

## **Social Norms of Bridewealth**

A Systematic Analysis of the Impact of Polygyny and Social-Economic Conditions

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### **Abstract**

In the majority of cultures, marriages were or still are accompanied by transfers of resources of substantive amount. These transfers are of very different character and take place either intragenerationally between the parents of the engaged couple (bridewealth or groom-price) or intergenerationally between the parents and the bride and/or the groom (dower, dowry, or indirect dowry). Bridewealth, which is transferred from the parents of the groom to the parents of the bride, is the most widespread kind of marriage transfer and it is investigated by an extensive body of literature on its social, cultural, and economic determinants. Most of these publications, however, rest on individual case studies of particular societies and a systematic, comparative, and quantitative analysis of this topic is still missing. We intend to close this gap by utilizing data from the Ethnographic Atlas, which provides information on basic characteristics of 1,267 traditional societies. Results from multivariate logit-regressions support central arguments of the literature on the determinants of bridewealth. It is particularly present if societies are characterized by subsistence economies of animal husbandry, extensive or intensive agriculture, patrilineal kinship systems, and polygyny. According to the discussion whether bridewealth is an element of classless societies or of societies with some inequality, the analyses support the latter argument. Bridewealth is particularly present in societies with a basic stratification between an economic or societal elite and a less wealthy or subordinate strata.

## 1. Introduction

The transfer of money, goods, or services at the time of marriage is an almost universal characteristic in ancient and traditional societies and it is still significantly present in contemporary threshold countries. The structure and character of these transfers, however, are very different in nature: intergenerational or intragenerational, given from the bride's family or given from the family of the groom. In matrilineal culture of the Nagovisi of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, for example, grooms reside with brides' families and groom-price paid by the latter compensates grooms' families for the loss of labor and reproductive capacities of their sons (Nash 1978). In the Volta region in Ghana, in contrast, the culture of patrilineal unions implies compensation payments of bride-wealth from the groom's family to the family of the bride, often by installments, (Horne et al. 2013). In China, moreover, brides become central actors for demands and negotiations with their own and their husbands' families for dowry and dower, i.e. for resources substantially supporting the start of their unions.

The features of particular systems of transfers at marriage are deeply rooted in tradition and culture and are governed by social custom and law. Social norms regulate both the economic and social character of transfers. The former covers the amount of money, goods, or services transferred and the room for negotiation between the families involved. The latter addresses the social consequences of transfers, for example, to what extent families become linked and mutually obliged or whether marriage transfers create a system of generalized exchange in order to enable marriages.

Norms are situational expressions of values, which are again deeply rooted in a society's living conditions (Schwartz). Thus, if the social-economic prerequisites of marriage transfers vanish, related traditional, longly practiced rules may change. Given the inert character of values and norms, however, a period of "cultural lag" is often observed as it may take a substantial amount of time until altered or new social norms have become prevalent. Moreover, changing social, demographic, and economic conditions may imply the dissolution of systems of marriage transfers, as it was observed in Europe, as well as a complete change of their character and purpose. For example, marriage transfers change from bride-wealth to groom-price if the value of women's productive abilities declines relative to men's one and the amount of groom price may inflationary increase if families socially and economically benefit from marrying their daughters with men from high status families (Lindenbaum 1981). If consumption goods become desirable symbols of social status, marriage payments move from transfers of cattle, tools, or land to transfers of TV-sets, refrigerators, or money. Demographic imbalances may also have an impact. The drastic increase of the excess rate of men in the Chinese marriage market has raised bride-wealth claims of families with daughters and leads to increased savings for wedding events for families of sons while males from poorer families are outcompeted, have to delay marriage, or cannot marry at all (Wei and Zhang 2011).

Inspecting the literature in sociology and anthropology, a multitude of explanations for particular systems of marriage payments can be found. Most of them, however, are functional justifications within the context of a particular tribe, culture, or society and rest on case studies. Only recently social

science researchers and evolutionary biologists have started a more general discussion on the determinants of marriage payment rules.

Throughout this paper, we will follow this program by a systematic empirical exploration of the relations between social-economic conditions, marriage systems, and bridewealth. We use the data of the Ethnographic Atlas, which contains a multitude of information on social, cultural, economic, agricultural, family- and kinship-related characteristics of 1,267 traditional societies.

Given the fact of a Babylonian heterogeneity of denominations of the different kinds of marriage transfers, we will firstly clarify the terminology in the following section. As our analyses intend to explain the presence of bridewealth norms, their economic and social character are more deeply discussed in Section 3. Based on theories and explanations of bridewealth, we will develop in Section 4 hypotheses on social and economic factors determining the presence of this kind of marriage transfer. We describe data and methods in Section 5 and we will present and discuss our descriptive and multivariate in Section 6. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and some perspectives for further research.

## **2. Forms of Marriage Transfers**

Marriage-related transfers take different forms and are of different nature (Anderson 2014, Huber et al. 2011). They may be intragenerational or intergenerational, they may involve parents of marriage partners as well as marriage partners themselves, parents may be explicitly excluded, or the extended kin of both spouses may be benefactors and beneficiaries of goods and services assigned. Transfers may have the character of one-sided donations or direct reciprocal or generalized social exchange. They may take place once or several times before, after, or at the time of marriage. Goods and services transferred reach from symbolic gifts, over labor, up to means of subsistence or property of substantive value.

According to the persons involved, marriage transfers can be typified within two dimensions (Anderson 2007, Encyclopedia Britannica Online 2016, Murdock 1981, 1967, Schlegel and Eloul 1988): they are intergenerational or intragenerational and the bride's or the groom's family is the beneficiary or donor of the resources transferred. Table 1 systematizes the different types and terms of transfers according to the two dimensions.

The term “bride-wealth”—“bride-price” is used as well—addresses intragenerational transfers from the groom's to the bride's family. If a symbolic payment takes place, which always consists of luxury goods, the term “token bride-price” is applied. Bride-wealth may consist of property or means of payment, like cash, livestock, tools, or items. It is a “[...] transfer of wealth [...] in direct connection with marriage” (Gulliver 1961: 1098). Neither the groom nor the bride are direct beneficiaries of payment. However, transfers may not be limited to the parents of marriage partners. Extended kin may be involved if the amount of bride-wealth exceeds the resources at disposal of the groom's father, or if

**Table 1** Kinds of marriage transfers in dependence of donor and beneficiary

Beneficiary	Donor			
	Bride's family	Groom's family	Bride	Groom
Bride's family	—	Bridewealth (brideprice)		Groomservice
Groom's family	Groomwealth (groomprice)	—	Brideservice	
Bride	Dowry	Dower (indirect dowry)	—	Dower
Groom	Groomprice (groomwealth)	Dower		—

intergenerational transfer    
 intragenerational transfer

bride-wealth is distributed among family members in order to reduce risks of loss due to draught or plagues, like in the case of cattle.

“Dowry” has rather ambiguous meanings. Originally, it addresses transfers from the bride’s family to the bride (Goody 1973, Randeria and Visaria 1984, Caplan 1984). However, it became a term covering all kinds of transfers, in which the bride’s family is the donor and the bride, the groom, or his family are beneficiaries. This extension emerged from the fact that there was always a smooth transition between intergenerational and intragenerational transfers of dowry, whereas the bride was the major beneficiary. Meanwhile, transfers from brides’ parents exclusively donated to grooms and their families are of high significance in India and South Asia. As these transfers have a different meaning and different implications for marriage partners than dowry in its traditional understanding, many authors suggest to denominate them as “groom-wealth” or “groom-price” (Spiro 1975, Nash 1978).

