Contemporary Fransfontein marriages

A few days after her wedding celebration in April 2004, I visited Anna at her mother's house. She was in an excellent mood and joyfully described her emotions: "I am feeling like being a big woman now. They are saying this to a married woman. Also at the job, when guys are coming there, our boss, he is also saying: This one is a married woman".

All women whose marriages Michael and I attended during our stay in Fransfontein were extremely proud after their wedding celebrations. In their personal triumphs, the women were rather expressive. In the days after her wedding, Nala, who married in 2005, only graciously raised her hand with her new wedding ring and smiled triumphantly as she passed her neighbors. People would smile back at her and address her with the formal noun *sadu* (or the Afrikaans *U*) to express their respect for her new status, instead of the informal *sats* or *sas* (or the Afrikaans *jy*). Many women mentioned that to be treated with respect (*!goasib*) is the most important and valued consequence of marriage. Respect is not only shown in the ways married people are addressed but also in how they are treated at public events like weddings and funerals. The importance of marriage as a status marker becomes visible when comparing marital status with other social categories like education and occupation. During all rites of passage, there are certain ritual practices that should only be performed by married Fransfonteiners.[1] For several of these rites of passage (e.g. the first haircut), this norm is not applied too strictly and exceptions are allowed. At weddings, however, the married are clearly separated from the unmarried and no transgressions are accepted. During an interview in September 2004, Mona, a teacher born in 1963 and married since 2000, expressed indignation that despite her high level of education and prestigious occupation she had not been treated with the same respect that married people received when she had still been unmarried:

1 The most important rites of passage in Fransfontein are a newborn's first haircut, baptism, school graduation, 21st birthdays, weddings and funerals (see Pauli 2018).

Every time during a wedding they would say: "Ah, the people who are not married, they cannot sit here. Only the married people can come and sit beside the groom and the bride. And the people who are not married must go outside". So, I am a teacher and I am coming with my friends and they say to me: "Ah, you people must go to that side, only the married people are allowed into this house". How did I feel? It was very bad. They would say: "Oh, the unmarried people cannot eat the wedding cake. Only the married people eat that cake".

Several practices mark the difference between the married and the unmarried during weddings. For instance, during the final handover of the bride to the groom's family on the last day of the wedding, only married people are allowed to sit near the couple (often in the bride's parental home), eat from the wedding cake and receive a special portion of one of the slaughtered cattle. Hardly hiding their envy, unmarried participants observe these ritual practices, often peeking into the house through the windows. Most of them will never marry. Because of tremendous increases in wedding costs, marriage rates have rapidly declined during the last decades. The large crowd of unmarried men and women in front of the windows can hardly imagine being in the place of the bride and groom. They are restricted to watching the happy few celebrating their marriages and their distintions.

Yet marriage is also loaded with ambivalence for the happy few who do manage to marry. Apart from the triumphs of marriage, so pointedly expressed in Nala's raised hand, there are also traumas and tests involved. Many men and women, interviewed on their marriages and observed during their weddings, expressed frustration about these tests and infringements. All weddings are made up of two basic components, the asking ritual that leads to the engagement, and the wedding celebration, generally following many weeks later. Below I will give a more detailed description of this marriage process; for the purposes of the discussion about the traumas and tests of the marriage process here, we need to focus briefly on some aspects of the asking ritual. During the many nights of discussion during the asking ritual, the couple's and each individual partner's faults and vulnerabilities are discussed vigorously and at great length; the groom-to-be is required to sit quietly with his kin group and the bride-to-be has to listen to the debate from inside her family's house. Personal characteristics like bodily appearance and (dis)abilities of the bride and groom are pointed out shamelessly. Many women have commented that they felt humiliated by what they hear about themselves during the asking ritual. One woman said that until today, years after her marriage, it is painful for her to remember the event. Inversely, the interaction between the two kin groups sometimes gets out of control "with unnecessary comments from the woman's family, humiliating the man's family" (Dawids 2007: 63). During these debates, the groom's family is in an inferior position and has to follow the demands of the bride's fami-

ly, even if this leads to postponements of the proceedings (potentially expensive in both time and money to the participants) (Dawids et al. 2007; Pauli/ Dawids 2017).

Marriage is a complex process, involving groups, couples and individuals with varying interests and aims. For everybody involved in a Fransfontein marriage, triumphs, tests and traumas might be rather closely related, unraveling the different aspects of marriage. In this chapter, I analyze the social and ritual practices of marriage (the next chapter, in turn, focuses on the transformation of marriage and links the changes to class formation processes). As a conceptual basis for the analysis of marriage practices, I first define what is perceived as marriage in Fransfontein. I then give a brief review of the data collected on marriage and present some basic information on Fransfontein marriages. An account of the first wedding ceremony that we witnessed in Fransfontein leads to a detailed description of the main ritual elements of engagement and wedding ceremonies. On this basis, I explore, first, the different types of marriage in terms of generational, economic and religious variations, and their distribution and, second, some of the legal aspects of marriage. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how the spread of school holidays, initiated by the apartheid state, has changed the timing of marriage.

DEFINING MARRIAGE IN FRANSFONTEIN

For the local population of Fransfontein, marriages are a clear-cut category. There are Christian marriages (mostly Protestant, but also some Roman Catholic and Pentecostal), civil marriages conducted by a magistrate, or marriages in terms of customary law. Of the 123 marriages for which Michael and I were able to collect information, 91 per cent are Christian marriages, 5 per cent are civil marriages and 4 per cent are marriages by customary law. In Namibia, all church marriages are also registered as civil marriages so that there is no difference between them from a legal perspective. Despite a civil marriage's significantly lower cost, it is generally not considered a favorable alternative to a Christian marriage, an observation also made by other researchers (e.g. Pendelton 1993; Tersbøl 2002). Locally, civil marriages are described as *!nari !game*, stealing a marriage. Marriages by customary law are not practiced in Fransfontein. People who were married by customary law are recent migrants, mainly Himba from the area around Rundu, working in Fransfontein as hired herders for local communal farmers. Yet this does not mean that Fransfontein marriages are "only" Christian and thereby "modern" marriages, nor that the people from Fransfontein have somehow lost "traditional marriages", namely those practiced by customary law. This misconception – a simplistic duality

posing seemingly traditional (i.e. customary law) marriage versus modern (i.e. Christian) marriage – is pointedly demonstrated in Chris de Wet's observations on Xhosa marriages:

> In 1980 I was asking an old woman a naive question, which a number of people had kindly answered in a naive manner for me – well either that, or the categories in my question had some salience to them. I asked her: did you marry in the church, or by Xhosa rites, or both? She gave me a wonderful answer. She said she was married by Xhosa custom, in the church. For her, a good Methodist – who was also a number of other good (and not so good) things – that made perfect sense. There had been a Methodist church in the settlement for a hundred years. Almost everyone in the settlement was a professing Methodist (as well as a practicing ancestor acknowledger). *IsiXhosa* – our custom – does not necessarily mean "tribal" belief and practice. It is another way of saying "our way of doing things". And going to church is part of our way of doing things – and has always been so. It is traditional. So it is isiXhosa. Hence *ndatshatisXhosa; ndatshatecaweni* (I was married by Xhosa custom; I was married in church). (de Wet 2008: 4)

A similar response would probably be given by most Fransfonteiners (see Mupotsa 2014, 2015; for a South African perspective, see also Schmidt 1981/82: 67-68). With the Lutheran church having been built in Fransfontein already in the late 19th century, church marriages are part of the local custom and are perceived as such. Though by far not the only element of a Fransfontein marriage, as I show in detail below, it is a crucial one.

A second critical characteristic of marriage in Fransfontein is that marriage is considered very different from cohabiting unions. Many demographers treat cohabitating unions as equivalent to official marriages, a practice that might make sense if one wants to understand the risk of pregnancy. From a local Fransfontein perspective, however, marriage is seen as a valued and honored institution, while cohabitating unions are scorned as *#nu gomans omi* (black cow marriage or black cow house). The house a cohabiting couple lives in might be called *!hai-omi* (bad house). The difference between couples is thus not based on residence (a criteria that would distinguish couples residing together – no matter whether married or not – from couples not residing together), a criteria demographers take as central, but solely on civil status. Married couples are treated and perceived as different from unmarried couples – irrespective of residence.

A third identifying characteristic of marriage in Fransfontein is that the marriage process does not take years, unlike in other parts of Africa where the advancement of bridewealth payments defines the status of a marriage (Comaroff 1980b; Hunter 2016; Radcliffe-Brown/Forde 1987 [1950]; White 2016). Research in South Africa has shown, for example, that it can take years of bridewealth payments to finalize a

marriage and legitimize the children (Murray 1981b), leading to various forms of marriage difficulties (Hunter 2016; White 2016). Though there are some marriages in Fransfontein where bridewealth is also requested during the opening asking ritual, the status of a couple as married is only determined by the completion of the wedding celebration and the final handover of the bride, not by any bridewealth payments. Before I describe the details of the marriage process ethnographically, I briefly summarize the sources on which I draw.

Marriage data

In "Fransfontein Fieldwork", I described the data Michael and I collected during our fieldwork from 2003 to 2005. Here, I want to outline the different kinds of information I use for my analysis of marriage in greater detail. The ethnographic description of the marriage process draws on five different types of sources (for a detailed discussion of these sources, also see "Fransfontein Fieldwork"):

(1) data on the conjugal histories of 361 men and 364 women (725 in total), collected in an ethnographic census in 2004;[2]
(2) information on 123 marriages between the 1940s and 2005, elicited through a marriage questionnaire in 2004;
(3) church registers on marriages from the 1890s until 2002;
(4) narratives of marriage ceremonies and marriages given in 20 life stories and 2 focus group interviews; and
(5) ethnographic observations and thick descriptions of 8 weddings.

