

# Marriage in the Mother City: The Anglican marriage records of Cape Town, 1865-1960<sup>1</sup>

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## *Abstract*

As a social institution that permeates almost all societies, marriage trends and practices are studied across the social sciences. Yet South African marriages, past and present, remain understudied, notably because of a lack of adequate source material. This paper contributes to a better understanding of marriage trends in the South African past by offering a new dataset of more than 55 000 marriages solemnized in the Anglican church of Cape Town between 1865 and 1960. We show how these records can both reveal new evidence to test existing hypotheses and expose trends that open new questions for historical inquiry.

**Keywords:** Marriages; Church; Parish; Marriage trends; Anglican; Cape Town; South Africa.

## **Introduction**

Studying marriage provides useful insights into the nature of societies, and approaching it as a historical subject can offer valuable perspectives on the past that speak to the present. In South Africa there is much opportunity to investigate marriage as it remains a relatively uncharted area of historical research. Debbie Budlender et. al. explain that the lack of academic attention on marriage in South African history is caused by a number of factors which include a lack of accessible data, difficulty in the interpretation of sources, and the “wide diversity in marriage forms, cultures, religions and languages.”<sup>4</sup> This paper introduces a new source for studying marriage and, more generally, the social, economic and family histories of Anglican Capetonians during the first half of the twentieth century. We begin with a discussion of why marriage is an important focus of research. Secondly, we

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4 D Budlender, N Chobokoane and S Simelane, “Marriage patterns in South Africa: methodological and substantive issues”, *Southern African Journal of Demography*, 9(1), 2004, p. 1.

explore current research to determine what can be achieved using marriage records and thirdly we present a newly transcribed data set of records from the Anglican church in Cape Town from 1865-1964. In the fourth section we showcase some of the potential uses of this dataset and finally we conclude.

The port city of Cape Town has roots in the seventeenth-century activities of the Dutch East India company. By the 1920s it was home to a racially and culturally diverse population of over 200 000 inhabitants and shaped by its heritage of Dutch and British colonialism.<sup>5</sup> More than 55 000 newly transcribed marriage records covering nearly a century, from 1865 to 1960, provide a snapshot of literacy attainment, interracial marriages, white flight, the seasonality of weddings, occupational assortment and migration flows. These are trends that are difficult to establish with sources commonly used for historical analyses. Marriage records combined with the quantitative social scientist's standard toolkit, we argue, can help to write a "history from below" that not only provides answers to old questions, but also exposes intriguing new trends that warrant further investigation.

## **Why marriage matters**

Marriage, marriage patterns and marital status garner interest from a diverse range of disciplines including economics, sociology, anthropology and demography.<sup>6</sup> Generally in the Western world today, love-marriages, where the partners involved form a union based on ideas of romantic love, are viewed as the preferred, if not ideal, form of marital union. It is easy to interpret the past in relation to this contemporary viewpoint. However, Stephanie Coontz argues that this understanding of marriage is relatively new in human history. For thousands of years marriages involved whole families and communities, and the decision of who to marry was not left up to individuals. Marriage was based on pragmatic political and economic advancement; it could forge new allegiances and ensure economic stability for whole communities.<sup>7</sup> Although love-marriages are praised today as the best form of union, especially in Western contexts, beneath our ideas of "love" lie similar forces. Instead of the focus solely being on the match that would be most advantageous for the community, though, the individual chooses a person who would most benefit them. Research on assortative matching shows that, even with this idea of "love" motivating decisions of who to marry, when given a choice, people tend to choose marriage partners of a very similar social status, whether that status be defined by religious and/or educational and/or cultural factors. Marriage preferences can ultimately affect when people leave school, their occupations, where they live and their religious and political affiliations.

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5 Union of South Africa, *Union Census, Population, 1946* (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1954), Table 9 – Population of the Principal Towns and Their Suburbs by Race and Sex – Census 1921, 1936, 1941 and 1946, p. 78.

6 D Budlender, N Chobokoane and S Simelane, "Marriage patterns in South Africa: Methodological and substantive issues", *Southern African Journal of Demography*, 9(1), 2004, p. 2.

7 S Coontz, *Marriage, a history: How love conquered marriage* (Penguin Books, New York, 2005), p. 7.

Marriage, and laws concerning marriage, can shape the nature of a society. Coontz argues that changing ideas about marriage can lead to a series of unexpected repercussions:<sup>8</sup>

No sooner had the ideal of the love match and lifelong intimacy taken hold than people began to demand the right to divorce. No sooner did people agree that families should serve children's needs than they began to find the legal penalties for illegitimacy inhumane. Some people demanded equal rights for women so they could survive economically without having to enter loveless marriages. Others even argued for the decriminalization of homosexual love, on the ground that people should be free to follow their hearts.

Some scholars argue that the practical value of marriage has decreased in places where laws have changed to allow for economic and social stability without marriage. But despite this decline, there is still enormous symbolic importance placed on the concept of marriage. Andrew J. Cherlin argues that marriage has been deinstitutionalised in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America. By this he means that there has been a "weakening of the social norms that define people's behaviour in a social institution such as marriage".<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that, as sociologist Peter C Smith put it in 1980, "[s]ignificant changes in social or economic structure eventually generate pressures for change in a society's marriage regime; in turn, the marriage institution is pivotal in demographic change, more so perhaps than any other component of social organization."<sup>10</sup> This is evident in the case of East Germany just after reunification in 1989. Marina A. Adler finds that marriage and fertility rates dropped to unprecedented lows in Eastern Germany for the period 1989-1994. She argues that this occurred because during this period Eastern German women's position in society changed, specifically in that they had less support from government. This change left them hesitant to commit to marriage and having children.<sup>11</sup>

Many economic, social, political, demographic and environmental factors affect the decision to marry. For instance, research has shown that levels of education determine the age at which people marry. The more educated they are, the older couples are when they get married and the smaller the age gap at marriage between spouses.<sup>12</sup> In countries with high levels of education and equality between sexes more people delay marriage than those with lower levels of education and equality between

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8 S Coontz, *Marriage, a history: ...*, p. 8.

9 AJ Cherlin, "The deinstitutionalization of American marriage", *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(4), 2004, p. 848.

10 PC Smith, "Asian marriage patterns in transition", *Journal of Family History*, 1980, p. 58.

11 MA Adler, "Social change and declines in marriage and fertility in Eastern Germany", *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 59(1), 1997, pp. 37-49.

