

Intimacy outside marriage

The decline of marriage has also reconfigured intimate relations. To marry is still what many people desire. Nevertheless, because of its contemporary exclusivity, marriage does not frame how most people intimately relate to each other. Instead, other ways of forming and consolidating intimate relations are sought out. Living together or having a child together are some alternatives to deepen heterosexual relations beyond marriage (Hunter 2016; White 2016). Furthermore, some women and men decide not to marry at all and stay single (James 2017; Niehaus 2017). In this chapter, I will trace these reconfigurations of intimate relationships outside marriage.

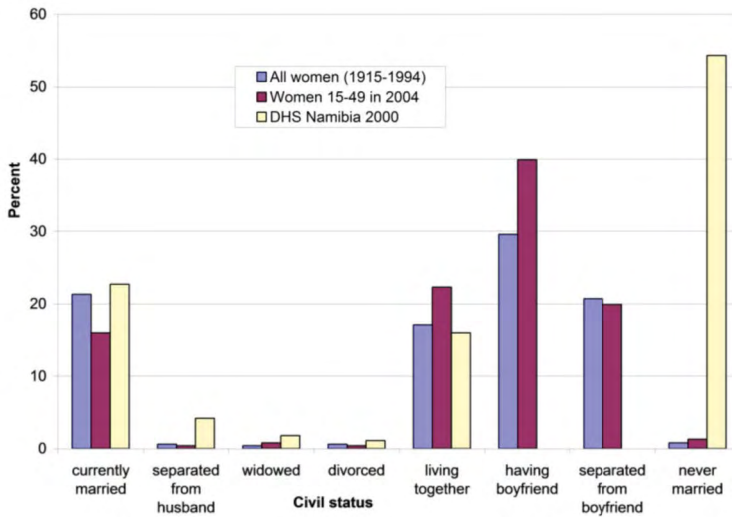
In his review of James Ferguson's (1999) seminal monography *Expectations of Modernity*, Owen Sichone notes: "An ethnography of decline must, of necessity, be a study of resilience, of survival and even of victory; because if one only sees reversals (de-industrialisation or de-modernisation or re-traditionalisation) one merely ends up with a reverse teleology". (Sichone 2001: 378) This chapter acknowledges the great variety of intimate relations outside and beyond marriage. The chapter is also an attempt to be critical of what Doreen Setume (2017) has called "nuptialism", a bias that sees all intimate relations only within the framework of marriage. I will start with a discussion of cohabitation. Demographers often treat living together as an alternative or even equivalent to marriage. This will lead to a description of the making and unmaking of love and sexual relations outside marriage. In the last part of the chapter I try to understand those women, and to some extent also the men, who have chosen to stay single. I conclude with an analysis of the increasing stigmatization of children born out-of-wedlock.

BLACK COW MARRIAGES: COHABITATION WITHOUT MARRIAGE

Many demographers argue that cohabitation can be treated like marriage (Bongaarts 1978). Cohabitation and marriage are seen as social institutions framing the birth of children. In Fransfontein, however, intimacy, sexuality and birth very often occur outside marriage and cohabitation. Many women are polyandrous mothers (Guyer 1994), like Silvia, born in 1950, who has given birth to four children from three different men. Silvia is unmarried and has never lived together with any of her intimate partners. Demographers would classify Silvia's children as "premarital fertility" (e.g. Garenne/Zwang 2005). This implies that marriage occurs at some point in time. The opposite is true for Fransfontein as well as other parts of Southern Africa (Pauli 2010a, 2016; Pauli/van Dijk 2016). Marriage is declining. "Premarital fertility" is better viewed as *fertility without marriage*.

Demographers often classify women like Silvia as "unmarried" and distinguish them from formally married and cohabiting women. I suggest classifying them together with cohabiting women and distinguishing them from formally married women. Figure 18 summarizes the spread of cohabitating, marital and non-residential intimate relations. The figure compares the Fransfontein data with data collected by the Namibian Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) of 2000 (MOHSS 2003: 79). To make the comparison with the DHS data more valid, I differentiate the Fransfontein data into two groups: first, all 362 women that were interviewed, born between 1915 and 1994 (blue) and, second, a subgroup of 238 women who were aged between 15 and 49 in 2004 (purple). The DHS only collects data for women between the ages of 15 and 49 (yellow). The percentages of women formally and currently (i.e. 2004 for Fransfontein and 2000 for Namibia) married are around 20 per cent for all three groups. The categories of divorced, separated and widowed women have very low percentages for all three groups (below five per cent). The category "living together" category also exhibits similar values for the three groups. The national percentage is slightly lower (16 per cent) the percentage for all Fransfontein women (17 per cent) and for Fransfontein women aged 15-49 (22 per cent). If a woman did not live together with a boyfriend at the time of the DHS and had never cohabited with a partner, the survey did not ask her whether she had a boyfriend. This explains the large size of the "never married" category for the DHS data in the figure. Over 54 per cent of all women in the DHS fall into this category. In our census, we differentiated this category and asked whether a woman currently had a boyfriend or whether she had separated from him. For all Fransfontein women, 30 per cent had a boyfriend in 2004 and 21 per cent had separated from their partner. If one only looks at Fransfontein women between 15 and 49 years, the percentages change slightly: 40 per cent had a boyfriend in 2004 while

Figure 18: Types of intimate relations – local vs. national level



20 per cent had separated from one. These distributions help to explain the 54 per cent of women that the DHS subsumes under “never married”. At least in Fransfontein, women falling into this category are sexually active, sometimes have long-term intimate partners without living with them, and have children with these partners. To subsume them under “premarital” or “never married” does not cover the diversity of the intimate and reproductive trajectories of these women.

