The female side of male patronage:  
Gender perspectives on elite formation processes in Northwest Namibia*  

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Abstract
Research on the emergence of elite cultures in Namibia has rarely taken gender into account. In my contribution, I focus on the entanglements between specific male patronage structures that have developed in Fransfontein, then Damaraland, since the 1970s and the emergence of a female middle class supported by these male ‘big men’, locally called kai aogu. From the 1970s onwards a considerable number of women in the area received jobs in newly built government institutions (e.g. schools, hostels, health stations) as domestic workers. As the analysis reveals, this phenomenon is limited to women who were in their twenties and thirties during the 1970s and 1980s. Biographic data indicates that many of these women were the lovers of local kai aogu and received their jobs through male patronage. Today these women constitute a female middle class between the economic elite and the vast majority of the population with no permanent income or employment. The contribution traces the development of these class structures from a gender perspective, thus shedding light on female dimensions to male patronage.

Introduction
During a visit to Windhoek in the summer of 2005 we met a very impressive and eloquent businesswoman, herself married to an influential manager.1 She explained to us that her husband’s success was also her success: “You know, behind every strong man there is a strong woman.”2 A couple of days later we left Windhoek and travelled to the rural community of Fransfontein to do six weeks of fieldwork, following up on our earlier long-term stay of one and a half years in 2003 and 2004. In the following weeks the businesswoman’s phrase resonated in my head. Indeed, the local elite men I encountered, mainly teachers, traditional authorities, a few administrators and some

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1 Michael Schnegg and I carried out fieldwork together.

2 As a Google search easily demonstrates, today this is an almost global phrase. A year after our encounter with the Namibian businesswoman I met an Indian banker, married to an important Indian politician. She used the same phrase to describe her husband’s success.

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wealthy pastoralists, were all married to strong women. However, these were not the only women ‘behind’ the strong, i.e. influential and wealthy, men. As life narratives, participant observations and reproductive histories clearly show, in Fransfontein (and very likely also elsewhere in Namibia) behind most strong men there are many women! Unlike the vast majority of the local population the elite men of Fransfontein are all married.3 Additionally, local elite men father many children with other women who are not their wives but their lovers.4

In my article I focus on this female side of male power. Overall, gender is rarely an issue in Namibian elite research.5 Whether the focus lies mainly on ‘traditional forms’ of leadership and power, e.g. chiefs and other traditional authorities,6 or on the interaction between ‘traditional forms’ of leaderships and what Gerhard Tötemeyer has labelled the ‘modernizing élites’, i.e. elites that have emerged with and through the colonial state, especially teachers, clergy and officials/clerks,7 an understanding of gender roles and relations is almost completely absent. Similarly, research in which Namibian postcolonial

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5 Heike Becker’s research is an important exception, especially her work on gender and traditional authorities (Heike Becker, “‘New things after independence’: gender and traditional authorities in postcolonial Namibia”, Journal of Southern African Studies, 2006, 32 (1): 29-48). However, Becker does not focus on class and elite formation processes.


(and colonial) elites are criticized as corrupt and inefficient also lacks a gender perspective.\(^8\)

What one does find are some general remarks that ‘now’ a few women have been appointed into influential positions. Gerhard Tötemeyer writes in his groundbreaking analysis of ‘traditional’ and ‘modernizing’ elites in Ovamboland about the composition of the Third Legislative Council elected in 1975: “It was the first time that women were elected to the Council.”\(^9\) Unfortunately, no further information on gender is provided.\(^10\)

However, Tötemeyer’s analysis can hardly be criticized for lacking a gender perspective given that his research predates the emergence of gender as a central category and perspective in the humanities. Yet, later work on elites in Namibia is not very different from Tötemeyer’s earlier approach. In his analysis of Rundu elites and the institution of the esimbi (big man) and quasi-esimbi Mattia Fumanti observes: “Access to the status of big-man in an urban context is no longer a prerogative of males since a number of women are recognized as ‘big-persons’”.\(^11\) Yet, apart from acknowledging that there are some female ‘big-persons’ gender is not discussed any further. Equally, in Fumanti’s extensive description of the burial of E.S., a very influential man from Rundu, even E.S.’s father-in-law, himself powerful, receives some analytic attention but gender is never an issue.\(^12\)

Finally, in his research on power, politics and history of chiefship in Kaokoland John T. Friedman dedicates exactly one footnote to the issue of gender:

> I should qualify my use of the phrase ‘Kaokolanders often represented’. More often, it was generally men, middle-aged and old men, knowledgeable men, wealthy men, male leaders, and the power elite (a few of whom were women) that generated discourses on the two opposing groups and the dispute, and not ‘Kaokolanders’, per se. Kaokoland’s political order is a patriarchal political order, and the Kaoko factional dispute does indeed reflect this gender stratification. Most Kaokoland women neither actively engage in, nor even possess knowledge about, the conflict.\(^13\)

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9 Tötemeyer, Namibia : 69.

10 In a footnote (footnote 9, page 227) Tötemeyer gives some information on his informants. However, information on their gender is not provided, thus one does not know how many, if any, female teachers, religious leaders, traders etc. were interviewed. Given that the analysis of the book consists largely of the perceptions of these members of the elite who were interviewed this lack of information is deplorable.


