From decline to distinction

Weddings and marriages, 1940s-2000s

THE DECLINE OF MARRIAGE IN FRANSFONTEIN

Conspicous weddings emerged in Fransfontein around the 1970s. During that decade, the apartheid regime established the artificial Damaraland. Concurrently, marriage rates started to decline. According to recent demographic and ethnographic research in Southern Africa, marriage rates have substantially declined throughout the region, age at marriage has strongly increased, premarital fertility has also significantly increased and HIV/AIDS prevalence rates are among the highest in the world. These demographic trends are especially distinctive in four Southern African countries: Botswana, Swaziland, South Africa and Namibia (Bongaarts 2007; Garenne/Tollman/Kahn 2000; Garenne/Zwang 2005; Therborn 2006).

To describe changes in marriage raises several methodological and conceptual challenges. Unlike analyzing fertility trends, which can take for granted that women's fecundity declines with time and eventually ceases (new reproductive technologies left aside), for marriage, literally speaking, it is never too late. Thus, unlike the demographic approach that takes women with so-called completed fertility histories and then analyzes variations in the number of births by, for example, education or economic status of the women, for marriage there is no such thing as a "completed marriage history". Consequently, to conclude that marriage is declining might be erroneous. The number of marriages may not be declining, but the age at which people marry might be rising. Additionally, if marriage is a process rather than an event, the unaware and biased observer may think that conjugal relations are rather fluid and not structured by marriage. This is exemplified in Robert Gordon's (2002) analysis of the perceptions and instances of prostitution during German and South African colonial times in Namibia. This raises the question of what definitions, data and methods are necessary to analyze whether marriage has declined.

First of all, one has to clarify when people are considered as married. In Southern Africa, marriage has often been defined as a process and not as a single event (Helle-Valle 1999; Hunter 2016; Murray 1981b; Radcliff-Brown 1987; White 2016). In such a processual approach to marriage, the marital status of a person depends on the advancement of bridewealth payments. This dynamic conceptualization of marriage makes calculations of "proportions married" or "median age at first marriage" problematic. Census figures might have to be viewed with caution, as recent research from South Africa shows (Hosegood 2013; Mhongo/Budlender 2013). In Fransfontein, however, marriage is happening during a brief period of time and as an event. Someone is considered married after completing either a civil marriage at the magistrate's office or a Christian marriage in the church (or both). It is, thus, possible to distinguish married and unmarried people in Fransfontein.

To analyze whether marriage rates are declining, one can compare the number of married people within a population at two (or more) points in time. This is done, for example, in historical demography and demography. However, if one does not have comparative data for two points in time, one might instead (or also additionally) use cohort analysis and compare in how far the median age at marriage and the percentage of those married has changed for different birth cohorts. For Fransfontein, we have census data for only one point in time, rendering a comparative approach unviable. However, on a national level there is a decline in the percentage married as a comparison of the Namibian Demographic and Health Survey for 1992 and 2000 shows. While in 1992, 27 per cent of all Namibian women between the ages 15-49 were formally married, by 2000 it had declined to 23 per cent (MOHSS 2003: 80).

Thus, considering this lack of comparative data for Fransfontein, I take a closer look at the median ages of marriage and the percentage of married women per cohorts as basis from which to understand marriage dynamics. The information is taken from the ethnographic census we conducted with 750 men and women (see "Fransfontein Fieldwork"). Table 8 presents a comparison of the percentages of married couples for eight ten-year birth cohorts.

The percentage of people marrying has steadily declined since the 1970s. As can be seen in the last row of the table, only 32 per cent of the 364 interviewed women 15 years and older are or have been married. The number of men who married is even lower, at only 25 per cent. Thus, less than 30 per cent of the population 15 years and older is or has been married. As the table shows, while the majority of older men and women (until birth cohort 1935-1944) is or has been married, from birth cohort 1945-1954 onwards, the majority of the population is unmarried. For all cohorts, divorce and separation are extremely rare. Of the 89 men who married at one point in their lives, 87 per cent are currently married, 10 per cent are widowers, and only 3 per cent are separated or divorced. Among the 115 women who were married at one point in

Table 8: Percentage married and median age at marriage

Birth cohorts	Women			Men		
	N	Percentage ever married	Median age at marriage	N	Percentage ever married	Median age at marriage
1915-1924	11	91	36,5	12	92	34
1925-1934	26	96	26	22	68	38,5
1935-1944	41	58	33	30	63	34
1945-1954	47	30	35	38	42	35
1955-1964	59	37	32	59	27	37
1965-1974	65	23	28	67	16	30
1975-1984	89	6		104	1	
1985-1994	26	0		29	0	
Total	**364**	**32**	**30**	**361**	**25**	**35**

their lives, 67 per cent are still married, 3 per cent are separated or divorced, and 30 per cent are widowed. Consequently, the number of married Fransfonteiners has consistently declined, but the few who have married have almost always remained married. Comparable low rates of marriage have been reported for South Africa where Dorrit Posel and Stephanie Rudwick (2013) showed that in 2010 only 41 per cent of what they classify as "African" women had ever been married, in contrast to 81 per cent of "white" women. Victoria Hosegood (2013) mentioned even lower figures for KwaZulu-Natal. Only 10 per cent of the women in the age category 20-45 years were married in 2009. Further, the majority of women in their late 40s had never been married (see also Hunter 2010: 93-94).

As elsewhere in Southern Africa, the declining percentage marrying might also be the result of a substantial increase in the age at marriage (Bongaarts 2007; Garenne/ Zwang 2005). In 2003, the Namibian Ministry of Health and Social Services published a report with the main findings of the 2000 Namibian Demographic and Health Survey (MOHSS 2003). Regarding developments in the age at marriage, it states:

Marriage occurs remarkably late in Namibia. Only 12 per cent of women age 25-49 marry before age 18 and only 43 per cent have married by age 25 […]. The median age at first marriage is 26,2 among women age 30-49. Comparison with data from the 1992 NDHS shows an increase in age at marriage. For example, the median age at first marriage for women 30-34 was 25 in 1992, compared to 27 in 2000. (MOHSS 2003: 82)

In Fransfontein, the median age at first marriage is also late. However, as the above table demonstrates, the median age at marriage has not increased for the different birth cohorts, and it suggests no clear trend toward an increase or decrease of the median age at marriage. For a long time, marriage has occurred late in Fransfontein as people have rather lived in cohabitating unions. The decline in marriage rates cannot be attributed to a change to a later age at marriage and longer periods of cohabitation. Independent of cohort and generation, if people marry, they prefer to do this at the end of their twenties and during their thirties. Despite this late age at marriage, most women have born children before they marry. There is very little stigmatization of children born out of wedlock (Pauli 2012). It is generally accepted for men and women to have different partners independent of marriage and also to have children with them. A group discussion I had in 2004 with four women between 35 and 50 years of age illustrates this norm:

Julia: What would be a good age to marry?
Hazel: Maybe, thirty.
Mona and Claudia: Yes.
Julia: Not younger?
All for women: Not younger.
Mona: You must experience something; have friends, good friends and experience things in life before you decided to get married. Also men have to do that.

Thus, the decline of marriage in Fransfontein represents a *de facto* decline of marriage rates and not an increase in the age at which people marry.[1] The question that requires an answer is thus not why people marry increasingly late in life in Fransfontein; this has, after all, been the case for a long time. The question that has to be understood is rather why so many people do not marry at all.

1 See Hosegood/McGrath/Moultire (2009) for comparable results from KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

EXPLANATIONS FOR THE DECLINE OF MARRIAGE

Although the history of marriage decline in Fransfontein is a specific one, there are nevertheless important parallels to developments in other Southern African regions (Claassens/Smythe 2013; Hunter 2015; Pauli/van Dijk 2016). Already in the 1930s, Isaac Schapera (1933, 1939) observed changes in marriage practices among the Kgatla of Bechuanaland, today's Botswana. His findings on increasing numbers of unmarried women and children born out of wedlock were first signs of the substantial transformations underway in social organization in Southern Africa. Since then, several reasons have been put forward for this decline of marriage.