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Table 14: Cohabiting, marital and non-residential intimate relations

	N	Average age in 200*	Average length of current relationship	Average age first sex*
Currently married	76	52,6 (16,0)	18,88 (16,3)	19,1 (3,7)
Living together	62	36,2 (11,2)	8,9 (8,1)	18,7 (5,9)
Boyfriend, not living together	105	31,0 (12,8)	6,2 (6,9)	17,7 (2,8)

* Standard deviation in brackets

What then is the status of living together? Table 14 indicates that currently married women are much older than women living together with a partner and women having a boyfriend but not living together. Contrary to the married women, the women living with a boyfriend and the women having a boyfriend but not living together are much closer in age.

The average length of the relationship is comparable between women living with their boyfriend and women having a boyfriend but not living together; it is different, however, from that of married women. The age at first intercourse does not vary significantly between the three groups. These averages indicate that women in the “living together” category are more similar to unmarried women than to formally married women. In Fransfontein, the co-residential union is rather fluid. This fluidity, for example living together with one man, separating and then living together with someone else, has no negative effects on a woman’s reputation. The same flexibility that applies to other aspects of Fransfontein livelihoods like kinship and migration also holds true for residence. Many people are constantly on the move, searching for employment, income opportunities and also new intimate relations. Women (and men) move in and out of households. This high level of residential and intimate mobility is an expression of the pervasive economic insecurities most people have to cope with (Pinho et al. 2016; Setel 1999: 238).

“Living together” thus has a very different meaning from being formally married. It is by no means perceived as a substitute for formal marriage. Marriage reduces the necessity to adapt and be flexible. “Living together”, however, can be a rather temporal state. During our stay we observed many movements of unmarried men and women in and out of a partner’s life and house.

Further evidence for not classifying couples living together as married comes from local discourse. There are different terms used locally for “living together”,

none with a positive connotation: *!hai-omi*, meaning “bad house”; or *‡nu gomas omi* (or *‡nu gomas !gameb*), meaning “black cow marriage” or “black cow house marriage”. Both in public events and in everyday affairs, a couple that lives together is treated similarly to a couple that does not live together. Only a formally married couple is treated differently. This becomes especially evident during marriage celebrations during which only formally married couples are allowed to participate in certain rituals. Many women told me that living together is just a waste of time: the woman has to bear the problems that may result from co-residence, such as alcohol abuse, domestic violence or a man “living off a woman’s money”, without being treated with the respect or enjoying the security a married woman receives.

Zitha Mokomane’s (2005, 2006) research on nuptiality patterns tackles very similar issues for Botswana. She shows that the number of cohabiting couples has strongly increased in Botswana during the last decades. Mokomane (2005: 20) asks in how far cohabitation has to be understood as an alternative or as a prelude to marriage, and differentiates three possibilities: first, cohabitation reflects a rejection of marriage and a “true alternative”, thus that people prefer cohabitation over marriage; second, cohabitation is a prelude to marriage, hence that marriage is only delayed, for example because of life circumstances; and third, cohabitation is an alternative to being single but with the same sexual “freedoms”. The first and third possibilities are rather similar. After analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, Mokomane concludes that in Botswana cohabitation is not equivalent to marriage. Her informants did not perceive cohabitation as a substitute for marriage, ruling out the first and third possibilities. Like women in Fransfontein, Mokomane’s interview partners stressed the many difficulties and risks cohabitating women had to experience, such as a lack of legal security in terms of maintenance and inheritance when compared with their married counterparts. As in Fransfontein, cohabitating women in Botswana are more similar to unmarried, not cohabitating but sexually and reproductive active women than to married women.

Mokomane’s informants perceived cohabitation as a temporary phase before marriage, a prelude: “The results clearly show that in Botswana marriage is the ‘ultimate goal’ for virtually all cohabitants while cohabitation is a compromise living arrangement for those who are not yet ready for marriage, and may not be for a considerable period of time, mainly due to economic reasons”. (Mokomane 2005: 33) But is cohabitation really always a prelude to marriage?

Like Mokomane (2005), we posed the question in our census whether people wanted to marry. Only about two thirds of the cohabitating and the non-residing women with a permanent boyfriend perceived marriage as the “ultimate goal”. Several of the women who cohabitated but did not want to marry said that their boyfriends just came and left as they wished, leaving them alone with all the problems. They did not want to marry

the boyfriends because of their lack of steadiness and responsibility. Thus, cohabitating women in Fransfontein did not always perceive cohabitation as a prelude to marriage. In addition, many women and men who expressed a wish to marry were very skeptical that they would ever be able to do so. Mokomane also describes a marked increase in wedding costs and the resulting difficulty for economically marginalized couples to marry (ibid: 26). She further states that the proportion of never married people in Botswana has significantly increased (ibid: 19). Nevertheless, she assumes that cohabitation is simply a prelude to marriage. But, if the situation of Fransfontein is taken as guide, then this will not be the case: even if cohabitating couples dream of marriage, the chance that their economic situation were to improve is indeed very slight. Cohabitation thus stands in between the “married” and “never married” categories. In some cases it might be a prelude to marriage, as Mokomane has shown for Botswana. But often, it is a variation of the “never married” category. This category includes approximately 70 per cent of all Fransfontein women who are having intimate relations outside marriage. Their intimate relations are formed on other premises than the stability that marriage might offer.