12 Fumanti, “Burying”. Fumanti mentions Ms. C., a fellow ‘graduate and educationalist’ of E.S., which indicates that there are at least some female elite members (ibid.: 473).

13 Friedman, “Making”: 45.
I would question this assumed absence of women and gender relations in elite formation, politics and activities. On the one hand all research cited above acknowledges the participation of at least some women albeit without going into the details of their participation. Thus, in-depth research on Namibian female leaders and female participation in the elite formation process and politics would be a very valuable extension of existing Namibian elite research. On the other hand, unlike prominent female politicians publicly less visible women might also be affected by male elite behaviour, especially male patronage. The lives of these women might be substantially influenced and altered because of their interactions with male patrons. These effects of male elite formation and behaviour will be the focus of my contribution.

I want to focus especially on the so-called ‘outside’ wives of influential men in the area and try to understand the long-term consequences of their relationships with powerful patrons. In the 1970s, a significant number of women in the Fransfontein area received jobs in government institutions like schools and hostels as domestic workers. I will show that this phenomenon is limited to women who were in their twenties and thirties during the 1970s and 1980s. As my biographic data indicates, many of these women received their jobs through male patronage (as lovers and/or political supporters of powerful male patrons in the 1970s and 1980s). Remarkably, today, most of the women live rather independently from their former male patrons and lovers. Thanks to their permanent income they are living a relatively comfortable life, forming a kind of ‘middle class’ in-between the administrative, political and pastoral elites and the majority of the population with no permanent income.

My approach will thus be twofold. Firstly, the emergence of a new type of elite during the 1970s and 1980s in Damaraland and especially Fransfontein will be outlined. Secondly, I will describe how these males, who have been influential since the 1970s, had relationships with women other than their official wives and present some of the long-term consequences of these relationships.

The findings presented here are based on 20 months of field work in Fransfontein and its surroundings, known today Kunene South (pre 1990 ‘Damaraland’), Northwest


15 A complementary approach would be to focus on the wives of the powerful male elite. Interestingly, many of them classify themselves as ‘housewives’, a classification which only emerged with the spread of the ‘modernizing’ elites in the 1970s (see below and Pauli, Celebrating; chapter 3).
Namibia.\textsuperscript{16} Fransfontein is approximately 500 kilometres from the country’s capital Windhoek. Together with my colleague and husband Michael Schnegg and our daughter Liliana, I lived and worked in the area from May 2003-September 2004, August-September 2005 and August-September 2006.\textsuperscript{17}

**Fransfontein’s ongoing elite formation**

One could divide the history of Fransfontein since the beginning of the German occupation of Namibia (then called ‘Southwest Africa’) in the second half of the 19th century into four (overlapping) phases: 1. the foundation of the Fransfontein community in 1891; 2. the creation of a so called reserve and the expansion of ‘white’ settlements around 1900; 3. the establishment of Apartheid and the homeland policies since the 1960s; 4. Independence in 1990 and postcolonial livelihoods.

The community of Fransfontein was founded around 1891 by a group of Nama pastoralists from Southern Namibia.\textsuperscript{18} First under German colonial rule and then, after the end of World War I, under South African colonial rule (as a mandatory power) the local population was forced to work on the commercial farms of the growing white settler community. These ‘white’ farms were the former grazing lands of the indigenous population that had been gradually expropriated, starting around 1900 and continuing until mid century.\textsuperscript{19} While the land of white settlers continued to expand, the indigenous

\textsuperscript{16} For all their support and for making this study possible, I would like to thank the people of the Fransfontein region. Valery Meyer, Emma IUiras, Francois Dawids, Jorries Seibeb, and Reinhardt Haraeb have been great research assistants. I would like to thank them for the time and thought they put into this research project.

\textsuperscript{17} For further information on the ethnographic background of the Fransfontein region and our fieldwork cf. Pauli, *Celebrating*: chapter 2 and 3. Our research has been part of the interdisciplinary research project ACACIA (SFB 389) headed by Prof. Dr. Michael Bollig, based at the Universities of Cologne and Bonn, Germany and funded by the German National Science Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*). In Namibia, Prof. Dr. Christo Botha from the UNAM was our point of contact and provided very important assistance. On many occasions Dr. Beatrice Sandelowsky (TUCSIN) supported our research project and local members of the research team. Martina Gockel-Frank and Clemens Greiner joint our project in 2005 and provided many stimulating ideas and ethnographic observations. Their research results on migration and HIV/AIDS complement our findings (cf. Martina Gockel-Frank, “Contraceptive use among women in Namibia. A case study of Khorixas, Kunene South”, *Journal of Namibia Studies*, 2009, 6: 27-55; Clemens Greiner, *Zwischen Ziegenkraal und Township. Migrationsprozesse in Nordwest-Namibia*, Berlin, Reimer, 2008).


population was forced into what were at the time termed ‘reserves’. Thus, the lives of the eldest generation of Fransfonteiners we interviewed were characterized by experiences of extreme loss of both movement and property. This generation had to endure the establishment of a reserve by the Germans in 1905, the continuous deprivation of land and autonomy, and were forced to work for white farmers. Up until the 1960s “blacks in Namibia were totally excluded from all positions of influence or authority within the Namibian polity.”