Data from the ethnographic census enables me to describe the distribution of marriage on an individual level and by using a time-cohort analysis. As Table 6 shows, marital status is clearly connected to age.

Of the 364 women interviewed on their conjugal histories, only 32 per cent (115 cases) are or have ever been married, while 68 per cent (249 cases) have never been married. The number of men who are or were married is even lower: of the 361 men, only 25 per cent (89 cases) ever married, 75 per cent (272 cases) have never been married. Thus, less than 30 per cent of the whole population is or has been married. As Table 6 demonstrates, while the overwhelming majority of elderly men and women (up until the 1935-1944 birth cohort) is or has been married, from the 1945-

2 Although a total of 750 interviews (362 men and 388 women) were conducted, yet those with incomplete information are disregarded.

Table 6: Marital status of 361 men and 364 women

Birth cohort	**Married** (at any one point in their lives)		**Never married**		**Total**
	Women	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	
1915-1924	10	11	1	1	23
1925-1934	25	15	1	7	48
1935-1944	24	19	17	11	71
1945-1954	14	16	33	22	85
1955-1964	22	16	37	43	118
1965-1974	15	11	50	56	132
1975-1984	5	1	84	103	193
1985-1994	0	0	26	29	55
Total	**115**	**89**	**249**	**272**	**725**

1954 birth cohort onwards, the majority of the population is unmarried. The dynamics behind this pronounced change are discussed in the chapter "From Decline to Distinction". Divorce and separation are extremely rare in Fransfontein. Of the 89 men who had married in their lives, 87 per cent (77 cases) are currently married (i.e. at the time that the ethnographic survey was conducted in July 2004), 10 per cent are widowers and only 3 per cent are separated (2 cases) or divorced (1 case) from their wives. As in other regions of the world, the number of widows is much higher than the number of widowers: of the 115 women who had married in their lives, 67 per cent are currently married (77 cases), 3 per cent are either separated (2 cases) or divorced (2 cases) from their husbands, and 30 per cent are widows.

For most marriages, we were able to elicit information on the rituals the individuals underwent during their weddings. This was done in a questionnaire that dealt exclusively with marriage and asked questions on support and consumption during the marriage celebrations. Of the 132 interviews conducted, 123 cases are valid and can be analyzed.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to establish the exact number of marriages that were conducted in Fransfontein in the decade or so prior to the field research. There is some indication of the numbers up to 2002 from the church register at the Fransfontein Lutheran church, though there were no commensurate numbers available for

Pentecostal and Roman Catholic weddings for this period. Yet, as the majority of Fransfonteiners is of Protestant faith, the weddings celebrated at the Lutheran church or by the Lutheran pastor from 1995 to 2002 at least allow an approximation of the absolute numbers.

On average, 11 marriages were celebrated per annum in the Fransfontein church or by the Fransfontein pastor. The differentiation is important because some of the marriages recorded in the church book were not celebrated in the church but on settlements in the Fransfontein communal area. From the late 1980s until the late 1990s, the Fransfontein pastor at the time aimed at marrying all elderly couples who had lived together most of their lives but had never married. To reach these couples, the pastor decided to keep the ritual as inexpensive and simple as possible. This contrasted sharply with the complex and costly marriage celebrations that had by then developed in the area. Most of these elderly couples were married in 1997.

For 2003 and 2004, we were able to observe and document seven Fransfontein weddings in detail, thus about half of the marriages that take place in an average year. For three of these and for another wedding in 2005 (Pauli/Dawids 2017), we observed both the complete asking ritual and the wedding celebration.

Three out of the eight marriages we observed were celebrated by wealthy migrants who came to celebrate their weddings in the wife's community. In Fransfontein it is the norm to marry in the wife's community. The few Fransfontein locals who were able to tie the knot during our fieldwork all had permanent employment. An exception was an elderly couple in August 2003 whose two successful children financed them a splendid wedding to express their gratitude towards them. This wedding was the first marriage we attended in Fransfontein and became the baseline for our later inquiries. It is with this wedding that I start my description of contemporary Fransfontein marriages.

Our first Fransfontein wedding

At the end of July 2003, Michael and I received our first wedding invitation: we were invited to attend the wedding reception of Mr. and Mrs. G. at 4 p.m. in the Lutheran church hall.

On our way to the church hall on the day of the wedding, we passed an otherwise abandoned house that was now filled with music and people. A delicious smell of food saturated the air. Women were cooking the meat and bones of a cow, slaughtered the previous day, in huge cast-iron pots. One woman saw us passing by and waved. We approached her and she explained that this was the traditional way of celebrating marriage: sitting in front of the house, singing, listening to music and eating meat. The woman was part of the groom's kin group. Lacking any

family ties in Fransfontein, the groom's family had rented the house for the occasion. After a little while we proceeded to the church hall. Here two teenage boys were controlling the potential guests: only people with a wedding gift and an invitation card were allowed to enter. On one side of the rectangular hall stood a large, decorated table, elevated on a wooden platform. At its center sat the bride and the groom. They were flanked by the bridesmaids and groomsmen, two couples on either side, all dressed in shades of purple. The wedding guests were seated at tables at floor level spread out across the hall. The setting arrangement gave a strong impression of performance and theater: what was staged was the best possible version of a marriage celebration, one expressing wealth, abundance and distinction. We were struck by how this part of the marriage ritual stood in direct opposition to the informal celebrations that we had observed at the groom's parental house a few minutes earlier.

A young woman told us to place our wedding gift in front of the bridal table. There, several other gifts were already on display. Most of the gifts were of impressive sizes. We had bought some cutlery as a gift and, seeing the other large presents lying next to our quite modest box, I was worried that this might not have been appropriate. With relief I later learned that our present was indeed very welcome. Some of the big presents contained only very small items, such as a bag of instant soup, or nothing at all. Because of this, some wedding parties have started to label all presents at receipt with the name of the giver.

At the time of the wedding, we were not yet acquainted with the bride and the groom. The couple lived in a settlement on one of the communal farms. Our friend and research assistant Jorries, a remote relative of the bride, had been kind enough to provide us with a wedding invitation. This was not an easy undertaking as weddings are important family events and some people are very skeptical of why strangers should participate in them. In the months following this weeding, we received further engagement and wedding invitations. One important reason for this was Michael's reputation of being a good photographer. We decided that for every couple that allowed us to participate in their asking ritual and/or wedding celebration, we would prepare a photo album with pictures of the ceremonies as gift. This gave us a chance to reciprocate and a clear, understandable role at the events.[3]

After greeting the other guests at our table, we looked more closely at the wedding couple. With surprise we observed that both the groom and the bride were in their

3 This position was aptly described by Gediminas Lankauskas, who acted as photographer during his fieldwork in Lithuania: "I now had an identifiable role with a responsibility to visually capture some of the most important moments in the lives of the newly-weds and their families". (Lankauskas 2015: 45; see also Pauli 2006)

sixties. I asked the person sitting next to me, a young woman who was working as a secretary in the town of Otjiwarongo, why the couple was marrying so late in life. She smiled at me and said that it had been the wish of the couple's grown-up children to finally marry their parents. In fact, the groom would have preferred an investment into livestock instead, yet the bride was very pleased with the suggestion. Most of their lives, the couple had worked for white commercial farmers and had found it very difficult to accumulate any money to marry. On one occasion a white farmer had agreed to support them but they had to leave the farm before the event took place place.

It was a Saturday, and the couple had married in church at noon. Now, several hours later, it was obvious that everybody was quite hungry. The designated master of ceremonies, a teacher, announced that food would soon be served. He then introduced the waitresses, seven young women who entered the hall from the adjacent kitchen. All of them were part of either the bride's or the groom's kin groups. They first served the bridal table, placing large bowls of meat and so-called Christmas salads on the table from which the bridal couple and their bridesmaids and groomsmen helped themselves. We learnt later that the salads – carrot and pineapple, potato, and noodle salads – were thus called because they are very common at the Christmas dinners that white farmers prepare for their workers.[4] After the bridal table had been served, the waitresses attended to the other guests: each person received a piece of meat and three scoops of salad on a paper plate. After everyone had finished eating, the master of ceremonies moderated a short program including a wedding waltz after which drinks were served. Rather quickly, people began leaving the hall.

On our way back home, we passed the groom's parental home again. There, people were in high spirits. Many were dancing and singing in front of the house. Unlike the rather stiff and theatrical atmosphere in the hall, here the guests seemed much more at ease and enjoying themselves. At home, we tried to make sense of what we had observed, learned and heard. Our dominant impression was one of puzzlement. At the time we saw the two ritual elements at the groom's parental home and at the reception as unconnected and unscripted and they did not make much sense to us. Only over the course of the next months would we gain the understanding of how they fit into a much larger complex. The following section offers a more detailed description of the stages of this complex.

4 Since the 1970s, Fransfonteiners have increasingly appropriated and incorporated this type of food into their wedding receptions.

AN OUTLINE OF CONTEMPORARY FRANSFONTEIN MARRIAGES

After attending this first wedding, we found out that an extended asking ritual, called *!game-#gans* (marriage asking) or just *#gans* (asking), takes place as the first step of every wedding. If everything works well, this ritual leads to the engagement, the *reng-#ûis* (putting on the ring). Then, after several weeks or even months of preparation, the wedding celebration commences with the *!hae-om #ûis* ritual, a weeklong seclusion of the bride in a darkened room in her parents' house. On the Friday of the bride's seclusion and the day before the church ceremony, the *!gameb-#as* ritual is performed where the two kin groups exchange cattle, driving them from one house to the other and slaughtering them. Each kin group will prepare its meat independently in preparation for the celebrations on the Saturday which each kin group will hold separately. The *!gameb* (marriage) on Saturday begins with the dressing of the bride and bridesmaids, and the groom and his groomsmen, at their respective houses. This is followed by the ritual of the bride leaving her parents' house, the church service with several associated ritual activities, and finally the reception of the invited guests in one of the town halls. Thus, a Fransfontein wedding celebration takes place at three locations, each for a different group of people: the bride's parental home for the bride's relatives, the groom's parental home for the groom's relatives, and the hall for the wedding reception for the invited guests. The official wedding ends when all central actors from both kin groups congregate at the bride's parental home for the */hui-eis* ritual (taking off the bride's veil). This ritual includes married couples and respected elders giving the newly married couple advice on married life. The wedding is finalized the next morning when the bride is handed over to the groom's family. Table 7 gives an overview of the timing, content and varying locations of the marriage process.