INTIMACY AND LOVE IN TIMES OF AIDS

He would spend half of the night with me and in the morning hours he would hike to work. That type of relationship. I knew that he belongs to someone else, the one we were cheating. Okay, that type of relationship. But one has to decide. I did not want to be in the shadow any longer. I wanted to be seen with him, to be seen by people. That is why I decided I cannot stay in the shadow. I heard that the lady whenever she finds out that he is dating someone else will fight. But I will not just be the one to be with at night and during the day he is with the other one. I want him to be next to me, to walk next to me during the day so that the others can see. That is how it became public. *Life narrative of a woman in her late twenties, February 2004*

During the first half of our stay in 2003/2004, the community of Fransfontein was intensively debating a court case that was running at the time. Just after our arrival, a young woman had attacked and severely injured another young woman with a broken bottle while spending the evening in one of Fransfontein *shebeens* (pubs). Because of

complicated head injuries that threatened her life, the attacked women had to be hospitalized for several weeks. The woman who attacked her was arrested and imprisoned in Khorixas. In the court case, she received a mild penalty. Several months after the act, she was able to start working again, in a state-financed occupation. The bone of contention for the argument between them had been a 25-year-old man, father of the child of the attacked woman. They had been a couple for several years. A few months before the attack, the man had found a well-paying job in Khorixas and shortly thereafter started dating the other woman. Unlike the mother of his child who had left school with grade 7, the new woman had finished high school and had worked in several well-paying jobs. At the beginning, the new woman was satisfied with the secret relationship. But with time, she wanted to leave this “shadow”. One evening, the three of them met in the local *shebeen*. The new woman started touching the man, expressing her affection so that everybody could see. This public demonstration of affection led to a rather immediate response by the betrayed woman. The two women started fighting, first verbally and then physically. In the course of fight, the new woman grabbed a bottle of beer, battered it and slammed its cut-off neck into the other woman’s head.

Of course, intimate relations in Fransfontein were very seldom as violent as in this narrative. Nevertheless, in a context of HIV/AIDS, economic insecurity and high rates of mobility, many Fransfontein intimate relations are contested, sometimes with violent undertones. With marriage out of reach for most people in Fransfontein, marriage has been replaced by other forms of intimacy, foremost intimacies based on the concept of love. This is especially true for the youngest generation, with women born between 1965 and 1984. Only 11 per cent of these women were married by 2004. One has to distinguish different types of conjugal relations outside marriage (Pinho et al. 2016). Roughly, one might differentiate between short-term relations and longer- and long-term ones. While many longer-/long-term relations start as one-night stands, not all brief sexual encounters eventually result in longer-lasting relations. Many women I talked with stressed that they only agreed to have sex with their partners because they had believed their promises of love and devotion. The possibility of a longer-lasting relation is often a central motiv for women to agree to sex (Wojcicki 2002). But “all those nice words”, as 25-year-old Isabel summarized the communication she had with her former lover at the beginning of their relation, evaporated into thin air. She soon realized that her lover was cheating on her with her best friend. When I asked Isabel whether they had planned to marry, she replied that at the moment */nammi* (love) was more important to her than marriage. */Nammi* meant that someone cared for her and supported her, also financially. Marriage was only a distant dream, but love was real.

Isabel described how an intimate relation typically starts and develops in Fransfontein. A man or a woman spots someone he or she likes in the village streets or in one of

the *shebeens*. This is called *sen* in Khoekhoegowab. Either the man or the woman can propose a *tē-am* (relation): for this, they ask the desired person to become their *soreb/sores* (boyfriend/girlfriend).¹ It is not very common, however, for a woman to propose to a man. In some cases, the person will not ask the desired partner himself or herself but will ask a friend to approach him or her. If the proposed person agrees, the two will start an intimate relation. Life stories with women and men show generally that the time between *sen*, *tē-am* and having sex for the first time is brief, often only one or two weeks. If the relation continues, the two become *sores* and *soreb* in the eyes of the general public, a process called */a-gu*. During this phase of the relationship, the exchange of presents in the form of gifts, cash and livestock is very important (on economic aspects of love, see Cole/Thomas 2009; Hunter 2009a). While the woman will only give small and relatively inexpensive signs of affection, the man is expected to give on a larger scale. By supporting the woman and her family, the new boyfriend expresses his love. A next step of intimacy is reached when the couple starts *#nu gomans omi* (living together), literally a black cow marriage or a black cow house. Sometimes the Afrikaans term *saam lewe* can also be used to describe this stage. The last stage of an idealized conjugal relation is *!gameb* (marriage). The wish to marry (*!game #gao*), is followed by the many ritual activities that I have described in the previous chapters. This is the stage that the vast majority of people in Fransfontein will never reach.

While most Fransfonteiners never marry, many engage in short-term casual relations and longer-term love relations. There exists an extensive anthropological literature on the question of how far the concept of romantic love is universal or a result of colonialization and “modernization” (Hirsch/Wardlow 2006; Jankowiak/Fischer 1992; Padilla et al. 2007; Smith 2001). In his research on love, fertility and marriage among Igbo men and women in Nigeria, Daniel Smith (2001) shows that romantic love as a criterion to start an intimate relation, eventually leading to marriage, and an increased importance of conjugality, such as joint decision-making between the partners, are rather recent phenomena. However, feelings of love have been known for a long time (ibid: 130). For my discussion here it is important to note that love is very much a pre-marital event among the Igbo and stands in contrast to marriage relations. Love will eventually lead to marriage and then get transformed into something else. Such practices and perceptions of love only apply if virtually everybody marries. In Fransfontein, in contrast, most people are never going to marry. Consequently, love as a frame to structure conjugal relations has a more central and lasting meaning here than in cultural

1 In Khoekhoegowab, “b” indicates a male ending while “s” stands for a female ending. Sometimes, the terms */hob* (boyfriend) or */hos* (girlfriend) are also used, terms that are more sex neutral than *soreb/sores*. While the words */hob* and */hos* can also apply to a same-sex friend, *soreb/sores* can only be used for a relationship between lovers.

contexts where marriage is still the norm and general practice. In some ways, love substitutes marriage in Fransfontein (and elsewhere in Namibia, see Mufune 2005; Tersbøl 2002). Mufune's research on myths of condoms and HIV/AIDS among Oshiwambo-speaking residents in rural northern Namibia describes this development:

With declining marriage rates and increasing divorce rates, sex for women is justified on the ground of love. Sex is used by men to pressurize girlfriends to show that they are in love (and are therefore a trusted partner) and not just after material goods. Conversely, women who want a serious relationship will quickly stop using condoms as a demonstration of their love, steadiness, and trust. (Mufune 2005: 680)