People were forced to work as unskilled labourers, in the case of Fransfontein’s eldest generation as workers on white settlement farms. However, for the eldest generation of Fransfonteiners the lines of confrontation did not yet divide indigenous ethnic groups but rather those perceived as the ‘natives’ from the ‘white settlers’: “Apart from a few piecemeal exceptions, rural reserves were not intended to be confined to particular ethnic groups until the Odendaal Plan was tabled in the early 1960s.”

What Kössler, borrowing the concept from Maré, describes as Apartheid’s strategy to construct a “politicised ethnicity” thoroughly changed the structure of indigenous Namibian communities.

The division into ethnic groups, so central to the construction of Apartheid, not only resulted in the creation of ‘politicised ethnicity’ between ethnic groups but also initiated processes of internal stratification within ethnic groups. After Namibia’s full administrative ‘integration’ into the Republic of South Africa in the late 1950s and 1960s the country was administered as a fifth province by South Africa. This annexation also implied the establishment of Apartheid and the creation of ‘homelands’ based on ethnic criteria in Namibia. To achieve this, the so-called ‘Odendaal commission’ was created in 1962. Because of international criticism, the implementation of the commission’s suggestions, summarized in the ‘Odendaal plan’, did not start until the end of the 1960s. The commission suggested the creation of ten ethnically homogeneous and self-administered ‘homelands’, among these ‘Damaraland’, including the Fransfontein reserve.

With the establishment of homelands new bureaucratic structures emerged. For Ovamboland, Gerhard Tötemeyer differentiates between different types of elites: on the

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23 I thank Clemens Greiner and the anonymous reviewers for their comments on these developments.
one hand the ‘modernizing’ elites, qualified through (Western types of) education and consisting of teachers, religious leaders, officials/clerks and nurses; on the other hand ‘traditional’ elites, i.e. traditional leaders and traders, often lacking any Western type of education. As Tötemeyer demonstrates in great detail the Ovamboland legislative councils were dominated by traditional leaders and traders. However, Tötemeyer also mentions the increasing influence of the modernizing elites. Writing about the Kavango, Fumanti describes a certain occupational fluidity as many later politicians started as teachers. The disparities between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ types of elites might also be a question of generation, as Fumanti’s work indicates.

Tötemeyer’s classification is also helpful in understanding the dynamics of elite formation in Fransfontein. Although ‘modernizing elites’ existed before the establishment of the homelands in the 1970s and 1980s, they were very small in numbers. The establishment of Fransfontein as a community in 1891 was linked to the building of a protestant church. In the first half of the twentieth century the church also hosted a small school, hostel and a small health station with one nurse. Thus a small ‘modernizing’ elite of priests, religious teachers and nurses existed before Apartheid. But the establishment of Damaraland greatly increased this ‘modernizing elite’. Beginning in the 1960s new buildings, like health stations and schools, were built in the Damaraland’s administrative capital Khorixas and – to a lesser extent – also in smaller communities like Fransfontein. In Fransfontein, the Frans-Frederik primary school was inaugurated in 1964. In 1980, a new state financed hostel replaced the old, smaller Fransfontein hostel. Additionally, a large community hall was built in 1978. In 1981, a health station was also built in Fransfontein. Thus, between the mid 1960s and the beginning of the 1980s many new jobs were created in Fransfontein. This enlarged on the one hand the ‘modernizing elite’ as new teachers, clerks and health personnel were employed. On the other hand low paying jobs requiring fewer qualifications, especially as domestic servants, also became available. In the following paragraph I will analyze these kinds of occupation in more detail.

Like the ‘modernizing elites’ the political elites also had antecedents before Apartheid and built on previous structures of ‘traditional’ leadership and authority. Yet similar to the quantitative extension of the ‘modernizing’ elites the number of people who were able to work as ‘traditional’ leaders and councillors greatly increased with the establishment of new bureaucratic structures in the 1970s and 1980s. It took until 1978 to set up a ‘second tier authority’ in Damaraland. In 1985, the Damara Council

26 Tötemeyer, Namibia.


28 These effects were even stronger in Khorixas, the administrative capital of Damaraland. There four primary schools and two secondary schools, all with adjacent hostels, and one hospital all opened between 1968 and 1982! I thank Martina Gockel-Frank for collecting these data on Khorixas.
finally codified the structure of a ‘tribal authority’.\(^{29}\) The first so-called ‘Bantustan-elections’ were held in 1978 in Damaraland. However, these elections were boycotted by all political groups except for the Damara United Front which was linked to the South-African backed Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). Then, in 1980, an overwhelming majority voted for the Damara Council under the new Paramount chief, Justus Garoeb. As Sian Sullivan writes, this victory marks the rise of a strong regional power built upon a rather static and historically discredited ‘tribal’ identity.\(^{30}\) The creation of a Damara Legislative Administration was based on notions of ‘traditional leadership’\(^{31}\). It consisted of an appointed chief, his deputy, headmen and councilors for Okombahe, Fransfontein and Sesfontein. Welwitschia (later called Khorixas) became the administrative seat of the regional government. The administration of the Damaraland was subdivided into 12 so-called wards (Afrikaans wyk). Fransfontein was ward nine, administered by a headman (hoofman in Afrikaans) and three councilors.

