another source, the 1960 national census of Portugal. This was the first Portuguese census to include data on household structures at the level of the municipality, and the last taken before the boom in post-World War II emigration which has dramatically changed the face of the province over the last quarter century. Its use for this purpose, however, was possible only after a number of assumptions were made for reclassifying the households, and thus absolute accuracy must not be inferred.

#### THE EVIDENCE

The 1960 census provides an overall picture of household composition in Portugal. In its general outline, the census lends support to the literature which emphasises the role of complex households in the province of Minho.

The three districts into which the province is divided each had complex households accounting for more than 15 per cent of all the total (Viana do Castelo 20.7%, Braga 16.8%, Porto, 18.3%). Complex households (i.e., multiple plus extended households) may however be the result of a number of processes not necessarily related to patterns of residence at

TABLE 1. Household composition in Minho in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

HOUSEHOLD TYPE	( <sup>1</sup> ) OLIVEIRA 1745	( <sup>2</sup> ) MONTARIA c. 1830 corr.	( <sup>3</sup> ) ANCORA c. 1830 corr.	( <sup>4</sup> ) ABELHEIRA c. 1830	( <sup>5</sup> ) AMONDE c. 1830	( <sup>6</sup> ) CARREÇO c. 1830	( <sup>7</sup> ) SANTA MARTA c. 1830	( <sup>8</sup> ) SERRELEIS c. 1830	( <sup>9</sup> ) URGESES 1878
1. SOLITARIES	16.7	11.7	21.9	15.0	13.3	9.9	10.5	20.5	16.9
2. NO FAMILY	10.3	0.8	0.8	7.6	6.7	-	1.2	-	2.6
3. SIMPLE FAMILY	57.2	71.7	54.7	71.9	71.7	45.3	69.3	64.8	71.4
4. EXTENDED FAMILY	9.7	7.5	11.7	3.8	3.4	11.6	9.4	5.7	9.1
5. MULTIPLE FAMILY	5.5	8.3	8.6	1.9	1.7	29.7	5.8	6.9	-
6. INDETERMINATE	0.6	-	2.3	-	3.3	3.5	3.9	2.3	-
ALL TYPES	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
NUMBERS	341	120	128	53	60	172	257	88	189

Sources: (<sup>1</sup>) AMORIM, 1983; (<sup>2</sup>) ROWLAND, 1981; (<sup>3</sup>) FEIJO, 1983; (<sup>4</sup>) NUNES, 1986 - all adapted

marriage. Multiple family households (two or more married couples sharing the same dwelling) are a far better indicator of the possible existence of a household formation rule leading to complexity. The figures for the three districts are 6.6 per cent (Viana do Castelo), 4.4 per cent (Braga) and 2.3 per cent multiple households for Porto. If this measure is used rather than overall percentages of complex households, differences between the districts appear to be significant, with Viana do Castelo showing more evidence of something close to a 'stem family' system of household reproduction. A finer analysis, using census data at the level of the municipality, has shown that multiplicity tends to increase with increasing distance from the highly urbanised area of Porto. Coastal and mountain areas also reveal higher proportions of multiple households.<sup>1</sup>

Although the majority of households in all three districts were simple family households, other types – that is 'solitaries' and 'no family' households – also accounted for between 16.1 per cent (Porto) and 23.4 per cent (Viana do Castelo). Assessing the meaning of these figures requires a more detailed analysis of the local context of residential experiences than can be carried out here.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence from local sources for the nineteenth century suggests a broadly similar pattern. The existence in most parishes of significant percentages of multiple family households stands out as a major characteristic of household composition in this region of Portugal. It suggests that a good deal of extended family households may be the result of mortality striking members of multiple family households – namely through the death of one partner of the old couple – rather than the extension of simple families through the moving in of widowed parents. In other words these features suggest the possible existence of practices leading to the formation of patrilocal households, although they do not rule out neolocal practices. As a matter of fact, available ethnographic evidence does not confirm the existence of normative rules prescribing patrilocal post-marital residence. As Pina-Cabral pointed out referring to two parishes in the Alto Minho (roughly corresponding to the district of Viana do Castelo), explicit rules on this particular item are difficult to recover except for two: every household should be headed by a married couple and only *one* married couple should head the household. In the community studied by Brettell, also located in Alto Minho, 'simple family' households seem to be considered as the ideal form of residence at marriage (Pina-Cabral, 1986; Brettell, 1985). In both cases, however, significant proportions of complex households (including multiple family ones) emerged. We discuss later in the paper why this should happen.