“Dower” takes place, if the groom’s family provides resources directly to the bride (Spiro 1975). Likewise, there is some discussion on the validity of this term. It also covers transfers from the groom’s family to its son, or gifts from the groom to the bride (Schlegel and Eloul 1988). Dower is of central importance for Muslim marriages. The groom has to hand over wealth—which is typically provided by his parents—to the bride as economic security in the case of his death or divorce. There is also the possibility that a bride receives parts of bridewealth given to her parents. In order to separate this situation from the one of direct transfers by dower, Goody (1973) suggests to apply the term “indirect dowry”.

Marriage-related transfers may also take place in the form of labor that is intergenerationally provided during a period before marriage. Brides or grooms work temporarily for the families of the potential or promised marriage partners, which is called “bride-service” in the former and “groom-service” in the latter case. This kind of transfer, however, doesn’t have to be one-sided. The families of the potential marriage partners benefit from grooms’ or brides’ work but they also have to spend resources in order to feed and to care for the young men or women during their stays (Bossen 1988).

Groom-service or bride-service typically take place in hunter and gatherer societies with no or very low levels of privately owned resources, like land or cattle. Thus, marriage transfers take the form of allocating temporarily the working abilities and manpower of brides or grooms to the parents of the marriage partners.

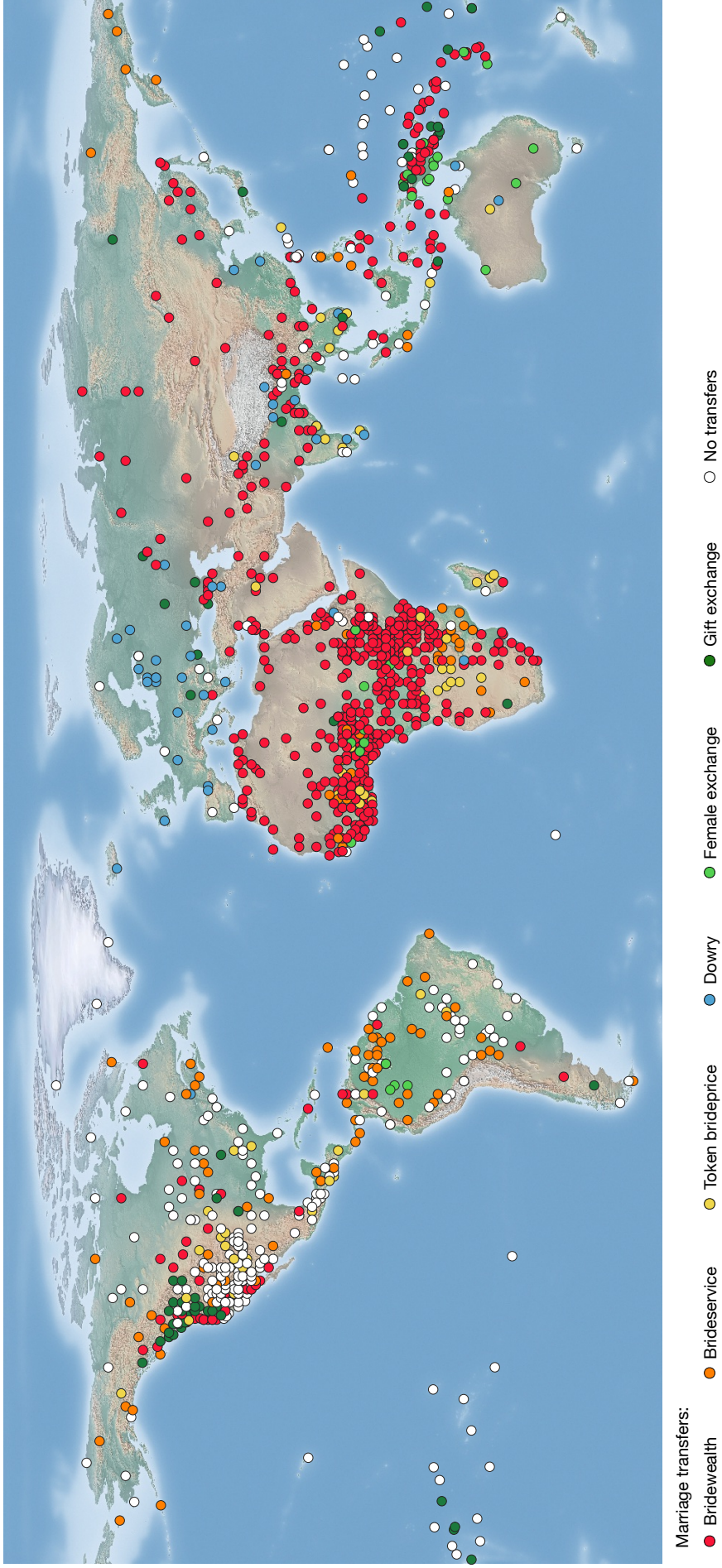
The marriage transfers listed in Table 1 are the ones that receive most recognition in the literature. However, a broad variety of other kinds of transfers are documented as well. In some cultures, for example, groom and bride exclusively receive gifts from their relatives and friends, but not from their parents (Huber et al. 2011). This creates a structure of general reciprocal exchange between families, whereas the gift givers expect return gifts from the marriage partners and their relatives in the case that their sons, daughters, or they themselves marry. Marriage-related transfers can also take the character of mutual reciprocal exchange at the time of marriage. This may include gifts or resources of equal value, but it may also include brides. Among the Beduins in the Israeli towns of Ramala and Lod, for example, exchange of brides takes place between families of equal social status. Each family, moreover, equally contributes to expenditures needed to set up the new households (Kressel 1977). The kind of transfer at marriage may also express the social status of the families involved. In other muslim societies, families of equal status mutually exchange brides. However, if a bride marries into a family of higher status, the latter pay bridewealth. The family of the bride accepts the transfer as an expression of its minor status.

Bridewealth and dowry receive particular recognition in the literature, as they are the most prominent forms of marriage transactions. Bridewealth was already practiced in the past in the Middle East, in South America, China, in Islamic societies, and the Mediterranean region and it is currently prevalent in sub-Saharan societies, some countries in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and China (Anderson 2007, 2015, Bossen 1988, Hughes 1978, Rapoport 2000, Tapper 1984) (see Figure 1). Dowry systems were known during the Greek and Roman era, in Western Europe and Latin America, and are currently present in China and other Asian societies. Geographically, bridewealth systems are much more spread than dowry, but the latter is or was more prevalent in the most populated parts of the world (Anderson 2007).

In countries of the western hemisphere, dowry disappeared during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. In other parts of the world, however, marriage payments continued to be of high importance and may experience significant transformations. In India, bridewealth and dowry become increasingly substituted by groom-price. The associated intensified competition for grooms imply transfers of increasing value from brides' parents to grooms and their parents and deteriorate women's status in society. Dowry is gaining in importance as well. In some regions of China bridewealth and indirect dowry are disappearing and dower to the bride becomes the dominant form of marriage payment. Brides are the central actors in negotiations about dower and grooms' families feel obliged to transfer increasing amounts of resources in order to support the start of their sons' unions.

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, bridewealth decreases in importance but also changes its character. Parents step back from bridewealth and grooms have to raise the required resources by

**Figure 1** Geographical distribution of forms of marriage transfers



Data source: D-Place: Database of Places, Language, Culture and Environment (<https://d-place.org/>), Kirby et al. 2016. Original data: Murdock et al. 1999.

themselves, leading to an attitude of women as a personal belonging of husbands. Moreover, if grooms are not able to raise bridewealth or if women want to take free decisions about their marriage partners, brides transfer bridewealth to their own mothers. Within this context, bridewealth loses its character of a compensation payment to brides' parents and becomes a donation to mothers in order to honor their efforts and costs for bringing up brides.