Apart from the ‘modernizing elites’ and the ‘traditional leaders’ Tötemeyer also points to the importance of the traders. A pendant to Tötemeyer’s Ovamboland observations was Khorixas councilor Simon Gobs, a Damaraland ‘big man’ or, as he was called locally in Khoekhoe-Koi aob. Gobs was a very successful business man and one of the wealthiest men in the region. In Fransfontein, most of the ‘traditional’ leaders were involved in other economic activity apart from their political commitments. Like large parts of the ‘modernizing elites’ many were raising livestock. The headman was also running a transportation business. Today Fransfontein elites still combine various economic activities, e.g. wage labour, pastoralism and small scale shop-keeping.\(^{32}\) There is no teacher and no traditional authority who is not engaged in farming.

Thus, although elite formation existed before Apartheid and the establishment of Damaraland, the phenomenon has grown. For a minority, living conditions improved significantly.\(^{34}\) For the majority, however, the situation worsened. Because of the poor


\(^{32}\) Rohde, “Nature”: 294f. Singular *kai aob*, plural (two) *kai aora*, (more than two) *kai aogu*. Khoekhoe-Koi-aob is the language spoken by the vast majority of the population.


\(^{34}\) Jauch states that “this new black elite earned salaries largely on par with those of their white counterparts and much higher than those of average black workers” (Herbert M. Jauch, *Affirmative action in Namibia. Redressing the imbalances of the past?*, Windhoek, New Namibian Books, 1998: 41). He estimates that in 1984 this class comprised approximately 15–20 percent of all indigenous households. Abrahams provides some wage specifications (Abrahams, “Waserauta”). The differences in wages in the second half of the 1970s between ‘ordinary wage-earners’ (R230 per year for ‘Blacks’, even lower for rural areas) and e.g. the chairmen of the Executive Committees of the second-tier (ethnic) Authorities (between R22.000

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quality of land out of which ‘Damaraland’ was created, the Odendaal plan itself stated that for the majority of the population survival within the homelands was impossible. For the creation of the ‘Damaraland’ 223 farms, most of them only surveyed and settled since the 1930s and mainly extensive cattle and small-stock enterprises, were bought from white owners. Unlike the 8500 hectares which were considered as a minimum of land a white farmer needed for farming, families in the newly created Damaraland had to survive on meagre 250 hectares per family. Thus many Damara speakers were not able to live in the ‘homeland’ but had to live on white commercial farms or the Windhoek Township Katutura in order to find employment.

Consequently, economic and social stratification within Fransfontein and other indigenous communities increased with Apartheid. Below I will present some data on current economic stratification. As will be seen, the contemporary distribution is not much different. Given these developments the moral dimension of elite formation and elite practices should also be discussed. Writing about Ghanaian elites Carola Lentz has cautioned against “partisan perspectives that idealise them as upholders of ‘civil society’ or condemn them as exploitative patron-bureaucrats”. This caution is also advisable when reflecting on Namibian elite formation and what has been written about it. While Tapscott, Jauch, Abrahams and Melber very critically assess the (mis)behaviour of many indigenous Namibian elites since the 1970s, Tötemeyer, Simon and Moorsom and Fumanti are much more cautious. Fumanti further stresses the and R28.000 per year), ordinary members of the (ethnic) Legislative Assemblies (between R3.000 and R5.000 per year) or teachers at high schools (R12.000 to R18.000 per year) are substantial.

35 Odendaal, Report: 93.  
36 See also Richard Rohde, Tinkering with Chaos: Towards a Communal Land Tenure Policy in Former Damaraland Windhoek, UNAM, Social Sciences Division, 1994; idem, “Nature”: 258.  
37 Alan Barnard, Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992: 213; Rohde, “Nature”: 259. This situation was comparable to the situation in other homelands: “As none of these artificially created homelands was economically viable in terms of subsistence agriculture, the inhabitants were forced to look for wage employment in order to provide for their families” (Jauch, Affirmative: 28). Cf. also Benneth Fuller’s work on Otjimbingwe (Fuller, Institutional).  
40 For myself, these reflections are an ongoing process and the comments of the three anonymous reviewers have been especially stimulating when re-thinking my own position.  
41 Abrahams, “Waserauta”; Fumanti, “Burying”; Jauch, Affirmative; Melber, Poverty; David Simon and Richard Moorsom, “Namibia’s political economy: A contemporary perspective”, in: G. Tötemeyer, V. Kandetu, and W. Werner, (eds.), Namibia in Perspective, Windhoek, The Council of Churches in Namibia, 1987: 82-101; Tapscott, “National”; idem, “War”; Tötemeyer, Namibia. The involvement of the South African state in Namibian class formation processes is another field of inquiry on which the above-mentioned authors differ. Jauch, Abrahams and especially Tapscott hold the view that with the implementation of self-governance through ‘homeland authorities’, South Africa fostered the rise of a loyal and stabilizing class within the homelands: “As in South Africa at the time, the creation of a black middle class was intended to act as a
differences between various Namibian regions regarding collaboration, cooperation and political activism of regional elites. The perception of elites also depends on the kind of research conducted. While macro approaches as undertaken by Tapscott and Jauch can be helpful to understand general tendencies, micro approaches and especially ethnographic in-depth studies such as the one conducted by Fumanti help to disentangle variations and contradictions inherent in broad and general trends. Thus, although I will argue in the following section that Apartheid’s bureaucratic structures did indeed foster a specific kind of male patronage in Fransfontein this does not mean that patrons were always exploitive. Indeed the gendered patronage structures that develop in the 1970s and 1980s might better be understood as a complex outcome of specific historical structures and agencies, leading to only partially intended and anticipated consequences, in particular the establishment of a ‘female middle class’.