The verification of hypotheses about patterns of post-marital residence when only cross-sectional information is available requires the assumption of stability of these patterns over time, so that the residential experience of the population at different ages at one point in time can be

treated as the experience of a synthetic cohort. As we have argued elsewhere, this exercise is likely to conceal other processes that can only be traced when genuine longitudinal information is available, and that may be responsible for the emergence of different forms of residential complexity (Nunes, 1986).

In spite of these limitations, even cross-sectional approaches may be useful in allowing new research questions to be shaped. The procedures used here – simulation of residential experience of married men over the course of their life, computation of headship rates and implications of demographic constraints on household formation and composition – have become standard procedures in comparative household studies.<sup>3</sup>

The distribution of married men by household type according to age clearly shows that less than 50 per cent of married men aged under 30 live in simple family households. As they grow old and death extends its toll over the elderly, that proportion is reduced. But as their children approach marriageable ages, the proportion of married men living in complex households increases again, approaching once more the 50 per cent mark.

Headship rates, that is rates based on a comparison between all married men in a given age group and those in the same age group who are heads of households, reveal significant proportions who have not attained headship at marriage, thus suggesting that some couples spend at least part of their early married life in the parental household of one of the partners and under the authority of the older couple.

Finally, demographic constraints tend to reduce the actual proportion of complex households. Amongst these we would stress age at marriage. In one parish of Viana do Castelo, age at first marriage stood at 27.4 years for females and 26.3 for males, for the period 1830-39. Late marriage, which was common throughout the province, widens the gap between generations and thus reduces the chances of parents surviving to the marriage of their children. This effect is even more likely due to the fact that it was not necessarily the oldest child who was granted the opportunity to 'marry in the house'.

Other demographic indices seem to fit well into this pattern, namely the sex ratio of the population and the proportions never marrying. The latter were high among females, for whom long distance long term or permanent emigration was far less common than for men. Brettell (1984, 1985) found 33.9 per cent of all women who died age 50 or over to be unmarried, whereas the corresponding figure for men reached only 10 per cent (the data refer to 1860-69). This discrepancy derives mostly from the imbalanced sex ratio, which in the region of Viana do Castelo was about 82.5 males per 100 females in the late 1830s. The imbalance revealed by age-specific sex ratios would be even more impressive. Unmarried persons could either live on their own, most often in 'solitary' households, or

become part of their kin's households, in the latter case helping to boost the proportion of extended households in the parish.<sup>4</sup>

In most parish-level studies, the small number of servants employed in husbandry has also been noticed. Contrary to North Western Europe, where service was a rite for young people prior to their marriage a period during which they were supposed to earn the means to set up their own households, the minor importance of servants in Minho constitutes another argument supporting the existence of a reproductive strategy of households based on members of the family.<sup>5</sup> Having a comparatively large number of relatives living in was one of the means of affirming the power of the household within the local community. The emergence of complex households would often be the result of a strategy aimed at maximising resources of the *casa*, rather than the outcome of any explicit rule of post-marital residence. This strategy was obviously feasible only for those whose resources enabled them to support large co-resident groups, in other words the wealthier strata of the landowning population (Pina-Cabral, 1984, 1986; see also Table 2).