One way of explaining the decline of marriage is to argue that marriage as a system of alliance and social organization has increasingly lost its meaning due to the substantial economic and social transformations that took place during the colonial period. In this context, kin-based alliances through marriage were becoming less important and were being substituted by other kinds of relationships, such as friendship or political affiliations. Jaqueline Solway tellingly named her 1990 article on relationships "Affines and Spouses, Friends and Lovers". Class formation in Botswana resulted in new social relationships, making the reliance on and alliance with kin only one option among others. Solway concluded:

> As class and kinship have come to coexist as principles of association, the political and economic links once solely expressed in the idiom of kinship and frequently solidified through affinal ties are now often formed on the basis of friendship. (Solway 1990: 61)

Clyde Mitchell (1961) and Philip Mayer (1961) also commented on the changing nature of kinship and marriage in urbanizing societies of Southern Africa since about the 1940s. Very similarly, Adam Kuper (1987, 2016) placed the formation of new economic elites center stage in his explanation of marriage transformations. In addition, forced and voluntary labor migration in many parts of Southern Africa resulted in locally "absent" migrants. Research on Lesotho migrants showed that a substantial number of these migrants preferred to invest in their father's family and not in bridewealth and affinal ties. Kuper concluded: "With the disappearance of its political rationale, preferential marriage on kinship lines is rapidly becoming a thing of the past". (Kuper 1987: 138) Ørnulf Gulbrandsen's (1986) research on male Tswana migrants came to similar conclusions. Contrary to the argument by John Comaroff and Simon Roberts (1977) that affinal ties continued to be an important resource and with the passing of polygyny were created through "serial monogamy", Gulbrandsen thoroughly doubted the ongoing relevance of affinity: "I have argued, on the contrary, that affines are rarely of particular importance to young men, and that prospective

affinal relationships are challenged rather than cultivated". (Gulbrandsen 1986: 24) Instead, he turned the Comaroff and Roberts argument upside down by suggesting that it is not the men that need affines but the affines that need the young men due to the latter's access to a cash income earned through labor migration: "It is the young men, rather than the affines, who represent a scarce resource". (ibid) Gulbrandsen's findings show how social class formation permeates various social relations, including kin and marital, but also generational relations.

Another line of understanding the transformations in marriage focuses on changing gender roles and relations. In his analysis of the 1992 Namibia Demographic and Health Survey, Orieji Chimere-Dan (1997) underscored the high incidence of non-marital teenage pregnancies in Namibia (and other Southern African countries) and linked these developments to the long-term effects of colonialism and forced labor migration which pressured many Namibian families to split and live in separate locations. He argued that this increased the number of female-headed households in both rural and urban areas. The necessity for formal marital unions declined while motherhood remained valuable. He noted that "many unmarried but socially successful mothers became important role models especially to young women who found this a reason to believe that childbearing outside a conventional marital union is no longer stigmatised and makes social and economic sense" (ibid: 9). Similarly, Eleanor Preston-Whyte linked the extensive South African apartheid labor migration system (including the demand for female labor, especially in the form of domestic services) to the rising numbers of female-headed households of unmarried mothers in the Durban area in the 1960s (see also Hosegood/McGrath/Moultire 2009; Hunter 2010; Preston-Whyte 1978). Also accepting that labor migration to South African mines is a central trigger for change in the marriage system, Gulbrandsen argued that young Tswana male migrants enjoyed an increased independence from their fathers' control because of their cash income and were able to delay marriage in order to enjoy prolonged periods of sexual freedom and consumerism. In a different context, Jane Guyer (1986: 196) termed a comparable reconfiguration of prestige and esteem as a preference for "wealth in things over wealth in people". Gulbrandsen further observed that, while Tswana men only delayed marriage, increasing numbers of Tswana women stayed single.

Women started to question marriage and some women even decided against marriage. In her research on Xhosa women in a township of Grahamstown, South Africa, in the 1970s, Virginia van der Vliet described their choice against marriage: "the women who were opting to remain single were by no means necessarily rejected – all were wage earners, often educated and keen to have children and with eligible suitors lined up: their unmarried state was a real and deliberate choice". (Van der Vliet 1984: 4) The women pondered reasons for and against marriage and came to

the conclusion that they did not want "a man who will tell her what to do, wanting to know where she stands financially" (1984: 4). Preston-Whyte came to very similar conclusions in regard to Zulu women who migrated to a Durban township in the 1960s: "Some of them would prefer to be married, but others regard marriage with mixed feelings, predominant amongst which is a fear of losing the independence and freedom they experience as wage earners in town". (Preston-Whyte 1978: 58) In their recent review of the literature, Christine Mhongo and Debbie Budlender summarized: "Both more recent and older literature suggest that over time women increasingly found themselves able to decide whether or not to marry, as they no longer needed to depend on a man's resources". (Mhongo and Budlender 2013: 189)

Both lines of thinking, the affinal and the gender explanation, connect the decline of marriage to a loss in the meaning and importance of marriage for everyday life and social organization. For the new political and economic elites, kin and affinal ties have lost in significance. Women may favor independence and do not want to rely on marriage ties. Finally, many men only invest half-heartedly into marriage or may even be unable to do so because of their meager economic standing. But why then are contemporary weddings in Fransfontein, and elsewhere in Southern Africa, celebrated in such a fancy fashion? Throughout the sub-continent, ethnographic research has observed substantial changes in wedding rituals and a dramatic increase in wedding costs (Mupotsa 2014; Pauli 2011; Solway 2016; van Dijk 2012, 2017).

A third line of argument thus focuses on a very different cause for the decline in marriage rates, namely accelerating costs for performing a marriage. There are many voices throughout Africa that see an increase in bridewealth payments as cause for why so few people are able to marry. Adeline Masquelier has observed that there exists

> a widespread sense in Niger that a growing thirst for the prestige earned through the staging of extravagant wedding celebrations has contributed to the spiralling bridewealth inflation and, by implication, the postponement of marriage for many. (Masquelier 2005: 62-63)

Equally, Isiugo-Abanihe (1994) cited a strong increase in bridewealth costs as the main reason for declining marriage rates in Nigeria, and Johnson-Hanks (2007b: 264) remarked that marriage went from a general prerequisite for adult status into a "sign of pecuniary honor" in southern Cameroon. Finally, Parkin and Nyamwaya have observed: "On the one hand, the absence of marriage payments in urban areas has often resulted in matricentric family units. On the other hand, among the urban elites, huge marriage prestations are commonly documented". (Parkin and Nyamwaya 1987a: 16) In a series of articles, Posel and Rudwick have shown how South Africa's very low marriage rates are connected to changes in *lobolo* (bridewealth) (Posel/Rudwick

2013, 2014; Posel/Rudwick/Casale 2011; Rudwick/Posel 2015). They concluded: "Delayed marriage and low marriage rates among Africans, therefore, may reflect a tension between men's inability to pay bridewealth and their respect for the custom as an integral part of the marriage process". (Posel/Rudwick 2013: 178)

The increase in brideweath is sometimes linked to the change from a payment with cattle to one of money. In her overview on marriage and family in Southern Africa up to the 1960s, Lucy Mair (1969: 37) remarked that the payment of bridewealth in cash "has undoubtedly introduced a commercial element into marriage". The effects the labor migration system has had on marriage and local economies is vividly expressed in the title to Basil Sansom's (1981) article "Cash Down for Brides" (see also Murray 1981b; Sansom 1981). And yet, although the increase and commercialization of bridewealth are important elements to explain the decline of marriage, Rijk van Dijk (2017: 32) has recently pointed out that it is suprising that, "in the public debates about the high costs of getting married that people currently face, little mention is made of the enormous resources that the couples have to muster in order to provide for all the glamour that is expected". Van Dijk (ibid: 33) shows for marriages in Molepolole, Botswana, that, compared to the tremendous costs of celebrating a wedding, "the costs for *lobola*/*bogadi* are becoming an almost insignificant element thereof". Unlike bridewealth, which the older generation of parents (at least partially) pays for, the vast share of all other wedding costs is shouldered by the marrying couple. This leads to new forms of conjugality that van Dijk (ibid: 36) aptly calls "monetary intimacy". Indeed, many couples have to go into debt to finance their wedding (see also James 2015: 53 for South Africa).