To understand intimate relations beyond, before or besides marriage in Fransfontein, it is thus necessary not only to analyze different types of relations (short, longer, long term) and to realize that love has substituted marriage, but one also has to reflect upon the meaning of trust and risks in times of AIDS (Hunter 2010). In Fransfontein, involvement in brief sexual encounters is often characterized by low levels of trust, high awareness of risk of a possible HIV infection, and a high likelihood of condom use. Contrary to this, longer-term unions (and also those imagined as such) have to cope with the ambiguities of trust. Trusting one's partner is both a critical but at the same time also potentially dangerous essence of long-term relations. Trust has become even more necessary, but also problematic and ambiguous in the midst of a crisis like the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Negotiating trust and risk is a general characteristic of intimate relations in times of AIDS and certainly not restricted to sub-Saharan Africa (Hirsch et al. 2009). Gausset (2001) has convincingly argued against the "Africanization" of HIV/AIDS (see also Setel 1999). Worldwide, the use of condoms is the safest way to protect oneself against AIDS. But in many regions of Africa (and also other parts of the world) they are perceived as inappropriate for long-term intimate relations as they are seen to signal promiscuity and immorality (Dilger 2003; Smith 2003). Smith's research on young rural-to-urban migrants in two Nigerian cities explicitly connects morality, sexuality and risk of infection:

Essentially, young people believed that if they chose partners of good moral character and if their relationships were founded on love, then they would face little risk of contracting HIV. Both young men and women said that they were much more likely to use condoms consistently in relationships that were considered short-term, unstable, or based on something other than love. (Smith 2003: 356)

Hansjörg Dilger has researched how Luo living in rural and urban regions of Tanzania survive the AIDS crisis:

The interviewees distinguished between the types of relationships they had. They agreed that it is easier for both sexes to insist upon the use of condoms if a relationship is based on “money”; this is because if it is based on “love” (*mapenzi*), then the use of condoms is inappropriate. (Dilger 2003: 39)

Finally, Eleanor Preston-Whyte describes similar ideas of love, trust and intimacy in her research on situational barriers to HIV protection in South Africa. Again, condom use is acceptable in casual but not in “love” relations:

While this form of protection is reportedly gaining acceptance in casual relationships, very little headways has been reported in introducing condom use in heterosexual, conjugal and longer-term “love” relationships. As elsewhere in the world, the issue of trust is paramount. (Preston-Whyte 1999: 142)

The use of condoms contradicts what long-term love relations are all about. Within love/trust relations, the risk of infection is often perceived as low. Different types of knowledge of one’s partner, as for example his or her moral and physical appearance, and not condom use are perceived as protective measures against infection. This practice was, for example, described by John during our fieldwork. When we asked him how people protect themselves against infection with HIV, he told us that “they do blood tests with the eyes” (Pauli/Schnegg 2007). One could add that blood tests are also being done with the ears, meaning that an evaluation of a partner is based on “observations” of physical appearance and “investigations” of past intimate and sexual behaviour. These “investigations” focus on the question in how far a person is known to *//om-mara* (“sleep around”) or *go-mara* (“look around”/“look at the other side”). Both are expressions that describe people that have many different sexual partners. The “testing” of a partner, however, is not a phenomenon linked only to AIDS. Practices of “testing” a partner have been common even before the dramatic spread of the pandemic (e.g. Bledsoe/Pison 1994; Gulbrandsen 1986). These practices continue until today and are adjusted to the new situation.

“Testing” also goes beyond issues of health, sexual behaviour and AIDS. Sincerity and commitment of a partner are also crucial. How engaged a partner is in an intimate relation is tested by his or her supportiveness, for example by providing money in times of need. Love is often constructed as the result of successful testing (Johnson-Hanks 2007b; Lewinson 2006; Pauli/Schnegg 2007). Bledsoe and Pison (1994: 5) underscore that the prolonged phases of “testing” a partner are also an expression of the procedural character of “African” marriage. Yet, while “testing” continues to be an important element of intimate relations in Fransfontein, marriage after “successful testing” is no longer a certain outcome for most Fransfonteiners.

Most intimate relations in Fransfontein now happen outside marriage. The previous chapter has discussed how reproduction and the birth of children largely take place outside marriage. Despite the spread of Western contraceptives and massive family planning campaigns, the average age at first sex and first birth has not changed for decades in Fransfontein (Pauli 2017a). Independent of marriage, becoming a mother or a father remains crucial for gender identities: “the importance of seeing women not only in the moment of sexual negotiation, but as mothers and would-be mothers: that is, in the context of their highly valued reproductive capacity”. (Preston-Whyte 1999: 140) Throughout the region, children are highly valued (Bochow 2012; Upton 2001). Use of contraception and especially condoms is often a contested topic within intimate relations. Some contraceptives are easier to hide than others. This explains the popularity of hormonal injections in Southern Africa (Preston-White 1999). Unlike hormonal pills or the loop, injections offer long-term protection and are rather easily kept secret. Preston-Whyte concludes: “We have yet to develop the equivalent secret protection against HIV”. (Preston-Whyte 1999: 149) Condoms, and also so-called femidoms (Mufune 2005: 676), are not secret protections. Quite the opposite, condoms are the most visible contraceptive method. They are a visible sign of mistrust and only acceptable in casual but not in longer-term love relations. Trust and having children together are important aspects of such long-term relations and condoms disrupt this central element of intimate life. Condoms, thus, prevent both HIV – and pregnancy. Situations which may be subsumed under the label “casual sex” lack such pregnancy aspirations – neither trust nor children are central, and condom use is very likely (Gausset 2001: 516).