TABLE 2A. *Households with resident servants in certain parishes (c. 1830)*

Parish	Number of households with servants	Per cent of total households
ABELHEIRA	3	5.7
AMONDE	2	3.3
CARREÇO	1	0.6
SANTA MARTA	23	8.9
SERRELEIS	13	14.8

Source: Feijó, 1983 (adapted)

TABLE 2B. *Households with servants according to type of household (Urgeses, 1878)*

Household type	No servants present	Servants present	Total
1. 'Solitaries'	28	4	32
2. No Family	3	2	5
3. Simple Family	111	24	135
4. Extended Family	12	5	17
5. Multiple Family	—	—	—
6. Indeterminate Structure	—	—	—
TOTAL	154	35	189
Per cent	(81.5)	(18.5)	(100)

Source: Nunes, 1986 (adapted)

Both historians and anthropologists have tended to relate the pattern of household composition to wider strategies of social reproduction in which considerations of the devolution of patrimony, as well as specific characteristics that landed patrimony assumed in this province, play a crucial role.

It is usually taken for granted that there are ecological and economic factors which favour family strategies that combine:

- a) the need to keep biological reproduction within moderately low limits. As a matter of fact, Minho has traditionally been a densely populated region witnessing almost constant flows of out-migration;
- b) the need to prevent fragmentation of landed property beyond critical levels which seemed, in many cases, to be an actual possibility<sup>6</sup>;
- c) a third need could be added; that of ensuring support for the older generation in old age or in periods of hardship. This could be achieved through flexible legislation regarding the devolution of property, allowing final decisions on the division of property among heirs to be postponed until death of the household head, or requirements on support in old age or widowhood to be included in any definition of the way patrimony and its control were handed over to heirs.

The major difficulty in setting up such a strategy derives from the available means of preventing population growth beyond levels compatible with available resources and stability of the local social structure: delayed marriage and 'forced' celibacy. These do not prevent high levels of marital fertility, thus making it possible for any couple to have several heirs surviving to adult age. This depends, of course, on levels of infant and child mortality and on the probability of surviving to adulthood. Thus, 'demographic lottery' is a crucial factor for the actual working of the family strategies just delineated. This is certainly a point deserving more thorough research (Wrigley, 1978; Lesthaeghe, 1980; Smith, 1984).

The discussion of devolution rules and inheritance practices in Minho cannot be grasped in terms of partible *versus* impartible inheritance, for what is characteristic of the Portuguese legal system of inheritance, as well as of actual practice in the region, is what we may call *unequal partibility*. Both inheritance laws and rules governing the systems of land tenure facilitated the emergence of unequal partibility. The inheritance laws allowed the bequeather to dispose freely of one third of his patrimony, which he could pass on to a 'favoured' heir.<sup>7</sup>

Land tenure was divided into various forms. Full property existed, but often subject to entailment (*vinculação*), which prevented its division. Leaseholds would not be estimated when the patrimony was valued, and were excluded from inheritance, but the right to a new contract might be granted to one heir. Finally, there was a kind of copyhold, *emphiteusis*, which was included in the valuation but was theoretically impartible. In brief, the prevailing laws allowed wide room for manoeuvre in practice.



Landed families seem often to have chosen one favoured heir (as often as not a daughter), who was allowed to bring the spouse into the parental house and continue as a member of the household. Birth order was not a determining factor in the choice of favoured heir; the latter was frequently the youngest son or daughter. He or she would take charge of the old parents. In many cases, children who did not marry 'in the house' established themselves in the neighbourhood of the parental household, often generating clusters of households linked by kin, following the pattern of 'sibling vicinality' described by Pina-Cabral for the area of Ponte da Barca (Pina-Cabral, 1986). Unfavoured heirs received a share of the parental patrimony which allowed them to emigrate, to marry and set up their own household, or, while single, to remain in the parental household.<sup>8</sup>

#### CORRELATES OF HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Rowland's analysis of the 1960 census suggested that only in the province of Minho could one find evidence of a correlation between property, inheritance and family such as the one outlined above. He also claimed that within this cultural region 'urbanization and the development of non-agricultural activities has no significant effect upon family structures'. Further research on this theme requires his concluding suggestion to be followed, namely that the regional configuration of household structure should be examined in its social and economic context (Rowland, 1984). Parish-level data provide some information on this, allowing a more thorough analysis of the effects of social differentiation on household composition and thus helping to avoid the problem of 'ecological fallacies' which arise when only aggregate data are used.