With or without bridewealth, getting married is nowadays very expensive in Namibia. High wedding costs and a decline in marriage have been observed in different parts of the country. In her study on Kwanyama people in rural Ohangwena region and urban Walvis Bay, Britt Tersbøl (2002) showed that costly church weddings are today perceived as the most ideal and prestigious of all marriage types. Yet, few people are able to afford these weddings, especially given the high unemployment rates. In his study on Damara people from Otjimbingwe and Sesfontein in the 1980s, Ben Fuller came to very similar conclusions: "Also, I noticed how few couples in Otjimbingwe were married, a fact that I can only attribute to the inability of people to pay for weddings. During my stay in Otjimbingwe only one resident couple who were not employed as teachers got married, and they held a painfully small wedding celebration". (Fuller 1993: 23) Fuller's conclusions are further supported by Gordon when he clearly describes marriage among the Damara people of Okombahe in the 1960s as an expression of elite status: "Teacher's daughters marry teachers or wealthy men, not only because of common philosophical interests, but also to increase the potential of resource combination […] Marriage alliances now tend to be

made with people who have above average, or potentially good resources, in an effort to achieve maximal utilization. Kinship alliances become an important criterion for demarcating superior lifestyles because of this family-centeredness".[2] (Gordon 1972: 79) This goes hand in hand with Fuller's (1993: 234) observation that the ideal is to marry someone whose family is at least of equal economic and social status.

This chapter engages with this question by taking a close look at how ritual and consumption practices during weddings have changed over the last sixty years. I do so by comparing six weddings that took place over the course of this period. I discuss the results against the background of all 123 marriages on which detailed information about wedding practices is available. In my analysis, I link the changes in wedding practices to the emergence of a local elite. I argue that weddings have changed from a universal rite of passage into a celebration of the class distinction of a new elite. Pierre Bourdieu (1984 [1979]) has shown how people try to achieve class mobility through the appropriation of tastes of higher classes than the ones they belong to (also see Bourdieu 1993: 273). The chapter concludes with a discussion of a set of questions: Why is this mechanism not used in Fransfontein? Why has the majority of the Fransfontein population not reappropriated marriage? Why are there not more affordable types of wedding in the village?

SIXTY YEARS OF WEDDING PRACTICES: 1940-2004

In his "French ethnography" on class distinctions, Bourdieu described the continuous demand for new markers of distinction by the elite/upper class. Having a distinctive taste that differs from the tastes of lower classes legitimizes class positions (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]; see also Erlank 2014; Kaplan 2013). Taking a closer look at the transformations in marriage rituals in Namibia, similar practices become visible. At the heart of Namibian class formation processes is a desire for distinction and exclusivity. Marriage celebrations have become central arenas to express and perform such distinctions. Constantly, new indicators of a distinct taste are added to the marriage rituals, such as new and expensive types of decoration, food or clothing. The earliest weddings we have recorded were celebrated in the 1940s. I then formed marriage cohorts on the basis of 10 year periods, starting with marriages that were celebrated between 1940 and 1949. The last marriage cohort includes fewer years than the other cohorts. As Table 9 shows, one marriage can be presented in detail for every decade except for the 1960s.

2 Laura Longmore (1959: 33) made the following observation in a Johannesburg township the 1950s: "Many educated women, especially teachers, prefer, however, to marry teachers".

Table 9: Six Fransfontein marriages

Marriage year	Names of couple	Age at marriage Husband/ Wife	Occupation at marriage		Asking/ Engagement
			Husband	Wife	
1945	Titus & Tama	41y / 25y	Farm worker	Helping mother	A: Yes E.: No
1958	Petrus & Jocoline	36y / 30y	Farm worker	Unemployed	A.: No E.: No
1975	Isaac & Emma	32y / 31y	House construction	Congregational work	A.: Yes E.: Yes
1985	Moses & Teresa	36y / 34y	Damara Council Authority	Hostel matron	A.: Yes E.: Yes
1993	Adam & Carol	32y / 33y	Teacher	Teacher	A.: Yes E.: Yes
2004	Josef & Anna	36y / 25y	Filling station attendant	Shop assistant	A.: Yes E.: Yes

Table 9 again shows that the age at marriage is not increasing. All couples throughout the cohorts married at a rather late age, while in their thirties. The two oldest couples spent most of their productive lives as workers on commercial white farms. The four younger couples were employed in various blue and white collar occupations at the time of their marriages. Almost all couples performed the *!game-#gans* asking ritual before their wedding. During the asking ritual, marriage was negotiated between the two kin groups. Only the four younger couples had an engagement. This is a first indicator for the directions in which weddings have changed. I now describe and discuss each of these six weddings, in chronological order.

Titus and Tama's marriage in 1945

One of the earliest weddings we recorded is Titus and Abertine's marriage in 1945. This marriage is typical for the marriages at that time. When Titus met Tama, he was working for the German farmer Kurt Claasen who owned a farm not far away from the Fransfontein reserve. Tama was living with her mother in Fransfontein. Through his brother, Titus asked Tama if she would agree to marry him. When she gave her consent,

a date for the formal *!game-#gans* was set. Titus gathered his family from both his mother's and his father's side and all went to Tama's parental house to ask for Tama. At the end of the ritual, both families agreed upon the payment of a cow as *abba gomas* compensation to the bride's mother. They also fixed a marriage date for one month later. Titus and Tama did not, however, celebrate a *reng #nuis* (engagement).

On the Saturday before their marriage, a cow provided by the husband's brother was slaughtered. The couple married the following Sunday during the regular church service. After the service, the couple and its guests proceeded to the bride's mother's house to eat and sing together. The husband's family gave the *abba gomas* to the wife's mother one week later. The overall expenses of the wedding were relatively moderate: Titus himself paid the church fee and bought inexpensive wedding rings and a new black jacket, grey trousers and black tie for himself; his sister (HZ) bought a white dress for Tama and one of his brothers (HB) paid for the cow for the wedding feast. Tama herself bought her shoes for the wedding. As the discussion below shows, when one compares this modest wedding with the expensive and elaborated practices of contemporary Fransfontein weddings, the difference is very marked.

Petrus and Jocoline's marriage in 1958

When Jocoline and Petrus married in 1958, both of them were working for the same white farmer in the nearby Kamanjab area. They celebrated their wedding on his farm and not in Fransfontein. Maybe because of these circumstances they did not have an asking ritual, nor an engagement, which were not yet common in the 1950s. There was also no *abba gomas*.

Petrus and Jocoline's wedding was even more modest than Titus and Tama's celebration. No cattle were slaughtered. The wedding food consisted mainly of two goats, sponsored by an aunt (HFZ) and the wife's mother. The husband paid for some vegetables. There were no soft drinks and no alcohol. The bridal couple's wedding clothes and shoes, the flowers for the bride, the church fee and the rings were all paid by the husband. In total, the amount the husband had to pay was very modest. Jocoline described her wedding celebration as very simple and typical for her time. She stressed that her many brothers and sisters married the same way. Jocoline also expressed her dissatisfaction with how marriage has changed: for eight out of her ten children, it is financially impossible to marry.

Isaac and Emma's marriage in 1975

In the 1970s, weddings gradually started to change, illustrated by Isaac and Emma's wedding. As is visible in the wedding pictures they took, Emma did not cover her head

with a so-called "traditional" Damara/Nama headscarf that had commonly been worn by brides like Tama and Jocoline. Instead, Emma wore a westernized white veil. At the time of their marriage, both Emma and Isaac were permanently employed. Emma was working for the Lutheran church while Isaac was employed in road construction. Soon after their marriage, Isaac entered the police force. The couple was rather affluent at the time of their wedding. This was expressed in the high costs of their wedding. The couple held both an asking ritual and an engagement. The bride's mother received the *abba gomas* six months after the wedding. Nevertheless, Emma and Isaac's engagement was still rather modest. Only 20 people attend the engagement celebration and were served sheep meat, but no additional drinks were bought. There was only an engagement ring, which was later taken as the wedding ring, and no additional engagement jewelry.