**Big men in love and a ‘female middle class’**

The specific patronage structures that developed in the 1970s and 1980s operated on different levels. Through the implementation of the second-tier ethnic administrations from the 1960s onwards the new bureaucratic homeland elites had a certain autonomy regarding public funds. Although a commission of enquiry into corruption was established, misappropriations of funds were not really punished. Similar to a more general view of the role of indigenous elites during Apartheid, an evaluation of the extent of corruption is difficult and controversial. A closer look at the dynamics within Damara land reveals a rather complex picture. On the one hand, and comparable to other homelands, there are multiple accusations of corruption, e.g. buying cars without interest charges or granting oneself “inconvenience allowances” and “private construction projects”. The Damara Council was described as ‘a money picnic’, an observation based for example on the fact that the Council

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43 Not all researchers have reached the same conclusions about the extent of corruption within the homelands. Tapscott, Botha and Abrahams all stress that there was widespread corruption (Abrahams, “Waserauta”; Christo Botha, “Development”, survival and adaptation in the former Damara ‘homeland’ of Namibia”, unpubl. manuscript, s.d.; Tapscott, “National”; idem, “War”). Contrary to this, Simon and Moorsom state that only “a handful of pro-South African black politicians and well-off stock-farmers have used their control over state finance not only to raise their standard of living but also to channel resources into their enterprises (for instance, drought relief) and to acquire means of production (for instance, white ranches)” (Simon and Moorsom, “Namibia’s”: 85). It is very likely that corruption varied in the different homelands. Thus, future research should analyze this question from a comparative perspective.

44 Botha, “Development”.

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overspent the given budget of 20 million Rand in 1982-3 by 9 million Rand. On the other hand there was also an awareness of the administrative problems within the Damara Council. In the 1980s, the chairman of the Damara Executive Committee, King Justus Garoeb, admitted that his administration lacked good administrators and was not able to deal with the influx of 28,000 people into Damaraland. Garoeb also pointed out the difficulties in the interaction with white officials. In several instances, for example regarding the resettlement of Riemvasmaker people in Damaraland, South Africa had failed to consult the Damara Council.

It is remarkable that despite of the strong increase in internal stratification described in the previous section and multiple accusations of corruption the Damara council was nevertheless supported by most of the Damara-speaking population of the region. According to Sian Sullivan, the Damara Council was viewed as rather successful by the local population prior to Independence for two reasons: 1. Its ability to redistribute wealth to the wards was positively perceived and 2. The Council’s attempts to overcome historically ingrained negative stereotypes of the Damara people without compromising support for the nationalistic ideology of SWAPO were positively valued.

An example of a rather positive evaluation of a Damaraland patron, ‘big man’ or, in Khoekhoegowab, a kai aob is the above-mentioned Damara councilor and successful businessman Simon Gobs who died in 1985. According to Richard Rohde Gobs has been variously described as either a kind of Damara Robin Hood or as a corrupt politician and petty criminal. Gobs drove a big Mercedes Benz and newspapers from the 1980s describe him as the best dressed man in Damaraland. Remarkably, Gobs’ grandeur was not viewed as elitist snobism but, quite the contrary, was widely admired as an expression of his ability to take advantage of the white Apartheid regime. This positive evaluation of its ‘big men’ by the local population can also be seen in the political continuity of most of the main actors to this day. Rohde has observed that “several of his [i.e. Simon Gobs’, J.P.] more discreet political associates, less flamboyant kai aob...”
including King Justus IGaroeb and the present regional councillor for Khorixas district Simson Tjongerero have remained in political office since that time. The resistance discourse was backed-up by complex patronage structures. Because of their positions, ward leaders, councilors and other administrators had access to important resources such as drought relief and many other rights and privileges. Ward leaders and councilors were consulted on questions of residence and disputes over access to land. These disputes were rarely taken above ward level. The ward’s authority also served symbolic and organizational functions: “Within the impoverished economy of Damaraland, networks of patronage associated with administratively legitimized leaders and their mediation in issues of access to the few resources available was highly significant within the homeland system.” Jobs were probably one of the most important assets the new patrons had to distribute. Sullivan describes the “flow of patronage to the newly created wards in the form of legitimate government payments for the administrative services of their headmen and councillors, and the distribution of pensions and wages through this local power structure”. As I have outlined in the previous section, with the establishment of Damaraland several new buildings, such as health stations, schools and hostels, were constructed. In Fransfontein, a primary school, a new state financed hostel, a large community hall and a health station were all built between the mid 1960s and the beginning of the 1980s. Thus, both in Fransfontein and Khorixas job opportunities significantly increased. These new jobs were a central element in the emerging patronage systems. Through the local power structures, employment was distributed. Rohde underlines that this also legitimized the positions of the tribal authority. Werner equally stresses that “tribal leaders utilised their access to state authority and funds to expand their support.” Yet the patrons, the kai aogu, received more than political support and loyalty. Often, they also received love and children. The gender dimension of their patronage behaviour has rarely been explored. In all of the newly built institutions, i.e. the hostel, school and health station, young, unskilled women were employed as cleaners, cooks or hostel matrons. Many of them were lovers of influential kai aogu.