Information on income or occupation of head, or both, is available for several parishes, and summarised in Table 3. This type of information gives some idea of patterns of social differentiation at local level.

In the two parishes of Santa Marta and Carreço, in the area of Viana, the higher the household income, the greater the likelihood of the household being a complex one. Only 14 per cent of the households of S. Marta and 49 per cent of those in Carreço with revenues below 500,000 reis were extended or multiple, whereas above that mark the proportions rose to 35 per cent and 77 per cent respectively (Table 3A). Data from Pina-Cabral's anthropological study of two parishes in the same area of Alto Minho in the late 1970s confirm the idea that wealth played a role in explaining differences in household composition at the local level (Table 3B).

Information on the occupation of household heads is available for the parish of Urgeses, in the municipality of Guimarães (Table 3C). Here no multiple family households could be found for the year 1878 to which the data refers. Neolocality seems to be the 'normal' pattern of household

TABLE 3. *Social differentiation and household composition*

## 3A: Household Revenue and Complexity in Extended and Multiple Households

Annual Revenue in 1,000 reis	<i>Santa Marta</i>		<i>Carreço</i>	
	Simple	Complex	Simple	Complex
0- 99	38	3	17	6
100-249	47	8	24	23
250-499	27	7	3	13
500-999	17	2	5	18
1,000 +	14	15	1	2

Source: Feijó, 1983

## 3B: Household Composition by Wealth Group in the 1980s

Wealth Group	'Paço'		'Conta'	
	Nuclear	Complex	Nuclear	Complex
Poor	137 (75.3%)	45 (24.8%)	113 (83.7%)	22 (16.3%)
Rich	61 (67.8%)	29 (32.2%)	25 (80.7%)	6 (19.4%)
Total	198 (73.0%)	74 (27.2%)	138 (83.1%)	28 (16.9%)

Source: Pina-Cabral, 1984 (adapted)

## 3C: Household Composition by Occupational Group of Head in Urgeses, 1878

Occupational Group	Household Type				
	1	2	3	4	All Types
Landowners	2	2	13	—	17
Farmers	1	—	44	11	56
Labourers	—	—	14	—	14
Masons & Carpenters	—	—	15	1	16
Artisans, Tradesmen & Others	—	—	18	3	21
Female head	—	2	16	1	19
Male Head, Occupa- tion Unknown	—	1	15	1	17
Solitary, Male	9	—	—	—	9
Solitary, Female	20	—	—	—	20
All Households	32	5	135	17	189

Source: Nunes, unpublished manuscript

formation and extensions arise only from widowed mothers and occasionally fathers, uncles and aunts or nephews or nieces joining a simple family household at some point in their life cycle. As would be expected, the proportions of 'solitaries' are high, since those who do not live in simple family households and have not joined a married relative have no alternative but to live as 'solitaries' or in 'no family' households. It appears from the table, however, that the emergence of extended family households is more likely to take place among the social group that has a more stable and permanent bond to land and is involved in agricultural work, namely that of the farmers. Once more, only wealthier and landed social groups seem able to maintain complex co-resident groups.<sup>9</sup>

A further point is suggested by the data. All the parishes included are located in the Alto Minho, the northernmost part of the province, with only the exception of Urgeses. The latter parish is part of an area which is more urbanised and industrialised than the Alto Minho and where a more differentiated economy has existed since the late middle ages. For a large part of the rural population, employment in non-agricultural activities like linen and cotton textiles, building, cutlery, tanning, woodwork and embroidery, among others, was an important source of income. Many of these activities were household based, thus allowing forms of what Wall calls the 'adaptive family economy' to emerge (Wall, 1986). Landowning or landholding families could thus diversify their sources of income and become less dependent on land to ensure a living while making fuller use of the labour force available in the household, namely that of children. Propertyless cottagers often depended on domestic spinning or weaving for a merchant or factory as their main means of subsistence.