The structure presented in Table 7 is only a "script" for how marriage should be performed in Fransfontein. Gediminas Lankauskas (2015: 30) reminds us, "although most rituals are scripted, they never follow the script to the letter, leaving room for interpretation, invention, and improvisational 'sketching'". The "script" is similar to what Lilia Abu-Lughod calls an outline when she discusses Egyptian Bedouin marriages: "Over the years, I attended many weddings, all of which followed this outline, yet each of which was distinct". (Abu-Lughod 1991: 156) Thus, it is crucial not just to study the outline of marriages but also the variations instantiated in each individual marriage. This section develops an outline of contemporary Fransfontein marriages, presenting and interpreting the various elements and stages of the Fransfontein marriage ritual, while the next scrutinizes variations and different kinds of weddings.

Table 7: Strucure and content of the asking and marriage rituals

1. *!Game-#gans* and *reng #nuis* (Marriage asking and engagement)				
Time	Wednesday to Saturday (short version) / Monday to Saturday (long version)			
Content	*Abba gomas* (discussion of marriage and bridewealth between the kin groups), beginning after sunset and ending with the *reng #nuis* (engagement) on Saturday night			
Place	Bride's house			
Wedding celebrations can commence on the subsequent Sunday, though this is seldomly practiced. It is more common to wait several months between the *reng #nuis* and the *!gameb.*				
2. *!Gameb* (Marriage)				
Time	Sunday	Friday	Saturday	Second Sunday
	(altogether one week)			
Content	*Kieri-erie-#gas* and *!Hae-om #nuis* (Stage 1) Procession from church to bride's parental home; seclusion of bride; beautification (with *!nau-i*) and preparation of bride	*!Gameb-#as* (Stage 2) Exchange of cattle between kin groups and slaughtering; hanging up of meat	*!Gameb* (Stage 3) Church + photos; (Stage 4) money walk; (Stage 5) *onthals* reception; celebrations at parental homes; (Stage 6) */hui-eis* (taking off the veil)	*#Gan-#ûis* (Stage 7) The asking-out of bride; final handover of bride to groom's family
Place	Bride's parental home	Bride's and groom's parental homes	Church, hall, houses of both kin groups	Bride's parental home

The description of marriage here focuses on Damara and Nama marriages.[5] For background information and historical comparative material, I draw on two sources in particular: Sigrid Schmidt's (1981/82) description and interpretation of Nama and Damara marriage, based on two marriages from the 1970s, and Sabine Klocke-Daffa's (2001) analysis of marriage rituals among the Nama of Berseba, southern Namibia. In addition, I draw on Bennet Fuller's (1993) discussion of cross-cousin marriage in his ethnography on Damara livelihoods in Otjimbingwe and Sesfontein; on Ursula Dentlinger's (1983) discussion of aspects of marriage in her analysis of the social mobility of the Topnaar of the Kuiseb River; Robert Gordon's (1972) reflections on marriage in his work on verbal communication in Okombahe; and Wade Pendelton's (1993) discussion of marriage in his study on the Windhoek township of Katutura.

The description and interpretation of the marriage process follows the chronological order presented in Table 7. While all ritual activities during the asking ritual and the engagement are concentrated in one location – the family compound of the bride-to-be's parents – the seven stages of the wedding celebration are enacted in different locations. Each stage commences with a description of the Fransfontein situation, drawing on both what Michael and I observed during our fieldwork and on Francois Dawids' description of his and other Fransfontein marriages (Dawids 2007; Pauli/Dawids 2017). In a second step, I discuss and compare our findings to other descriptions of Nama and Damara marriages.

The asking ritual (*!game-#gans*)

The decision to marry is not influenced by a couple's parents or wider kin groups. Both Schmidt (1981/82: 56) and Klocke-Daffa (2001: 149) mention that in earlier times arranged marriages probably existed but that they were not being practiced anymore. However, the contemporary decision to marry is not only guided by love and other "modern" concepts of individual passion (Thomas/Cole 2009). Current Fransfontein marriages have a very real material basis: apart from love, the decision to marry is a way to communicate elite status.

5 While it would be of significant value to compare these to marriage outlines available for other regions and ethnic groups – such as Ngamiland Herero (Gibson 1958) and contemporary Ovambo (Tersbøl 2002) – such an in-depth reading and complex comparison is beyond the scope of this chapter. There are some interesting similarities with Fransfontein, for example a variation of the asking ritual in the Herero context, but also substantial differences, such as in the limitation of bridewealth in Fransfontein.

If a couple decides to marry, they inform their parents. In several instances, we observed couples planning much more modest and inexpensive weddings than the ones they eventually celebrated and had to pay for (Pauli/Dawids 2017). Often, family members argue that if they should go through all the trouble of preparing for and celebrating a marriage, then a small wedding did not make any sense – the payoffs in terms of prestige and status would not be worth the effort. Small weddings and especially civil marriages look "as if you do not have a family", two sisters commented ahead of their brother's asking ritual in March 2004. Whenever a marriage takes place, the kin groups pull their resources together. And yet, despite much discussion that marriages are expressions of great solidarity among kin, there are limits to kin support. Repeatedly we observed how kin did not in fact support each other during weddings. At one wedding, for example, relatives stole meat from the wedding slaughtering. Our systematic data on the wedding support networks show that kin finance only a fraction of the actual wedding costs. Relying on kin support only, a couple would thus not be able to finance a marriage. The couple, and especially the groom, has to have sufficient independent income to pay the major share of the costs.

The *!game-#gans* always starts at night. In general, the ritual takes three days, from Wednesday night to Saturday night. Both Dawids (2007) and some elder Fransfontein informants report that the asking ritual often stretched over more days in the past. Shortening it to three days makes it easier for those working in other towns to attend the event, having to take leave for only two days (Thursday and Friday). If the groom and bride have been living together before their wedding, it is necessary for the bride to return to her parents' house the latest by the night before the asking starts. In such a case, the groom's family might bring along some goods (e.g. sugar, tea, maize-meal, candles) wrapped in a white cloth (*!uri-!heib*) as gifts to "appease the woman's family" (Dawids 2007: 62). Also, if the couple already has children together, the bride's family might ask for compensation from the groom's family.

The actual asking ritual will start the night following the bride's return to her parental home. The ritual takes place outside the house of the woman's family. One word captures the essence of the asking ritual rather well: *toxoba* (please). Without doubt, *toxoba* is the most frequently used word in the communication between the two kin groups. Different members of the man's kin will say *toxoba* in varying ways in the course of the three nights. Thus, at times the negotiation in the asking ritual comes to resemble begging rather than asking. The first *toxoba* is articulated right at the beginning of the process when the man's kin group stands in front of the gate of the woman's parental house and asks for permission to enter. Sometimes, it can take hours until the woman's kin group will grant permission. When the man's kin is finally allowed inside, they are often not offered any chairs but have to sit on the ground in the yard, facing the woman's kin group. As Dawids (2007: 63) writes,

Figure 7: Asking for the bride at the !game-#gans

reflecting on his own experience undergoing the asking ritual as a groom, "sitting in front of them, on the ground, is a way of subordination, a sign of humiliation". Once seated on the ground, the woman's kin ask the man's kin to provide a light, usually given in the form of candles, petroleum lamps, firewood or even a generator. If the man's kin is unable to satisfy the demand, the asking ritual is immediately be broken off and postponed to the next evening. Once this demand is fulfilled, the man's kin begins to plead with the woman's kin for their approval of the marriage. The woman's family refuses this demand for a long time, discussing in detail all the risks they perceive this union would pose. Figure 7 gives an impression of this verbal exchange between the two kin groups.

Michael took this photograph in December 2003 during the asking ritual of two migrants who had returned to Fransfontein after having worked in Walvis Bay for a number of years. He was sitting behind the man's family, facing the woman's kin when he took the picture. On the right hand side of the photo is the man's father. He is a well-respected man in the community, as a reason of which he has been offered a chair by the woman's kin. Facing the groom's father are the woman's mother and one of her *makeis* (big mother), obscured by two kneeling men. Moments before, the woman's family accused the groom-to-be of not being able to provide for a wife because of his reputation as someone who drinks too much alcohol. To counteract this accusation, the groom-to-be approached his future mother-in-law and the *makeis* on

his knees and with bowed head, pleading for forgiveness. He is accompanied by one of his brothers.

This is just one example of the many accusations the man's kin group has to master. It is also common that (perceived) errors of other members of the man's kin group are mentioned and discussed, such as a criminal record or even a probable illness. The woman's kin also identify and discuss the flaws and vulnerabilities of the bride-to-be, which she, secluded in her family's house, can hear. Her kin might say that she is not a worthy housewife, is untidy and does not know how to cook, or that she is too young for marriage. In one case, the woman's family argued that because of AIDS it was too dangerous to give away their daughter to strangers. Members of the man's kin group counter these accusations in long monologues, with many rhetoric breaks, though the speakers will never denunciate the woman's family. The man's kin group has to endure the charges and continuously repeat the request for permission for the marriage.