These different forms of marriage transactions are mostly characterized as one-sided transfers. However, this perspective may be an oversimplification because there is also mutual exchange between the families involved. There is evidence that in some societies marriage transfers are a singular, one-sided act, and in others they build foundations of long-lasting relationships which may be embedded within structures of reciprocal exchange.

### **3. The Economic and Social Character of Bridewealth**

Bride-wealth payments are repeatedly attributed as economic exchange between the bride's and the groom's family (Horne et al. 2013, Tapper 1981, Papps 1983). The economic character refers to three elements typifying the transfer: the acquisition of usage rights, the provision of compensation payments, and the embedding in institutional regulations.

In exchange to bridewealth, grooms and their families receive usage rights over brides' fertility and work abilities, which includes both domestic and agricultural work, but they do not grant property rights on the latter (Borgerhoff Mulder 1995, Dadoo 1998, Meekers 1992). Bridewealth also legitimizes a union as a marriage. This provides again the legal basis for transfer, enforcement, and sanctioning of marital rights as well as of inheritances of the couple (Atekyereza 2001, Evans-Pritchard 1931, Gay 1960, Mizinga 2000, Ogbu 1978, Price and Thomas 1999). In patrilineal societies, it ensures that couples' offspring belongs to the families of husbands, in matrilineal societies, it ensures rights on brides (Horne et al. 2013, Radcliffe-Brown 1929, Goldschmidt 1974, Meekers 1992, de Vries et al. 2006). In some cultures, moreover, parts of bridewealth are paid as success rewards for children born to husbands' lineages (Goldschmidt 1974, Bascom 1990). The exchange character of bridewealth also becomes evident by the fact that husbands' families can demand retransfers of bridewealth, particularly if a wife turns out to be infertile or if the number of children she gave birth to is perceived as being insufficient (Ogbu 1978, Rudwick and Posel 2014). In many cultures, women can also seek for divorce. Depending on the evaluation of husbands' families how much they benefited from the rights acquired by bridewealth, women or they parents have to make repayments

Bridewealth is not only motivated by the acquisition of rights, it is also a compensation payment to brides' parents. In the case of patrilocal and patrilineal societies, the latter lose the reproductive and working abilities of their daughters as husbands' families become the exclusive beneficiaries of these abilities after marriage. However, families that have received bridewealth become able to wed their sons. I.e. they become able to benefit from the abilities of their sons' wives and to ensure the reproduction of their lineage. Consequently, bridewealth is also perceived as an investment (Gray 1960,

Goody 1973). Brides' families require bridewealth in order to invest into the marriages of their sons and bridewealth in itself is an investment into the production and reproduction of families by ensuring usage rights on brides' abilities. In general, bridewealth may work as a rotating investment fund within a community or region enabling families to wed their children (Goody 1973).

Bride-wealth takes place within institutional regulations that reduce transaction costs in the end. Rules by custom define the procedure of negotiations, the sequence and timing of transfers, as well as the rights and duties of the parties involved. The amount of payments are negotiated in advance or there is a fixed standard payment to be made. Payments may take place uniquely, repeatedly at fixed periods, or as installments. Rights are concurrently subrogated to husbands and their families by the share of payments they made.

Despite its economic character, bridewealth is not a price mirroring supply and demand of brides on marriage markets. It is primarily determined by the amounts of rights and abilities received in exchange. If brides are comparatively old or if they were already married before, for example, lower amounts of wealth are transferred because these women have already spent more of their fertile years than younger marriageable ones. Moreover, rights and abilities received by bridewealth are of very general nature. Particularly in pastoral or agricultural societies households' subsistence and economic success depend on the quantity of working family members but not on individual expertise or human capital of the latter. Thus, women are close substitutes to each other on marriage markets and consequently, bridewealth payments merely fluctuate within particular margins. Within these margins negotiations may be possible and the bargained amount may be important for the social status of the bride's family. Contrary to dower or groom-price, however, no inflationary increase of bridewealth was observed in the past (Anderson 2007). Payments increased over time, but this was primarily an adjustment to inflation.

A relative stability of the amount of resources to be transferred is also a precondition for bridewealth as a rotating fond for enabling marriages. Families that have received bridewealth for the weddings of their daughters have to rely on that these resources are approximately sufficient to wed their sons. A high variation of payments would either challenge the whole wedding system or it would lead to a stratification with separate rotating fonds for families of different wealth. The latter, however, requires a society with a distinct unequal distribution of wealth.

Although the process of bride-wealth payments follows the logic of economic transactions, it doesn't have to be economically motivated. Only in particular situations families can assume to benefit directly from bridewealth. This is the case, for example, for families having more daughters than sons or if is common practice that fathers keep bridewealth and sons have to raise the resources required for their marriages. Moreover, if bridewealth consists of cattle, the temporary increase of the herds of the brides' families may lead to more offspring which will again increase sizes of these herds in the long run. In other situations, moreover, bridewealth may lead to economic benefits in an indirect manner as it enables marriages that create alliances with wealthy or powerful families, that provide access



to political offices, or that create cooperative ties beyond community borders (Chisholm and Burbank 1991, Tertilt 2006, Walker et al. 2011).

Bridewealth may also establish relationships between families, which again provide the basis for future economic transactions or supportive transfers (Rudwick and Posel 2014, de Vries et al. 2006, Perlman 1966). This applies particularly to cultures where bridewealth is paid in installments, as this leads to incomplete or postponed reciprocity between the families involved (Dekker and Hogeveen 2002, Horne et al. 2013). Depending on the payments already made, brides' families are obliged to transfer rights to grooms and their families step by step. The latter are obliged to the former because they are already allowed to utilize the brides' productive and reproductive abilities. This debt may be directly settled by providing services or payments to brides' fathers. Grooms from poor families may get into debt for a long time. In the case of the Zulu of South Africa, for example, men who cannot offer bridewealth make symbolic payments by stones with the promise that the bridewealth payment for their first daughters are transferred to the fathers-in-law (Posel and Rudwick 2014, see also Ibrahim (1990) for Sudan).

If relatives of grooms raise bridewealth that is again distributed among brides' relatives, installments create social relationships between larger parts of the families involved. Bridewealth may also create a system of indirect generalized exchange within a community. If average livestock per family is too small in order to be used for bridewealth, different families contribute to the required resources (Whitelaw 2013, Fleischer 1999). These families become linked with one another and the risky character of generalized exchange enforces trust and solidarity within the community.

Relationships between the families of marriage partners may also establish via prescribed mutual transfers. In the culture of the Zulu, for example, the bride's family receives bridewealth but it also has to retransfer costly gifts to the family of the groom. Bridewealth may be needed in order to finance these gifts. In other cultures, grooms and brides are chosen according to the characters of their fathers and the willingness of their families for cooperation and provision of help (Gulliver 1961).

Bridewealth, however, may also be highly individualized and without any implications for the relationships between the families of the marriage partners. As already addressed, fathers may keep bridewealth and sons have to raise their own bridewealth, often leading to wage labour migration of young men (Price and Thomas 1999). In other societies, marriage and bridewealth do not have any implications for social relationships and installments are strictly not possible (Gay 1960).

As already addressed, also in polygynous societies, an inflation of bridewealth cannot be observed. Its amount is determined by custom, its symbolic nature, its legal and social implications (Posel and Casale 2013). Within a community, therefore, the amount of bridewealth does not significantly vary by the wealth of the spouses' families (Anderson 2007). This inertia caused by normative regulations reduces the risk of rapidly increasing marriage payments due to market mechanisms, but it also reduces opportunities for declining bridewealth and the reduction of inequalities on marriage markets.