The wedding itself, however, was celebrated on a much bigger scale than the weddings of the two earlier cohorts as described above. Both the husband's and the wife's kin slaughtered and exchanged cows. The animals were sponsored by an uncle of the husband (HMB) and the father of the wife respectively. The wife and her sisters paid for the salads and the cool drinks. The wife and husband bought their wedding garments for themselves, the bride wearing a plain white dress that she later wore at other special occasions. There were no uniform dresses for the wedding escort of bridesmaids, groomsmen and accompanying children. Further, no hall was rented for the celebration. After the church service, the couple celebrated at the two parental homes. This wedding illustrates the changes in wedding practices that were starting to take place and the direction these changes hint at. They were the beginning of even larger transformations.

Moses and Teresa's marriage in 1985

The wedding of Moses and Teresa in 1985 was one of the big events of the 1970s and 1980s. It was an expression of the power and possibilities of the new political elites. At the time of the marriage, the groom was part of the then ruling Damara Council and the bride was in charge of one of the school hostels in Khorixas. For their wedding, workers sewed a huge tent to be erected on a large field on the outskirts of Fransfontein to accommodate the hundreds of invited guests who could not fit into any of the halls available in Fransfontein. The couple celebrated an asking ritual and an engagement, and paid *abba gomas* two weeks after the wedding. The engagement was financed by the husband and was relatively small (when compared to the extensive wedding): only several dozen guests were invited and enjoyed the meat of a slaughtered cow, cool drinks and beer; the bride was marked with earrings, a necklace and a watch.

Before the wedding, the couple's kin exchanged and slaughtered cattle. A number of goats and sheep were slaughtered, dozens of salads were prepared and soft drinks

and alcohol was served in abundance. All food and drinks were paid by the husband, except for some salads that had been prepared by the wife's female kin. The husband also bought all wedding garments, with a fancy wedding dress made just for the occasion. After the wedding, the bride kept this in her closet as a memento of the wedding. This wedding was the first wedding in Fransfontein to have uniform dresses and suits sewn for the bridesmaids and the groomsmen, again paid for by the husband. The husband also hired a professional band to entertain the guests. Clearly, this wedding differs from the weddings of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

This wedding also marked a notable shift in form and meaning of the alliances that are formed through marriage. It is at this point that the importance of kin as basis for alliances and reciprocal support begins to dwindle (Solway 1990). As shown in this wedding, the help of kin was no longer necessarily required to stage a ceremony: the husband paid the wedding largely himself. In contrast, a wedding became an important arena for a novel type of alliance: Moses and Teresa's ceremony illustrated how the new political and professional elite of the homeland used weddings to meet, socialize and form alliances. Describing their wedding to me some twenty years later, the couple proudly underscored that everybody important in Damaraland had attended their wedding.

Adam and Carol's wedding in 1993

By the 1990s, not only politicians had the financial means to celebrate increasingly more conspicuous weddings, but teachers also celebrated comparably luxurious weddings. This is illustrated by the 1993 marriage of Adam and Carol, both employed as teachers since the 1980s. Both their asking and engagement rituals were held on a larger scale than the engagements of the previous decades: approximately 50 people attended and significant quantities of meat, soft drinks and alcohol were served. The food was financed by the wife's kin whereas the engagement rings, necklace, watch and earrings for the wife were all bought by the husband. The engagement did not include the payment of an *abba gomas*, however.

For the wedding, the husband purchased another ring, a wedding ring. Buying two separate rings was a novelty at the time, increasing the costs. Cattle for slaughtering were given by the relatives, the wife's cow by her brother, and the husband's cow by his father. The wife's mother provided for a number of additional small stock as well as the salads. The wife's sisters bought soft drinks and alcohol. The husband paid the wedding garments for himself and his wife, with a special dress to be used only for the wedding. Like Teresa, Carol has kept her wedding dress in a closet and has never worn it again. The wife and her brothers and sisters paid for the clothes of the wedding escort, while the husband paid the rental for the hall.

It is interesting to note that all practices and items that marked Moses and Teresa's wedding were also present at Adam and Carol's wedding. But the two weddings differed significantly in the way they were financed. While Moses and Teresa's was basically a "one-man-show" with Moses featuring as the big spender, matching and expressing his status as one of the central political figures in Damaraland, the expenses of Adam and Carol's wedding were shared between the couple on a much more egalitarian basis, also incorporating a number of relatives.

Josef and Anna's wedding in 2004

Josef and Anna's marriage shows that the new style of wedding that has been increasingly performed since the 1970s and 1980s has become the contemporary way of celebrating a Fransfontein wedding. During our fieldwork, we did not observe any tendency of reducing a wedding's costs. In Josef and Anna's case, the couple had an asking ritual and an engagement, but no *abba gomas* was given. Both their engagement and their wedding were attended by approximately 100 people. At the engagement, some sheep were slaughtered and soft drinks and alcohol were served. The costs were shared by the husband and the wife's mother who had permanent employment as a hostel worker. The husband paid for the engagement ring, necklace and earrings for the wife, and a watch for both the wife and himself.

The families exchanged and slaughtered cattle, with the wife's cow sponsored by the wife's father and the husband himself paying for his cow. The wife's brother paid for additional small stock. The wife's family also paid for the salads, the soft drinks and the beer. The husband bought the wedding dress for his wife, while the wife bought the husband's wedding clothes. The husband bought the wedding rings. Though the couple had a uniform dress style for the bridesmaids and groomsmen, the latter paid for their clothes by themselves. The husband and wife shared the rental for the hall. Thus, as in Adam and Carol's wedding, the wife shared some of the costs of the wedding and both kin were substantially included; similarly too, however, the husband shouldered the largest share of the costs.

Analyzing changing weddings

The chronological reading of these six weddings provides a first impression of the kind of changes wedding practices have gone through. The marriage ritual has transformed from a common, albeit special event into an exclusive celebration of class distinction. While couples willing to tie the knot in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were mainly faced with the problem of buying their wedding clothes and slaughtering a cow, couples from the 1970s onwards had to shoulder a multiplicity of costs. Even

Table 10: The wedding's ritual core – wedding garments through time

		Percentage per cohort having specific marriage items						
		Bride				Groom		
Marriage cohort	**N**	**Dress**	**Shoes**	**Ring**	**Flowers**	**Suit**	**Shoes**	**Ring**
1940-1949	6	100	100	83,3	33,3	100	100	83,3
1950-1959	16	87,5	87,5	87,5	37,5	93,8	87,5	87,5
1960-1969	12	91,7	83,3	91,6	33,3	90,9	81,8	75
1970-1979	21	90,5	90,5	90,5	71,4	90,5	85,7	80,9
1980-1989	18	83,3	83,3	88,9	72,2	77,8	77,8	88,9
1990-1999	25	84	80	96	64	80	84	92
2000-2004	25	92	92	92	76	88	88	92
Total	**123**	**89**	**87**	**91**	**61**	**87**	**85**	**87**

with supporting kin groups in the background, increasingly only permanently employed grooms and, to a lesser extent, brides found themselves capable to do so. The new elite, especially the political *kai aogu* (big men) of Damaraland, and their desire for distinction gradually changed wedding practices.

There is a core of goods for ritual consumption that all six weddings have in common. All six couples bought their wedding garments and in all six cases the husband paid for the rings. In fact, Table 10 shows that new wedding garments and wedding rings are essential not only to the six exemplary marriages but to most of the 123 marriages in our sample.