Daisy, who married in 1999 when she was 22, explained that it is mostly the *makeis* who brings forward the accusations and insults during the asking ritual. One reason that she identified for this is the jealousy the *makeis* feel at the fact that their younger sister will soon have a married daughter while their own daughters are still unmarried (Pauli/Dawids 2017). Fuller identifies another reason for the tensions between the two kin groups during the asking ritual, namely the fact that the marriage is not only about creating a bond between two individuals but one between two larger entities. The result is that "future economic bonds, future reciprocal obligations (and possibilities) are discussed openly with an honest brutality not seen in any other sphere of Damara/Nama life" (Fuller 1993: 234).

Bridewealth in Fransfontein?

One part of the asking ritual can also be the request by the woman's family for a cow from the man's family, the so-called *abba gomas*. *Abba* means to carry someone on one's back, such as how mothers or other female caretakers carry babies and small children on their backs. *Gomas*, in turn, is the term for cow. When the woman's family asks the man's family for an *abbas gomas* during the asking ritual, it is in fact asking the latter to compensate the woman's family for all the years the woman had been "carried", thus supported, by her family. The *abba gomas* should be handed over between the engagement and the wedding, but often this does not, in fact, take place. Even years later, this can be considered as an open debt still owed by the husband and his kin.

This opens the question of the relationship between the *abba gomas* and Damara/Nama bridewealth. In how far the *abba gomas* can be understood as bridewealth

is contested in the literature. According to Fuller (1993: 231), "Damara/Nama people do not ascribe to bride-price payments". The groom and his family might pay the wedding feast but nothing additional. He does not, in fact, mention the *abba gomas* at all. Klocke-Daffa (2001: 159), who offers a detailed description of the *abba gomas* practice, argues explicitly that it should not be perceived as a kind of "bride price". Bridewealth, she suggests, rather needs to be understood as compensation for the loss of a daughter or to legitimize children already born to a couple, both not practiced among the Damara/Nama. Schmidt (1981/82: 65) similarly concludes that the *abba gomas* of the Nama and Damara is not a kind of bridewealth because it did not legitimize a marriage or children born within the marriage, the role that bridewealth fulfills among the Herero or other Southern African polities (Gibson 1962: 5).

Yet Klocke-Daffa and Schmidt might define bridewealth too narrowly: as Dominique Meekers describes for the Shona of Zimbabwe, bridewealth may include the *roora* stage where a cow is handed over to the bride's mother in acknowledgement of her efforts in raising her daughter (Meekers 1993). And, in contrast to Fuller, Klocke-Daffa and Schmidt, Pendelton (1993: 88) states explicitly that it is indeed customary for Nama and in more recent times also for Damara to pay bridewealth. Reporting on marriage practices in the Windhoek township of Katutura, the transfer of *bruidie* (possibly derived from the Afrikaans word for bride) requires the parents of the groom to bring a cow called *apagomas*, a transfer that cannot be substituted by money. Similarly, Dentlinger (1983: 153) mentions the institution of "bride-payments" for the Nama Topnaar of the Kuiseb river in the 1970s, again in compensation to the woman's parents for raising the bride (ibid: 154). Gordon (1972: 133) marks the rise of bridewealth transfers (which he calls *braidie*) in Damara marriages in Okombahe in the 1960s that began with the incorporation of Okombahe into a wider cash economy. Connecting these wider socio-economic changes to class formation processes at the local level, Gordon argues that "social performances were increasingly evaluated in monetary terms" (ibid: 134). *Braidie* became part of these dynamics and was perceived as a "payment for bringing up and educating the girl" (ibid). Interestingly, Gordon does not mention the *abba gomas* but only states that there are no definite rules concerning the amount of *braidie* and that it varies from case to case.

Thus, the question whether the Fransfontein *abba gomas* might be perceived as some kind of bridewealth cannot be answered straightforwardly.[6] The ambiguity of the concept is also realized locally. Some people in Fransfontein linked the *abba*

6 The situation is further complicated by the fact that the Damara practiced bride service, where the groom worked for his father-in-law for a specific period of time, rather than bridewealth (Schmidt 1981/82: 58). Yet, as none of the people we interviewed on marriage in Fransfontein mentioned bride service, I do not consider this aspect here.

gomas to the institution of *lobola* as practiced by the Xhosa of South Africa, as expressed in Dawids' (2007: 65) explanation that "people who are familiar with the South African cultures, traditions, and norms, will recognize this practice because in isiXhosa this is referred to as 'lobola'". Others argued that the man's family should also receive an *abba gomas* to compensate them for the raising the groom. This argument runs in parallel to how the marriage slaughtering changed from a ritual performed only by the groom's family in the early 20th century to one performed by each side with an exchange of cattle (Schmidt 1981/82: 63). A similar development for the *abba gomas* would clearly identify it as something different from bridewealth.

In my view, the current institution of the *abba gomas* does include some aspects of the bridewealth concept, though there are signs that it might in future become completely separated from it. I view the *abba gomas* as both a gift for the bride's mother acknowledging her role in raising the woman, and as symbolic compensation for the reproductive potential that the bride represents: it is only through the reproductive capabilities of the bride that the groom's family is able to reproduce itself. Such a link between marriage and reproduction is very much in line with the broader bridewealth concept. The exchange and equation of cattle and women is a recurrent topic throughout the Fransfontein marriage process and a general theme throughout Southern Africa, most pointedly captured by the title of Adam Kuper's famous monograph *Wives for Cattle* (Kuper 1982, 2016; Pauli/van Dijk 2016). It is, in fact, a theme that comes up explicitly in the celebration of the engagement which ends off the asking ritual.

The end of asking: The *reng #nuis*

The relief felt by the man's kin group and the bride and groom when the asking ritual approaches its end cannot be overstated. After (at least) two nights of accusations from the woman's side and begging, asking, discussing, challenging and pleading for forgiveness from the man's side, the asking ritual is finalized with the *reng #nuis* (engagement).

The *reng #nuis* begins with the two kin groups finally agreeing on the marriage. In a plain dress, the bride leaves her parents' house and sits down between the two kin groups. She has to pass one final test. She is asked a number of questions on the different aspects of her potential new status, in order to ascertain that she is indeed willing to take care of her new family (see Dawids 2007: 64) Once she has answered these questions to the satisfaction of both sides, her relatives hand her over to a female relative of the man's kin group, usually an elderly, married woman, while the groom is handed over to the bride's family. At this point respected individuals from both kin groups will issue *//namadi* (advice) to the couple on how to behave as husband and wife.

The next preparatory stage for the engagement involves one of the leitmotifs of Fransfontein marriages. The woman's family presents a new enamel cup to the crowd and gives it to the groom's kin with the remark that the cup is complete and does not have any stains. The cup symbolizes the bride and indicates that, like the cup, the bride is given to the groom's kin without any stains or marks. The theme of completeness plays a similarly crucial role during the marriage slaughtering when all parts of the slaughtered cattle are presented and hung up in public.

The engagement proper with the exchange of rings can then proceed. While the bride changes and returns to the yard in a fashionable outfit, a beautifully decorated table with food and drinks is prepared. The couple is seated at this table. During the subsequent ceremony, two acts have to take place: one is setting the date of the wedding; and the other is for the groom and his family to "mark" the bride. The "marking" is done by giving the bride jewelry. Often, one of the groom's *makeis* will "mark" the bride with a pair of earrings, though a necklace, bracelet or watch can also be used for this. The *reng #nuis* per se, when a ring is placed on the bride's finger, is, however, always done by the groom. In general, the bride also marks the groom with a watch. Each marking is accompanied by comments by the marker. The groom might say that he marks the woman bride as his bride with the ring. The theme of "marking" the bride comes from the close symbolic connection between women and cattle and the fact that marking in cattle indicates ownership. Jorries, whose asking and marriage we observed in 2004, explained the link in the following manner: "Like cattle, the bride is marked so that everybody can see that she is not free anymore". The marking is followed by speeches and songs. This often includes a champagne contest during which the bride and groom have to compete in opening a bottle of champagne and drinking from the other one's glass. The serving of food to all participants marks the end of the formal part of the ritual and the beginning of the celebration.

Detailed descriptions of the asking ritual are only provided by Schmidt and Klocke-Daffa. In southern Namibia, the ritual is called the *mā-//na* (give-away) ritual. It has several similar stages to the ones I have described for Fransfontein, though Klocke-Daffa does not discuss the marking stage at all and gives the engagement little attention (Klocke-Daffe 2001). Similar to our local informants, Schmidt (1981/82: 58) underscores the symbolic equation between women and cattle in the marking ritual, claiming that the marking of the bride has a long tradition and can also be observed among other ethnic groups, as for example the Herero. She concludes: "It is plausible to assume that this is an old custom that through the influence of the country's white population has been gradually changed". (ibid) Though the items used for the marking have been "modernized" (for example, watches), it thus seems very likely that the practice itself has more historic depth. Schmidt makes the critical

point that the asking ritual and the engagement should not be perceived as equivalent to a European engagement. She argues instead that these rituals go further and are already a variation of marriage, "much more comparable to a modern civil marriage" than an engagement (ibid: 59).

The expenses for the asking and the engagement are rather high. Transport and accommodation for all relatives on both sides have to be organized and paid for. The husband has to buy the jewelry for the marking, often spending an amount equivalent to the value of a cow. In addition, a goat has to be slaughtered and drinks have to be bought for the celebration, all of which has to be financed by the groom and his family (the chapter "From Decline to Distinction" discusses the dissemination of asking rituals and engagements as well as the increased wedding costs in greater detail).

The time that elapses between the *reng #nuis* and the marriage ceremony itself can vary quite widely. Theoretically, the wedding could proceed immediately after the conclusion of the engagement on the Saturday, with the separation of the bride commencing on Sunday after the church service. Most commonly, however, several months elapse before the wedding is held, not least to give the groom and his kin a chance of recovering financially and preparing for the expenses of the wedding.