#### 4. Hypotheses on the Emergence and Prevalence of Bridewealth Norms

The evolution and existence of bridewealth norms in a society and the amount of bridewealth to be transferred depends on a variety of demographic, economic, and cultural factors. These factors are related to a society's demographic and economic structure as well as to the characteristics of brides' and grooms' families, the evaluation of brides' and grooms' working capabilities and the type of goods exchanged upon marriages.

**Polygyny and the demand and supply of brides.** Although bridewealth is not a market price reflecting supply and demand of brides on marriage markets, it may be utilized as a premium payment within competitions for marriage partners (Becker 1993). Thus, families are able to attract brides, if they offer – within the culturally set upper margin of payments – somewhat higher bridewealth than others. This utilization of bridewealth becomes particularly important in polygynous societies. Men's opportunity to engage in unions with multiple wives leads to an undersupply of women on marriage markets, increases the competition for brides, and makes men's reproductive success more uncertain. Thus, bridewealth becomes a mean to ensure marriages of sons, both for first or subsequent unions (Fortunato et al. 2006: 356, Hartung et al. 1982, Huber et al. 2011).

Theories on the emergence of polygyny, however, argue that monogamous or polygynous unions do not depend on the amount of bridewealth offered but on the amount of fertility related resources controlled by husbands and their families. In particular, already married men have to control more resources than bachelors in order to engage in polygynous unions, as these resources have to compensate women's reproductive costs for sharing husbands with co-wives. However, in the case of arranged marriages – which prevail in polygynous societies – women and their families have only limited information about potential marriage partners. Thus, they may attribute bridewealth as a signal that grooms are honestly motivated to engage in unions with their daughters and that they and their families possess sufficient amounts of resources to be reproductively successful (Apostolou 2008, Atekyereza 2001). This holds particularly for already married men. They have to document that they are able to compensate women's costs for polygyny as well as to ensure the wellbeing of two or more wives and their offspring.

In polygynous societies, therefore, men's success on marriage markets is very much determined by wealth and bridewealth is of central importance within this context. Men from wealthier families are more able to marry at all, to engage in multiple marriages, and to be reproductively successful. Women become concentrated in these families. Men from less wealthy families, on the contrary, have to face a marriage squeeze, may have to allocate additional resources over a longer period in order to become marriageable, or may systematically be excluded from marriages (Goldschmidt 1974, Huber et al. 2011, Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte 2012).

According to these arguments, polygyny does not lead to an increase or inflation of bride-wealth. Men from wealthy families offer somewhat but not abundantly more resources in order to outperform competing grooms. It is primarily used as a mean to enable first and subsequent marriages.

Moreover, gender-specific norms on marriageability relax competition on marriage markets in polygynous societies. The number of brides is increased by the principle of universal marriage for women and regulations that women become marriageable at much younger ages than men. Moreover, divorced or widowed women have to remarry quickly. The number of grooms is reduced by the fact that men don't have to marry within a short age period but to enter first marriages throughout their whole lives. It is also reduced by the necessities of bridewealth and the control of sufficient amounts of fertility-related resources. Men who do not satisfy these criteria are excluded from marriage.

**Hypothesis 1:** We expect that polygamous societies have a higher likelihood to develop bridewealth norms than monogamous societies.

**Mode of subsistence.** Bridewealth provides usage rights both on women's productive and reproductive abilities and it compensates brides' families for the loss of working power of their daughters due to marriage. Thus, the relevance of bridewealth is closely connected with the economic structure of a society. Bridewealth is particularly present in horticultural, pastoral, or extensive agricultural economies, which do not require the operation of heavy tools and in which women's working power makes important contributions to households' subsistence (Schlegel and Eloul 1988). A household's economic productivity, moreover, does not rest on particular qualifications of its members, but on their quantity. Thus, women's fertility is also relevant according to the contribution of their children to agricultural work, herding, or work in the household (Caldwell 2005). This situation changes if labor markets provide income opportunities for women. Now, bridewealth honors women's educational qualifications and income potential (Resnik 2015). However, emerging labor markets are primarily beneficial for males and women's income potential and economic contributions to the household become devalued (Anderson 2014). As a consequence, bridewealth becomes replaced by groom price and parents are less willing to invest in the education of their daughters but in high quality grooms via payments to them or their families.

Bridewealth also requires wealth that is privately owned and that can be accumulated, divided, and expanded. This applies to livestock or movable items (Apostolou 2008) as they are present in agrarian or pastoral societies. In hunter and gatherer societies, however, wealth can hardly be accumulated and subsistence rests on personal abilities and social capital, which cannot be transferred. Consequently, marriages are not accompanied by bridewealth. Bridewealth is also less present in more intensive agricultural economies, in which fields are cultivated by heavy tools, like the plow or irrigation (Bossen 1988, Anderson and Bidner 2015, Goody 1976). The plow increases the value of men's workforce for subsistence and devalues women's one. Moreover, agriculture becomes focused on land that can permanently be fertilized or irrigated. These areas can be divided and distributed, but they may not be extended later on.

**Hypothesis 2:** We expect bridewealth norms when the economic basis is pastoral, horticultural or agricultural with extensive land use and women's labor highly valued. In contrast, bridewealth norms are expected to emerge less frequent in hunter-gatherer societies as well as in economies resting on intensive agricultural cultivation.

**Lineage systems.** The legal consequences of bridewealth do not only cover usage rights on wives they also legitimize marriages in general, related transfers, enforcements, and sanctioning of marital rights as well as lineage affiliations of children (Gay 1960, Evans-Pritchard 1931, Ogbu 1978). Sub-Saharan societies, for example, know a large variety of unions. Couples can live together and they can have children, but only after bridewealth is paid and the union is established according to socially recognized rules, it is legitimized and attributed as a marriage (Ogbu 1978, Price and Thomas 1999, Mizinga 2000, Atekyereza 2001). Correspondingly, if bridewealth is paid in installments, children belong to their mothers' families as long as the agreed amounts of wealth are not completely transferred (de Vries et al. 2006). Moreover, if rights expire due to divorce, the repayments of bridewealth publicly symbolizes the termination of a marriage.

The relevance of bridewealth for the volume of rights transferred and children's affiliations varies by lineage system. It is particularly important in patrilineal societies, less important in matrilineal ones and of medium importance in double uni-lineal descent and bilateral lineage systems. In patrilineal societies, husbands receive more rights on wives than in matrilineal ones. Children become members of husbands' lineages, which is not the case for matrilineal cultures (Horne et al. 2013, Radcliffe-Brown 1929, Goldschmidt 1974, Meekers 1992). In general, the more rights upon brides and children grooms and their families receive the higher the bridewealth to be paid (Bossen 1988). Thus, in cultures with low bridewealth, children may not become members of husbands' families and they and their mothers may even not take up patrilocal residence. The contrary is the case in marriage systems of high bridewealth.

In all lineage systems, the bride does not become property of the groom and his family. The marriage partners receive reciprocal conjugal rights at the time of marriage and in many cultures there is a variety of socially accepted reasons for the wife to seek for divorce. Depending on the lineage system, wives or their families may have to repay bridewealth if the divorce is not caused by the husband. In matrilineal societies, husbands' families lose the agricultural and domestic working power of wives, which has to be compensated by at least partial repayments of bridewealth. In patrilineal or bilateral societies, however, children belong to the husband after divorce (Price and Thomas 1999). These children may be credited against the loss of wives' abilities and only some or even no bridewealth has to be retransferred.

**Hypothesis 3:** Patrilineal lineage systems will lead with higher probability to bridewealth norms than matrilineal or other lineage systems.

