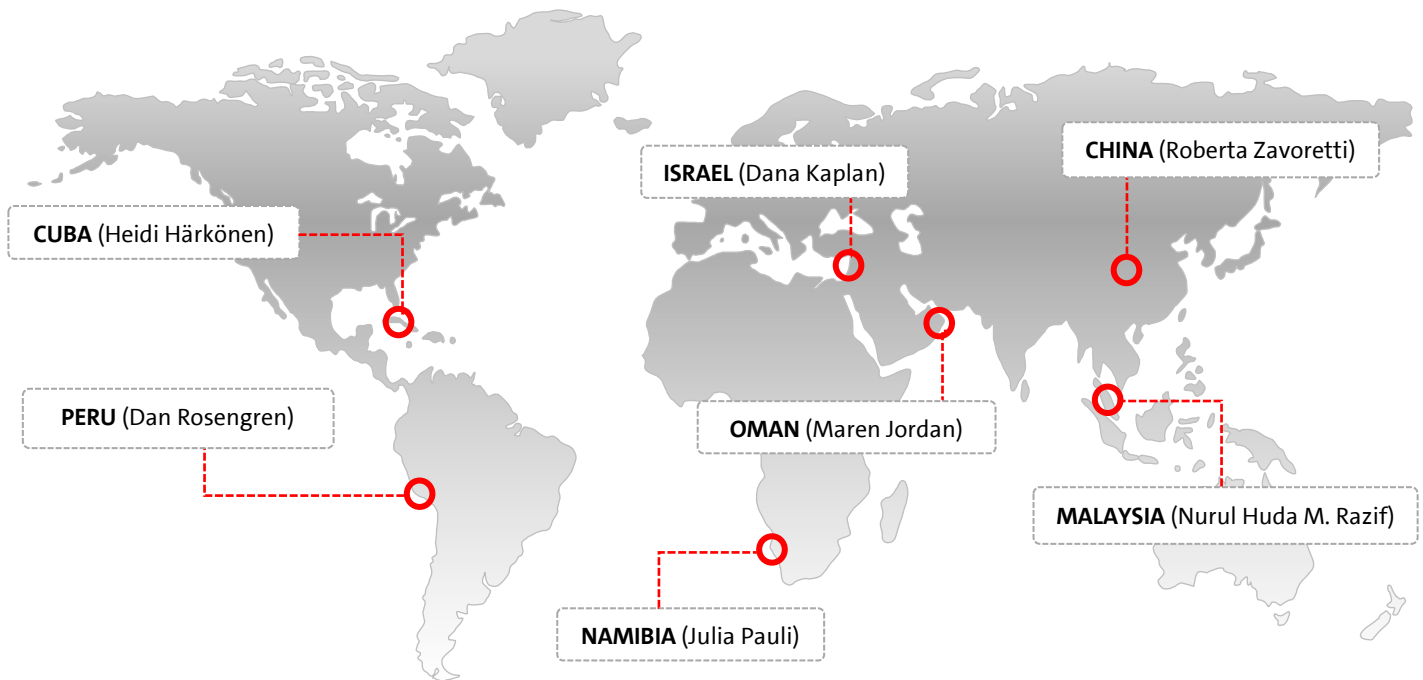


**WORKSHOP**  
**Marriage and Modernity in Comparative Perspective**  
University of Hamburg, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2018



Map of the Workshop's Case Studies

**ABSTRACTS**

**Marrying Married Men: Polygyny & Changing Conjugal Aspirations of Modern Malay Woman**

**Nurul Huda Mohd. Razif** (University of Cambridge)

Since the 1980s, Malaysia has witnessed increasing levels of education and employment among Malay women, thanks to its rapidly rising economy. Consequently, Malay women have become successful and fierce rivals to their male counterparts in the labor market, almost at the cost of marriage. In this paper, I consider how delayed matrimony is in fact a chance to explore alternative forms of marriage to monogamy. In Muslim-majority Malaysia, polygamy (specifically, polygyny) is legal for men, which means that women may benefit from the possibility that married men are still marriageable. Polygamy in Malaysia today has lost its aristocratic exclusivity and is facilitated by the economic prosperity of a flourishing Malay middle-class. I explore the ways in which modern Malay women create opportunities within polygamy to secure lawful access to companionship, sexual intimacy, and motherhood, as well as maintaining their freedom to continue their professional careers. More importantly, I consider how their financial independence enables them to mitigate the economic (and, consequently, emotional) risks of entering into a precarious union such as polygamy. Though socially and legally contentious, the increasing (but still rather reserved) acceptance of polygamy reinforces the social, cultural, and religious significance of the institution of marriage in Malay society, especially as a means of attaining access to “halal” (permissible) intimacy.