12 S Carmichael, "Marriage and power: Age at first marriage and spousal age gap in lesser developed countries", *The History of the Family*, 16, 2011, pp. 416-436.

sexes. These delays in marriage result in decreasing population sizes because usually with the delay of marriage comes a delay in having children. Age at marriage and age gap at marriage are two indicators of women's agency within those marriages and the broader society. The younger women are and the bigger the age gap between husband and wife, the worse off they are believed to be.<sup>13</sup>

Marriage is not only used as an indicator of a society's wellbeing, it also plays important roles in governing human behaviour. Sociologist Göran Therborn outlines five different functions of marriage in a society. Firstly, he argues that it regulates sexuality. Secondly, it is a way of organising procreation and the care of children. Thirdly, it is a means of uniting or dividing societies and the final two are what Therborn calls "social status" and "householding". That is to say that marriage is an important determinant of social status and the management of households.<sup>14</sup>

The timing of marriage can affect the whole course of an individual's life and social norms at different times can determine whether the timing of the marriage is correct or not. Glen Elder and Richard Rockwell explain that the consequences of marriage timing include, firstly, "the marriage market, mating options, and their resulting patterns", secondly, "the asynchrony of events across career lines (marital, parental, and socioeconomic) as expressed in the economic squeeze of early marriage and the advantage of late marriage" and finally "the interpretation of experienced event-timing variations have consequences that shape the meaning of events".<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned in the introduction, marriage has existed in many different forms over time, but two broad distinctions have been drawn, firstly, between Western and Asian forms, and secondly, between monogamous and polygamous forms. With the spread of Christianity in Europe came an emphasis on the consent of the two individuals entering into a union. And in the last two centuries in the West, as mentioned earlier, the idea has developed that couples should marry for love, as opposed to economic and social advantage. The European Marriage Pattern was first mapped out by John Hajnal in 1965. He found that it was characterised by two things that set it apart from marriage in other parts of the world: firstly, a high age at first marriage, and secondly, a large proportion of society that never marries at all. Tine De Moor and Jan Luiten Van Zanden argue that women delaying marriage in the early modern period in Northern Europe formed a specific marriage pattern which ultimately promoted economic development in Western Europe.<sup>16</sup> Together,

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13 S Carmichael, "Marriage and power: Age at first marriage and spousal age gap in lesser developed countries", *The History of the Family*, 16, 2011, pp. 416-436.

14 G Therborn, *Between sex and power: Family in the world, 1900-2000* (Routledge, London and New York, 2004), pp. 131-133.

15 GH Elder and RC Rockwell, "Marital timing in women's life patterns", *Journal of Family History*, 1(1), 1976, p. 34.

16 T De Moor & JL Van Zanden "Girl power: The European marriage pattern and labour markets in the North Sea region in the late medieval and early modern period", *Economic History Review*, 63, 1, 2010, pp. 1-33.

these two articles show that marriage lies at the centre of the Great Divergence.<sup>17</sup>

Speaking in broad terms, marriage in the East has traditionally been seen as vastly different to marriage in the West. However, Raymo et. al. argue that today phenomena such as later marriage, avoidance of marriage and lower fertility rates have increased dramatically in the East, in countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China, to such an extent that these low rates are more pronounced than in the West. They also find that there are other elements of East Asian families that have hardly changed. For example, East Asian families still include high rates of co-resident multigenerational families.<sup>18</sup>

In Africa a plethora of different marriage traditions exist. Ideas about marriage were at the forefront of the concerns of early Christian missions and Douglas Falen argues that this has led to a “conceptual divide between monogamous Christian marriage and African polygyny”.<sup>19</sup> Polygamy, although not unique to Africa, has attracted particular interest. The continent has been portrayed as a place where most of society is polygamous, although this is not the case.<sup>20</sup> Polygamy has been linked to “slow growth, including low savings rates, reduced investment in girls’ human capital, and diminished labour supply of unmarried men”.<sup>21</sup> Economist James Fenske finds that polygamy rates have dropped significantly in Africa and attributes this decline to colonial education. He concludes that “ethnic institutions are shaped by history”.<sup>22</sup> Bride wealth, or the tradition of a groom or his family paying a particular fee to the bride’s family in order to secure a union, has also received attention. Social Anthropologist Jack Goody argued that marriage in Africa is ultimately very different to forms of marriage in Eurasian contexts. He explained that “[o]ut-marriage [exogamy] and bridewealth in Africa stand in contrast to in-marriage [endogamy] and dowry in Eurasia”.<sup>23</sup> While the dowry and in-marriage were means of maintaining existing levels of wealth and property ownership, he argues that out-marriage and bride wealth spread or share them.<sup>24</sup>

In the recent South African context Posel et. al. have linked *ilobolo* or bride wealth payments to declining rates of marriage amongst black South Africans in the post-apartheid era. They find that especially amongst black groups in South Africa

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17 K Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the making of the modern world economy* (Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2000).

18 JM Raymo, H Park, Y Xie and W Jean Yeung, “Marriage and family in East Asia: Continuity and change”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41, 2015, pp. 471-492.

19 DJ Falen, “Polygyny and Christian marriage in Africa: the case of Benin”, *African Studies Review*, 51(2), 2008, p. 51.

20 DJ Falen, “Polygyny and Christian marriage in Africa: the case of Benin”, *African Studies Review*, 51(2), 2008, p. 51.

21 J Fenske, “African polygamy: Past and present”, *Elsevier*, 117, 2015, p. 58.

22 J Fenske, “African polygamy: Past and present”, *Elsevier*, 117, 2015, p. 72.

23 J Goody, “Class and marriage in Africa and Eurasia”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 76(4), 1971, p. 585.

24 J Goody, “Class and marriage in Africa and Eurasia”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 76(4), 1971, p. 593.

with very high rates of *ilobolo* payments, such as the amaZulu, the percentage of women who remain unmarried, or choose cohabitation over marriage, are higher than amongst other groups in the population.<sup>25</sup> Another work by Posel and Casale confirms that *ilobolo* acts as a financial deterrent to marriage and that marriage rates amongst black women in South Africa are largely determined by the economic status of men.<sup>26</sup>

## Using marriage records

Because of the pervasiveness of the institution of marriage in social relations, marriage records have been used in different fields of research to answer a variety of questions. Economists, for instance, have used them to understand standard of living and demographers have asked questions concerning demographic transitions. Marriage records have been used in a variety of ways to extract obvious information, such as age at marriage and marriage age gap, but also to draw conclusions on literacy, work seasons, empowerment, social mobility, remarriage, employment and widows/widowers. In this section we provide a brief survey of research that has been done using marriage records.

Economist Felix Meier zu Selhausen used Protestant marriage records from Uganda from 1880-1945 to measure a change in women's literacy rates over time in order to measure the impact of missionaries on their empowerment.<sup>27</sup> A working paper by Meier zu Selhausen uses Anglican marriage records to research intergenerational social mobility. By using the occupations of men in the records, he finds that despite the common understanding that British indirect rule led to the perpetuation of existing pre-colonial power structures, the colonial labour economy empowered previously lower-class men.<sup>28</sup>

Demographer Jan van Bavel and Historian Jan Kok used marriage records in combination with birth and death certificates to understand birth spacing in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century. They used marriage records for women's age at marriage to determine whether or not the length of marriage has an effect on fecundity.<sup>29</sup> Frans van Poppel and Marloes Schoonheim used information about witnesses in civil marriage certificates to build a foundation on which to compare

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25 D Posel, S Rudwick and D Casale, "Is marriage a dying institution in South Africa? Exploring changes in marriage in the context of *ilobolo* payments", *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 25(1), 2001, pp. 102-111.