Hertha’s story of how she received a lifelong occupation as one of the domestic workers in the Fransfontein school hostel highlights this central feature of the economic and

50 Ibid.: 296.
51 Although these powers were not ‘legal’ (ibid.: 262).
52 Ibid.
53 Sullivan, “Communalization”: 23.
54 Sullivan, “Communalization”.
56 Werner, “Ethnicity”: 76.
57 It would be interesting to analyze the geographic distribution of these relationships. Our impression is that quite a number of big men from Khorixas, the former administrative seat of Damaraland, had ‘outside-marriage’ relations in nearby Fransfontein (approximately 30 kilometres away from Khorixas).
social dynamics of the patronage networks. Hertha was born in the mid 1950s in another Namibian town. As a teenager she came to Fransfontein and also went to school there. However, she did not finish school. At the age of 17 and in grade 7 she dropped out of school because she was pregnant with her daughter. The baby-girl was taken away from her by her family and grew up with the father’s family. In 1974 Hertha became pregnant again and lost the baby. Around that time she started dating one of the local big men. She was in her mid twenties and full of admiration for the older, married man. He treasured her beauty and her youth. In 1978, she became pregnant by this influential kai aob. At the same time through her influential lover’s help she also gained employment in the hostel — first as maternity cover (although pregnant herself!) and then, after the birth of her child, as a permanently employed domestic worker. The relationship with the kai aob did not last much longer after the birth of the child. However, the kai aob’s child is the only one of her children who ever received maintenance by the father. The four fathers of her other four children never paid any maintenance and Hertha did not sue them. Today, Hertha enjoys being economically independent. Although she does not earn a lot she is happy with her permanent income as a hostel worker. She has a small, but well-kept house. She says that she never wanted to marry any of the fathers of her other children. According to Hertha, that would have only meant an extra mouth to feed and the end of her economic independence. I then asked her if she would have married the kai aob. With reluctance she said, probably, but he was already married when she met him.

Like Hertha many young women in the 1970s and 1980s were lovers of influential men of the homeland’s administration. One of the ward’s council’s members, now in his late fifties, provided us with information about all the children he knows he fathered. In total, he knows of 20 children he had with 11 women, one of them his wife (with her he has five children). Most of his children were born during the 1970s and 1980s. However, not all women who gave birth to children of big men, kai aogu, were supported the same way as Hertha. Some received smaller favours and some hardly received anything at all. Furthermore, not all women who were lucky enough to receive work in the 1970s and 1980s were lovers of influential big men. Jana, born in the mid 1950s, started

58 All names of persons not holding public offices are pseudonyms. I have also changed some of the biographic information to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors.
60 This does not mean that such gender relations ceased after Independence in 1990. Furthermore, not only kai aogu of the new administrative structures had lovers and out-of-wedlock children. Men of the ‘modernizing elites’, especially teachers, acted very similar to the political kai aogu.
61 Although I am absolutely aware of various forms of exploitation and violence that some of the lovers of big men had suffered, I do not analyze these exploitive dimensions of the male patron-female lover relationships here because of the focus of my argument.
working as a hostel cleaner in the 1980s. She had been a UDF (United Democratic Front, the party lead by Damara Council’s head Justus Garoeb) member for some time. Every time she met Garoeb at one of the meetings she begged him for work and stressed that she had always been loyal to him and the party. Eventually, Jana says, he pitied her so much that he gave her the work. It was not only women but also a few men who received job favours from the kai aogu, e.g. a job as toilet cleaner or janitor. But most of the permanent, albeit low-paying jobs the patrons gave away were given to young women who were often their lovers. The following table 1 indicates how much the employment as a hostel and school cleaner is bound to two specific birth cohorts, i.e. women born between 1945-1954 and 1955-1964.

Table 1: 
Occupation of 380 women by birth cohorts, Fransfontein region, July 2004 (raw frequencies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Cohorts</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Hostel worker</th>
<th>Other GRN employees</th>
<th>Housewife</th>
<th>Penny Economy</th>
<th>Pensioner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1915–1924</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925–1934</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935–1944</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945–1954</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955–1964</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-1974</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1984</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1994</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum</strong></td>
<td>380</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of all 25 women who found employment in the hostel and school 22 were born between 1945 and 1964. Furthermore, a quarter of the women born between 1945 and 1954 and a fifth of the women born between 1955-1964 have worked or are working for the hostel or school compared to almost no women in theses occupations in earlier or later cohorts. All of the women were hired in the 1970s and 1980s and were then in their twenties and thirties. Most of them had children by men from the homeland’s administration who were influential at that time. There is only one woman born before 1945 who has worked in the hostel. She has already retired but I have listed her under the hostel worker column. Women in the ‘pensioner’ category have never been employed as hostel workers or at any other government institution such as the health station or the school. I have summarized the state financed occupations, e.g. teaching.