Both the existence of employment in nearby towns (Guimarães, in this case) and the spread of factories into rural parishes from the 1870s onwards tended to reduce the role of households as work units. Co-residence and work became two differentiated social processes. Although this differentiation was not so evident in areas like the Alto Minho (for reasons that will be discussed in the next section), remittances from emigration played a role that approached, to some extent, that of the more varied opportunities for non-agricultural work for a market in the area of the Vale do Ave, where Guimarães is located.

It would be too hasty to conclude, however, that other social structural features in this area were markedly different from those found in the Alto Minho. Devolution practices do not appear to have been specific to this area, except for the greater importance of property other than land (handlooms, for example). The same can be said of 'risk devolution' systems: those who had close kin living nearby would be cared for by them in situations of distress. Other channels of support of a 'collective' nature would provide for those who either had no kin or whose kin had no means to provide for them; alternatively, private charity was also relied

upon by the poor. Vicinality also provided a basis for mutual assistance.<sup>10</sup>

Patterns of authority and intergenerational relations did not seem to differ markedly throughout the Minho either. The devolution of property was a very significant mediating factor here. The flexibility of inheritance laws and practice granted the older generation considerable bargaining power whenever conflicts arose or decisions had to be made regarding management of the family property. But even where 'external' sources of employment seemed to undermine that power, a father could still maintain it by acting as a 'mediator' between employers and candidates for a job. Factory owners often relied on fathers to ensure that their labour force would be docile and behave 'properly', as well as to provide adequate socialisation into factory work, including the acquisition of basic skills.

#### DISCUSSION

The comparison of household composition within the province and across social groups reveals differences but it also conceals genuine similarities. Co-residence is but one social process which is worth studying in its own right, and it can suggest how far different social processes like consumption, reproduction and production are integrated at the household level. The composition of the co-resident group (that is, the number of household members, their age, sex, marital status and kin relations within the household) is indicative of the range of processes that can be carried out within the unit. Absence of a couple with both members in the reproductive age range (regardless of whether or not their cohabitation is sanctioned by a legal marriage ceremony) rules out the possibility of that particular household being a unit of reproduction. Similarly, absence of adults of working age would mean that the household could not possibly perform the functions of a work unit, and that its members would have to rely on some form of transfer income to survive.

It is essential to keep in mind that residence should not be accorded too much importance as a process among other social processes. Apart from the difficulty of defining, what is meant by 'residence' in a specific context,<sup>11</sup> its relation to other processes may be central to a proper definition of the cultural and social structural specificity of a community or region. In some areas of Southern Europe, and possibly other parts of Europe as well, residential propinquity plays a role not very different from that played by co-residence in others. This may even be true for the same areas at different points in time. The already mentioned pattern of 'sibling vicinality' in the Alto Minho, for instance, ensures that the preference for a neolocal residence at marriage for all children save the favoured heir or heiress is compatible with maintaining strong links with the paternal household, which will be fundamental for the working of

forms of cooperative labour and child care, for instance, through the easy circulation of children between households. This suggests that neolocality in these areas is linked in very different ways to kin, welfare and work patterns from elsewhere in North West Europe, where a household formation system entailing economic self-sufficiency and 'risk devolution' based on the 'collectivity' seems to be linked to the preference for hired labour, be it of servants or of wage labourers.<sup>12</sup> The need to consider the issue of co-residence in a more cautious way than hitherto applies also to studies on the working of 'stem family systems' in other parts of Europe. The fact has often been overlooked that the term 'stem family', as it is used in most of the available studies, refers to processes that are linked to a specific form of property devolution but not necessarily to residence in the same household. Retired parents are often found living in separate quarters or in separate buildings, even when they share resources from the same farm with a married son or daughter. This appears to have been the case in some areas of the Minho.<sup>13</sup>