Throughout all seven marriage cohorts, covering more than sixty years of Fransfontein wedding practices, more than 80 per cent of all couples invested in a wedding dress for the bride, new shoes for bride and groom, new trousers for the groom and wedding rings. Flowers for the bride are not as common throughout all cohorts. Only about a third of all couples until the 1970s spent money on bridal flowers. Since the 1970s, more than two thirds of all weddings include flowers. In an arid environment like Fransfontein, flowers are a luxury good. Wedding foods and beverages are not as standardized as wedding garments and the rings. Table 11 provides an overview of the food and beverages preferences for the different marriage cohorts.

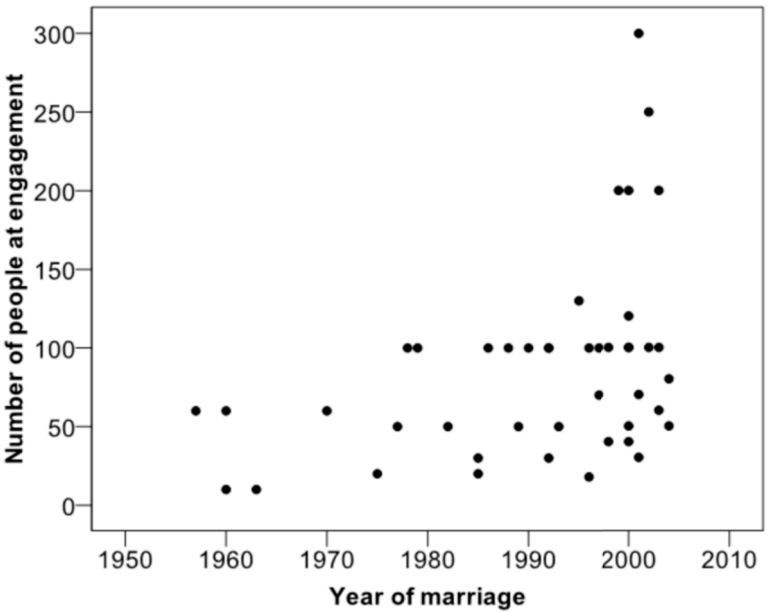
Table 11: Optional wedding items – food and beverages through time

		Percentage per cohort having specific marriage items					
Marriage cohort	**N**	**Cow wife**	**Cow husband**	**Small stock**	**Salad/ veg.**	**Cool drinks**	**Alco-hol**
1940-1949	6	33,3	66,7	83,3	66,7	83,3	50
1950-1959	16	50	75	37,5	75	18,75	43,75
1960-1969	12	33,3	66,7	58,3	75	33,3	16,7
1970-1979	21	52,4	61,90	52,4	80,9	66,7	76,1
1980-1989	18	44,4	61,1	83,3	88,9	88,9	88,9
1990-1999	25	44	56	76	100	80	80
2000-2004	25	66,7	84	44	88	92	80
Total	**123**	**49**	**68**	**60**	**85**	**69**	**68**

Some of the wedding consumption goods become more popular over time. Salads and vegetables were already common in the 1940s with more than two thirds of all weddings including them up to the 1960s. However, since the 1970s they are even more widespread. Similarly, cool drinks and alcohol, mainly beer, were served at some weddings already in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. But it is only since the 1970s that the vast majority of weddings include these goods into their celebrations. Throughout all marriage cohorts, the majority of weddings consumed a slaughtered cow from the groom and his family. The numbers that had a cow slaughtered by the bride's family were much smaller. Small stock was also slaughtered throughout all marriage cohorts, with no clear tendency for an increase or decrease of the practice. Small stock is used as a flexible substitution or supplement if there are no cattle available or if additional meat is needed to cater for all guests. Thus, throughout all marriage cohorts, meat has been served at weddings, with a certain level of flexibility regarding the kind of meat served. Only in the last decades have food and beverages become more standardized and expensive. Today couples are confronted with the expectation that a wedding has to include soft drinks and salads for all guests.

The discussion so far has focused on a wedding's core elements (garments and rings) and on some of the optional wedding goods, such as food and beverages. I now

Figure 15: Number of engagement guests for 52 weddings



turn to those practices and goods that hardly existed before the 1970s or not at all. The most obvious extension of the wedding's ritual core is the engagement ritual. To judge from the six exemplary marriages, only weddings from the 1970s onwards celebrated engagement parties. Equally, of the 123 marriages, only 42 per cent (52 marriages) had an engagement. Engagements were rare until the 1960s: only about 10 to 20 per cent of all marriages celebrated an engagement prior to the 1960s. Since then, however, the number of engagements has steadily increased. In the youngest marriage cohort, with marriages celebrated between 2000 and 2004, more than 70 per cent included an engagement celebration. As Figure 15 shows, this ritual extension is not only one in kind but also one in scale.

From the 1970s onwards, engagements became more common and their scale and cost increased. Figure 15 plots the year of marriage against the number of people invited at the engagement ritual. The visual impression of a strong increase in the number of guests invited to engagements since the 1970s is supported by a highly significant Pearson correlation of 0,408**. At some of the engagements around the turn of the millennium, more than 200 guests were welcomed. This has led to a dramatic increase of costs for the couples and their kin, not only because of the increased number of guests, but also because of the addition of the engagement ritual itself. The exemplary marriages above show that is has become common since the 1970s to

"mark" the bride with excessive jewelry at the end of the engagement. While necklace, earrings and watches for the couple were nonexistent until then, they have since become an integral part of the engagement ritual (see the chapter "Contemporary Fransfontein Marriages" for a detailed description of these ritual practices).

Engagements are not the only costly change of the wedding outline to have taken place. During the 1970s, affluent couples began to have matching garments for their bridesmaids and groomsmen. The first weddings to start with this practice were the weddings of the new professional, administrative and political elites of Damaraland. Both Moses and Teresa's and Adam and Carol's weddings exemplify this style setting (Plotnicov 1970: 293). Today, the practice has become ubiquitous at weddings. In addition, the number of bridesmaids and groomsmen has increased since the 1970s: it is now common for wedding couples to be accompanied by up to six couples. The exact garments provided for the escorts vary in style and cost: some of the weddings we observed used what was called traditional Nama and Damara materials for these outfits, with the bride and her friends sewing them themselves, whereas other couples preferred to buy expensive satin robes imported from South Africa.

Before the 1970s, not a single Fransfontein marriage included a wedding reception at a hall. Up to the end of the 1960s, weddings were celebrated at the houses of the bride's and groom's kin groups. In the 1970s, five per cent of the weddings incorporated a wedding reception: these were all elite weddings, celebrated by wealthy politicians, administrators, and teachers. By the 1980s, 28 per cent had a wedding reception, by the 1990s almost half, and from 2000 to 2004, 60 per cent staged a reception at a hall. To entertain and impress the guests, the hall is decorated with flowers and sometimes a band is hired. Unlike the informality at the two parental homes, the reception at a wedding hall is a formal ceremony and, although one of the most luxurious moments of the wedding, often lasts less than two hours. Usually, hundreds of guests are invited to the wedding reception and huge amounts of food and drinks are served. This novel practice has substantially increased the wedding costs. It includes the rental of the hall, providing decoration, hiring a professional band and renting an adjacent kitchen for the preparation of the food. It also encompasses organizing and paying for the transport of the wedding guests.

To summarize the changes in wedding practices, one can differentiated three different sets of wedding practices and goods. There is the core that consists of the clothes and rings of the bridal couple: 80 per cent of all wedding celebrations included these goods. Then there are optional goods and practices such as soft drinks and alcohol: these goods existed before the 1970s but only became commonplace from the 1970s onwards. Overall, between 50 and 70 per cent of all marriage celebrations included these goods. Third, there are the items and practices that have emerged since

the 1970s, such as the wedding reception at a rental hall and matched garments for the wedding escort: only 20 to 30 per cent of all 123 marriage celebrations included these goods and practices.