**Social stratification.** Bridewealth is repeatedly attributed as being typical for societies with relative economic equality (Goody 1973, Schlegel and Eloul 1988). In pastoral or extensive agricultural economies, most work is done by women who are also primarily responsible for the production of food for their children and themselves. Accumulation of wealth is limited because after a man has died his wealth is distributed among his sons. Thus, men's socioeconomic status is of minor importance for decisions about marriage partners (Hakansson 1990). However, bridewealth is also sensitive to economic inequality. If men would have to marry at young ages and if they would have to raise bride-

wealth on their own, grooms would be characterized by relative economic equality. However, if men's age at marriage is flexible and if bridewealth is typically provided by their families or themselves at higher ages, grooms of heterogeneous economic status are present on marriage markets..

More wealthy families are able to attract more promising and a larger number of brides by offering somewhat higher bridewealth within shorter periods. Bridewealth, therefore, is an effective mechanism to concentrate women around older, wealthy men and their sons. These families are interested in securing their competitive advantage by perpetuating the bridewealth norms (Emsinger and Knight 1997, Tapper 1981, 1984). As a consequence, segmented marriage markets and processes of social closure are observed. Wealthy families build an economic elite within which comparatively high amounts of bridewealth are transferred in order to exclude less wealthy men (Hakansson 1990).

If societies develop to higher complexity, however, bridewealth declines in importance and becomes substituted by dowry, groom price, or indirect dowry (Anderson 2014, 2007, Bossen 1988). This development is very much caused by a change of competition for brides to a change of competition for grooms. Various factors are responsible for this.

Increasing social stratification implies that marriage decisions also consider the social or economic status of marriage partners. In more complex societies, the status of a family and its offspring is defined by the social and economic status of husbands. Consequently, parents become vitally interested in endogamous or hypergamous marriages of their daughters. This ensures the maintenance or improvement of social status of their daughters, grandchildren, and themselves and may also establish valuable economic or political relationships to husbands' families. They become substantially motivated to take the initiative of selecting suitable marriage partners for their daughters (Diekemann 1979, Gaulin and Boster 1990). This is not possible by the reception of bridewealth but by the active offer of dowry or groom price (Emsinger and Knight 1997).

Agrarian societies typically develop towards intensive forms of cultivation, which includes the utilization of the plow, application of irrigation, or cultivation of permanent cash crops like tea. Women's ability to carry out labor-intensive light agrarian work becomes less demanded within these systems of subsistence. Intensification of agriculture also leads to an increase of the value of agricultural land. Fertile land becomes limited or cannot easily be expanded. Intensive cultivation and permanent plantation are long-term economic investments. In the case of marriage, these means of production and subsistence cannot easily be divided and expanded afterwards. Consequently, they remain undivided in men's lineage and women and their parents have to compete for land-owning men. Men, moreover, benefit from emerging labor markets and income generating opportunities. This is not the case for women and their valued abilities become limited to give birth to children and work in the household. All these developments lead to an increase of men's importance, a decrease of women's importance for households' subsistence and wealth, and a competition for grooms on marriage markets.

In the case of the extended family with its sole household, bride-wealth is integrated into the overall pool of resources. Although wives are economically separated from the households of their husbands' families in most cultures, an increase of resources improves the latter's abilities to support

the former and its offspring. Emerging labor markets, however, imply that men become economically more independent and more autonomous from their parents. They may become able to finance a marriage and to establish a households of their own (Ensminger and Knight 1997). This new household is not able to directly participate from the pool of resources controlled by spouses' parents. As the latter are vitally interested into the wellbeing of their children and grandchildren they provide support by dowry or indirect dowry.

**Hypothesis 4:** We expected an inverted U-shaped relationship between the degree of social stratification and bridewealth.

## 5. Data and Methods

**Data.** We constructed a data file based on an updated version of the Ethnographic Atlas (EA). The Ethnographic Atlas contains rich ethnological information from 1,291 preindustrial societies. It covers more than 90 cultural traits including information on kinship-structure, settlements, marriage systems, kind of subsistence economy, social stratification, or lineage systems. The data were originally collected by Murdock and other scientists and published in *Ethnology* between 1962 and 1971 (Murdock 1962-1971, see O'Leary 1969 for an overview). They were extended and corrected afterwards, particularly by Barry (1980a, 1980b), Gray (1999), Korotayev et al. (2004), Bondarenko et al. (2005), and Kirby et al. (2016). The latter substantially revised and integrated the Ethnographic Atlas into the framework of the D-PLACE database from which we downloaded the data.<sup>1</sup>

The data of the Ethnographic Atlas stem from coding of central cultural characteristics of societies reported in original ethnographies being published in journals and books.<sup>2</sup> The covered period starts from from 800 BC and ends with the most recent source from 1965. The unit of data is a society or cultural group, i.e. "[...] a group of people at a focal location with a shared language that differs from that of their neighbors" (Kirby et al. 2016:6). This definition applies to the majority of societies in the data, but in some cases multiple societies share one language. All societies considered are preindustrial and do not represent any kind of nation state. The Ethnographic Atlas is not a complete inventory count of all cultural groups world wide. It considers only societies that are adequately described in the sources and draws emphasis on North American and African societies (Kirby et al. 2016). Moreover, as Europe is not a traditional field of research in Ethnology, cultures from this continent tend to be underrepresented (Murdock 1967).

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable in the subsequent empirical analysis is the presence of bride-wealth in a society. The Ethnographic Atlas provides information on the prevailing type of transactions at marriage in a cultural group. These are "bridewealth", "bride-service", "token bride-price", "gift exchange", "female exchange", and "dowry". The latter category also includes groom-price. See Table 1 for a more detailed definition of the different types of marriage transfers. These categories are

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://d-place.org> for further information.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://d-place.org/sources> for a documentation of the considered publications.

summarized into a dummy variable, whereas 1 represents the presence of bridewealth and 0 indicates all other kinds of transfers at marriage.

**Explanatory variables.** Following the hypotheses formulated in the preceding section, the explanatory variables address a culture's marriage system, the most important subsistence economy, the lineage system, and the degree of social stratification.

The variable on marriage systems considers monogamy and the prevalence of polygyny. The original variable in the Ethnographic Atlas provides information about the presence of monogamy, polygyny, or polyandry. In the case of polygyny it also informs whether it is occasional or limited, common, or general. Polygyny is attributed as occasional or limited if it is culturally favored in a society but if its prevalence is less than 20 percent among all unions (Murdock 1957:670–671). Common or general polygyny addresses societies with a prevalence of more than at least 20 percent, whereas the term “common” is used to separate sororal from non-sororal polygynous partnerships. Thus, in order to avoid a corroboration of the analyses with these two kinds of polygyny, the categories “common” (general and preferably sororal) and “general” (general and preferably non-sororal) are summarized. The modified variable informs about the “prevalence of polygyny”, i.e. whether a marriage system is “monogamous”, “polyandrous”, or whether polygyny is “occasionally or limited”, or “generally” present.

In order to create a variable that informs about the most important kind of subsistence economy, different variables from the Ethnographic Atlas are used. One set of variables reports societies' dependence on particular kinds of subsistence. These are “gathering of wild plants and small land fauna”, “hunting, including trapping and fowling”, “fishing, including shellfishing and the pursuit of large aquatic animals”, “animal husbandry”, and “agriculture” (see Table 2). For each economy, the degree of dependence is reported on an ordinal scale, starting from “0 to 5 percent” up to “86 to 100 percent”. In a first step, the most important subsistence economy is identified. If two economies are of equal importance, the related cases are excluded from analysis. If agriculture is most important, additional information on its intensity is considered in a second step. The Ethnographic Atlas informs whether agriculture is “casual”, “extensive or shifting”, “semi-intensive in forms of vegetable gardens or groves of fruit trees”, “intensive on permanent fields”, or “intensive and largely dependent upon irrigation”. These categories are summarized to “extensive” (extensive or shifting), “semi-intensive”, and “intensive” (permanent fields or irrigation). “Casual” agriculture is not considered, because it is not reported as the most important economy in any society. Consequently, the final variable differentiates between “gathering”, “hunting”, “fishing”, “animal husbandry”, “extensive agriculture”, “semi-intensive agriculture”, and “intensive agriculture”.