The existence of different forms of labour and different patterns of female work throughout the region is another important factor in explaining family life and household composition and reproduction in the Minho. In spite of the familiar stereotype that opposes a 'peasant' Minho to an Alentejo polarised between large landowners and farmers, on the one hand, and agricultural labourers on the other, day labourers (*jornaleiros*) constitute a substantial category of the labour force in parts of Minho, and landless cottagers are not uncommon either. Besides, many 'peasant' households – indeed most of them in some parts of Minho – have at least one member working full or part time outside the household. Pluriactivity and multiple sources of income linked to non-agricultural occupations or to emigration are quite common in this region, and their role is often crucial for the very survival of small scale farming. The availability of jobs in industry, for instance, allows the redundant labour force in the household to contribute to the household budget by bringing in cash. Similarly, the type of return migration that is common in the region is also a source of supplementary income in the form of remittances, allowing implements to be bought for the farm, taxes paid and the overall family budget of those who stay to be more balanced.

In this context it is very important to consider patterns of female work. Women are essential to the functioning of north western Portuguese agriculture, especially if one keeps in mind the predominantly male emigration. Within the region, however, the economic role of women is likely to vary according to local ecotypes and to the opportunities they generate for female employment outside the household.<sup>14</sup> Different ecotypes are normally linked to different patterns of social differentiation that are likely to produce, in turn, several modes of employment and work patterns. The latter may not only be sex-specific but also depend on age

and marital status.

In areas like the Alto Minho, where male out migration provides the most important source of non-agricultural income, most of the work carried out by women was agricultural and performed within the space of the family holding or its close neighbourhood. Women in landowning families usually remained attached to the 'casa', the elementary social unit defined by Pina-Cabral (1986) as the unit composed of the group of people who share a common pool of resources, plus the buildings, land, animals, implements and even the place in the graveyard belonging to the 'casa', the unit being ideally self sufficient as far as food production was concerned. The possibility of setting up a 'casa' being reserved to landed strata of the local population, the poorer sharecroppers, day labourers and servants not only found it considerably harder to get married, but also failed to acquire a stable link with land. The latter groups were spatially more mobile than the landowning farmers, with servants sometimes leaving for places as far as Porto or Lisbon (Brettell, 1985).

Where non-agricultural employment was locally available, women and young girls often took advantage of the opportunity to contribute to the household budget and, at the same time, to try to increase their chances in the marriage market. This was the case in the Vale do Ave where dependence on land of many of the rural households had been weakened through several centuries of domestic industry, which finally gave way to work in textile mills from the second half of the 19th century onwards. Although participation in the textile labour force seems to have been subordinated to marriage and childbearing, with women entering the labour force in their teens, leaving it after the birth of their first or second child and often reentering it after childbearing had ceased, in their forties, the response of married women to the demand for labour in the local textile industry seems to have been rather flexible, with many of them entering factories during peaks of demand for textiles. In this area, the links of women to their family of procreation seem to have been stronger than those to land and 'casa'. Even in those parishes where the textile industry was not very important, the mobility of women in the Vale do Ave seems to have been far more important than in Alto Minho.<sup>15</sup> As can be seen from these examples, even within an area sharing common cultural features that differentiate it as a 'cultural region' within Portugal, the influence of a variety of ecotypical settings generates intra-regional differences in household composition, patterns of female work or occupational structure that can be quite marked.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The approach outlined here is an attempt to contribute to an historical sociology of European rural populations, using evidence on household

composition and demographic patterns as a starting point, and to look at these features in context. Some of the features of rural society in Minho raise substantial problems as far as the use of the 'classical peasantry' as a theoretical reference in historical studies of rural societies is concerned. The latter seems less and less relevant to the need for capturing the overall logic behind social systems displaying features that deviate from the theory in such a way, that any attempt at using the latter as an explanatory framework would yield little more than negative characterisations of the empirical record. Much of the recent work on rural societies in the past strongly supports our view.<sup>16</sup> As Smith (1984) recently noticed, features of pre-19th century English rural society such as the importance of wage labour or the existence of a developed land market 'might also be identifiable in other European areas and were undoubtedly present in other non-Western parts of the continent'. Other issues like the relationship between co-residence, kin networks, welfare systems and work patterns need much more comparative work on different areas of Europe to be undertaken before their role in shaping regional contrasts can be fully understood. From this point of view, the Iberian Peninsula, and Portugal in particular, is certainly one of the potentially most interesting areas for future research.