The marriage (*!gameb*)

The wedding celebration can be divided into seven different stages (see Table 7). The wedding commences with the seclusion of the bride for six days, beginning after mass on the Sunday before the wedding (Stage 1).[7] On the subsequent Friday, the marriage slaughtering is conducted (Stage 2). Late in the morning on Saturday, the church ceremony takes place (Stage 3). After church, the couple and their wedding party take official pictures and do the "money walk" (Stage 4). From here, they proceed to the wedding reception (Stage 5). Either immediately after the wedding reception or on the next morning, the bride's veil is removed (Stage 6). On Sunday, the bride is finally be handed over to the groom's family (Stage 7).

Seclusion of the bride (*kieri-erie-#gas* and *!hae-om #nuis*)

On the Sunday before the wedding, the *!hae-om #nuis* (to be put in a darkened room) of the bride commences. As the bride is sitting in church, women of the groom's kin group cover her head with a veil. Singing and ululating, they walk her from the church to her parents' house (see Figure 8). The name of the ritual derives from the "kieri-erie" sound of the ululation and the word *#gas* (to put inside).

7 Some families have shortened this period to three days, secluding the bride only after the Wednesday service.

Figure 8: Secluding the bride

Although the bride is confined to her parents' house during the seclusion, and often to just one room, it is the responsibility of the women of the groom's kin group to take care of her. The groom's sisters and other close female relatives bring food and beauty products for her. This underscores the liminal character of the seclusion phase: the bride no longer belongs to her own kin group anymore but is not yet fully attached to groom's kin group. By feeding her, the groom's sisters grow a new kinship bond and create relatedness between themselves (as representatives of their kin group) and the bride.[8] The aim is for the bride to gain weight during her seclusion. One of the grooms we interviewed explained to us that he wants his bride to look "beautifully fat at her wedding day". Meat, milk and fat should be given to the bride. Again, there is also an equation between cattle and wife: neither thin cattle nor thin women are seen as desirable. Younger brides have begun to contest this beauty ideal. Influenced by Western television and soap operas that portray a very different idea of beauty, they do not want to gain any weight; some even want to lose weight. During her seclusion, the bride applies a red cream called *!nau-i* to all parts of her body, and especially to her face and neckline, to even and lighten the skin. The cream is made from a red stone sourced in the area around Opuwo, finely ground and mixed with animal fat.[9] During the entire seclusion, the bride is not allowed to go outsideand the groom is also not allowed to come inside. However, several of the women I interviewed indicated to me that they tried to sneak out at night to meet their grooms.

8 Feeding to create and maintain relatedness (and kinship) is a central topos in recent kinship research (Weismantel 1995; Carsten 2004, 1997).

9 Fiona Ilonga, who produces and sells this cream in Fransfontein, has written a chapter reflecting on local conceptions of beauty (Ilonga 2007).

Only Schmidt (1981/82: 59) describes this part of the marriage process. Like our Fransfontein informants, the women whom Schmidt interviewed report the use of *!nau-i* and explain the seclusion of the bride in a darkened room with the aim of lightening her skin (1981/82: 60). Schmidt notes that earlier reports do not include any information on a bride's seclusion shortly before the wedding ceremony. She does indicate, however, that Winifred Hoernlé describes a comparable seclusion period as part of girls' initiation ceremonies. There are indeed some striking parallels between the ritual marking a Nama girl's first menstruation, for example, and the Fransfontein seclusion of brides (Hoernlé 1918, 1923: 523-524). According to Hoernlé, first time menstruating girls where secluded in a menstruation hut. During the day, they were not allowed to leave the hut and were taken care of and fed with meat. Hoernlé writes: "For one of the chief things required of a girl in the hut is that she should get fat, with smoothly shining skin". (Hoernlé 1918: 71) While the girl was in the hut, her skin was being treated with something Hoernlé calls *!naop*, "a face paint made by grinding a soft red stone to powder and mixing it with fat" (ibid). Today, neither girls' initiation ceremonies nor menstruation seclusions still take place in Fransfontein. But it seems very likely that some of the ritual elements of these former puberty rites, especially the seclusion, have been transformed into the marriage rituals.

Ritual slaughtering *(!gameb-#as*)

In Fransfontein, the*!gameb-#as* (marriage slaughtering) is always done very early on Friday morning, ideally at dawn. It begins with the groom and his male relatives driving a cow from their house to the bride'sparental home. Once they arrive there, the groom kills the cow while his relatives hold the animal down. This can be done in various ways, as we observed during the rituals we witnessed. Sometimes the grooms stabbed the cow, while at other times the animal's throat was cut. Once the animal has been killed, the groom runs into the bride's parental home and his relatives proceed with cutting up the meat.

Once the meat is cut up, it is hung up (see Figure 9), a practice discussed in detail by both Schmidt and Klocke-Daffa. The hanging up of the meat represents another variation of the central symbolic themes of Fransfontein marriage: the equation of cattle and wives and the completeness of both. The groom's family has to present all parts of the slaughtered animal – including its blood, its skin and the contents of its intestines – to the bride's family. The soft parts of the animal are displayed in large bowls while the large pieces of meat on the bones are hung up on a wooden frame. One of the influential female relatives of the groom's kin identifies all animal parts by naming them, to show the bride's relatives that they are all there. The bride's family pays painstaking attention to the presentation; if any piece were to be found missing, the bride's family could

Figure 9: Hanging up the meat

refuse the animal and force the groom's family to slaughter another cow. The importance of the completeness of the slaughtered animal is a variation of the equation between cattle and women: just as the complete cup presented during the engagement symbolizes the untarnished bride, the entire cow symbolizes the groom who enters marriage complete and without a stain. At this point, other goods will also be given to the bride's family, such as sugar, tea and Knorr soup.

While the bride's family starts to prepare the meat, several other ritual activities take place. Sometimes a married female relative covers the heads of the bride and two of her married female relatives with the fat of the cow's stomach (see Figure 10).[10] It is critical that it is a married woman who performs this, as only a woman like her is able to pass on the luck that is necessary to make a marriage work. Schmidt (1981/82: 64) and Klocke-Daffa (2001: 171) also mention the custom, highlighting the high value fat has for most of Namibia's ethnic groups and how it symbolizes fecundity. Thus, both the fat and the fact that it is a married woman applying it bring luck and fecundity to the marriage.

Another ritual activity done as the meat is being prepared is the *#gui-/hamises* (tearing of the stomach) ritual. During this, two respected, elderly and married women from each of the kin groups tear one of the stomachs or the intestine of the cow to symbolize that, from now on, the two kin groups have to share. Interestingly,

10 According to Michael Bollig (personal communication July 2009), these practices resemble those among the Herero and Himba.

Figure 10: Putting fat from a cow's stomach on the bride's head

this practice is not mentioned in any of the literature on Nama and Damara marriage. After these additional ritual activities are completed at the bride's parental home, the groom's kin group returns to the groom's parental house and awaits the bride's kin group to arrive and to present it with its cow. The ritual practice of slaughtering and presenting the cow at the groom's parental house is very similar to the one at the bride's parental house, yet the slaughtering will be performed by one of the bride's brothers. For the rest of the Friday, both kin groups will stay at their respective houses and prepare for the wedding day.

Schmidt (1981/82: 63) reports that the practice of the reciprocal slaughtering by the bride's family appeared in the first half of the 20th century. Beforehand, only the groom's kin group slaughtered a cow. She also mentions a further custom that continues to be practiced in present-day Fransfontein, namely placing a white flag on the roofs of each of the two parental homes to indicate the marriage (ibid). Schmidt ascribes this practice to white Afrikaans marriage rituals.[11]

The church wedding

In Fransfontein, the church wedding is always celebrated late on Saturday morning. The morning until then is spent by the groom and his groomsmen and the bride and her bridesmaids to prepare themselves for the church ceremony in their respective

11 Already in the 1950s, Laura Longmore (1959: 94) observed white flags as a symbol for upcoming weddings in a township of Johannesburg.

parental houses. Women of the groom's kin take the wedding dress to the bride and help her to get ready.

The bride and the groom have asked siblings and friends to be their bridesmaids and groomsmen. Both Khoekhoegowab terms – *strei-aon* for groomsman and *strei-taras* for bridesmaid – are derived from Afrikaans words: *strei* is a variation of the Afrikaans *strooi* (straw), while *aon* means man and *taras* means woman in Khoekhoegowab. Like the practice of placing white flags on the parental houses of bridal couple, the appropriation of these words indicates the influence of Afrikaans culture on Nama and Damara marriages (cf. Schmidt 1981/82: 65). In Afrikaans the bride's male attendant is called the *strooijonker* (literally, straw boy) and the bridesmaid the *strooimeisie* (literally, straw girl). Bridesmaids and groomsmen always form couples. The number of couples at a wedding varies – while some weddings might only have four couples, others can have as many as eight. Critically here is that the bridesmaids and groomsmen are all dressed the same way.

The church wedding follows common Christian practices. Interestingly, several important family members on both sides do not attend the church wedding. They are busy celebrating and preparing food at the respective parental homes and at the reception hall. Compared to the number of people celebrating at the two parental homes and also later at the reception, the number of people attending the church wedding is rather small. While the church wedding is an important element of a Fransfontein marriage, the low attendance indicates that it is certainly not the only highlight. Other ritual practices, especially the asking ceremony, the wedding slaughtering and the asking-out of the bride ritual at the end, are as important as the church wedding. The couple will sign the marriage register during the church service. The marriage will later be reported to the magistrate in Khorixas. Thus, all Fransfontein church marriages are always also civil marriages (and registered as such). After exchanging the rings, the couple will kiss and then turn to the congregation. This is the first time that they introduce themselves as *!game-aob* (marriage man or husband) and *!game-taras* (marriage woman or wife). After mass, the newlyweds come out of church and the congregation throws rice and confetti. Although this practice is of European origin, Klocke-Daffa (2001: 171) comments that its symbolism has older roots. She links it to the practice of covering the bride's head with the cow's stomach fat, with both practices believed to bring luck and fecundity to the marriage.