According to the dominant lineage structure of a society, the Ethnographic Atlas considers “patrilineal” or “matrilineal” descent, “duolateral” lineage, which addresses a mixture of patrilineal and matrilineal regulations according to kinship, inheritance, or rights, “bilateral”, where a child belongs to the father's and the mother's lineage, “ambilineal”, i.e. a child can freely decide whether belonging to the lineage of the mother or of the father, “parallel” or “quasi-lineage”, where sons always belong to the

father's lineage and daughters always become members of their mother's kinship, and finally "mixed", which identifies the coexistence of different lineage systems. For the analyses, the categories "patrilineal", "matrilineal", "bilateral", and "mixed" are kept and "duolateral", "parallel", and "ambilineal" lineages are summarized to one category named "heterogeneous". It addresses that elements of patrilineal and matrilineal modes of descent are present within one lineage system.

The Ethnographic Atlas covers the character and degree of social stratification of a society by a variable on class differentiation. The characterization focuses on the stratification among free members of a cultural group and does not consider the presence of slaves in the social structure. The categories are "absence of significant class distinctions", "wealth distinctions", "elite stratification", which means that a class derives its superior status from control over scarce resources, "dual stratification", in which a society is divided into a hereditary aristocracy and a class of subordinates, and "complex stratification into social classes", which is primarily based on occupational status. The related variable enters the analyses without any modifications

For purposes of control, the analyses also consider the focal year to which the data of a particular society refer. General characteristics of societies, as they are considered in the analyses, document different stages of historical development. Thus, the opportunity to observe particular characteristics is closely related with the historical period of investigation or documentation. As the distribution of the focal year is substantially negatively skewed, its values were reflected and afterwards the natural logarithm was computed (Tabachnick and Fidell 1989, Section 4.1.6).

**Number of cases and analytical strategy.** The purpose of the subsequent analyses is to identify determinants of bride-wealth in comparison to all other forms of marriage transfers. Thus, they consider only cultures, in which these transfers take place. This applies to 997 cultures, which provide the basis for the descriptive analyses. The multivariate analyses rest on 788 cases due to missing values among the explanatory variables and societies with two equally important subsistence economies ( $n = XX$ ). Because of small number of cases ( $n = 3$ , see Table 2), polyandrous societies are also not considered. Estimates from multivariate binary logit regressions as well as average marginal effects are reported. The latter informs about the average change of the probability that bride-wealth is the dominant form of marriage transfer in a society given a change in the related explicatory variable (Long and Freese 2014, Chapters 4.5. and 6.2)

## 6. Results

**Descriptive analyses.** In the majority of societies considered in the Ethnographic Atlas, marriages are associated with transfers. Among the 1,272 societies with information on the presence or absence of transfers, in slightly more than one fifth (21.6 %) no transactions take place or just bridal gifts are given over. If transfers take place within the context of marriages, bride-wealth takes a dominant position with a share of 65.9 percent (see Table 1). Bride-service is the second most important kind of transfer (12.5 %) followed by token bride-price (6.8 %) and gift exchange (6.5 %). Dowry or groom-price



**Table 1** Distribution of Kind of Marriage Transfer

Kind of marriage transfer	Share (in %)	N	MV descrip- tives (n=788)
Bride-wealth (transfer of a substantial consideration in the form of livestock, goods, or money from the groom or his relatives to the kinsmen of the bride)	65.9	657	62.6
Token bride-wealth (a small or symbolic payment only)	6.8	68	} 37.4
Bride service (a substantial material consideration in which the principal element consists of labor or other services rendered by the groom to the bride's kinsmen)	12.5	125	
Dowry or groom-price (transfer of a substantial amount of property from the bride's relatives to the bride, the groom, or the kinsmen of the latter)	4.3	43	
Gift exchange (reciprocal exchange of gifts of substantial value between the relatives of the bride and groom, or a continuing exchange of goods and services in approximately equal amounts between the groom or his kinsmen and the bride's relatives)	6.5	65	
Female exchange (transfer of a sister or other female relative of the groom in exchange for the bride)	3.9	39	
Total	99.9	997	100.0

are of minor importance (4.3 %). Overall, in 85.2 percent of all societies reporting marriage transactions, the family of the bride is the beneficiary of resources, gifts, or manpower.

According to the distributions reported in Table 2, laws or custom strictly prescribing monogamous unions are the exception in the considered societies (12.2%) while the possibility of polygyny is the rule. In one third of the societies, polygyny is at least occasionally practiced, but in more than 50 percent (55.7%) polygyny occurs on a general level, i.e. the prevalence of this kind of union is more than 20 percent upon all marriages.

As the Ethnographic Atlas exclusively considers preindustrial societies, it is not surprising that for 73.2 percent of all cultures agriculture constitutes the most important subsistence economy. Extensive or shifting agriculture is most present (37.4%) followed by intensive agriculture resting substantially on permanent fields or irrigation (30.4%). In line with these results, more complex structures of social stratification on the basis of occupations are an exception (8.3 %). In most cases, stratification rests either on wealth (21.6 %) or on inherited superior social status (22.8 %). However, 43.2 percent of all cultures are not characterized by the presence of any social strata. Finally, societies' lineage structure is mainly patrilineal (55.4 %). Bilateral descent is present in 18.7 percent of all cases and matrilineal descent only makes up a share of 12.1 percent.

There is a clear association between the kind of marriage system and the kind of marriage transfer. The more prevalent polygyny the more marriages are accompanied by bride-wealth payments (see Figure 2). In 56.2 percent of all societies with occasional polygyny bride-wealth is the dominant

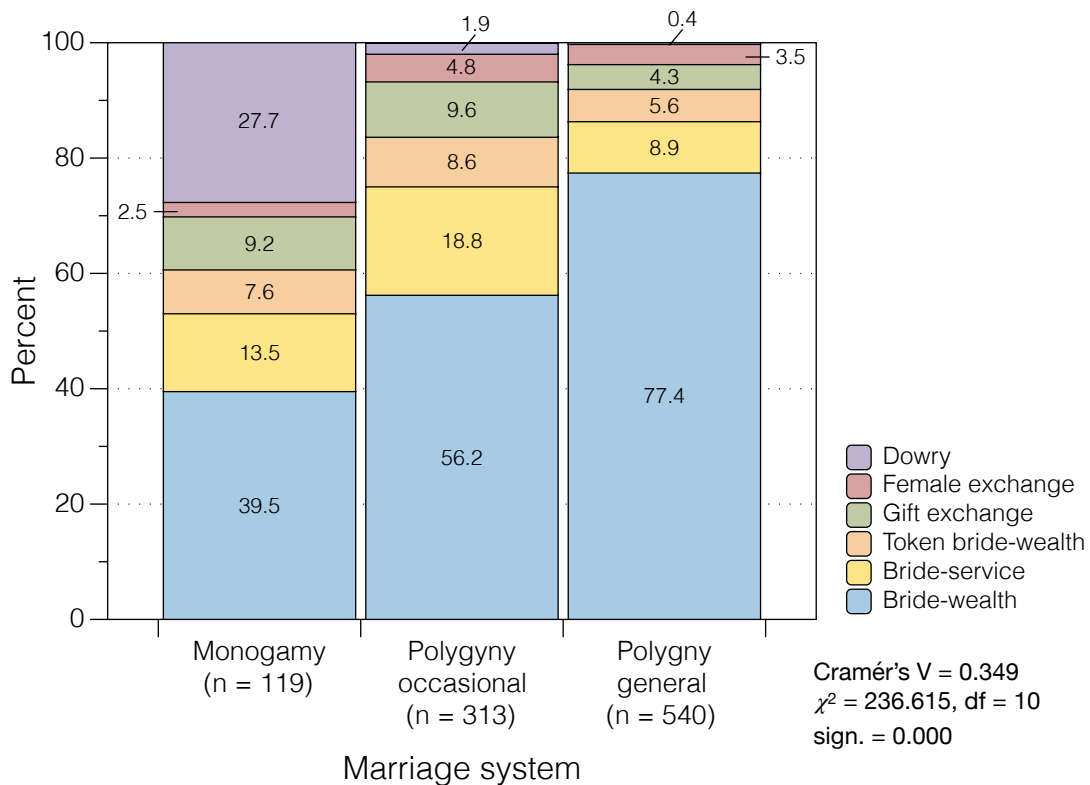
**Table 2** Descriptive statistics of marriages system, most important subsistence economy, kind of stratification, lineage system, and focal year