## **The Right Time to Marry: Renegotiations of Marriage Timing among Women in Contemporary Oman**

**Maren Jordan** (University of Hamburg)

As elsewhere in the world marriage practices in the Sultanate of Oman are undergoing profound change, evoking new aspirations and anxieties. Until today, marriage has been universal for both men and women in the Sultanate and remains the only legal framework in which sexual intimacy is permissible. While staying voluntarily single is not an option, the *when*, *whom* and *how* to marry have become increasingly debated. Delayed marriage for women is at the heart of these debates. In this paper, I examine how the timing of marriage has changed since the 1970s in Northern Oman. Based on recent ethnographic fieldwork in the Sultanate between 2016 and 2017, I explore ways in which marriage timing is renegotiated among women of different age-cohorts and class-backgrounds. Until the early 1980s, arranged kin-marriage and pre-puberty marriage for girls were the norm in Oman's interior region. Marital age was primarily determined by biological maturity and girls achieved adulthood through motherhood and *not* marriage. The idea of timing and planning one's (future) marriage is thus relatively new in this local context. So are the temporal category of youth and female singlehood, which have both resulted from the overall phenomenon of marriage postponement in Omani society since the 1970s. Rather than seeing the 'modernity' of Omani marriage practices on the material level, I argue in this paper that it expresses itself through new ideas of timing and planning the future.

## **Matsigenka Marriages and Family Formation in the Modern**

**Dan Rosengren** (University of Gothenburg)

The Matsigenka, who live in the tropical rain forest of south-eastern Peru, have during the last 50 to 60 years experienced an ever increasing wave of migrants who mainly come from the neighbouring highlands. During this time the Matsigenka of the Upper Urubamba River area have become a minority living in their communities surrounded by migrants in whose wake major changes have been introduced. The migrants come to the area in search for land and economic gain and to them their migration is a sign of being modern and striving for social advancement. Lately the province has earned much from the exploitation of natural gas in the area and much of the money has been spent on building roads and bridges. Together with the arrival of the migrants this extension of the infrastructure has meant that the national society has come much closer both socially and physically and with that also the spread of modernist influences.

Among young Matsigenka people, modernity has an aura of attraction and many aspire for a different life than that of their parents. Marrying out of Matsigenka society is one strategy to achieve this goal. With the introduction of notions of modernity, the ideal of love-marriage is spreading and is prominently exploited during the courtship period. Considering the stress on romance in the pre-marriage phase, marrying out of Matsigenka society frequently turns out to be less trouble-free than was expected. From the point of view of Matsigenka women, these ethnically mixed marriages have signified a shift in post-marital settlement patterns from uxorilocality to virilocality. Within Matsigenka society young wives can commonly rely on the help and support of parents and sisters if their husbands' do not behave properly. In modernist Andean society patriarchal structures are more evident and stronger than in indigenous Matsigenka society. After marriage many Matsigenka women experience that they are subject to cruelty and abuse from their husbands. Since they have moved from the sphere of influence of their parents, they are to a large extent on their own and more vulnerable. As a consequence, the rate of divorce in ethnically mixed marriages is high from which follows that the number of single-

mother households is increasing. Since no statistical information is available it is not possible to generalize. To illustrate my argument I will depart from the case of one family formed by a man who was married thrice and who has two sons and a daughter with the first wife, a daughter with his second wife, and three daughters and a son with the third. All the children have experiences of mixed marriages that I will use in comparison to their parents.

### **A Celebration of Belonging: Weddings of Middle Class Migrants in Namibia**

**Julia Pauli** (University of Hamburg)

Namibian marriage has thoroughly transformed throughout the last fifty years. The institution used to be widespread and common. Today, marriage is rare and most Namibians are unmarried. Those who marry belong to the middle and upper classes. Their weddings are class and identity projects through which they negotiate modes of belonging. Middle class urbanites who successfully migrated from rural areas have to decide how and especially where to marry. They are confronted with antagonistic expectations from rural kin and urban friends. Building on James Ferguson's (1999) style analysis of urbanites in the Zambian copper belt, I describe strategies and decisions of middle class urbanites to strengthen, translate, reject and create belonging through place-making practices in their weddings. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in rural and urban Namibia since 2003, I analyse what these various practices of celebrating mean for the understanding of marriage – as a site of negotiated and sometimes contested belonging – within the context of highly mobile life worlds.