26 D Posel & D Casale, "The relationship between sex ratios and marriage rates in South Africa", *Applied Economics*, 45(5), 2013, pp. 663-676.

27 F Meier zu Selhausen, "Missionaries and female empowerment in colonial Uganda: New evidence from Protestant marriage registers, 1880-1945", *Economic History of Developing Regions*, 1, 2014, pp. 74-112.

28 F Meier Zu Selhausen, M Van Leeuwen, J Weisdorf, "Social mobility among Christian Africans: Evidence from Anglican marriage registers in Uganda, 1895-2011", *Economic History Review*, 71(4), 2018, 1291-1321.

29 J Van Bevel and J Kok, "Birth Spacing in the Netherlands. The effects of family composition, occupation and religion on birth intervals, 1820-1885", *European Journal of Population*, 20, 2004, pp. 119-140.

distinctions between religious groups. They found that Jews had a far broader network, geographically speaking, and greater family involvement than Catholics and Protestants.<sup>30</sup>

Marriage records can also be used to trace the seasonality of weddings over time. Economic Historian Martin Dribe and Sociologist Bart van de Putte studied 120 000 marriage records across 117 parishes in Sweden over two hundred years from 1690-1895 to understand the effects of the Industrious Revolution<sup>31</sup> on marriage seasonality. They found that the seasonality changed drastically over the time period, and that there was a shift from most marriages adapting to lifecycles associated with grain production (most marriages in late spring and very few marriages in summer) to a very varied pattern with marriages being spread throughout the year.<sup>32</sup>

Biologists have also made use of marriage records. Castilla et al. used civil marriage certificates in Argentina to determine the frequency of marriages between first cousins. In 1968 the Argentinian government made a change to the marriage certificate to include a section where the marriage officer could indicate whether or not the couple were first cousins.<sup>33</sup> Other research has linked marriage records to sources of biographical data. Economist David Mitch studied marriage registers and census records in England for the nineteenth century in order to observe changes in literacy and occupational mobility over time in rural and urban contexts.<sup>34</sup>

Little such work has been done in a South African context. Natasha Erlank uses diocesan records to study African weddings in the Eastern Cape during the late nineteenth century, although her interest is in the wedding ceremony and its meaning.<sup>35</sup> While Posel et. al. have studied contemporary marriage trends using quantitative methods, we find none of the kind of social science history research that has been done elsewhere. Such projects require the transcription of large numbers of historical marriage documents.

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30 F van Poppel and M Schoonheim, "Measuring cultural differences between religions using network data. An example based on nineteenth-century Dutch marriage certificates", *Annales De Démographie Historique*, 1(109), 2005, pp. 173-197.

31 The Industrious Revolution, to be distinguished from the Industrial Revolution, is identified by Jan de Vries as the changing patterns in consumerism, consumer desires and "new industrious behaviour" in which the Industrial Revolution occurred. J De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer behaviour and the household economy, 1650 to the present* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008).

32 M Dribe and B Van De Putte, "Marriage seasonality and the industrious revolution: Southern Sweden, 1690-1895", *Economic History Review*, 65(3), 2012, pp. 1123-1146.

33 EE Castilla, MA Gomez, JS Lopez-Camelo and JE Paz, "Frequency of first-cousin marriages from civil marriage certificates in Argentina", *Human Biology*, 63(2), 1991, pp. 203-210.

34 D Mitch, "Literacy and occupational mobility in rural versus urban Victorian England: evidence from the linked marriage register and census records for Birmingham and Norfolk, 185 and 1881", *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, 38(1), 2005, pp. 26-38.

35 N Erlank, "The white wedding: Affect and economy in South Africa in the early twentieth century", *African Studies Review*, 57(2), 2014, pp. 29-50.

## **A new source**

We have constructed a new dataset which provides information about Anglicans living in Cape Town from 1865 to 1964. This dataset has been transcribed from records found on Family Search which were digitised by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. The Anglican church was the single biggest denomination/religion for both coloured and white people in Cape Town for the time period. In the census of 1936, there were 54 839 white Anglicans in Cape Town, representing 36% of the city's population. The next most common religious group for white people in the city was Dutch Reformed, with 28 981 identifying as such. In the same census, there were 60 086 coloured Anglicans. The next most common group was also Dutch Reformed, with 28 232 coloured members, representing 21% of the city's population.<sup>36</sup> Coloured and white citizens of Cape Town are the focus of this dataset as there are just over 1000 black couples that appear. These lower numbers are, on the one hand, because of a very low black population in the city for the period covered by the dataset and, on the other, because the Anglican church was not as popular amongst the black population as it was for coloured and white. The black population was only 14 160 in 1936, representing 7% of the city's inhabitants in that year.<sup>37</sup>

How representative, then, are these records of the population of Cape Town residents? The Union censuses of 1911, 1936 and 1951 all contained information about the religions of the population of the Union and the city of Cape Town. Unfortunately, each of these presented figures according to different classifications of geography as well as different types of analysis. We do, however, see the Anglican church decreasing in size over time by looking at those who reported themselves as Anglicans as a percentage of the total religions reported. Despite a decline in membership, the Anglican church remained the single-biggest religious affiliation for the first half of the twentieth century for both coloured and white people in the city. This was only the case for Cape Town though. In the Union as a whole the Dutch Reformed church was the most common religious affiliation. According to the censuses, membership in the Anglican church amongst white Capetonians dropped from 36% of all those that report religions in the city in 1936 to 29% in 1951. For coloured people in the city there is no figure available for 1951, but there is for 1946 and the figure dropped from 39% identifying as Anglican in 1936, to 35% in 1946. The three biggest religious affiliations for coloured and white

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36 Union of South Africa, *Sixth Census, Volume VI, Religions, 1936* (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1941), Religions (Europeans), Religions (Coloureds), Table C.3., Denominations in the Principal Towns and Their Suburbs, Census 1936, p. 96; *Union of South Africa Sixth Census, Volume VI, Religions, 1936* (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1941), Religions (Europeans), Table A.3., Denominations in the Principal Towns and Their Suburbs, Census 1936, p. 9; *1946 Union Census, Population*, p. 78.

37 Union of South Africa, *Union Census, Population, 1946* (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1954), Table 9 – Population of the Principal Towns and Their Suburbs By Race and Sex – Census 1921, 1936, 1941 and 1946, p. 78.

Capetonians saw decreases during this period and the censuses indicate a greater spread across denominations and religions as well as an increase in denominations and religions.<sup>38</sup> The censuses reported the religions of black people even more haphazardly and the 1946 census is the first to contain the relevant information. In 1946, the most common religious affiliation for black people in the city was Methodist at 30% and Anglicans were the second most common, representing 20% of the black population.<sup>39</sup>

These numbers suggest that the Anglican records reflect a large proportion of Cape society, even if there may still be selection effects at play. It is likely, for example, that more affluent, English-speaking members attended the Anglican church vis-à-vis the Dutch Reformed or other denominations or were married in the civil court as was the case for Jewish or Islamic affiliations or those without religious affiliations. Without additional transcription, the extent of this bias remains unknown.