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62 Every Namibian who reaches the age of 60 is entitled to receive a monthly pension. During our main fieldwork time in 2003 and 2004 the amount was N$250 per month.
and nursing, under the column ‘other GRN employees’. Not surprisingly, as with the emergence of hostel workers better paid positions requiring higher qualifications e.g. teachers, nurses and administrators also became more common in the 1970s and 1980s. I have entered almost two thirds of all women into the ‘penny economy’ category. This is of course a very broad category, including diverse occupations such as taking in clothes for washing, collecting fire wood, working temporarily for commercial farmers, working as a pastoralist, helping in the mother’s household etc. Elsewhere I have discussed these different occupations in detail.

Only two women born after 1964 have been hired as hostel workers. Almost all younger women never had a chance to work in this sector — all positions were occupied before they came of age. Today, the rather inflated Fransfontein hostel and school sector is no longer expanding but rather being cut back. As the narration of Hertha’s love and occupation history has already indicated, the cohort employment pattern that becomes visible in the above table underlines that hostel work was one of the central modes of exchange between the kai angu and part of the local female population. Through hostel work the women received a certain degree of economic security and autonomy, most often in exchange for love and children.

The table also shows the rise of ‘housewives’. The discourse surrounding these married women is that they do not have to work because their influential and relatively wealthy husbands provide for them. Elsewhere I have analyzed the marriage transformations in detail. Here, I only want to comment briefly on the entanglements between male patrons, their wives and their lovers (who sometimes became hostel workers). Splendid and expensive weddings were first celebrated in the 1970s. In fact, the above-mentioned member of the ward council, who fathered 20 children with 11 women, was one of the first people in the area to celebrate a large, sumptuous wedding in the mid 1970s. He married a former hostel worker who, after getting married, stopped working and became a ‘housewife’. Thus, one might argue that the male patrons of that time were very privileged — in opulent weddings they married their wives and at the same time continued their relationships with the other women with whom they also had children. Thus while the local big men thrived, those whom Rohde has termed ‘small men’, i.e. men without permanent and secure employment, lost out significantly.

Their chances of ever financing one of the increasingly more expensive weddings fell dramatically. Only recently has the postcolonial disempowerment of large portions of the

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63 GRN is an abbreviation for government.
64 Pauli, Celebrating: chapter 3.
male population become a topic in African gender studies.\textsuperscript{67} For Damaraland, Fuller states:

Unemployed young men are unable to gather the necessary wealth — animals for slaughter, traditional beer and store bought liquor, a dress for the bride, and food for the reception — that a marriage requires. As a result, sexual unions remain informal, lacking the consent of the community.\textsuperscript{68}

As I have analyzed elsewhere, the majority (71 percent) of the hostel workers has remained unmarried.\textsuperscript{69} All of them have children with both \textit{kai aogu} and ‘small men’. Only those who managed to marry ‘up’, i.e. married one of the local \textit{kai aogu}, decided to tie the knot. In my biographic interviews all other unmarried hostel workers were very outspoken in their refusal to marry a man ‘without money’. This is already an indication of a certain class consciousness. For example, Susan, a woman born at the end of the 1940s and employed as a hostel worker, describes her economic situation as being ‘in between’ and ‘in the middle’, i.e. she thinks that she is neither rich nor poor. As the following table 2 demonstrates this is a rather precise description of the current economic status of the hostel workers.

In table 2 only households of the community of Fransfontein itself are included. For the surrounding communal area Michael Schnegg has analyzed the processes of economic stratification in detail.\textsuperscript{70} As indicators for economic stratification table 2 presents the occupation of the Fransfontein household heads, their gender and the distribution of several selected consumption items. The classification of occupations slightly varies from the previous classification in table 1. The category ‘housewife’ is excluded (there are no housewives as household heads) while the category ‘other GRN employees’ is subdivide into three categories: teacher/nurse, traditional authority and local GRN/police.