Economic insecurities, the necessity to be mobile, a high value placed on children and specific forms of trust and risk, especially those associated with AIDS, frame the intimate relations of the younger and middle-aged Fransfontein men and women (born after 1964). To extend my analysis of intimate relations beyond, before and besides marriage, I next turn to the making and unmaking of intimate relationships.

THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF INTIMATE RELATIONS

In Fransfontein, the making of a new conjugal relation very often implies the breaking of an already existing one. This common constellation makes it difficult to see women only as victims of male betrayals. Nevertheless, public discourse focuses more on male than on female cheating. In all life stories I elicited, a cheating male partner is part of the narrative. In Khoekhoegowab, cheating or betraying is called */hōagao*. All women narrated how they discovered that their partners betrayed them. Most highlighted their role as victim of betrayal and not as actor in the betrayal of other women or of their existing male partners. A common beginning of an intimate

relation is the story of how Frieda and Tom² fell in love. We observed the ups and downs of their relationship from 2003 to 2004.

In late 2003, Tom *sen* (spotted) Frieda in a Fransfontein *shebeen*. Only a couple of days later he proposed a relationship to her, *tē-am*. He was having a lucky streak at the time: after a long period without a steady income, he had recently found a well-paid occupation 20 kilometres away in Khorixas. However, Tom was not single when he proposed to Frieda; he was in a long-term relationship with Rita. Both were living together with Tom's mother, a pensioner who raised several grandchildren and so-called *groot-maak* (foster) children in her large stone house. Tom and Rita were parents of a four-year-old son. Frieda, in turn, was a single mother who lived in her mother's household with her three-year-old daughter. Tom, Rita and Frieda were all in their twenties.

In the first couple of weeks of their relationship, Tom and Frieda only met secretly. Then, Tom publicly split up with Rita. Tom's and Frieda's mothers did not consent to the new relationship. Frieda's mother commented that she thought Tom was unreliable and selfish. Tom's mother perceived Frieda as snobbish. Tom moved out of his mother's house and started staying in his office in Khorixas. Most nights he spent with Frieda in her room at her mother's house. Rita, meanwhile, continued to live with Tom's mother. While Tom and Frieda tried to consolidate their relationship, gossip was running high. Rita's and Tom's mothers spread rumours about Frieda's HIV status. One evening, a sad and frustrated Rita drank heavily at a local *shebeen*. Tom's mother was deeply disappointed about this behavior and kicked Rita out of her house the very next day. Together with her son, Rita left Fransfontein and went to live with relatives in a faraway town.

Some months later Frieda had to leave Fransfontein for a week. Tom took this as an opportunity to visit his ex-girlfriend Rita and their son. When they met again, Tom and Rita still felt attracted to each other. They revived their intimate relation and returned to Fransfontein together. Frieda was furious. This led to fights between Frieda and Tom. Eventually, Rita was tired of all this love turmoil. This time, she left Tom. In the end, all three were left without an intimate partner. Frieda continued her life as a single mother in Fransfontein. Both Tom and Rita left the village and moved to different towns in Namibia.

The betrayal of Rita is rather typical for the beginning of a new intimate relation. Often, the betrayed woman is in a more vulnerable position than the new female partner. The betrayed woman might be economically dependent or pregnant. When Isabel, for example, discovered that her boyfriend was cheating on her, she was five months pregnant. She found out about the relationship when she returned from a visit

2 Because of the sensitivity of the topic, I have changed not only all names but also other information relating to persons and places.

to her sister in southern Namibia. The father of her child had promised to pick her up at the train station in Windhoek where they were living at the time. When he did not appear, Isabel took a taxi to meet up with him at his home. There, she encountered her boyfriend in bed with another woman. He had mixed up the dates of Isabel's return to Windhoek. Isabel said:

When I saw him with the lady, I was thinking: "What are you doing?" He says he is not feeling okay. But the lady is also angry. I tell her: "Don't be angry with me. I will go back to my house. I am pregnant, I cannot fight. I cannot do anything". He tells the lady: "You must go back, my girlfriend, she is coming back now". But I say: "I go back". And I take my bags.

Isabel and the father of her child continued to stay in touch. When their daughter was born, he sent clothes and food. During a phone call, he wanted to revive their relation. Isabel narrated: "He was asking for forgiveness. But I told him: 'No problem, I am not having any problem. Now I am okay. I've got your daughter. You can visit her. And after the visit, you can go back to your girlfriend!'" There are a number of similarities between Rita's and Isabel's reaction to betrayal. Both stayed in touch with their child's father. In Isabel's case, her child's father paid her material support for their child, whereas Rita received support from her ex-boyfriend's mother and for a while even continued to live in her house. Rita and Isabel were both economically vulnerable and dependent on financial support. While both felt personally and emotionally hurt, they nevertheless had to keep going on.

When asked whether they had ever cheated whilst being in a fixed relationship, relatively few Fransfonteiners said yes. By far the highest percentages of self-reported cheating can be found among young men: almost half of the 58 men between 15-24 years in our survey said that they had cheated, yet only about one fifth of the 77 women of the same age category admitted the same. At this point it is necessary to ask what people mean when they speak about cheating. Clearly, there might be some underreporting. Some women posited that if a partner was physically absent, sex with another partner was not considered an infidelity (see also LeBeau et al. 2001: 58). It is also unusual for women to engage in more than one intimate relationship at a time, leading to lower levels of overall female cheating. Men, and especially young men, are much more likely to have multiple intimate partners concurrently and to talk about their multiple relations, as such behaviour is often perceived as a sign of masculinity.