In comparison, Schmidt (1981/82: 65) mentions the church wedding only briefly. Her two key informants did not give any details on their church wedding because they assumed that these Christian ritual practices were well known. Klocke-Daffa (2001: 170-172), in turn, is much more explicit than Schmidt, though her description does not vary much from my own description. The only difference is that weddings

Figure 11: A typical wedding picture

in Berseba, where she did her fieldwork, tended to take place on Sundays, rather than Saturdays as in Fransfontein (ibid: 173).

After church: Photos and money

After the church service, wedding photographs are taken. In Fransfontein, newly-wed couples either take their pictures at the Fransfontein Fountain, a natural fountain at the outskirts of the village, or in the lush and beautiful garden of one of the traditional councillors. Figure 11 shows a typical motive used for wedding pictures.

It is likely that these gardens play an important role in marriage photos because of the symbolic value of water in this water-scarce region. Most other places in Fransfontein are dry and dusty, lacking plants and water. Already in the early 20th century, Winifred Hoernlé (1923) marked the centrality of water for Nama speaking groups, among others also the "Zwartboys" of Fransfontein and Windhoek. While considered valuable and essential for life, it is also believed to be able to cause sickness and death if not handled appropriately. These potential dangers have to be controlled through rituals and prohibitions. While Hoernlé does not examine water in relation to marriage rites, the emphasis she places on the symbolic value of water can also be traced to the importance that water, fountains and gardens have for Fransfontein weddings.

After the wedding pictures have been taken, the couple and their bridesmaids and groomsmen walk to the groom's parental house. Their walk has to be encouraged with gifts of money: only when coins are thrown at their feet will the newlywed continue to walk. The coins are collected into small baskets by flower girls and boys. At the groom's parental house, a bedroom has been beautifully decorated with curtains and bed covers brought from Windhoek. Upon their arrival, the couple, their entourage and as many wedding guests as possible cram into this room. The air is very hot and people start sweating. Two respected members of the two kin groups ask the wedding attendants to throw as much money as possible on the bed. Only when they perceive the amount on the bed as sufficient will the bride be allowed to sit down on the bed.

After a short break, during which food and drinks are served at the groom's parental home, the couple and their bridesmaids and groomsmen proceeds to the bride's parental home, again enticed by coins thrown at their feet. At this house, too, all wedding participants and guests congregate in a bedroom where the guests are again asked to throw money on the bed. Later, all the money collected in this way will be handed over to the newlywed couple. Pendelton (1993: 88-89) discusses a similar practice among the Ovambo and and calls it the Owambo "marriage walk". Yet, neither Schmidt nor Klocke-Daffa mention a comparable practice for the Nama/Damara. The Fransfontein money walk reflects a Frazerian magical thinking, such as that encountered by Lankauskas at Lithuanian weddings: "Weddings provided arenas for metaphoric money making – for creating imaginaries of its abundance and ready availability". (Lankauskas 2015:94) Yet, the money given during the two money walks and on the two money beds is little when compared to the large wedding costs that the couple and their kin have to muster. Many people in Fransfontein are needy, living on very little and often having no money at all. There is thus not much money to be given at a wedding. The importance of the wedding money thus lies not so much in its financial contribution to the wedding costs but rather in its symbolic value as representation of a wedding's capacity to express and even generate wealth and abundance. This is all the more astonishing as most people in the village have so little money.

Staging marriage (*onthals*)

For their wedding reception, couples in Fransfontein either rent the church hall, the school hall or the community hall. The church hall is the smallest of the three buildings while the school hall is the largest. The community hall is the cheapest option: built in the 1980s during the apartheid period, it is not in a very good shape. The wedding reception is called *onthals* in Khoekhoegowab, an appropriation of the Afrikaans term *onthaal* (reception).

Globally, weddings have become central sites for the negotiation of what is locally constructed as "traditional" and as "modern".[12] These dynamics are especially evident when looking at food and clothing. Reflecting on clothes and clothing in Africa, Hildi Hendrickson observes: "When we see Africans using *our* products to create *their* identities – and vice versa – we learn that the meaning of body or commodity is not inherent but is in fact symbolically created and contested by both producers and consumers". (Hendrickson 1996: 2) All ingredients for the Christmas salads offered at weddings are expensive and often hard or even impossible to get in Fransfontein. One needs a car to bring large amounts of potatoes, carrots or pineapples to Fransfontein. Such difficulties increase the value of the salads, turning them into food for very special occasions. Meat, the other highly valued and central ingredient at weddings, is also costly but locally available. For a wedding, one needs both types of food. Together they form what people construct as "traditional food" at a Fransfontein wedding. It is not so much the origin of the Christmas salads, their "whiteness" or "modernity", that makes them special and thus appropriate for a wedding. It is rather the difficulty in acquiring their ingredients. Similarly, it is the cost of the meat that makes it special. Both are thus well suited to mark the exclusivity and traditionality of wedding food.

As described above, the couple and their bridesmaids and groomsmen are sitting on an elevated platform in the reception hall, facing the tables with the wedding guests situated below them (see Figure 12). This placement has a certain similarity to the high table that can be found in some prestigious British universities. A master of ceremonies, who has already introduced the waitresses, moderates the reception program. The "champagne competition", already introduced for the *reng #nuis*, is performed again. The programs can be quite varied: most couples have a wedding waltz, some ask a choir to sing, sometimes a group of relatives performs a dance, the guests and the couple may pray together, and respected elders may hold speeches and give further advice to the newlyweds. Dawids writes about the weddings he has attended: "The handing out of the drinks usually signifies the beginning of the end". (Dawids 2007: 75) After the newlyweds and their guests have finished their drinks, everybody starts leaving. Although the reception is one of the most expensive moments in a Fransfontein wedding, it is quite short, often lasting less than two hours.

12 In comparative global perspective, this seems to be a crucial theme for many contemporary weddings (see Mupotsa 2014 for South Africa; van Dijk 2017 for Botswana; Debevec 2007 for Burkina Faso; Lankauskas 2015 for Lithuania; Argyrou 1996 for Cyprus; Bristol-Rhys 2007 for UAE; and Kendall 1996 for Korea).

Figure 12: The wedding reception

Schmidt (1981/82: 65) does not mention the reception at all. I suggest that this as a sign for the changes in marriage practices. The weddings of the 1960s and 1970s that Schmidt's informants reflect upon take place well before the thorough transformations of the late 1970s and the 1980s (see "From Decline to Distinction"). Receptions are not yet an integral part of marriage for Schmidt's informants. At that time, the wedding celebration and the wedding meal take place first at the bride's parental house and then at the groom's parental house. This is similar to the movement between the two parental homes during the marriage slaughtering in present-day weddings. According to Schmidt, the marriage is finalized with the asking-out of the bride at her family's house. By the time Klocke-Daffa (2001: 172) writes twenty years later, reflecting on marriages of the 1990s, wedding receptions are a central part of Nama marriages. First, newlyweds in Berseba celebrate at a hall in very similar fashion as I have described above. Then, they celebrate at the groom's and finally at the bride's parental home. There the asking-out ends the marriage feast.

According to Schmidt (1981/82: 65), it is very likely that, at the beginning of the 20th century, weddings were only celebrated at the bride's parental home. This is confirmed by our wedding interviews with elderly couples and widows. The counter-slaughtering was introduced in the first half of the 20th century, thus extending the wedding celebration to both houses. Then, at the end of the 1970s, weddings began to include a celebration at a rented hall. In contrast to the greater informality and lower cost of the celebrations at the two houses, this reception is expensive and very formal.

Showing the bride (*/hui-eis*)

We observed a certain flexibility regarding the practice of the */hui-eis*, when the bride's veil is removed and the bride is presented. The *//hui-eis* takes place at the groom's parental house. The newly-weds are seated at a table, with married elders congregating around them. These elders proceed to give *//namadi* (advice) to the couple, advice that can sometimes be rather harsh. During one */hui-eis* we attended, a local *kai aob* got so enraged about the freedom women had gained in recent years that he almost had to leave the */hui-eis*. He had started with giving advice on how married women should behave and ended with a condemnation of gender mainstreaming that, according to him, is propagated at local workshops organized by various NGOs. One of the main features of the ritual is the lifting of the veil, yet there seems to be some space for flexibility with how this is done. Sometimes the bride's veil is simply lifted before the *//namadi*, sometimes it happens afterwards. At one wedding we attended, the lifting of the veil turned into a practice similar to the money bed when the master of ceremonies spontaneously announced that the veil would only be lifted if enough money was given to the couple. He encouraged the guests' generosity by emphasizing the necessity of controlling that the bride was still complete and nothing of her was missing. He thus re-introduced the Fransfontein marriage leitmotif of "completeness". After the veil is lifted, the bride changes into an ordinary dress, which underscores that her status has now changed from bride to wife. Sometimes, the lifting of the bride's veil is followed by the opening of the wedding presents. It seems that the lifting of the veil is a new introduction as none of the earlier discussions of Nama and Damara weddings mentions this event.

Asking-out of the bride (*#gan-# ûis*)

A Fransfontein marriage ends with the *#gan-#ûis*, the asking-out of the bride at the bride's parental house. This is the last time that the groom's family has to ask the bride's family, this time for permission that the wife can formally move to her husband's place. Often, some more *//namadi* will be given to the couple. It is also common that the new wife will be asked to prepare and serve some tea to the guests in order to demonstrate her new status. In many families, the wedding cake is eaten at this stage. Only married people are allowed to eat from the wedding cake.

Similarly, the meat of the *#gaus* (hip bone) of the cows slaughtered during the marriage slaughtering will only be distributed among the married wedding guests at the final asking-out of the bride. The hip bone has been cooked seperatley from the rest of the wedding food. Later, the bone is rubbed with the same *!nau-i* cream that the bride used during her seclusion and, after the wedding, is hung up at the bride's parental home. Figure 13 displays a *#gaus* (the bone on the right side).