Before the first British occupation of the Cape of 1795, the only Anglican services held on its shores were conducted by Naval chaplains when resting on the way to a different destination.<sup>40</sup> The Anglican church in South Africa initially consisted of various independent churches in the Cape, and later Natal, loosely affiliated with the Church of England. They were linked to the Governor in Council (the Queen's representative) at the Cape and the churches were protected by the law of the Cape Colony and Britain.<sup>41</sup> English-speaking churches in South African history, including the Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians, were united in their loyalty to the British Empire.<sup>42</sup> The first Bishop at the Cape, Robert Gray, was appointed in 1848.<sup>43</sup> From 1870 the Anglican church organisation developed in a systematic and unified way, unlike its early roots in the Cape Colony.<sup>44</sup> Our records precede this era; our first

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38 Union of South Africa, *Sixth Census, Volume VI, Religions, 1936* (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1941), Religions (Europeans), Table A.3., Denominations in the Principal Towns and Their Suburbs, Census 1936, p. 9; *Union of South Africa Sixth Census, Volume VI, Religions, 1936* (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1941), Religions (Europeans), Religions (Coloureds), Table C.3., Denominations in the Principal Towns and Their Suburbs, Census 1936, p. 96; Union of South Africa, *Population Census, Volume III, Religions, 1951* (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1956), Religions (Coloureds), Table 9.-Denominations in the Principal Towns and their Suburbs, Census, 1946, p. 58; Union of South Africa, *Population Census, Volume III, Religions, 1951* (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1956), Table 4.-Denominations in Metropolitan and other Principal Urban Areas-Census, 1946 and 1951, p. 26.

39 Union of South Africa, *Population Census, Volume III, Religions, 1951* (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1956), Religions (Coloureds), Table 9 -Denominations in the Principal Towns and their Suburbs, Census, 1946, p. 58; Union of South Africa, *Population Census, Volume III, Religions, 1951* (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1956), Religions (Natives), Table 15.-Denominations in Metropolitan and other Principal Urban Areas-Census, 1946, p. 74.

40 OM Suberg, *The Anglican tradition in South Africa: A historical overview* (Unisa Press, South Africa, 1999) pp. 10-11.

41 OM Suberg, *The Anglican tradition in South Africa...*, p. 30.

42 JW De Gruchy, "Grappling with a colonial heritage: The English-speaking churches under imperialism and apartheid", R Elphick and R Davenport (Eds.), *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social & cultural history* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1997), p. 156.

43 OM Suberg, *The Anglican tradition in South Africa...*, p. 38.

44 OM Suberg, *The Anglican tradition in South Africa...*, p. 43.

record is of Godfrey Armytage, a lieutenant in the 6<sup>th</sup> regiment, marrying Charlotte Emily Blackburn, a minor, on 18 February 1849 in St. John's, Wynberg. Because we lack information on age for most of these early marriages—the couples only reported 'full' or 'minor' in the age column—our analysis begins in 1865. Before 1935, the legal age of marriage at the Cape was 14 for boys and 12 for girls.<sup>45</sup>

The marriage records provide extensive information on couples in the Anglican church. Each record provides details about the bride and groom, including their names, races, ages, places of residence at the time of the wedding, relationship statuses before marriage, occupations and the date of their marriage. All parishes within the current borders of Cape Town have been transcribed representing all parts of Cape Town society. Image 1 provides an example of a marriage record for a couple from Athlone. The top left corner of the image shows that both the bride and groom were "mixed" race. They got married at St. Mark's Church in the district of Athlone in the Cape Province and their marriage took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1932. The groom's full name was Frank Henry George van der Speck, and the bride was Henrietta Jane Stellenboom. They were both twenty years of age and both born in South Africa. Neither of them had been married before. At the time of their marriage Frank was a cabinet-making apprentice and Henrietta a school teacher. Before their marriage Frank had been living in Crawford Road in Kromboom, while Henrietta lived in Klipfontein Road in Athlone. They had the Banns read (their intention to marry was announced in church services) before their wedding day and consent for the union was given by Henrietta's mother and Frank's father. They married without an antenuptial contract. The handwriting of the couple is clear to see next to the phrase "This Marriage was contracted by us" and it seems that Henrietta's family acted as witnesses.

The size and shape of the marriage records changed somewhat over the hundred years we study. In the nineteenth century race was not recorded; the category was added in 1910, presumably because of legislation within the new Union of South Africa. Country of birth was added in 1924. Although male occupations are listed from the earliest records, female occupations are only included consistently from 1939, presumably as more women entered the labour market in preparation for war.

On their own, these records provide little that is of value to the historian. Genealogists, of course, will find them useful in reconstructing family histories; for this reason, the full dataset is now available online. But combining the information contained in these records, we argue, provides historians with new insights into the social, economic and even political lives of ordinary men and women who lived in Cape Town during a period of remarkable social, economic and political change. This is important. According to Neil Roos, "[h]istorians know remarkably little about the lives of [ordinary] white people in twentieth-century South Africa, or

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45 HR Hahlo, *The South African law of husband and wife* (Juta & Co. Limited, Wynberg, 1973), p. 8.

how they reproduced, maintained, and negotiated successive racial regimes.”<sup>46</sup> This is even more true of coloured people in twentieth-century South Africa. Much of this is due to a lack of source material; Roos calls for “subaltern studies” to mend the gap. We propose, instead, that innovative approaches from the data revolution<sup>47</sup>—such as the aggregation of thousands of marriage records over more than a century—offer a more useful way of understanding these histories from below.

Image 1: An example of an original marriage register record

4607-177/21-50-300. S. B.M.D. 3 (Union).

**ORIGINEEL HUWELIKSREGISTER.**  
**ORIGINAL MARRIAGE REGISTER.**

No. .... 275 ..... /2

Man: ..... *(initials)* .....  
 Vrouw: ..... *(initials)* .....  
 Husband: .....  
 Wife: .....

Huwelik Bevestigd te ..... *S. Markie church* ..... District: ..... *Att. Lona* ..... Province: ..... *Cape* .....  
 Marriage Solemnized at ..... District: ..... Province: .....