Economic aspects can influence the making and unmaking of intimate relations (see also van Dijk 2017). A new, well-paying job often coincides with the beginning of an affair which might later develop into a longer-lasting relationship. If a man moves up the economic ladder, it is also likely that his new girlfriend will be of a

higher economic status than his previous girlfriend. When I asked Frieda, for example, whether she saw any difference between herself and Rita, she said yes. Frieda explained that, unlike Rita, she was economically independent. Frieda stressed that scrutinizing a potential partner's educational and professional achievements was part of testing a new partner. Another highly educated woman reflected at length on the role of the economic standing of both partners in a relationship. Commenting on her partner's previous girlfriend, she noted how "material" this girlfriend had been, only thinking of "cash, car and cellular", a local expression to describe a money-grabbing woman. With disdain in her voice, she noted the less educated status of this woman: "She even quit school after grade seven! Primary school! I mean, both hands should bring something into the relation".

Tom's behavior after finding a new job illustrates this. Gossip spread in Fransfontein when Tom and his new girlfriend Frieda left the *shebeen* arm in arm. Tom's brother commented that Tom's behaviour is typical for men in the area. During Tom's long unemployment, Rita had also supported him financially. Now that he had found a new job and his own money, he turned down his former girlfriend and looked for someone "better", with more education and working experience. This points to an implicit norm that intimate partners should be more or less of an equal economic status. If a change in economic status occurs, it is likely that an "intimate adjustment" will follow.

Although both men and women left their partners, in the local perception it is the man who leaves the woman. In our ethnographic survey, we asked our interviewees to list the reasons they thought were acceptable for leaving a woman. There were only slight differences between the answers given by men and by women. Only about a third of Fransfontein men and women thought it proper to leave a woman who demands too much money. Different forms of support, including material and financial support, were not considered to be in opposition to love but were rather perceived as expressions of love and intimacy. Thus, to demand money and other resources from a male partner was not considered wrong. An issue on which men and women differed was the evaluation of a woman perceived to be drinking too much. Many more women than men thought that this is an adequate reason for a man to leave. One possible explanation might be that women perceived drinking too much alcohol are considered to be "risky": there were numerous stories going around about drunken women having unprotected sex. Why most men did not perceive this as a reason to leave is unclear, however.

Once a new intimate relationship has been started, the bond needs to be consolidated. Often, this was difficult and challenging for newly formed couples. Frieda's mother, for example, disliked Tom and did not approve of her daughter's relationship with him. Indeed, she threatened to kick Frieda out of her house, leaving Frieda sad and frustrated. She described how she had been single for two years, feeling lonely and abandoned. Now that she had finally found someone to love, everybody seemed

to be opposed to the relationship. Frieda's love for Tom was not bound to marriage or children: for her what was central was the feeling of love, though she added after a while that she would not be against marriage. It was the feeling of love that made the relationship special and true for her. Frieda's perceptions are very similar to Isabel's comments about love and marriage. Both said that their love for their partners had made them stop using condoms. Frieda continued to use hormonal injections, however, to prevent a pregnancy. When asked about the risk of being infected with HIV, she replied that she now knew Tom as she had done the "blood tests with the eyes". Tom did not have any dubious spots or sores which could have suggested an infection with *haga* (AIDS).³ Frieda not only knew her partner's "surface", however. Their love was also a form of trust: she knew that he would not harm her.

Feelings of trust but also of fear and danger depend on the stage of an intimate relationship (Preston-Whyte 1999). Feelings of insecurity, risk and danger are prominent at the beginning of intimacy. With time, perceptions of risk and danger are substituted by feelings of love, trust and security. This also helps to explain why, despite widespread risk awareness, HIV infection rates are still high in Namibia (Pinho et al. 2016).

To understand the unmaking of intimate relations, two major themes, mobility and (sometimes violent) conflict, are important. Employment opportunities are extremely rare in Fransfontein so that people have to be flexible and mobile to make a living. Young people in particular are very mobile. In such a situation it is rather difficult to keep in contact with people left behind. Given the lack of public transport in large parts of Namibia, visits are difficult to organize and costly. To make telephone calls is also beyond the economic possibilities of most people.⁴

Intimate relations very often not only include love and pleasure but also conflict, sometimes even domestic violence. A few women reported being subjected to severe physical and psychological violence. However, it is important to note that many men in Fransfontein are very caring and not violent at all. More research should focus on these men (Pauli 2007b).

Further, in Fransfontein, violence within gender categories is also common. The narrative with which I opened this section describes an extreme act of violence between two women. Much social science research and studies of HIV/AIDS overlook conflict that arises within gender categories, especially between women (Pauli 2007b). A high-ranking police officer indicated in 2005 that there had been a strong increase of severe

3 *Haga* literally means "four" in Khoekhowgowab, the way in which people referred to the four-lettered word "AIDS".

4 This might have changed since my fieldwork from 2003 to 2006 when access to mobile phones and the internet was still very rare in Fransfontein.

violence among young women in Fransfontein. These developments are related to a multiplicity of factors, among them substantial economic insecurities and the fear of AIDS. As the making and unmaking of Frieda and Tom's intimate relationship shows, couples have to cope with many insecurities and ambiguities. In this situation, there are people in Fransfontein, especially women, who have decided that they have had enough of these ambiguities and that chose to remain single. It is to them that I now turn.

WOMEN STAYING SINGLE

Research indicates that the category of unmarried women is not a new category (Gulbrandsen 1986; Hunter 2002; Mayer 1961; van der Vliet 1991: 235). According to Philip Mayer (1961: 85), so called *amankazana* (free women), thus unmarried women living at their father's homestead and bearing their children there, provided a model for independent unmarried mothers in the townships and some rural areas in South Africa. Isaac Schapera and Simon Roberts (1975: 267) describe a similar category of unmarried women living in their father's ward in Rampedi, then Bechuanaland, in the 1970s. The women Virginia van der Vliet interviewed in the 1970s who deliberately chose to stay single were not confined to their fathers' compounds. Rather, they often lived on their own and raised their children by themselves: "Like so many women, from the elite to the humblest hawker or domestic worker, this option [of staying single] had become possible with the chance the towns offered for financial independence". (van der Vliet 1991: 236-237)