Variable	Share (in %)	N	MV descriptives (n=788)
<i>Marriage system:</i>			
Monogamy	12.2	119	12.9
Polygyny, occasional or limited	32.1	313	33.6
Polygyny, general	55.4	540	53.4
Polyandry	0.3	3	—
<i>Total</i>	<u>100,0</u>	<u>975</u>	
<i>Most important subsistence economy:</i>			
Fishing	9.3	88	10.5
Gathering (gathering of wild plants and small land fauna)	4.9	46	5.6
Hunting (including trapping and fowling)	4.7	44	5.5
Animal husbandry	7.9	75	7.0
Agriculture, extensive or shifting	37.4	353	37.3
Agriculture, semi-intensive (vegetable gardens, groves of fruit trees)	5.4	51	6.4
Agriculture, intensive (permanent fields, dependence upon irrigation)	30.4	287	27.8
<i>Total</i>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>944</u>	
<i>Descent:</i>			
Patrilineal	55.4	544	52.8
Matrilineal	12.1	119	11.9
Bilateral	18.9	186	22.2
Heterogeneous (duolateral, parallel, ambilineal)	9.2	90	9.0
Mixed	4.4	43	4.1
<i>Total</i>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>982</u>	
<i>Stratification:</i>			
No significant class distinctions among freeman (slaves not considered)	43.2	364	43.2
By wealth (possession or distribution of property, but no classes by distinction or inheritance)	21.6	182	21.3
Elite (superior class controlling scarce resource and subordinate class of serfs or property-less proletariat)	4.1	35	3.8
Hereditary aristocracy (superior aristocracy and lower class of ordinary commoners or freemen)	22.8	192	23.0
Complex (multiple classes due to extensive differentiation of occupational statuses)	8.3	70	8.6
<i>Total</i>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>853</u>	
<i>Year</i> (natural logarithm of reversed value)	—	—	3.8 (0.760)

Note: For the continuous variable “Year” mean value and standard deviation (in parenthesis) are reported.

form of transfer and in the case of general polygyny, this share increases to 77.4 percent. Polygyny is not a necessary condition for the evolution of bridewealth norms. The latter are also present in mono-

**Figure 2** Kind of marriage transfer separated by marriage system (n = 971)



gamous cultures, but to a much smaller extent (39.5 %). Dowry, on the other hand, is almost unknown in polygynous cultures (1.9 % resp. 0.4 %) while it is common in monogamous ones (39.5 %).

**Multivariate analysis.** According to the effects of the marriage system, the multivariate analysis confirms the bivariate pattern. The probability that marriages are accompanied by bride-wealth norms increases with the prevalence of polygyny. Compared to the reference group of monogamous cultures and under the control of social and economic conditions, occasional polygyny increases the probability of bride-wealth by 13.8 percent on average and general polygyny by 26.4 percent. Thus, the data from the Ethnographic Atlas yield strong support for the polygyny-bridewealth hypothesis (H1).

A society's economic basis is highly relevant for the emergence of bride-wealth norms as well. Particularly in pastoralist cultures, bridewealth is much more prevalent than in cultures economically depending on fishing. The probability for the presence of this kind of marriage transfer increases by 24.8 percent. A positive impact on bride-wealth can also be found in cultures with intensive or extensive agriculture (increase by 12.0 % resp. 15.2%). However, the degree of intensity of agriculture does not add much to the prediction of its existence. Moreover, the prevalence of bridewealth in semi-intensive agricultures, which depend on vegetable gardens or groves of fruit trees, does not differ from the one in fishing societies. In sum, the results confirm our second hypothesis concerning pastoralist societies but they do not support the prediction that bridewealth norms are more common in extensive than in intensive agricultural societies.

**Table 3** The Impact of Polygyny and Socio-Economic Factors on Bridewealth Norms

	Logit			AME		
	Coeff.	Std. Err.	sign.	Coeff.	Std. Err.	sign.
<i>Marriage system</i>						
Monogamy	ref.			ref.		
Polygyny occasional or limited	0.709	0.292	*	0.138	0.056	*
Polygyny general	1.408	0.296	***	0.264	0.057	***
<i>Most important subsistence economy</i>						
Fishing	ref.			ref.		
Gathering	-0.061	0.435		-0.012	0.084	
Hunting	0.415	0.419		0.079	0.078	
Pastoralism	1.443	0.550	**	0.248	0.087	**
Extensive agriculture	0.640	0.314	*	0.120	0.061	*
Semi-intensive agriculture	0.007	0.426		0.001	0.082	
Intensive agriculture	0.827	0.341	*	0.152	0.064	*
<i>Descent</i>						
Patrilineal	1.908	0.258	***	0.384	0.052	***
Matrilineal	0.582	0.311		0.126	0.067	
Bilateral	ref.			ref.		
Heterogeneous	0.620	0.334		0.134	0.072	
Mixed	1.355	0.462	**	0.287	0.091	**
<i>Stratification</i>						
No stratification	ref.			ref.		
By wealth	0.918	0.244	***	0.156	0.039	***
Elite	1.076	0.595		0.179	0.089	*
Hereditary aristocracy	0.626	0.237	**	0.109	0.041	**
Complex, classes	-0.380	0.362		-0.070	0.068	
Focal year (reflected, natural logarithm)	0.091	0.123		0.016	0.021	
Constant	-2.800	0.675	***	—	—	
LL	-405.763					
$\chi^2$	230.59		***			
df	17					
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.221					
N	788					

Levels of significance: \*  $\leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $\leq 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $\leq 0.001$

The results for the different kinds of descent show, that bride-wealth is closely associated with a culture of unilateral lineage, i.e that all children, daughters or sons, or particular elements of descent either belong to the family of the mother or to the family of the father but not to both. This is documented by the positive coefficients of the different lineage systems relative to bilateral descent. As expected, patrilineal descent is significantly related to bridewealth norms. It increases the probability of their presence by 38.4 percent. The effect is even stronger than the impact of polygyny. Obviously, a

groom's family transfers resources as an investment in the lineage of their son. The strong significant effect of mixed descent may also rest on patrilineal kinship structures, as different forms of descent coexist within a society. In sum, both polygyny and patrilineal descent are very strongly connected to the rule of bride-wealth payments at marriage. Hence, we find strong evidence in favor of hypothesis three.