Datum van Huwelik	Volle Namen van Gekwone Man of Vrouw	Ontrouwen	Subscriptied. Country of Birth.	Stand in Huwel. Personal Status.	Beroep. Occupation.	Woonplaats ten tijde van het Huwelik.	Na Geboorte van Huwelik.	Met wien Trouwden. Contests by Whom given.	Dy of number Huweliksoor. Contract.	OPMERKINGEN. REMARKS.
<i>June 25<sup>th</sup> 1932</i>	<i>Frank Henry George van der Spek</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>S. Africa</i>	<i>bachelor</i>	<i>calvinist making appointment</i>	<i>Krombosch</i>	<i>Dam</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>initial</i>
	<i>Henniella Jane Stellenboom</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>S. Africa</i>	<i>spinster</i>	<i>teacher</i>	<i>Klooffontein</i>	<i>Att. Lona</i>	<i>Mother</i>		

Dit Huwelik is bevestigd door mij op heden de  
 This Marriage was solemnized by me on this the  
*Twenty fifth* day of *June* 19*32*  
 in tegenwoordigheid van de ondergetekende getuigen:—  
 in the presence of the undersigned Witnesses:—  
*L. J. Stellenboom*  
*L. J. Stellenboom*

Dit Huwelik is voltrokken  
 This Marriage was contracted  
 by us  
*(Signature)*  
 Predikant.—Minister.  
*(Signature)*  
 Kerkgenootschap.—Dedication.  
 Magistraat.—Magistrate.

Source: William Cullen Library (Wits University, Johannesburg), “Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801-2004”. Database with images. FamilySearch, available at <https://FamilySearch.org> (accessed on 14 June 2016).

### Aggregation

From the 49 parishes for which marriage records are available between 1849 and 1972, we transcribed 55 279 marriage records. Each marriage record was manually transcribed, a time-intensive process that took almost two years. Of course, manual transcription has the potential to create errors if, for example, the handwriting is of poor quality, as is often the case. To avoid this, we followed a rigorous process of double-checking the transcribed records. We also benefitted from the fact that some of the records were already partially transcribed on the FamilySearch website. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that mistakes could easily creep in, especially where

46 N Roos, “South African history and subaltern historiography: Ideas for a radical history of white folk”, *International Review of Social History*, 61(1), 2016, pp. 117-150.  
 47 J Fourie, “The data revolution in African economic history”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 47(2), 2016, pp. 193-212.

names are concerned. Given that our analysis below relies almost entirely on numerical or standardised observations (race and place-of-origin, for example), we believe these errors are of minor concern. Moreover, given that we assemble a dataset of more than 55 000 records, any individual errors are unlikely to affect our results in any meaningful way. This is also why we begin the analysis, as stated above, in 1865 and end it in 1960. After 1960, the records fall in number. We cannot determine the reason for this; the most likely reason seems to be the ad hoc nature of archiving church records after 1960. If the available records are not a true reflection of all Anglican marriage records in Cape Town, it is likely to lead to sample selection bias. We therefore end our analysis in 1960.

### ***Literacy***

Even though these marriage records provide a wealth of genealogical information, their main benefit is in aggregation. Image 2 plots the number of marriage records available by year between 1865 and 1960. The most obvious trend is the rapid increase during the 1890s, notably in the final years of the South African War, and the decline that set in thereafter. A second noteworthy observation is the sudden decline in 1918 owing to the Spanish Flu that swept South Africa and much of the world. A third outlier is 1940, as couples presumably married in anticipation of military service.

The shades denote literacy in the records. Literacy is measured as a score between zero and four. The marriage record required the signature of the bride and groom as well as two witnesses to the marriage. Four would indicate that all four of these individuals could sign their own name on the marriage record; zero would indicate that none of them could sign the document. A cross usually replaced the signature when the bride, groom or witnesses could not sign. What is clear from Image 2 is the high number of crosses in the early period—in 1892, for example, at least one in two marriage certificates included at least one cross. This changed significantly in the early twentieth century and by the 1950s, almost no marriage certificates included any crosses.

### ***Race***

Race classification was prevalent in the marriage records of the Anglican church even before the introduction of the Population Registration Act of 1950. This Act, according to Deborah Posel, “made the apartheid system of racial classification notoriously distinctive”.<sup>48</sup> Race categories used in the marriage records varied and coloured Anglicans were identified as “mixed”, or “Cape Coloured”, or “Cape Malay”, to name a few examples.

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<sup>48</sup> D Posel, “Race as common sense: racial classification in twentieth-century South Africa”, *African Studies Review*, 44(2), 2001, p. 89.

The race category was standardised using the four race categories of the 1950 Act—white, coloured, black and Indian. Because the definition of Indian/Asian changed over the twentieth century, and because there were very few individuals classified under this category, we combined Indian with coloured. The standardisation allowed us to investigate interracial marriages across time. Image 3 shows the decline in interracial marriages (marriages between Anglicans identified as white, coloured and black) from 1910 (when the race variable was included) to 1960. It shows a steady decline in the share of marriages, from as high as 8% of all marriages soon after unification to almost zero after the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act which effectively banned interracial marriages. Fourie and Inwood use a subsample of these marriage records to investigate the reasons for this sharp decline.<sup>49</sup>

The Anglican Church in South Africa did not initially resist segregation policies. It did, however, continue to train clergy and run churches of all races under the same denominational structure. By 1949, with the National Party gaining power over the Union of South Africa, various Christian denominations, including the Anglican church, became more outspoken against the segregation of society.<sup>50</sup> Despite the imposition of the Prohibition on Mixed Marriages Act, for example, a few interracial marriages were still sanctioned after 1949, providing some evidence of resistance against apartheid doctrine.

The impact of the Group Areas Act, one of the most infamous apartheid policies, is also clearly visible in the records. Image 4 shows the decline in the number of marriages of white couples in the Woodstock parish after 1948. Woodstock was classified as a coloured neighbourhood under apartheid, causing many whites to move to so-called whites-only suburbs.<sup>51</sup>