Clearly, from the 1970s onwards, Fransfontein weddings have changed from a modest ritual for everyone into a conspicuous celebration by the elite. The emerging Fransfontein bourgeoisie (Wallace 2011: 267) of the 1970s and 1980s increasingly expressed its status through their weddings, and this process has continued. Much in line with Thorstein Veblen's (1994 [1899]) reflections on conspicuous consumption and class, contemporary Fransfontein weddings stimulate envy and emulation. At the weddings we attended, wealthier Fransfonteiners, for example, were impressed by the use of new media such as digital cameras, and talked about using such devices for their or their children's weddings. The changes in wedding practices are thus closely linked to the emergence of new political, administrative and professional elites since the 1970s.

PERFORMING DISTINCTIONS

The new elites of the 1970s emerged with the establishment of Damaraland. Before this, economic stratification was mainly based on the number of livestock a household owned. The racist German and South African policy of land dispossessions throughout the 20th century made it very difficult for indigenous Namibians to accumulate livestock. As a result, wealth variations were not very pronounced among the Fransfontein population until the 1970s. Most people lived meager lives and were forced to work for white commercial farmers. During the 1970s, however, a new political and administrative elite emerged. Some of the most powerful members of this elite worked for the Damara Council, while others were employed in the educational or health sectors. Indeed, there is a certain degree of flexibility between these occupational spheres: many influential politicians started their careers as teachers, one of the very few academic options available for indigenous Namibians at that time (Fumanti 2016).

This mainly male elite established a gendered patronage system. This does not mean that women had no agency (Pauli 2010b) nor that all men gained in power. Rather, the power and patronage system that emerged in the 1970s favored a few influential men while marginalizing the majority of both men and women. There are two aspects of the male elites' behavior that are of special interest for my argument: on the one hand, their love relations with several women and their maintenance of a number of out-of-wedlock children and, on the other hand, their celebration of increasingly conspicuous marriages.

The establishment of Damaraland did not only create occupations for emerging male elites. It also saw the creation of many unskilled and long-term jobs in the domestic sector. This included occupations as domestic cleaners, hostel workers, matrons and cooks in the newly built health posts, administrative buildings, schools, hostels and the clinic (in Khorixas). Many of these jobs were given to the young female lovers of the new political and administrative elite. Some of these female domestic workers, hostel matrons and cooks in time also became wives, as was the case in the marriage of Moses and Teresa described above. I cannot yet explain why some women became wives and other remained unmarried. There does not seem to be, for example, a marriage strategy comparable to the one Bourdieu (1976) describes for rural France. Thus, in terms of education, wealth, honor (e.g. indicated by virginity) and number of children, the wives of the political and administrative elite had the same background as the women who did not marry. Ethnicity is also not an explanation: some of the wives had the same ethnic background as their powerful husbands (mainly Damara), while others did not. Teresa, for example, had been born in Namibia's northern region ("Ovamboland") and spoke Oshiwambo as mother tongue, while her powerful husband was a Khoekhoegowab (Damara) speaker. Teachers, though, seem to be an exception: there is a tendency for them to marry fellow teachers (Longmore 1959: 33), as exemplified in Adam and Carol's marriage. All *kai aogu* of this new elite married and, like in the case of Moses and Teresa, their weddings were central social events in Damaraland's political landscape of the 1970s and 1980s, performances of power and distinction.

Next, I turn to these performances of power and ask in how far a man's occupation at the time of his marriage is linked to the wedding practices and items that have become indicators of distinction since the 1970s. Given my above results of the transformations in wedding practices and goods, I focus on the following indicators of distinction: performing an engagement ritual; having matching garments for the wedding escorts; and holding a wedding reception additional to the celebrations in the paternal family houses. I classified male occupations at the time of the wedding into six categories. The first category, "white collar government", represents all professionals employed by the state, such as teachers, civil servants and politicians. The second category, "blue collar government", includes unskilled government occupations, mainly jobs as driver for the different government institutions. The third, "other employment", holds occupations such as mechanic, builder or employee of a road construction operator. All of these occupations can be found in the Fransfontein and Khorixas area, differentiating these three categories from the fourth, the "migrant" category, that includes occupations outside this area, mainly industrial work for mining or fishing companies. The fifth category, "farmers", refers to farmers who work in the communal Fransfontein area and are the owners of their livestock, whereas the

Table 12: Male occupation at time of marriage, wedding items and age

Percentage of weddings with specific wedding items							
			Dresses and garments				
Occupation	**N**	**Engage-ment**	**Brides-maids**	**Grooms-men**	**Chil-dren**	**Recep-tion**	**Median age 2004**
White collar government	11	73	55	55	64	55	50
Blue collar government	11	64	36	36	36	46	58
Other employment	7	100	57	57	43	43	56
Farmer	11	9	27	27	18	9	61
Farm worker	10	30	10	10	10	20	58,5
Migrant	3	67	100	67	67	67	44
Total	**53**	**53**	**40**	**38**	**36**	**36**	**56**

last, "farm workers", refers to people employed by either a communal or a commercial farmer. They do not own the livestock they are herding.

Table 12 shows that there are three occupational groups that tend to celebrate their weddings with the new indicators of distinction. These are white collar government employees, other employees and migrants. For all wedding goods and practices, these groups have above-average percentages, while the three other occupational categories, thus blue collar government employees, farmers and farm workers, have below-average percentages. However, it is critical to consider age in this context of class distinction, so that I have also included the median age in 2004 for all occupational categories in the table (see last column). Those occupations with the lowest scores on the wedding goods are also the ones with the highest median ages in 2004.

Many of them celebrated their weddings before the wedding changes of the 1970s. White collar government employees, other employees and migrants are younger. Their weddings are more likely structured by the new wedding outline that

emerged from the 1970s. This includes engagements, matched garments for the wedding escort and the renting of a hall for the wedding reception. In sum, wedding practices have changed substantially in Fransfontein since the 1970s. The new political, administrative and professional elite has been the central force behind these changes. Clearly, it was not the intention of this elite to make weddings, and thus marriage, almost impossible for the rest of the population; yet this unintended consequence has very real effects on the lives of the rest of the Fransfontein population.

To understand these transformations, it is thus necessary not only to analyse the "married class" and its display of conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1994 [1899]), but also to examine the audience of the conspicuous celebrators and the boundaries created between these two groups (Campbell 1995). In his work on the bachelors of Béarn, a rural community in the French Pyreneans, Bourdieu (2008) showed how urbanization and individualization in French society increased the difficulties of rural men who wished to marry. A key scene in his analysis is a Christmas ball at which a rather large crowd of bachelors stands on the fringe to watch the guests dancing, flirting and joyously celebrating. Bourdieu's description exhibits some remarkable similarities with a scene we observed during a wedding ceremony in Fransfontein in the summer of 2005 (Pauli 2011). A crowd of people had gathered in front of the barred windows of the bride's parental home, eagerly trying to catch a glimpse of what was going on inside. Seeing the crowd, I wondered whether something might have happened, perhaps a conflict between the two kin groups involved in the marriage? But then a women at the back of the crowd explained that they just wanted to watch the married people inside the house celebrating the final asking-out of the bride. Only married people were allowed to attend this part of the ceremony and they received wedding cake and meat, served by the bride. As in France, the unmarried Fransfontein crowd watching the wedding of an elite couple visibly demonstrated their own exclusion: "they are and they know they are 'unmarriageable'" (Bourdieu 2008: 82). In both Béarn and Fransfontein, elite celebrations exhibit the boundaries between the different classes.

Given what is at stake, it is remarkable how little these marriage- and class-based boundaries are contested. Many unmarried people have accepted that they are living in a state of "waithood" (Honwana 2012), waiting to marry and waiting for a better, middle-class life. People unable to marry will not marry at all, rather than change the wedding ritual (see also Hunter 2016; Posel/Rudwick 2013; White 2016). They do not mock "bourgeois weddings", as do the French peasant communities (Reed-Danahay 1996), nor do they vary the wedding outline to match their economic possibilities (Argyrou 1996; Kendall 1996).[3] Such acts of copying, appropriating and

3 For Southern Africa, Mair mentiones variations of wedding outlines based on economic means (Mair 1969: 39-41; see also Levin 1947).

resisting are almost completely absent in Fransfontein. Only occasionally will a "struggle" wedding take place in Fransfontein (Pauli/Dawids 2017) at which the marrying couple does not clearly belong to the local elite or the urban, "commuting" middle class and has only recently acquired some income. Some Fransfonteiners question the financial basis of such struggle weddings and challenge the wedding couples for the sense of entitlement their ceremonies portray (Pauli/Dawids 2017). Yet the question should rather be why there are not more such attempts at redefining and reappropriating marriage?

