

**The key to fertility.
Generation, reproduction and elite formation in a
Namibian community**

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Abstract

If the reproduction of elites differs from other socio-economic groups has been scrutinized in various cultural and historical contexts. While some studies have found that elites are forerunners of demographic change others question the overall relevance of economic status differences to explain demographic transitions. Based on long-term ethnographic and demographic data collected since 2003 in Fransfontein, a rural community in the former Namibian "Damaraland", I want to describe how fertility started to decline since approximately the 1970s. During the same time period, the establishment of infrastructure and bureaucracy within the newly found homeland fostered the emergence of a small indigenous elite of professionals and businessmen. Among this elite, new gender roles like the housewife appeared. The fertility of this first generation of elite women, however, does not decline and is thus no explanation for the decrease in the number of children born since the 1970s. Contrary to this, the daughters of the first generation of elite women have indeed changed their reproductive behavior. For this elite generation, a delay of the first pregnancy and first birth is embedded into new images of the self and the future and a change in consumption habits and life styles. The symbolic giving of one or more keys during splendid 21st birthday parties of elite daughters rewards such delays in pregnancy and motherhood. Consequently, the link between elites and reproduction is not unidirectional and may change for different time periods, generations and varying social, economic and normative conjunctures.