#### NOTES

1. A more detailed analysis of municipal data in the 1960 census, as well as a discussion of variation in household composition at the local level and of some aspects of rural-urban contrasts, is included in a forthcoming article by the authors.
2. See Nunes, 1986, and forthcoming work by the authors.
3. On the lifecycle approach to household studies, see the contributions to Hareven, 1977, and the methodological remarks in Watkins, 1980, and Kertzer, 1984. The exclusion of single women (a substantial part of the population in this area of late marriage and high permanent celibacy) from most of the local sources, prevents a fuller analysis of residential experiences over the lifecycle. Even when only the male population is considered, high levels of out migration make any interpretation of the data difficult. Since we are interested in patterns of post-marital residence, we can concentrate on analysis of married males. Even so bias can be introduced by the migration of married men; overall results are likely to be little affected, however.
4. The exclusion of single females from most sources biases the estimates of 'solitary' households upwards, thus making it extremely difficult to get any accurate information on this particular issue when militia lists are used.
5. The situation as far as service is concerned may have been different in other areas of Minho, like the industrialised Vale do Ave or the more market oriented agricultural areas near Porto.
6. 'Fragmentation of property' refers to the size of holdings; it should not be confused with the scattered shape of the holdings, imposed by ecological constraints to ensure the viability of a farm in this area of mixed farming through the combination of plots with different characteristics. For a fuller discussion of this point see Feijó, 1983, and Nunes, 1984.
7. For a discussion of devolution in north western Portugal see Brandão, 1985.

8. It should be clear that the situation described does not correspond to the one that would be expected from the operation of a 'stem family' system. More than one child is allowed to marry and stay with the respective partner in the parental household until they are able to establish themselves in their own household, or until another sibling gets married. The operation can be repeated a number of times in some cases. Establishment after leaving the parental household often follows the pattern of 'sibling vicinality' (see text). The child who finally remains at home (usually a daughter, who will get a larger share of the parental patrimony) accepts the task of taking care of the parents in old age. She does not necessarily marry. It should also be noticed again that although entire farms may be passed on to one heir, this can only be the case when the family patrimony allows other heirs to obtain the share they are legally entitled to. In some cases, migration of the preferred heir may be one way of acquiring the cash income necessary for simultaneously compensating the other heirs and maintaining a viable farm. The principle of partibility prevails even when partibility is unequal. For a comparison with the working of a genuine 'stem family' system (the Basque one), see Douglass, 1969.
9. Research in progress on consecutive yearly listings shows that the overall distribution of households by type in Urgeses has varied over time, with some periods witnessing higher proportions of complex households than others. A closer look at the data suggests that several influences were at work that had little to do with any change in normative rules concerning residence at marriage (e.g. economic hardship, housing shortages, increases in the incidence of male migration).
10. See Poinard, 1910, for examples of dependence on institutionalised welfare in Minho. Brettell (1985) has suggested that the repeated bearing of illegitimate children would provide some security in old age for women in the poorest sections of the population, whose prospects of ever marrying were low or virtually nil. The same idea often appears in the works of 19th century novelist Camilo Castelo Branco.
11. The definition of residence in historical sources is not always clear. Here we have assumed that people listed as belonging to the same household sleep under the same roof and share a common consumption pool. In this region, commensality is a fundamental dimension in defining household membership.
12. See Hajnal, 1982, and for a discussion based on the English case but with important theoretical implications for other settings, Smith, 1981, 1984 and 1986.
13. For a 'classical' example of this type of confusion, see Berkner, 1972 and 1976, and the criticisms by Laslett in Wachter et al, 1978, ch.6; see also Wall, 1983, for a discussion of the status of residence in the analysis of historical family forms. A defence of the study of residence as a process in its own right can be found in Verdon, 1980.
14. We use the concept of ecotype as defined by Lofgren (1978): 'an adaptation to a given ecological setting or a local ecosystem within a given macro-economic framework' p. 101).
15. On the issue of intra-regional variation, see note 1.
16. A good example of this is the discussion of 'the complex rural laboring groups that defy neat classification' in Holmes and Quataert, 1986.