Although these women chose to stay single, they were not socially isolated. They formed the core of female family networks and households (Hellman 1974; Preston-Whyte 1978). The family households of these wage-earning women represented new forms of female cooperation, with households including wage-earning and non-wage-earning women that were connected through uterine kin ties. Preston-Whyte (1978: 59) calls these families "female linked" (cf. Jackson 2014). Men only temporarily participated in these households as sons, brothers, lovers and providers of children. Preston-Whyte (1978: 55-58) and Adam Kuper (1987: 147) underscore the similarities these units had with Caribbean matrifocal family systems but also how they deviated strongly from rural Zulu social organization:

The cooperation between women, that is, between mothers and daughters, between sisters and even between grandmothers and their grandchildren, which I have described in this essay, presents a marked contrast to the structurally important linkages between agnatically related males upon which Zulu homestead composition and local organization were based. (Preston-Whyte 1978: 82)

The female perception that it can be an advantage not to marry, along with declining marriage rates, is reflected in accounts throughout Namibia. In their study of eight congregations in the Omusati and Oshikoto administrative regions, north-central Namibia, Riikka Shemeikka, Veijo Notkola and Harri Siiskonen (2005: 103) find that many young women try to protect their independence by remaining unmarried. Iken (1999: 179-183) cites a number of reasons why Nama women in southern Namibia prefer to remain unmarried. A critical one among the women who have regular incomes and well-paid jobs is the fear of losing decision-making power, especially in economic matters. These women had definite views about marriage and the requirements for a marriage partner, with the result that they did not perceive all men to be equally suitable. Iken (*ibid*: 181) stresses that such arguments “point to the potential for conflicting gender roles and new directions in gender relations”. Situating these developments in a historical perspective, Iken writes: “Single motherhood reportedly became a more common feature among the Nama and other communities in Namibia and southern Africa after 1918, and went hand in hand with a declining marriage rate”. (Iken 1999: 172) However, until the 1960s, marriage remained a rather normative event in the life course of most women she interviewed (*ibid*: 180). It was only in the last decades of the 20th century that the percentage of never-married women and men became increasingly visible. Thus, there is substantial evidence that some Southern African women have gained agency from the structural changes in marriage systems. But how did the situation change for men?

Only in recent years have in-depth interpretations of Southern African male gender roles and masculinities emerged (e.g. Hunter 2004, 2005; Morrell 2000; Ouzgane/Morrell 2005; Richter/Morrell 2006). Similar to earlier feminist research (Di Leonardo 1991), this line of investigation highlights the multiple dimensions – political, economic, cultural and social aspects – that form male identities. Material power and economic disempowerment play an especially prominent role in current constructions of masculinity in Southern Africa.

One of the first to analyze the effects of the labour migration system on male identities and marriage was Ørnulf Gulbrandsen (1986) in his research on Tswana migrant communities in the 1970s in Botswana. According to him, young male Tswana migrants gained significant agency and prestige in the 1960s and 1970s through their participation in the labour migration system to South African mines into which their home communities were linked. The young men continued to marry, yet later in life and no longer on their fathers’ terms: now it was the groom himself and not the lineage or the groom’s family that was responsible for the bridewealth. The migrants’ cash incomes led to strong increase in bridewealth amounts. This led to a rapid and thorough transformation of the definition of male identity, one tightly linked to economic success and spending power. The essence of manliness turned into an economic asset, gradually

excluding those men without the necessary financial resources. In his long-term South African ethnography, Mark Hunter (2009b, 2010) describes comparable transformations of notions of masculinity for Mandeni, KwaZulu-Natal, from the 19th century until today. He traces how the image of “man as provider” emerged only with the strong increase in labour migration in the first half of the 20th century (Hunter 2004, 2009a). Yet this notion in a way also “trapped” men into the migration system: “Once men were married, their dependency on migrancy meant that gifts became rerouted to support the homestead and became signifiers of men’s continued love for their wives and families”. (Hunter 2009a: 143) Some decades later and with steeply rising unemployment rates, masculine identities based on the material expressions of love and marriage became increasingly less viable. Hunter (2007) convincingly argues that the economic crisis of the last decades has deprived most men of the means to fulfil the role of the homestead provider, among other factors contributing to the strong decline in marriage rates. Obviously, the entanglement of class and gender has produced new masculinities. Elite and middle class men are still able to fulfil the image of the male provider, declaring it as “traditional”. This discourse makes the constraints of poorer men to express their masculinities even more evident and humiliating. However, masculinities of economically marginalized men have also been reconfigured.

Several authors have argued that the economic marginalization of increasing numbers of African men has created a kind of “cultural limbo” (Cole 2004; Cornwall 2002; Johnson-Hanks 2007b; Masquelier 2005; Parkin and Nyamwaya 1987a; Tersbøl 2002). For instance, Adeline Masquelier (2005: 60) has observed for men in Niger that “young men without the means to marry find themselves condemned to a kind of limbo life”, and Britt Pinkowsky Tersbøl (2002: 367) comments on the situation of poor men in Namibia’s northern regions in the following way: “Without resources, without a job, and without a house, a man cannot marry. This situation leaves men in a social and cultural limbo. The basic building stones of male identity and masculinity are unavailable to men”. How then is this “cultural limbo” filled? Margrethe Silberschmidt (2001) was among the first to analyze the effects unemployment and economic deprivation have had on masculine identities in East Africa. Multiple partners and violence against women figure prominently in these new male identities. Hunter (2004: 145) comes to very similar conclusions: “Men celebrating multiple sexual partners, widely seen as an ‘innate’ feature of African sexuality, are in their present form, a product of an economic crisis that has ripped the core out of previous expressions of manhood – working, marrying, and building an independent household”.