Figure 13: Marking the end of the wedding

Schmidt (1981/82: 65) and Klocke-Daffa (2001: 173) both view the asking-out ritual as the final stage of Damara and Nama marriages, and interpret it as the last remains of the former practice of bride service. During that practice, the Damara/Nama husband and his family had to gather for a final asking-out ritual after the husband had completed several months or even years of bride service. While neither Klocke-Daffa nor Schmidt found any proof anymore for the practice of bride service in their areas of research (Okombahe and Berseba), they noted that the final asking-out ritual had remained. In Fransfontein in the early 2000s, none of our interlocutors ever mentioned bride service or saw a link between bride service and the asking-out ritual. For them, the asking-out ritual was rather linked to the asking-ritual at the beginning of the marriage process. They saw these two rituals as framing the wedding and the asking-out ritual as that stage that closes the cycle of marriage.

Tracing the marriage ritual through the evidence given by Schmidt and Klocke-Daffa in particular, we can see that the present-day Fransfontein marriage process is a complex performance of hybrid rituals. Different cultural practices – Nama, Damara, Herero and Ovambo, but also Afrikaans, German and British – have merged and produced the unique form of marriage rituals that I have labeled "Fransfontein

marriage". Danai Mupotsa (2014: 186) has noted a similar cultural multiplicity in contemporary South African weddings when she states that they are "both modern and traditional, communal and individualistic, representative of freedom and unfreedom, romantic as well as obligatory". The result of this merging, this hybridization is African (de Wet 2008; Mupotsa 2014, 2015). Any attempt at classifying these marriages into "true" (i.e. "traditional") or "modern" (i.e. "new") marriage types would completely miss the form, content and dynamic of African (and Fransfontein) marriage. Fransfontein marriages are "remotely global", to borrow Charles Piot's (1999) insightful term. They are shaped as much by "indigenous" culture as by colonial and postcolonial forces.

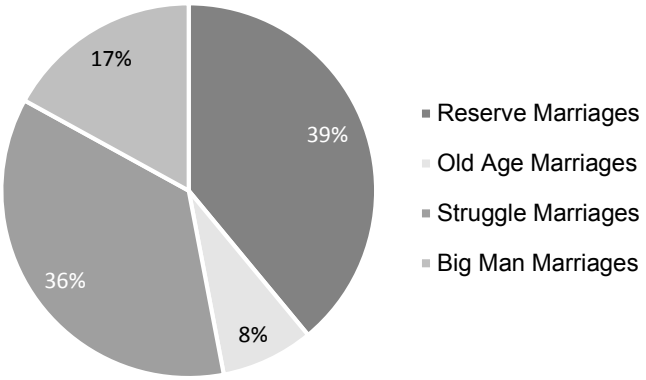
MARRIAGE VARIATIONS

Every single wedding introduces variations to the general outline given above of current Fransfontein marriages. People, events, strategies, desires, vulnerabilities and hopes are never the same (Abu-Lughod 1991: 156). Yet, regardless of these idiosyncrasies of expression and events, some of the variations can be classified systematically. By analyzing these variations in terms of central social categories such as generation, class and religious affiliation, it is indeed possible to identify forms of clustering amongst Fransfontein marriages. I will start with an analysis of Fransfontein marriages in terms of generation.

There are significant variations in type of marriage by generation. The eldest generation interviewed, born between 1915 and 1944, celebrated rather simple and affordable weddings. In August 2005, one woman born in the 1930s described weddings before the mid-1970s in the following way: "You know, everything was just at one house, at the bride's house. There was the asking, and then the celebration. In between, one went to church. The celebration? What celebration? It was just the slaughtering of a goat, sitting together in front of the house, singing". Some of these weddings did not take place in the Fransfontein reserve itself but rather at the couple's place of work on a commercial farm owned by a white farmer. Yet, as the bride and groom and their wedding party nevertheless belonged to the reserve's population, I include them in this generation of marriages. I cluster all of the marriages of couples born up to the 1940s and celebrated before the mid-1970s under the label "reserve marriages", indicating that most of these marriages were celebrated while Fransfontein was still a reserve. These reserve marriages constitute 39 per cent of all marriages (see Figure 14).

Not all of the couples of the eldest generation (born up to the 1940s) and living together as family were able to marry early in life. One factor that played a particular

Figure 14: Types of marriage of 139 couples



role in preventing marriages was conflict with white farmers. At the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s, the local Lutheran pastor decided to marry all such older unmarried couples. These wedding celebrations were very modest and affordable. I label these marriages "old age marriages". Eight per cent of all marriages we recorded belong to this category. Given the similarities between reserve marriages and old age marriages, it is clear that they are both variations of a more general form of marriage: simple and affordable weddings.

From the 1970s onwards, the ritual practices of weddings started to change. Local *kai aogu* emerged. They occupied prestigious jobs at the time of the wedding (politicians, administrators or professionals) and were considered wealthy by local standards (Pauli 2010b). In some cases the wife also had a good-paying occupation at the time of her wedding, in particular if she was a teacher. These marriages first began to appear in the later 1970s. The couples involved were generally born after 1945. These marriages extended and transformed the previously modest form of Fransfontein marriage, leading to the current lavish practices. I group these marriages under the label "big man marriage". Today, only a few big man marriages take place, celebrated by the few new professionals and politicians that have come into office during the last 10 to 15 years or, more frequently, by wealthy migrants returning to the village. I include these elite weddings in the big man marriage category that makes up 17 per cent of all marriages.

Although the changing marriage practices initiated by big man weddings have significantly increased marriage costs, not everybody lacking the financial means for lavish weddings has stopped marrying. People of local middle class status, including drivers at the ministries in Khorixas, police sergeants, domestic workers, or road construction workers, hope to further climb the social ladder and get ahead by celebrating costly weddings. Because of the substantial economic and social effort required by these weddings,

they are locally labeled as "struggle marriages". Dawids and I have analyzed his own wedding as a struggle for recognition and security (Pauli/Dawids 2017). Within the Namibian context, the term *struggle* has a specific, historically situated meaning. It is first and foremost associated with the liberation struggle against apartheid and for independence. Henning Melber (2014: 26-28) observes a "struggle mentality" characterizing Namibian postcolonial society and argues that the heroic narrative of the struggle for freedom is very much present in everyday life. To struggle may then not only capture the pain of working towards a purpose, but also the relief and even pleasure of achieving it. It was thus striking when, during our fieldwork in Fransfontein, we repeatedly heard how the concept of *struggle* was applied to describe wedding preparations for couples with limited financial means. Today it is no longer the struggle for political freedom but the struggle for a dignified and economically secure life that preoccupies most people in Fransfontein. Marriage as a central indicator of adult status (see Pauli 2011) has become a tremendous struggle to achieve. Thirty-six per cent of all marriages fall into this category (see Figure 14). These are weddings of couples who want to marry like the elite even though they are not (yet) part of the elite themselves. For this type of marriage, support from kin is essential (Pauli/Dawids 2017) but is often not sufficient. Because of their lack of a permanent and sufficiently high income, these couples need additional economic incentives to marry. Otto, a construction worker in his thirties, explained his motivation to get married in the following way: "At the time I started to think about marriage I was having some nice contracts. Money was coming in. I think the birth of the son was also influencing the decision; she was also pregnant at that time". Our two closest research assistants, Jorries and Francois, both married while we were living in Fransfontein. At several occasions, both of them expressed that they would not have married without the extra income and support they had received from us. For us it was a welcome opportunity to reciprocate something for their great support of our research. In an interview in August 2005, Francois clearly linked his marriage plans to our research project: "We were thinking about marriage, but not so seriously because we did not have any income. But when you employed us that was when we started thinking seriously about marriage. […] I think that this is the trend; the rich men are getting married. You will not find a poor man like me married".

It is remarkable how much Francois distances himself from his new status as a married man and thus in some ways a man from the "elite". He still feels like a "poor" man. He can only explain his new status in terms of luck, similar to finding money on the street.[13] Remarkably, the expenses and practices of the struggle weddings hardly differ

13 The way we saw our role in the lives of our research assistants stands in stark contrast to how Victor Crapanzano (1980) dealt with Tuhami, his assistant during research he con-

from the lavishness of big man or elite weddings. My analysis of marriage in terms of generation thus demonstrates how marriages have gotten more lavish and expensive over time, and with that a clear marker of elite status within the community.

Another way of analyzing Fransfontein marriages is by religion. Lutheran and Roman Catholic marriages are still the norm in Fransfontein (86 per cent of all marriages) and prior to the 1990s there were no Pentecostal marriages at all in Fransfontein. However, by the end of the 1990s, twelve per cent of all marriages were Pentecostal (calculated from the 1940s onwards, this makes five per cent in total). As there is no Pentecostal church in Fransfontein, Pentecostal wedding services take place in the same halls as those that are rented for the wedding receptions. Compared to Roman Catholic and Lutheran weddings, the church service plays a much more central role for Pentecostal weddings. Virtually every guest involved in a Pentecostal marriage attends the church service, in comparison to the small number we observed in Roman Catholic and Lutheran weddings. It is, however, interesting to note that still most of the ritual activities, including the ritual slaughtering, are performed in a similar fashion, regardless of religious affiliation. This contrasts sharply with what Rijk van Dijk (2012a) observed for weddings in Botswana and what I encountered in urban weddings in Windhoek more recently (2015-2016). While Pentecostal churches within these more urban contexts tend to perceive *traditional* rituals as problematic and might even reject them, this is not the case in the rural context of Fransfontein.