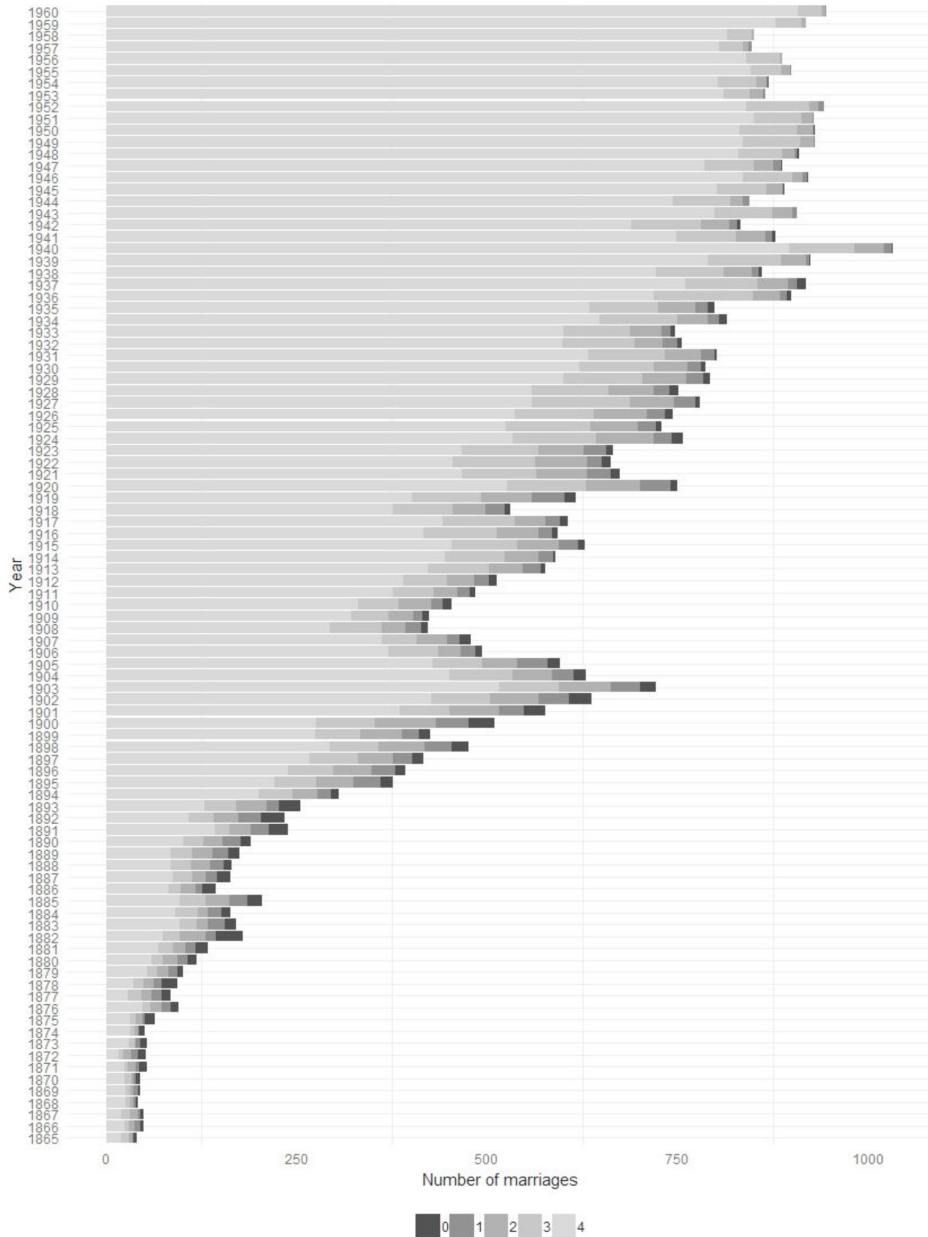
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49 J Fourie and K Inwood, "Interracial marriages in twentieth-century Cape Town: Evidence from Anglican marriage records", *The History of the Family*, 24(3), 2019, pp. 629-652.

50 JW De Gruchy, "Grappling with a colonial heritage: The English-speaking churches under imperialism and apartheid", R Elphick and R Davenport (Eds.), *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social & cultural history* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1997), p. 159.

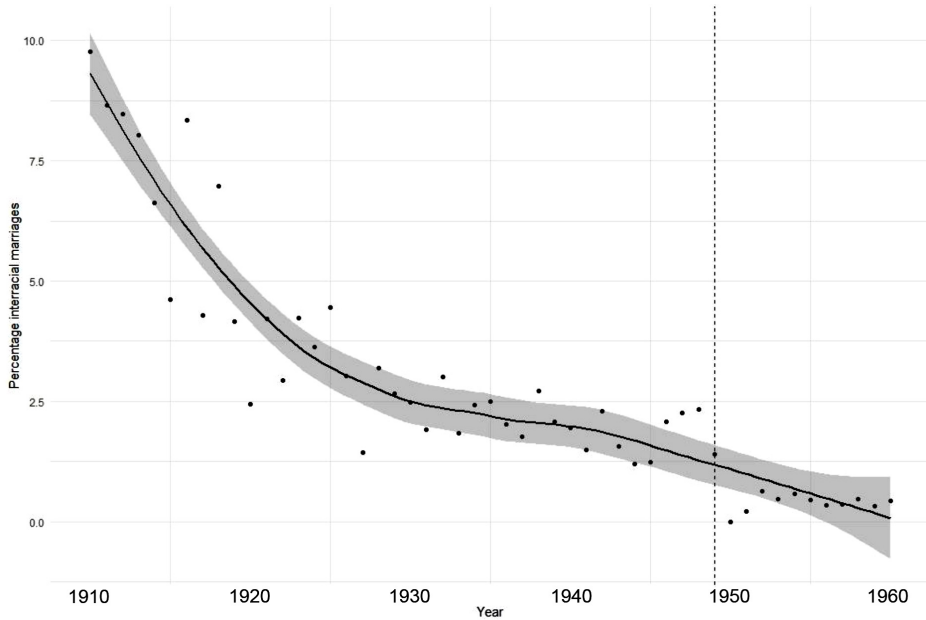
51 Of course, even if an area was restricted to one racial group, reality was often more complex.

Image 2: Number of marriage records and literacy by year, 1865-1960



Source: William Cullen Library (Wits University, Johannesburg), “Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801-2004”. Database with images. FamilySearch, available at <https://FamilySearch.org> (accessed on 14 June 2016).