### **From "Simple" to "Social" Weddings: Cruel Optimism and the Middle Class in Israel**

**Dana Kaplan** (The Open University of Israel)

Two decades ago I started researching Jewish upper middle class's weddings in Israel. Employing a Bourdieusian perspective, I juxtaposed consumers' and producers' aesthetic tastes, focusing on the materialization of these tastes into specific consumption practices and products. Evidently, each of the two parties orchestrating the wedding was entangled in different micro-conflicts, status competitions and webs of obligations. For example, for the consuming middle-class couples, both inter- and intra-family feuds over certain decisions regarding the wedding were feared of. At the same time, however, the affective labour of planning a wedding also signalled the "normal chaos" of being a "real" family, and, more broadly – the couple's transition into their designated social locations as bourgeois young adults.

The couples therefore oscillated between their desire, as young people, to hold informal weddings and their inbuilt middle-class habitus. This meant that they understood perfectly the significance of the festive event for the accrual of social capital, specifically in their parents' lives (who almost always also paid for the weddings). This resulted in what I dubbed "simple weddings" – that look and feel *both* very elegant and unassuming. Wedding producers on their part – caterers, florists, wedding gowns designers etc. – were invested in semi-artistic practices and in constructing a nascent luxurious wedding niche, this by transposing bits and pieces from repertoires of artistic production. Together, both the couples and the quasi-artists created similar looking, very standardized weddings; not too ostentatious but still very sophisticated. The "simple" middle class wedding expressed a burgeoning cosmopolitan middle class in Israel, high on omnivorous cultural capital.

In recent years, a newer version of simplicity has emerged. Although many of the practices I described in my previous research have not disappeared and the aesthetic differences between lower and upper middle class weddings remain intact, "ethical" weddings became appealing for fashionable, creative class couples. Usually, these ethical weddings are self-organized by family and friends who are asked to bring their self-made (organic/vegan/local) food, wedding gifts are kept to the minimum, and the weddings are usually set in nature (rather than in nature-simulated venues), and the overall vibe is more New-Agey. Still, such ecological, non- or less-consumerist weddings are, I would argue, as classed and exclusionary as the preceding "simple" ones. I shall contextualize the rise of the ethical middle-class wedding as a new distinction practice, by considering the growing precariousness, intra-class competition and subsequent contradictory socio-political leanings of young professionals in a neoliberal Israel.

### **With and Against the Family, With and Against the State. Staying Single and Getting Rich in Present Day Urban China**

**Roberta Zavoretti** (University of Cologne)

In urban China marriage is considered to be an obligatory step towards adulthood and full social personhood. Marriage choices generally involve both the couple and their parents, who are expected to provide the young couple with a 'starting fund'. Newly married couples are largely expected to conceive shortly after marrying. These expectations tie in with state- and market-sponsored images of prosperous three generation families who own their apartments and enjoy the comforts of consumer society.

While for many people singlehood is lived as a failure, some single informants enjoy the freedom of unmarried life and attempt to postpone marriage; few, however, ostensibly refuse to marry. One of these rare cases is represented by Wang Qing and his girlfriend Zhou Ying, a couple of wealthy Nanjing residents who have been living together for 15 years with no plans to marry or bear children. Zhou and Wang depict their singular living arrangement as consistent with their distinctive taste for truth and beauty, highlighting their difference from the conformist mass. While their living arrangement is in many ways comparable to normative 'married life', they explain their choice in terms of defiance towards patriarchal familyism and the state that supports it. The feeling of self-worth that they attain through their stand is corroborated by an economic success, which, ironically, they could have not achieved without the policies of the same state they claim to challenge.

### **Contestations of Love and Configurations of Class in Contemporary Cuban Weddings**

**Dr. Heidi Härkönen** (University of Helsinki)

During recent years, extravagant weddings have experienced a ritual revival in Havana. In a marked contrast to earlier, state-driven *fiestas* in socialist wedding halls, in contemporary Havana, weddings are celebrated in top-end, luxurious hotels. Historically, in pre-revolutionary Cuba, elaborate weddings and legal marriage used to be the practice of a small number of privileged, white Cubans while the majority favoured consensual unions and matrifocal kin relations. Although the socialist government has for decades attempted to abolish such differences, in post-Soviet Cuba, in the context of economic liberalisations and increasing possibilities for consumption, weddings have again become the realm of significant inequality in terms of race and class. By drawing on long-term ethnographic research in Cuba, this article argues that con-

temporary *Habanero* weddings have become both the reflection and agent of post-socialist inequalities, since lavish parties offer privileged Cubans both an opportunity to show off their wealth and to engage in lucrative business ventures as private *fiesta* organisers. In a context with a legacy of socialism, these inequalities create complex contestations of love, trust and betrayal amongst the individual Cubans who try to negotiate their intimate attachments, separations and economic advancement in the new Cuba.

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