A rural-urban difference similar to the one in Pentecostal weddings also becomes visible when we consider class in relation to religion. In the urban setting of Windhoek, Pentecostal churches also seem attractive to established upper-middle classes and the elite. In contrast, all Pentecostal weddings in the rural context of Fransfontein are struggle marriages, celebrated by couples with limited financial means. For these economically struggling couples, it is a great advantage that their overall wedding costs are reduced due to the prohibition of alcohol by their church. In addition, becoming a member of a Pentecostal church has not (yet perhaps) become an issue for

ducted in Morocco. Just like Francois and Jorries, Tuhami wishes to marry and asks Crapanzano for financial support. Crapanzano, however, refuses to assist, and rather psychoanalyses the "material" (the desires, dreams, and narratives) that Tuhami "produces" or "constructs" for him. In my mind, these passages of Crapanzano's otherwise excellent ethnography greatly lack empathy on part of the anthropologist. It remains unclear why Crapanzano does not support Tuhami – especially given the closeness of their encounter. It is more than understandable (even without psychoanalysis) that the individuals on whom anthropologists rely and get close to try to make the best of the situation – including drawing on the anthropologists in their pursuit of central life projects like marriage.

the political and economic elite of Fransfontein; they rather celebrate their weddings in the Fransfontein Protestant church (cf. Pauli 2012).

To sum up, marriage types vary by generation and are embedded in class differences. Affordable and simple marriages took place before the 1970s and big man marriages and struggle marriages have occurred since the end of the 1970s. Religious variations exist. However, there are no variations based on ethnicity – despite the existence of several different languages and ethnic groups.

MARRIAGE AND THE STATE

When it came to marriage, German colonial legislation was mainly concerned with the issue of "Rassenmischehen" (racially mixed marriages), thus marriages between German men and female colonial subjects (Wildenthal 1997). In 1905, the German colonial administration prohibited all civil marriages of this kind, a year later also all church weddings, and in 1907 the Windhoek high court declared all "mixed" marriages entered into before 1905 as invalid (Engel 1973; Essner 1997; Sippel 1995). The issue stirred up a significant amount of debate in Germany (Acker 1912; Friedrich 1909; Grentrup 1914). One particular aim of the legislation seemed to have been the removal of the rights of children born to "mixed married" couples (Engel 1973: 121), in particular their inheritance rights. Gordon explains: "If *Mischlings* were born in wedlock they gained their father's citizenship, whereas according to German (and later South African Roman-Dutch) law, illegitimate children were legally related only to their mothers". (Gordon 2005: 57) The rights of these children remain a continuous theme in marriage legislation throughout the German administration. In contrast to the intense and well-documented debates on so-called "mixed marriages", however, information on legislation for all other marriages is rare for the German colonial period.

Marriage law in South West Africa under South African rule was determined most critically by the Native Administration Proclamation, 15 of 1928, that came into effect on January 1, 1930 (Becker/Hinz 1995: 29). It was based on the Black Administration Act, 38 of 1927, that had been instituted in South Africa itself. The legislation established two types of marriage property regimes in South West Africa and stayed on the books until the passing of the Married Persons Equality Act in 1996.[14] The Native Administration Proclamation meant that all civil marriages

14 South Africa had already reformed its legislation on marriage in the 1980s, though this was not reproduced in Namibia at the same time (Sippel 1997: 395). The 1996 legislation in Namibia to a large extent followed the South African lead.

(this included all Christian marriages, as these were automatically entered as civil marriages) outside the so-called Police Zone, were marriages out of community of property unless the parties made a recorded declaration to the opposite (which would then result in a marriage in community of property) (Becker/Hinz 1995: 30). All "indigenous marriages" within the Police Zone were not affected by this proclamation; by default, these marriages were marriages in community of property.

Fransfontein marriages that were entered into before the law reforms of the 1990s, the discriminatory Roman-Dutch common law concept of marital power still applies. It places wives in the position of minors, while husbands have the right to administer the property of both spouses (Hubbard 2007: 102; Sippel 1997). Harald Sippel (1997: 385) differentiates three elements of marital power: the husband's power over the person of his wife, the husband's power over the property of his wife, and the husband's power as head of the family. All three elements have been abolished with the new Married Persons Equality Act of 1996. As Diane Hubbard writes: "Couples married 'in community of property' must now consult each other on most major financial transactions with husbands and wives being subject to identical powers and restraints". (Hubbard 2007: 102) The provision that the law will no longer recognize the husband in civil marriages as the "head of household" resulted in much controversy both inside and outside parliament (Hubbard 2007: 102-104). It still had strong echoes in Fransfontein during our fieldwork in 2003 and 2004. Though several radio programs had been aired to inform the general public of the new law and on their new rights, Fransfontein men and women were confused by the terms "in community of property" and "out of community of property" and felt that these were some kind of Western NGO inventions aimed at changing "traditional communities". However, separation and divorce are extremely rare in the Fransfontein area with only about three per cent of all marriages ending in separation and/or divorce. This means that only a tiny proportion of the population will ever go through property conflicts common during separation and divorce. Thus, the material consequences of the type of marriage contract (whether in community or out of community of property) are of only minor importance for most Fransfonteiners.

A low divorce rate does not mean that marriages are happier in this area than elsewhere. Several married women told me about being mistreated by their husbands, through physical abuse, physical and emotional neglect, and the fear of being infected by sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV, because of the husband's continuous cheating. Yet, despite these difficulties, almost all women remained in their marital relationships and did not leave their spouses. One of the main reasons for this lies in the great difficulties and tremendous costs of getting married in the first place. As a female teacher in one of the focus group interviews

remarked: "After so much trouble, one does not want to lose it all again," referring to the social status, respect and prestige she had acquired through marriage.

Two other aspects covered by the Namibian law reforms since the 1990s, however, have stirred wide public interest in Fransfontein: maintenance and the inheritance rights of children, both for those born "inside" and those born "outside" of marriage.[15] It is important to note that, legally, cohabitation is not treated as marriage, thus that cohabitating partners have no rights on each other. The only exceptions are common children: "Namibian law makes all parents responsible for the maintenance of their children in proportion to their financial resources, and there is no distinction between children born inside marriage and children born outside marriage for this purpose". (Hubbard/Zimba 2004: 17) In contrast, children born inside marriage and children born outside marriage continue to be treatead differently when it comes to inheritance rights: "Children born outside of marriage are still disadvantaged when it comes to inheritance – in terms of civil law, such children may not inherit from their fathers or father's families unless they are named in a will, even if paternity is proven and acknowledged". (ibid). This legislation is reflected in local usage in Fransfontein where married elite men and women distinguish between children born "outside" and "inside" marriage in terms of inheriting from a father's estate (Pauli 2012). I discuss these developments in more detail in Part III.

The last issue that shapes marriage on the ground is the education system. An analysis of this brings this chapter on marriages in present-day Fransfontein to a close.

Marriage and school vacations

When we received our first wedding invitation at the end of July 2003, school vacations had already started. At that time we were still living in one of the empty hostel on the Fransfontein school ground. With the beginning of the holidays, the school ground had become quiet and empty. Outside the school yard, the village was filled with music and movement. From all over the country, people had returned to Fransfontein to celebrate important rites of passage, especially engagements and weddings.

In present-day Namibia, there are three major school vacations, all of several weeks in length: the first one in March after the rainy season, the winter break in July and August, and the summer break from December into early January. Our first experience of a wedding fell into the winter break. Many of our acquaintances were

15 A child born "outside of marriage" in general means that its mother is not married. The father may be married but then not to the child's mother (see Part III for a discussion of how ideas of illegitimacy have entered local discourses).

traveling around the country, attending engagements and weddings, or receiving family and guests in Fransfontein. All three holiday breaks are marked by this type of travel for engagements and weddings. For many families, school holidays mean movement: picking up children from different hostels and bringing them to places where they can spend the vacations. Communal farms fill up with young people staying over with their rural kinfolk. Having to be on the move anyway, people try to combine the needs of their children with other family obligations like attending weddings. As white-collar workers such as teachers often support weddings financially and their active participation is highly valued at marriage events, the state's influence on the timing of wedding celebrations is channeled through the institutions of schools and holidays.

The emergence of state-funded schools and the spread of education was connected to the establishment of homeland governments in the 1970s. Remarkably, the spread of these public institutions had an almost immediate effect on the timing of weddings. For 66 of the 123 weddings in our census, we recorded the month in which the wedding events were held. The concentration of weddings into only a few months started in the 1970s. In the 1990s, December began to emerge as the favorite wedding month. This is remarkable insofar as December had previously been the least preferred month for wedding celebrations because of its heat and humidity. Indeed, none of the couples who married before the 1980s married in December. Because of the spread of state-controlled formal education, more than half of all current weddings are celebrated during school holidays. Unfortunately, we do not have information on the engagement months. Nevertheless it seems plausible that the timing of these would have changed comparably.

Church registers available for the Fransfontein, Khorixas and Outjo ELCRN parishes confirm the results from our census. The preference to celebrate weddings in December clearly emerges in the 1970s. Before then, the winter months and especially July were preferred. Thus, state sponsored institutions have subtly shaped and changed the timing of weddings. Beyond the Fransfontein region, Klocke-Daffa (2001: 173) has observed comparable changes in the timing of weddings. She reports that in Berseba, southern Namibia, the church service after which the bride is secluded has been rescheduled from Monday to Sunday so that working guests would not have to take another day leave. Martine Segalen (1990: 145) describes a similar shift in timing of weddings in France from February and November, the months with the least work for agricultural workers in the 17th and 18th centuries, to the summer months from the 19th century onwards when the newly urbanized and industrialized workers had their holidays.

Contemporary Fransfontein marriages are shaped by a multiplicity of forces: the state and its laws and institutions; the community and its norms, values and sanctions;

and individual actors with their aspirations and anxieties. In this chapter I have focused on a detailed description of the current social, religious and legal practices of weddings and engagements, followed by a discussion of the different variations of a normative wedding. In the next chapter I analyze how marriage has changed from an almost universal institution to an exclusive celebration of class distinctions.