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#### ABSTRACT

The province of Minho in the north west of Portugal has long been regarded as a differentiated cultural region of Portugal. This paper begins with a brief presentation of the evidence on household composition in this region published so far, which offers new arguments about the identification of this province's characteristics. The existence of significant proportions of complex family households is related to patterns of post-marital residence, to demographic features and to strategies of patrimony devolution. The pattern of household composition allows a degree of variation both within each community and across the region. These differences do not imply, however, that different social processes are at work. It is argued that residence should not be given too much importance, but rather be considered as one process among others. The process of household formation is then analysed in a broader social context and related to factors such as forms of labour and patterns of female employment. The authors suggest that some features of rural society in Minho raise substantial problems as far as the use of the 'classic peasantry' as a theoretical reference in studies of an historical nature is concerned, and point to new avenues that may help to foster our knowledge and understanding of historical rural societies in Europe.

## RÉSUMÉ

La province du Minho, au nord-ouest du Portugal, est depuis longtemps considérée comme une région culturellement différenciée. L'article commence par rappeler brièvement les traits caractéristiques des familles dans cette région, ce qui caractérise par le fait même la région elle-même. L'importance quantitative des ménages complexes est liée à des modèles de résidence post-maritale, à des faits démographiques et à des stratégies de transmission du patrimoine. Ce modèle de composition des ménages permet une grande variabilité tant dans les collectivités qu'au plan de la région, mais cette différenciation n'implique pas que des processus différents soient à l'oeuvre. Car le fait de la résidence n'est pas un fait fondamental: le processus de formation des ménages est en effet inscrit dans un contexte social plus large où jouent aussi les formes de travail et l'emploi féminin. Les auteurs suggèrent alors que ces caractéristiques de la société rurale du Minho posent des problèmes de fond dès qu'on fait théoriquement référence à une 'paysannerie classique' dans une étude historique; ils indiquent de nouvelles pistes qui pourraient alimenter la connaissance des sociétés rurales européennes.

## KURZFASSUNG

Die Provinz Minho im Nordwesten Portugals ist lange als eine Region angesehen worden, die sich kulturell unterschiedlich entwickelt hat. Der Beitrag beginnt mit einer kurzen Vorstellung des bisher veröffentlichten Materials über die Zusammensetzung der Haushalte in dieser Region. Damit werden neue Belege zur Bestimmung der besonderen Kennzeichen dieser Provinz vorgelegt. Das Vorhandensein bedeutender Anteile von Großfamilien-Haushalten hängt zusammen mit den Mustern der Wohnstandortwahl nach der Eheschließung, demographischen Merkmalen und Strategien der Erbfolge.

Das Muster der Haushaltszusammensetzung erlaubt eine gewisse Variation, sowohl innerhalb einer jeden Gemeinde, als auch zwischen den Regionen. Diese Unterschiede implizieren jedoch nicht, daß unterschiedliche soziale Prozesse wirksam sind. Es wird behauptet, daß die Wohnsitzwahl nicht von so großer Bedeutung ist, sondern als ein Prozess unter anderen anzusehen ist. Es wird dann der Prozess der Haushaltsbildung in einem breiteren sozialen Kontext analysiert und in Beziehung gesetzt zu Faktoren wie Arbeitsformen und Muster der Erwerbstätigkeit von Frauen. Die Autoren weisen darauf hin, daß einige Merkmale der ländlichen Gesellschaft des Minho, was die Benutzung des klassischen Bauerntums als theoretisches Bezugssystem bei historischen Studien anbetrifft, erhebliche Probleme aufwerfen. Sie zeigen neue Wege auf, die helfen können, unser Wissen und unsere Kenntnis über historische ländliche Gesellschaften zu verbessern.