The kind of stratification contributes to the prevalence of bride-wealth norms as well. In line with our hypothesis H4, the results document a nonlinear relationship between the prevalence of bride-wealth and the degree of societal stratification. If stratification is characterized by wealth, which is, however, not institutionalized by classes, or by a duality between an occupational elite or a hereditary aristocracy and subordinates, bride-wealth is present with a significant higher probability compared to societies without any substantive kind of stratification. According to complex societies, which are stratified by occupational classes, the average probability of bridewealth is almost as equal as in unstratified cultures.

## **7. Discussion: Consequences of a Changing Bridewealth System**

Research on bridewealth, its character and determinants has a long tradition in the social sciences and is documented by an extensive list of books and articles. However, there is only a small number of publications that follow a systematic comparative perspective by utilizing multivariate statistical methods. Utilizing data of the Ethnographic Atlas, which reports general characteristics of 1.267 premodern societies, the analyses presented in this paper confirm central determinants of bridewealth that are addressed before in case studies or reviews about the topic. Polygynous, patrilineal, and moderately stratified cultures as well as societies whose subsistence rests on pastoralism, extensive or intensive agriculture are much more prone to develop bridewealth norms than societies without these characteristics.

Our results also provide two new insights. As already addressed in the theoretical part of this paper, intensive agriculture increases the value of men's work power and devalues women's one, as the latter become less able to contribute to subsistence. As a consequence, the prevalence of bride-wealth should decline. Thus, the positive and significant effect of intensive agriculture is unexpected. Two general explanations of this effect are possible. Either the devaluation of women's agricultural work has not sufficiently advanced or this process was counterbalanced by an increasing value of women's domestic and reproductive abilities. The latter argument could also hold for pastoral societies as animal husbandry is primarily in men's hand. The second insight contributes to the discussion whether bridewealth is an element of societies without or with basic stratification.

Results from the analyses also help to explain processes of disappearance or changing characters of bridewealth. Systems of marriage payments disappeared in Europe, North America and Latin America, but continue to exist in Africa and alter substantially in Asia. During industrialization in Europe and at the end of the colonial period in Latin America, couples decided for forms of marriages that do not require marriage payments (Anderson 2007). The significance of arranged marriages declined and

men and women became able to choose their marriage partners and the kind of marriage more independently. This development rests on a variety of factors. The influence of families declined as the nuclear family became substituted for the extended family. Thus, the intragenerational bond between couples became stronger, ties between parents and children declined in importance, and parental control of the mating decisions of its offspring declined. Due to increasing income potentials based on education, the economic significance of inheritances declined. Individualization, declining significance of lineage, the acceptance of love relationships, and the emergence of labor markets contributed to this process. Within this context, inherited status was replaced by individual achievement leading to a declining importance of endogamous marriages among couples of equal wealth or status and an increasing heterogeneity of wealth and status among women.

Processes of modernization take also place in Africa and Asia. As the preceding examinations have shown, however, marriage payments continue to exist in these parts of the world. In the southern part of Africa, for example, bridewealth is still common, but its meaning has changed. It is now a payment given to the bride's mother in order to honor the burden of upbringing the bride or to secure the bride's status in a marriage. In India bridewealth disappears and groom price appears instead. In parts of China intragenerational transfers between the families of the marriage partners has decreased and was replaced by direct dowry to the groom or the bride. Thus, the question arises whether the disappearance of marriage payments is a phenomenon of the Western hemisphere and whether social developments in other parts of the world imply a coexistence between modernization and marriage payments.

There is evidence that in at least a couple of societies bridewealth is still present but has changed its functions and meaning. In many sub-Saharan societies, bridewealth has experienced commercialization (Atekyereza 2001). Colonial tax systems introduced a money economy and emerging labor markets offered opportunities for monetary income primarily for men. Cattle or agricultural land continued to be means of subsistence but they also became means of income by selling crops or livestock (Mizinga 2000). In the following, bridewealth consists increasingly of money or other items, like cattle, that can be bought or sold. Bridewealth also lost its character of exchange or of a rotating fund enabling marriages and became a mean for material advancement and exploitation of other families. As a consequence, brides' families demanded increasing amounts of marriage payments. Moreover, bridewealth has changed from an intragenerational to an intergenerational transfer. Now, men themselves acquire bridewealth instead of their fathers or their extended families.

These developments caused substantive changes in marriage markets and marital behavior. The number of official marriages deteriorated and the number of non-legal marriages, which do not require bridewealth, increases (Perlman 1966). In South Africa, extramarital pregnancies do not lead to marriages but to compensation payments by fathers (Kaufmann et al. 2001). These are lower than bridewealth payments and do not allow the father to live with the child. Consequently, many children grow up without a father in residence. Men's age at marriage increases as it takes longer to acquire the high amounts of payments demanded by brides' families. At the same time, the age gap between bride

and groom increases as well. Deep poverty but also the expectation of increased wealth pushes families to marry their daughters at young ages (Aleau and Mach 2016, Davis 1999, Hague et al. 2011).

Marriage markets become significantly characterized by economic inequality, because higher-earning men are likely to marry and poor or less wealthier men are excluded from marriage (Posel and Casale 2013: 673, Casale and Posel 2010). Bridewealth becomes a mean of social stratification. Grooms document wealth and economic potential by being able to pay high bridewealth. Brides' families increase their wealth and social status by being able to demand high amounts of marriage payments. Many grooms borrow resources in order to fund bridewealth and have to start their marriage in deep impoverishment (Hague et al. 2011: 556). Additionally, new strategies of handling bridewealth emerged, like lending of brides, promises to pay bridewealth in future, rituals to reduce bridewealth, or marrying women from other ethnic groups that do not demand bridewealth (Mizinga 2000). Also violent cattle rustling became a common phenomenon, for example, in South Sudan or Uganda (Aleau and Mach 2016).

Bridewealth continues to be closely connected with traditional views of women's rights and fertility. It still rates women's reproductive and domestic abilities and women still lose their autonomy over reproduction and life once bridewealth is paid (Horne et al. 2013, Doodoo et al. 2014, Kaufmann et al. 2001). This is tightened by the changing character of bridewealth. Due to commercialization and the fact that men have to fund bridewealth by themselves, many husbands perceive that their wives owe to them personally the meeting of their sexual, reproductive, and domestic aspirations (Mizinga 2000, Atekyereza 2001). This may seriously harm women's reproductive health. They are not able to decide on the number and the timing of children or on contraception, and they are exposed to sexual diseases transferred by their husbands (Wendo 2004, Bishai et al. 2009). Moreover, it provides a legitimation for husbands to resort to domestic violence if they are dissatisfied with their wives (Hague et al. 2011, Fuseini 2013).

Despite its commercialization, bridewealth is still perceived as a strong element of African identity (Rudwick and Posel 2014, Mujuzi 2010), as a cultural constant, and a collective moral obligation. The collectivistic nature of African identity is an important force within this context. Individuals feel obliged to family members, elders and ancestors, and bridewealth is one element of paying respect to them (Rudwick and Posel 2014). Hence, it expresses the value a groom attributes to the parents for rising their daughter and the value he ascribes to the marriage (Mathis 2011). It is also an important step for the social development of marriage partners, as a marriage makes them a woman and a man. Bridewealth also expresses a husband's recognition of dignity and worth of his wife as well as of continued respect (Hague et al. 2011: 556, Mwamwenda and Monyooe 1997).

However, as we have seen there are many non-intended consequences of a changing bridewealth system in a changing world and many of the consequences are harmful for grooms, brides, and their families. Further research should address the change of bridewealth norms and its consequences in a more systematic way by empirical data and researchers should ask on how to mitigate the harmful consequences.

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