

Book Review

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Pauli, Julia (2019), *The Decline of Marriage in Namibia: Kinship and Social Class in a Rural Community*, Bielefeld, Transcript, ISBN 978-3-8376-4303-9 (paperback), 96 pages

Julia Pauli's book merges two current debates, namely the debate on the emerging, African middle class and the debate on the global decline of marriage. Julia Pauli studies the downward statistical trend of marriages through the lens of social differentiation and the *New Kinship* debate, arguing that the *Decline of Marriage* manifests itself differently within the various, clearly defined social strata of Namibia. The argument is laid out on about 250 pages and the book is organised in three parts: The first part reflects on the fieldwork conducted in Fransfontein, a small settlement in the northwest of Namibia, and on the settlement's post-apartheid livelihood. The second, and slightly shorter part, discusses the value of marriages in the past and today, while the third part describes the situation of those who form families outside marriage. A compendious conclusion follows.

The theoretical underpinnings of the work are already presented in the introduction. They lie in the scholarship of Pierre Bourdieu, whose theories Pauli also problematises. Her Bourdieuan examination of class distinction forms the backdrop upon which her book is painted (pp. 18–21). She critically engages with the economic history of Namibia and its long colonial occupation and Apartheid. During these periods, a black elite emerged, but the formation of a black middle class is a more recent development, as Pauli shows (pp. 22–24; 111–118). The author has legitimate objections to Bourdieu's all too static theories, which do not do justice to the economic, political and social upheavals that have taken place in Namibia over the last fifty years. Bourdieu's theories do not account for the context of genesis under which social classes originally formed in Namibia and the immense possibility for people to experience both social rise and fall. Pauli vigorously argues that Namibian social structure is much more heterogeneous and fluid than the social structure of mid-twentieth century France Bourdieu described.

The first part of the book also includes an in-depth discussion of its expanded triangulation of research methods. The thoroughly assembled group of interviewees of various age ranges prove that a differentiated, long-term perspective on age is worth exploring. Most of the interviewees born between 1915 and 1944 were married, while only a third of interviewees born between 1945 and 1964 were married. For those born in 1965 and later years, only 11 per cent were married, however, some may eventually marry (p. 70ff). In addition to the detailed ethnographies of women from all three age



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groups, Pauli's geographical survey of the town of Fransfontein is quite impressive. For example, the homes of unmarried women are usually on smaller plots of land to the southeast of the town than of married women. For married couples, the husband is typically the head of the household, though the cartography shows numerous femilocal households (p. 116).

In the empirical parts two and three, various aspects of marriage are examined: stability, break, change, plurality, and exclusiveness. In opposition to classic kinship theories, Pauli argues in the second part of the book that marriage in Namibia is not generally regarded as important or necessary for older and younger generations alike, though marriage manifests itself differently with respect to social class. For the elder generation, the wedding celebration was modest, while today a lavish wedding ceremony is a public display of status and wealth few can afford (pp. 189ff, 252). The marriage between two members of the elite is still a very important life event not least for establishing the line inheritance. Additionally, the middle class has developed a new festivity, which honours a kind of accomplishment; women who have not had children by their twenty-first birthday receive *the key*. *The key* is a rite of passage into the age in which motherhood is desired, which correlates motherhood with the biological age, rather than marriage. This disentanglement of reproduction and marriage is not exclusive to the middle class, as the third part shows. The bond between mother and child, for instance, is much stronger than the alliance of marriage. For older generations, mothers had multiple children with the same partner. Conversely, younger women are more likely to engage in "polyandric motherhood" (Guyer 1994 in Pauli 2019: 209) by having children from different fathers, which creates a larger lateral support network. Therefore, marriage declines partly out of choice (p. 242ff), partly due to economic changes commenced in the late 1970s (pp. 189, 260).

Overall, I enjoyed reading this detailed and well-arranged ethnography. My critique concerns Pauli's theoretical approach. The author asks how Bourdieu's thinking can be fruitfully applied to the Namibian lifeworlds (p. 20). That being asked, anthropological research projects conducted in the past twenty years that have not cited and referenced Bourdieuan sociology are a rarity; yet at the same time, projects that have critiqued the limited applicability of his work are equally uncommon. Even though Bourdieu's work is essentially required reading for anthropologists, he is not a canonised theorist on middle classes in the Global South.

Addressing an interdisciplinary readership, Pauli's discussion on the middle class is somewhat mercurial. Pauli's research, which took place between 2003 and 2006, was not originally focussed on social stratification and classes as the methods section suggests. Yet, it should be stated that the anthropological involvement in the interdisciplinary debate on African middle classes first arose after Pauli's study was concluded. When reading the book, one has the sneaking suspicion that the middle class debate was added retroactively to the manuscript. Therefore, some chapters focus more on class than others. Nevertheless, the book has the potential to be well received by a diverse range of interdisciplinary readers, though at the same time foreknowledge of kinship terminology is recommended.

I enjoyed reading the chapter on methods in particular. The connection that Pauli draws between ethnography, geography, and demographic data is a both pleasant and informative read. Moreover, the chapter encapsulated very practical questions asked by Pauli. For example, she discusses how fieldwork with a family opens doors for research and she acknowledges her data collection in a team including family members and research assistants (p. 57ff). In the era of Data Property Rights, every anthropologist should take to heart how jointly collected data should be handled (see also Curtis 2019). The way local research partners, family members, and colleagues who assist in data generation and analysis are included in the publication and presentation of the research is an important part of any anthropological undertaking.

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