Image 3: Interracial marriages in Cape Town, 1910-1960

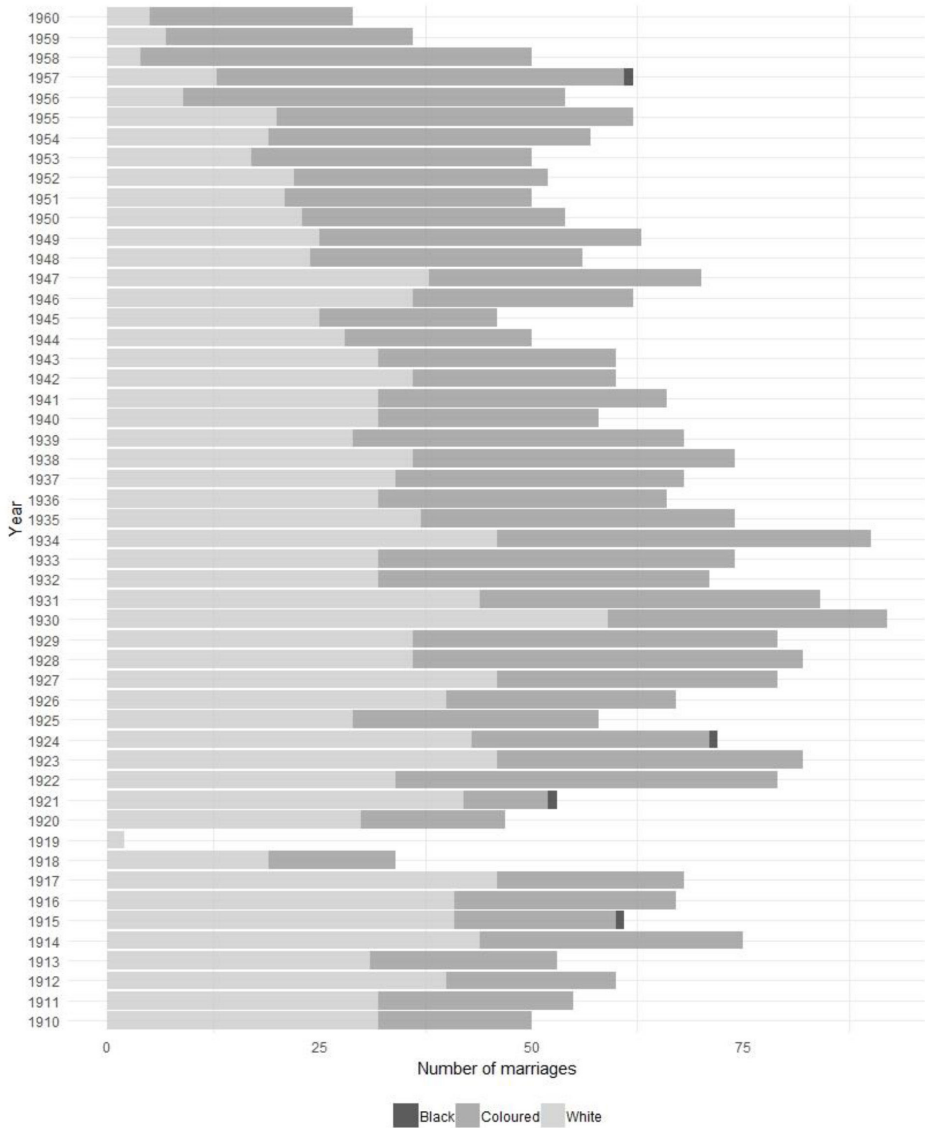


Source: William Cullen Library (Wits University, Johannesburg), “Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801-2004”. Database with images. FamilySearch, available at <https://FamilySearch.org> (accessed on 14 June 2016).

The Group Areas Act had profound consequences for those residing in the “wrong” areas. Evidence of this can be found in the marriage records. Mildred Francina Fester and Alexander George Thomas married on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1950. Both listed their race as coloured. They married in Athlone. Mildred was 20 at the time and working as a machinist. Alexander was 24 and listed his occupation as a tailor. The marriage record states that in 1965, this couple changed their race to white. When they married in 1950 Alexander gave his town of residence as “Claremont” and Mildred’s town was “Gleemoor”. In the 1960s, Claremont was cleared of all “non-white” residents. There had, until this time, been clusters of coloured people living amongst wealthier whites in the area. It seems likely that a couple like Mildred and Alexander, faced with the prospect of losing their home and being forced out of the community, took a chance and applied to change their race—a move which, if successful, would enable them to live in a safe neighbourhood, where their children could attend good schools and receive access to all the other benefits of being white in apartheid South Africa. Gleemoor, Mildred’s place of residence at marriage, was, however, a coloured area near to Athlone.<sup>52</sup>

52 V Bickford-Smith, E Van Heyningen and N Worden, *Cape Town in the twentieth century* (David Philip Publishers, Claremont, 1999), pp. 183;141.

Image 4: Number of marriages in Woodstock, by race and year, 1910-1960



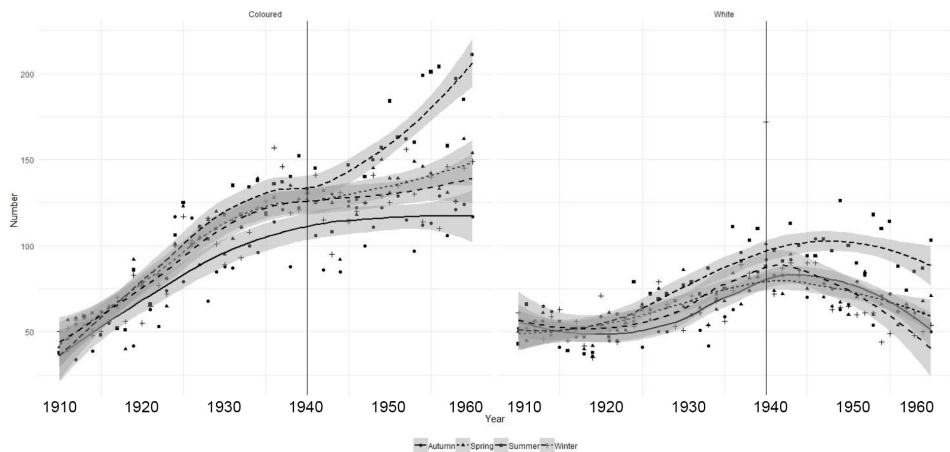
Source: William Cullen Library (Wits University, Johannesburg), “Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801-2004”. Database with images. FamilySearch, available at <https://FamilySearch.org> (accessed on 14 June 2016).

### Seasonality

Aggregating the marriage records also allows us to observe seasonal patterns of marriage, providing a glimpse into the social and wedding conventions of the time.

Image 5 splits the observations by race—coloured and white—and plots the number of marriages by season between 1910 and 1960. What is clear is that, for white marriages, there is almost no difference in the number of marriages by season before 1940. A statistically significant gap, however, opens up after the Second World War: summer marriages become far more numerous than marriages during the other seasons. The same is true for coloured marriages, although autumn marriages seem to be unpopular from the 1930s already. The discrepancy between summer marriages and marriages during the other seasons also seems to be larger towards the end of the period. From this brief analysis, it would seem that weddings became more important events during the 1950s as both white and coloured couples began to show a clear preference for summer wedding dates.

Image 5: Number of marriages, by season, race and year, 1910-1960



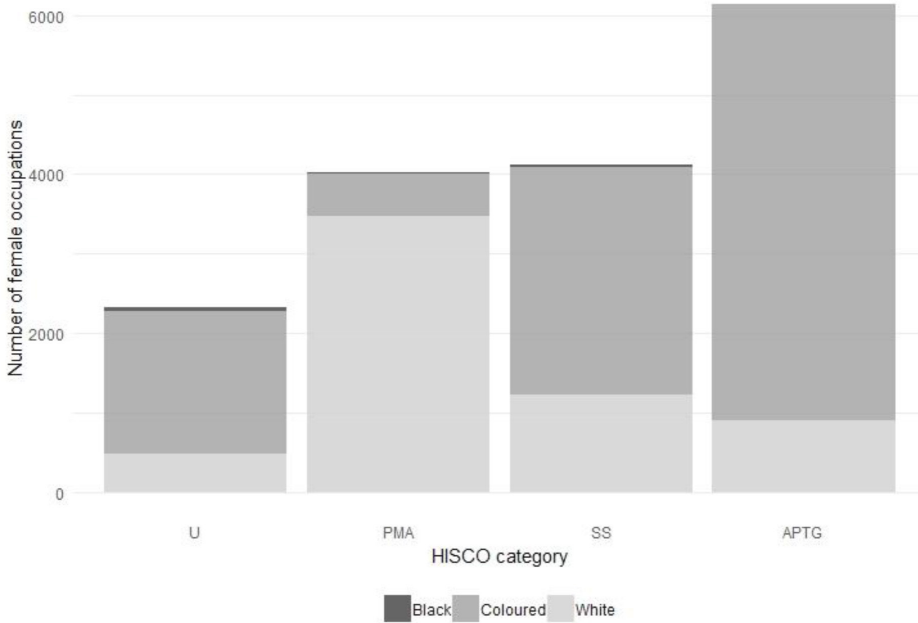
Source: William Cullen Library (Wits University, Johannesburg), “Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801-2004”. Database with images. FamilySearch, available at <https://FamilySearch.org> (accessed on 14 June 2016).