On the basis of the occupations of the Fransfontein household heads presented in table 2 one might subdivide the 129 Fransfontein households into three groups: wealthy elite households, middle class households and low to no permanent income households.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{68} Fuller, \textit{Institutional}: 297.
\textsuperscript{69} Pauli, \textit{Celebrating}; idem, “(Re)producing”.
\textsuperscript{70} Schnegg, “Combination”.
\textsuperscript{71} One might argue that the occupation of only the household head is not enough to classify the households. Other household members might have additional sources of income that could change the picture. However, additional information on other household members — especially conjugal partners and children — only underscore the results presented here. For instance, most teachers are married to other teachers and their children receive excellent education opportunities qualifying them for equally well paying occupations, while the economic activities of household members from households with heads living on penny economic activities are comparable to those of the head.
Table 2:
Occupation and gender of household head and consumption patterns (Fransfontein households only, July 2004, N=129)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation of the household head</th>
<th>Proportion of Fransfontein households</th>
<th>Proportion headed by women (in percent)</th>
<th>Consumption items per household (in percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Nurse</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trad. authorities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4,6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local GRN/police</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7,0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostel worker</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12,4</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny economy</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>52,7</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioner</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19,4</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All households</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first three rows of table 2, i.e. teachers and nurses, the traditional authorities and the employees of the local government and police, all have relatively high and permanent incomes. The salary of traditional authorities slightly deviates from this pattern. At approximately 1000 Namibian Dollars it is not much higher than the salaries earned by hostel workers. However, most traditional authorities can count on further income sources, especially through their ownership of livestock. That traditional authorities form part of the economic elite is also clearly underscored by the consumption patterns shown in table 2. Like teachers and other government employees the overwhelming majority of traditional authorities have electricity in their homes and own a TV, a fridge and at least one car (several of the traditional authorities actually own more than one car). In sum, only 16 percent of all households fall into this category of wealthy elite households.

A middle category consists of the households of the hostel workers (cf. table 2). This also the category with by far the highest proportion of female heads: 88 percent of these households are headed by unmarried women. With approximately 700 Namibian Dollars income per month ownership of commodity goods among these 12 percent of the Fransfontein households is much more limited than among the wealthy elite households. Yet, as table 2 shows ownership is average (fridge) or even above average (TV). Vehicles, though, are rarely owned by hostel workers. The majority of these households occupy houses with electricity, often constructed by the government. However, overall this is a very small middle class. The last group consists of households with low

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72 The relatively low percentages of car ownership for police and local government stem from the fact that some of the household heads falling into this category have access to government vehicles.

73 16 percent is the sum of the first three rows of table 2 in round figures.
or no income on a regular basis. 72 percent of all Fransfontein households fall into this category. As table 2 shows, here one finds on the one hand households headed by pensioners and on the other hand those Fransfontein households that have to live on penny economic activities. The overwhelming majority of these households (88 percent) do not have access to electricity. Almost all of these households occupy so-called ‘traditional mud houses’.74 Consequently, only very few of these households own a fridge or a TV.75 Although still below average the number of car owners is relatively high. However, most of the cars owned by this economically marginalized group are both very old and rusty or not in use at all. This stands in stark contrast to the luxurious and expensive Toyotas and Nissans owned by the wealthy elite.

Thus, although there have been tremendous political transformations since the 1970s and 1980s, in particular Independence in 1990, the female middle class of hostel workers has managed to maintain and consolidate its status.76 Consequently, an important question for the future will be to what extent this temporary middle class, i.e. a middle class that is almost completely bound to a specific historical situation and consists of women of just two birth cohorts, might transform into a longer-term middle class.

Conclusion
The gradual implementation of Apartheid in ‘Damaraland’ since approximately the beginning of the 1970s strongly shaped already ongoing processes of elite formation. While previous ‘modernizing’ and ‘political’ elites had been rather small in number, the new bureaucratic structures significantly enlarged the group of influential big men, locally called *kaiaogu*. These male patrons of the 1970s and 1980s were certainly not pursuing a hidden female empowerment agenda when they supported their female lovers with permanent income possibilities as domestic workers in the local school and hostel. However, such gendered patronage structures had the effect of establishing a rather singular group of economically independent women. As the analysis has revealed, the female hostel/school workers constitute a sort of middle class in between the economic elites and the vast majority of the population with no permanent income and employment. The women have also been able to maintain their status to this day, long after the end of their relationships with the powerful patrons. As my analysis of the hostel/school workers shows, they are indeed rather autonomous in many important dimensions of their lives, e.g. in their decision to remain single and resolute against the idea of marrying a man below their own economic status. However, given the origins of

74 Pauli, “Gendered”.
75 In these cases the electronic equipment is powered by solar energy.
76 Similarly, despite these significant political transformations, many of the former homeland big men continue to hold public offices and authority (Rohde, “Nature”: 296; cf. also Tapscott, “War”; Werner “Ethnicity”).
their economic independence, i.e. being the young lovers of powerful, elder men, their life trajectories do not suit simple “feminist fables”.77

“Behind every strong man there is a strong woman” the successful businesswoman introduced at the beginning of the article explained to us. This phrase indicates that the success of a man is not only the result of his own struggle but that he is embedded in a wider conjugal structure that makes his achievements possible. However, at least for the situation examined here, the embedding of male success and elite behaviour is much more complex than just one strong woman. There can be no doubt that many of the local elite patrons did and do receive much support from their wives. However, additionally they also received love and support from women other than their wives. These women in turn benefited from the help of their powerful lovers. Furthermore, the female lovers were also involved in relationships with other men besides their influential kai aogu. Behind these women, therefore, there is not just one strong man but many. Thus, what emerges is a complex gendered network of giving and taking. The businesswoman was right to stress the gender embedding of male success and her remark could be an inspiration for future Namibian elite research which often lacks a gender perspective. However, it might not only be the relation between one man and one woman that can help to explain how elite formation shapes gender and vice versa. Sometimes, as in the Fransfontein case, thinking in gendered networks might be the more appropriate way for understanding.

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