WHY NOT A CHEAPER COPY?

That the explosion of wedding costs and with it the exclusion of large parts of the population from a previously common social institution is ongoing and not resisted represents a cultural conundrum. I suggest that agency and structure theories can provide crucial insights to solve this conundrum. Sherry B. Ortner's concept of "serious games" describes the interplay between agencies and structures. A "serious game" is an "intense play of multiply positioned subjects pursuing cultural goals within a matrix of local inequalities and power differentials" (Ortner 2006: 144). Such a matrix, or structure as William Sewell (1992, 2005) terms it, has a dual character: it is composed of both resources and of schemas. There are two types of resources, namely human resources (e.g. physical strength, knowledge etc.) and nonhuman resources (i.e. objects, animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured) that can be used to enhance or maintain power (Sewell 2005: 133). Yet resources do not simply exist by themselves: "What they amount to as resources is largely a consequence of the schemas that inform their use". (ibid: 135) Schemas, defined as cognitive and cultural procedures of meaning making that are both "generalizable" and "transposable" (ibid: 131), thus enable and form the use of resources. Consequently, how schemas and resources lead to structures is a dialectic process that Sewell describes as follows:

> Schemas not empowered or regenerated by resources would eventually be abandoned and forgotten, just as resources without cultural schemas to direct their use would eventually dissipate and decay. Sets of schemas and resources may properly be said to constitute *structures* only when they mutually imply and sustain each other over time. (Sewell 2005: 137)

Where can the acting subject be placed within this conception of structure? How much influence can actors and groups of actors actually exercise on structures? The answer to this question will strongly influence the empirical analysis. This becomes

especially evident in Jean and John Comaroffs' introduction to *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (1992), where they formulate a deep skepticism of and critique against the overemphasis of the concept of agency. They argue that this emphasis continues Eurocentric perceptions of the person and may lead to oversimplification of historical processes. The Comaroffs stress that a focus on the motivations of actors can be misleading as these are often "only" reflections of past actions. They also argue that an emphasis of agency does not take the unintended consequences of any historical process sufficiently into account. In their own work, the Comaroffs thus do not focus on individual actors and their agencies but instead on the "the pulse of collective forces" (Comaroff/Comaroff 1992: 36). If one were to place the dialectic between agency and structure on a continuum, the Comaroffs' work would clearly be aligned on the side of structure.

In a critical engagement with the Comaroffs, Ortner argues for a more central consideration of agency within an understanding of social process that are shaped by structure and the "the pulse of collective forces". Agency, according to Ortner, is part of the process and has to be understood carefully: "'Agency' is never a thing in itself but is always part of a process of what Giddens calls structuration, the making and remaking of larger social and cultural formations". (Ortner 2006: 134) What then is agency? Sewell (1992: 20) defines agency as "the strivings and motivated transactions that constitute the experienced surface of social life". Thus, agency is the human capacity for desiring, forming intentions and acting creatively (Sewell 2005: 20). Some theorists argue, in clear opposition to the Comaroffs, that all anthropological analysis should start with individuals and their agencies. One example of this is Martin Sökefeld who concludes his article on self, identity and culture, in which he has presented a detailed individual history, with the following plea for a new methodological reorientation, yet to be created: "It requires giving real importance to the actual individuals we work with while studying 'culture'". (Sökefeld 1999: 431)

Here I want to follow Ortner's and Sewell's approach on agency and structure. This requires that I discuss one final point of this dialectic, namely the question of how agency and power are interwoven. Again, Ortner's reflections are helpful:

> In probably the most common usage "agency" can be virtually synonymous with the forms of power people have at their disposal, their ability to act on their own behalf, influence other people and events, and maintain some kind of control in their own lives. Agency in this sense is relevant for both domination and resistance. People in positions of power "have" – legitimately or not – what might be thought of as "a lot of agency", but the dominated too always have certain capacities, and sometimes very significant capacities, to exercise some sort of influence over the ways in which events unfold. (Ortner 2006: 143-144)

Like Ortner (2006: 165), I am not going to discuss the concept of power in its theoretical complexity but instead use it mainly as a structure-dependent means that actors use to (1) "act on their own behalf" to pursue culturally defined goals and projects, (2) "influence other people and events" for these projects, and (3) "maintain some kind of control of their own lives" and not be dominated by the projects of others. Thus, Sewell's structures (2005: 145) empower actors differently, which again has effects on an actor's agency to transform or reproduce structures.

This finally brings me back to the reflection of the conundrum of why no cheaper versions of weddings have arisen in Fransfontein. I want to start with some brief remarks on structural forces, "the pulse of collective forces", before I take a closer look at the different agencies of actors within Fransfontein.

One line of thinking about the decline of marriage concentrates on structural forces. Simply argued, colonialism and apartheid reconfigured the political and social landscapes and reduced the centrality of kin relations. In their place, other types of power relations emerged, most prominently patronage structures dominated by male elites. Their power was strongly connected to the apartheid state and depended on their capacity to redistribute central resources. As Abner Cohen (1981) and Bourdieu (1984 [1979]) have shown, elites are in constant need to legitimize their privileges. Weddings have become a central arena to do so, leading to an explosion in costs of wedding ceremonies. Yet the explanation that an explosion of costs has made it impossible for most people to marry describes, metaphorically speaking, the symptoms but not the causes of the problem. On a broader scale and taking inspiration from Sewell, I suggest that the schema for a wedding is being changed. Weddings are transformed into highly valuable resources accessible only to those actors with much agency. Thus, it is the enhanced agency of some male actors, itself clearly embedded in wider political, economic and social forces, that sets the local structural changes of the marriage system in motion. Their agency transforms the object, marriage, so deeply that those with lesser agency are also increasingly less able to participate. Such a dynamic of distincton works through exclusion. But why do most Fransfontein people, those with lesser agency, accept that they are unable to marry? Why do they accept that marriage has turned into such a rare resource? After all, Ortner (2006: 144) reminds us that "the dominated too always have certain capacities, and sometimes very significant capacities, to exercise some sort of influence over the ways in which events unfold". To understand why this is not the case in Fransfontein, it is necessary to understand who "the dominated" are and what their "projects" or their goals are.

"The dominated" are of course not a homogeneous group. In order to illustrate this, I differentiated four different social groups with different perspectives on the marriage transformations: (1) men and their kin groups, (2) women and their kin

groups, (3) the couple of husband and wife, and (4) institutions beyond the local level, mainly the church and the state. Obviously, these four social groups are not clear-cut categories but do overlap. However, I hope that this analytic separation can shed some light on the conundrum of why no cheaper version of the wedding has arisen in Fransfontein (see also Gulbrandsen 1986).

I want to start with the first group, men and their kin. Here it is essential to differentiate between the powerful and the not-so-powerful men. The perspective of the male in power, his agency and his ways of legitimating his power has been already discussed above. Regarding these men, it will be interesting to see how they try to hand down their privileges to the next generation. Michael and I were, in fact, able to observe the wedding of a legitimate son of a very influential Damara politician in 2004. It was absolutely obvious that virtually the whole event was sponsored by the father and that the bride and the groom were only actors in a play directed by the powerful man. Yet, the parental habitus also influenced the performance of the son: the more the wedding progressed, the more self-confident he became.

In informal interviews with non-affluent men who most likely will never marry, some stressed that it is more important to father children than to be married. Similarly, men may create alternative masculine identities that are not based on marriage but on having (many) lovers and children (Schaumburg 2013). Yet, although several of the men expressed resignation about their inability to marry, none suggested as solution to stage a cheaper wedding in order to marry at all. Clearly, such a proposition would require the bride and her kin group to agree.