## ***Occupations***

The occupations of brides and grooms also provide useful insights into their lives and position in society. Winifred Kitty Neilson Kemp, for instance, was a 36-year-old bride who appeared in the marriage records. She listed her occupation as “surgeon” in 1925, ten years before it became common for women to list an occupation on the marriage certificate. Her country of origin is listed as “England” and she married a 35-year-old merchant from Scotland, James William George Home. Unusual occupations found in the records include rat catcher, professional cricketer (in 1929) and toilet roll assistant. A helpful means of organising and analysing occupations is the historical international standard classification of occupations (HISCO), which provides ten major groups into which all occupations can be divided. Groups 0 and 1

are for professional, technical and related workers; 2 is administrative and managerial workers; 3 is clerical and related workers; 4 is sales workers; 5 service workers; 6 agricultural, animal husbandry and forestry workers, fishermen and hunters; groups 7, 8 and 9 are production related workers, transport equipment operators and labourers.<sup>53</sup>

Image 6: Number of female occupations by HISCO category and race, 1939-1960



Source: William Cullen Library (Wits University, Johannesburg), “Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801-2004”. Database with images. FamilySearch, available at <https://FamilySearch.org> (accessed on 14 June 2016).

We classify 3 246 unique occupations for women into these categories, and then further group categories 0, 1, 2 and 3 into professional, managerial and administrative workers (PMA), categories 4 and 5 into sales and service workers, categories 6, 7, 8 and 9 into agricultural, production, transport and general labourers (APTG), and all unpaid labour as U. We do not include students, retirees and others outside the labour market. Image 6 reports the results, by race.

Coloured female workers dominate sales and service work as well as agriculture, production, transport and general labourers. White women are most commonly employed in professional, managerial or administrative work, including clerical workers. The shift towards these occupations before, during and after the Second

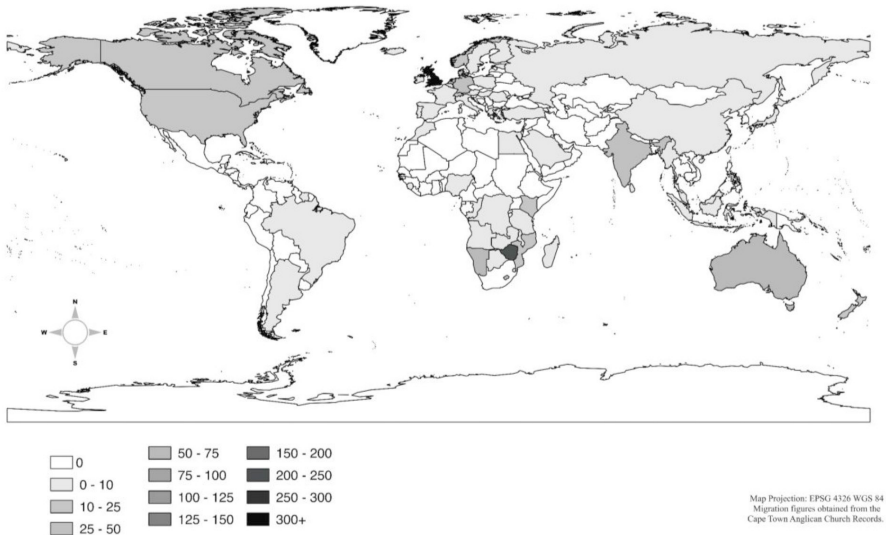
<sup>53</sup> HISCO Tree of Occupational Groups (available at <https://historyofwork.iisg.nl/major.php>, accessed on 19 September 2019).

World War is discussed by Rommelspacher.<sup>54</sup>

## Foreign

It was not only South Africans that married in Cape Town's Anglican churches. Image 7 shows a map of the countries where non-South African grooms were born, as recorded by the Anglican marriage records from 1924 to 1960. It reveals a wide range of origin countries. The United Kingdom, as expected, is the most common origin region, with more than 2 000 grooms originating from there. Southern African countries and colonies, notably Southern Rhodesia (127), St. Helena (80), South West Africa (49), Basutoland (40), Northern Rhodesia (33) and Nyasaland (18), also feature prominently. Yet there are also grooms from several lesser-known territories, including Iceland (1), Honolulu (1), Burma (1), Nigeria (1) and Suriname (1).

Image 7: Map of foreign grooms' place-of-birth, 1924-1960



William Cullen Library (Wits University, Johannesburg), "Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801-2004". Database with images. FamilySearch, available at <https://FamilySearch.org> (accessed on 14 June 2016).

## Conclusion

Writing about ordinary people in history is never easy. Many people leave no trace of their thoughts or their actions in places where historians may traditionally search for them. One way to address this lacuna is by reading against the grain of the archive, either through personal memories, or oral histories or literary sources that

<sup>54</sup> A Rommelspacher, "'Too delicate to work'? women and work in Cape Town 1938-1939", mimeo.

can be criticised for their subjectivity or, as we show here, through a combination of newly transcribed sources at the individual level and the quantitative tools of the social scientist.

In this paper, we used more than 55 000 marriage records to reveal the patterns in the social lives of people who married in the Anglican church in Cape Town between 1865 and 1960. Marriage is an ancient institution and therefore provides a wonderful lens to view the changing literacy, racial, segregation, occupational and migration trends in the city over almost a century. We are not the first to employ marriage records to understand social change, but we are the first to do so on such a large scale for one city at the southern tip of Africa.

Our new source addresses some previously unanswered questions. Interracial marriages declined in Cape Town well before the imposition of the 1949 Prohibition on Mixed Marriages Act. Racial reclassification, as recorded by these records, reveals the tragedy and the fluidity of apartheid-era race categorisation. The records also expose new trends that necessitate further investigation. Why did summer become the season of choice for weddings by the 1950s, for white but especially for coloured couples? When did white women enter professional occupations, and why? And were migrants more likely to marry other migrants or did they assimilate into Cape Town society by marrying locally-born spouses?

The sources do, of course, also have limitations. They only provide a snapshot of the lives of mostly young men and women. By linking the marriage records to other sources, perhaps death notices, one would be able to track individuals over time. A further possibility is to match marriage records to baptism records to measure bridal pregnancy.<sup>55</sup> And, of course, it would be illuminating to compare the Anglican church to other denominations in Cape Town or Cape Town to other towns in the Cape hinterland, to other regions of southern Africa and the British Empire, and to the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom. There is still much to learn about marriage trends and the social histories of ordinary people they can tell.

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<sup>55</sup> L. Richardson, "Measuring illegitimacy and bridal pregnancy in Cape Town" (MA in History, Stellenbosch University, 2020).