As the interviews with women showed, however, they and their kin (the second group) were often opposed to the proposition of a cheaper wedding. To them a cheaper marriage implied being a "cheaper wife", namely one who lacked strong kin ties or whose kin could negotiate sufficiently strongly on her behalf during the marriage negotiations. This is a very negative view of women and their kin and thus not a position women would strive for. I will demonstrate this through the example of the wedding of Francois and Namaku in 2005 (Pauli/Dawids 2017). Namaku's family is not very wealthy and we had imagined that the family would be very happy about her marriage to a reliable, hard-working, employed man. We certainly did not expect them to make things too difficult for him and his family. The opposite was the case. The bride's kin group chose the unmarried sister of the bride's mother (MZ) as its representative. Her first act was to force the male's kin group to stage an asking and engagement ritual on a farm far away from Fransfontein. This imposed a heavy strain on the man's wedding budget. At this location, the bride's kin did not offer the man's kin any place to sleep and they finally ended up resting in a small goat pen. The asking ritual thus became a very tough process. In another step, the bride's kin demanded that the groom build extra rooms on the bride's mother's compound for the

wedding event. When I later asked the married couple what this had meant for them, the wife indicated that it proved to the wife's kin group that the man and his kin would continue to take care of all of them after the wedding. To achieve this commitment, the wife's kin had to make punishing demands on the man and not give in easily. I opposed this with the reflection that it was exactly these multiple demands that made it difficult for men and women to marry, exemplified not least by the bride's MZ and her daughters who were all still unmarried. Despite this, it was exactly the bride's MZ who was especially hard on the groom and his family, and possibly giving her own daughters' current boyfriends nightmares.

What does this vignette show regarding the conundrum of cheaper versions of weddings and the dialectic of structure and agency? Above, I started my reflections with Ortner (2006: 144) theorizing about the "multiply positioned subjects pursuing cultural goals". The multiple positions in which actors are embedded can force them to act within conflicting normative structures. In the situation above, the bride's MZ has a lot of agency and uses it for her specific, culturally informed goals, yet in the long run her actions severely limit her own and her daughters' agency regarding marriage. Comparable to Gulbrandsen's (1986) observation, it seems that it is not only the groom who needs affines but also the affines who need the groom and his embodiment of the hope for long-term support.

The third group I want to look at is the couple. For three marriages we were able to observe how, as one groom has described it, "things got out of hand". All three couples started small, thinking of a modest civil marriage at the magistrate's office, with a meal afterwards. Romantic ideals of the unity of a man and a woman and their love as the most important essence of marriage were mentioned – and not spending huge amounts of money on a conspicuous wedding. Yet, none of these couples was able to pursue their "romantic" wedding goal. During the whole time of our fieldwork, there was only one couple that celebrated a simple wedding. This was a bi-national couple, the wife having been born in Fransfontein and the husband having migrated to Namibia from Sweden. Soon after the wedding the couple left Fransfontein.

What then happened to the goals and agencies of the three Fransfontein couples that did not manage to keep their weddings simple? As soon as their kin groups heard of the marriage plans, they deeply involved themselves into the process. Some offered financial support, others mainly "advice", yet both often made things even more complicated for the couple (Pauli/Dawids 2017). During one of the weddings, an aunt of the wife (MMZD) declared that it was inappropriate to slaughter and exchange a black cow at a marriage. Her opinion caused a cascade of problems, with the couple being forced to buy another cow for the slaughtering. Asked why they do not allow the couple to marry on a lower budget, a couple of the groom's (unmarried) sisters replied with indignation: "That looks as if you do not have a family!" The answer

illustrates how the needs and wishes of marrying couples and those of their kin are embedded in multiple and conflicting structures. While it made sense for the groom's unmarried sisters to ensure that their brother would celebrate a luxurious and big wedding, these actions simultaneously reduced their own chances of marrying.

One has to differentiate between couples. None of the Fransfontein couples took the decision to marry without a solid financial base. To a large extent, this base stemmed from of the groom's permanent income for, unlike in South Africa (James 2015), people in Fransfontein did not go into debt to finance their wedding. In Fransfontein, it is very difficult to borrow even small amounts of money, let alone the huge amounts necessary to pay for a wedding. But not all couples marrying are wealthy and some struggle hard to marry. Locally, these weddings are labeled "struggle marriages" (Pauli/Dawids 2017). In contrast to elite weddings, couples that struggle into marriage receive a lot of support from their kin. The way these couples celebrate their weddings is thus only partially based on their own decisions and agency; they are much more strongly embedded in the cultural goals of other actors, goals that might strongly alter their personal intentions and plans (such as those for a modest wedding). In addition, their agency is often structured and further limited by ideas about kinship. This is expressed in an interview I conducted with Robert, a 34 year old unmarried man:

Julia: Can you imagine marrying in the magistrate only?
Robert: No, I would never just marry in the magistrate. When my girlfriend and I love each other, then people must know that this person loves this other person. If we only went to the magistrate, no one would know that we have married. But with our traditional marriage, even someone in Otjikondo knows.
Julia: Everyone knows.
Robert: Even someone in Windhoek will know that I have married, or someone in Tsumeb. Then there are many witnesses.

Later in the interview, Robert also stressed that "marrying in the magistrate" is cheap, like "stealing marriage". His reasoning demonstrates how strongly the new way to celebrate weddings has already being internalized and normalized. Indeed, it is likely that he would not recognize his own grandparents' modest wedding as what he imagines a "traditional marriage" to be. The critical feature here is that lavish weddings are public weddings, a characteristic of great significance to people in Fransfontein: it can only be the public eye that can certify the new kin relations (see also Schareika 2010; Smith 2001).

Finally, I want to reflect on the role of institutions beyond the local level, thus the churches and the state (the fourth group). Although there is a general public awareness that marriage is on a decline in the country, neither the state nor the churches

have initiated or sponsored any "marriage program" to promote marriage. To my knowledge there are also no such attempts in any of the other Southern African countries that have similar declining marriage rates,[4] unlike countries like the USA that has introduced a program aimed specifically at the African-American population (Lane 2004). The Lutheran church in Fransfontein is very aware of the situation and some, albeit localized, action is being taken, such as encouraging "old age marriages" that I described in "Contemporary Fransfontein Marriages". This occurred under the auspices of the local pastor who felt that old couples who had lived together for a long time and had children together should be married. He started his own personal campaign and married many of these couples in a rather modest fashion. Apart from this, no other actions are observable in Fransfontein.

Yet, the growth of Pentecostal churches might change this. We observed how a woman pressured her boyfriend into marriage by joining a Pentecostal church and moving out of the joint household, returning to her mother's house with their two children. The woman argued that living together without marriage was now a sin for her. The man tried to convince her that without him having permanent employment, it did not make any sense to spend money on a wedding, but his argument did not convince her since she knew that he owned almost a dozen cows. While he wanted to use the cattle to build up his stock, she saw it as a great opportunity to invest in a wedding. After months of doubts and loneliness, the man finally decided to sell most of his livestock to pay for the wedding. The Pentecostal community also helped to facilitate the wedding by sponsoring food.

Thus, solving the condundrum of why there is no cheaper version to a wedding in Fransfontein is rather complex, involving many actors, cultural goals and power relations. I realize that the interpretations I offer here are only fragments and aspects and do not give one central cause. However, I think that this is part and parcel of a theoretical perspective that allows for multiple agencies and structures, considering both the "pulse of collective forces" (Comaroff/Comaroff 1992: 36) and the "actual individual" (Sökefeld 1999: 431).

4 However, Hosegood, McGrath and Moultire (2009) have recently stressed that the post-apartheid South African government now accepts different forms of marriage (also customary marriages) as official marriages. This "marriage-friendly" policy, nevertheless, does not halt the decline in marriage rates observable in many South African regions, among others KwaZulu-Natal (see also Hosegood 2013).