Gender identities have comparably been reconfigured in Fransfontein. Some Fransfontein women have deliberately chosen to stay single. This expression of female agency is not a simple resistance story with an economic independent woman/mother as the heroine fighting patriarchy. Although some women have expressed

awareness of male domination and female resistance, these women are as much formed by gender structures as they form them. In the chapter “Forming Families”, I turned to agency-structure theories to understand why the poor do not reappropriate marriage. Here, I want to build on Ortner’s (2006) discussion of agency, power and gender. Although stressing that questions of agency are not only gendered issues (but go beyond gender), Ortner (ibid: 139) writes that gender relations nevertheless often provide “the most vivid examples”. I want to scrutinize the “intense play of multiply positioned subjects pursuing cultural goals within a matrix of local inequalities and power differentials” (Ortner 2006: 144) by distinguishing three types of women: women as wives; women who have chosen to stay single; and unmarried women who would like to marry. The women who want to stay single have to be subdivided into two generations: the generation of “single” mothers who raised their children in 1970s and 1980s; and the women born in the late 1960s or later who came of age with Namibia’s independence (I am not discussing the oldest generation of women here whose marriage choices predate the changes of the 1970s). Further, the perspective of men is only presented through the narratives of women. This is a bias which stems from the fact that, despite some interviews I conducted with men, my more detailed and in-depth understanding of intimacy, marriage, reproduction and sexuality comes from discussions and interviews with women.

With the changes of the 1970s, the new role of the woman as wife and housewife emerged. Fransfontein women largely perceived being a housewife with ambivalence. On the one hand they saw it as implying that the husband is wealthy enough to marry and finance such a living. Women that classify themselves as housewives generally take pride in this status. On the other hand, many women considered being a married housewife meant a loss of agency, especially in terms of decision-making. Even married women who continued to work after their marriage, especially teachers, stressed the many quarrels they had with their husbands about decision-making and issues of trust. With the spread of AIDS, these quarrels became fiercer, with many married women in fear about the risks their husbands’ potential infidelity would carry for them. Even before AIDS, married women could suffer from the infidelities of their husbands. One such woman, Lina, was so depressed by her husband’s continuous cheating that she tried to burn herself to death. The risks thus involved in marriage was expressed most clearly when I asked married women whether they would wish for their daughters to marry. Most were sceptical or even opposed it, as illustrated in Mona’s response: “By my side, I don’t know. My daughter should learn for herself and be independent. During marriage, you sometimes have to stay in the house, have to be silent, silent until your heart becomes sick. I do not want that for my child”.

Being a married woman is thus perceived to be a mixed blessing. This partially explains why women began to remain single from the 1970s onwards. Especially

women with secure, even if low-paying, employment as domestic servants in government institutions opted against marriage. Most of these women received their employment in the 1970s and 1980s because they were the intimate partners of influential *kai aogu*. With time, these relationships came to an end and the women dated other men, often also having children with them. Most of these later men had no secure employment and were poor in comparison with the *kai aogu*. Women with employment started to perceive these men as a burden and strain on their resources and freedom. Hertha and other middle aged women employed in the domestic sector of government institutions in Fransfontein explained their unmarried status as a deliberate choice against staying with and marrying these economically marginalized men. These women had gained agency through a male patronage system that emerged with the apartheid homelands of the 1970s. At the same time, their very agency was instrumental in the limitation of the agency of economically deprived men who were unable to afford expensive weddings and lifestyles or to act as providers of the household. The unmarried lives of these women can only be understood in relation to the tremendous political and economic changes of the 1970s and 1980s and the restructuring of gendered agency. These economically independent women became role models for younger women (Chimere-Dan 1997). Thus Gulbrandsen notes for Botswana: “Legitimization of the status of the unmarried mother may stem from the fact that high-status women are often in this category”. (Gulbrandsen 1986: 21) Likewise, Parkin and Nyamwaya see educated, urban women as role models and primary agents of change in marriage and the family:

In acting as a reference group for other women and requiring men to adapt to their choices, it will not be strange if it is such women who will bring about the greatest transformations in ideas and practices relating to marriage in Africa. (Parkin and Nyamwaya 1987a: 16)

Among the youngest Fransfontein generation were several well-educated women working in better-paid occupations such as in the health sector. Like the generation of their mothers, they expressed scepticism towards marriage (Pauli 2017a). This is shown in a group discussion I had with four women in their twenties in 2004:

Julia: Is it a question of money that so many young people are not married?

Vanessa: Everything has changed, you know, things have gotten expensive. The parents themselves are not married. They are still with a boyfriend or a girlfriend, you know, and they still want to get married. And then the child wants to get married, you know, those money problems.

Julia: So if all of you had a lot of money, all of you would be married?

All four women: No!

The four women then elaborated that they were looking for Mr. Right, a trustful, faithful, good looking, educated, wealthy man. All four wanted to keep their economic independence after marriage and wanted to continue working. In certain ways, the attitudes of these younger women were similar to those of their mother's generation. Just as for the domestic workers of the 1970s and 1980s, marriage was not a necessity in life for the young, educated women of the early 2000s. It was only an option and then only with the right candidate. But there were also differences between these two generations: many more of the young women were educated and they depended to a much lesser degree on the benevolence of male patrons.

Finally, I want to reflect on the situation of those women who wanted to marry but were unable to do so. As I described in the chapter "Postapartheid Livelihoods", many of these women lived in the part of Fransfontein called *ḫoabatere*, meaning "go out". They survived amidst great economic insecurities. Marriage to them was a dream, a way in which they could forget their daily struggles for a moment. At the same time they knew that their chances of marrying were extremely small. One afternoon in 2006, single mother Tanja described to me how she walked to the local shop every evening. Through the shop window, she could watch her favourite Mexican telenovela "When You are Mine". Like in this series, Tanja dreamed that one day someone would marry her out of her misery. Then she laughed. Her daughter commented that this was just a Cinderella fairy tale, not real life. All of these dreams, regardless whether imagined by middle-aged domestic servants, young educated professionals or marginalized poor women, are about *wealthy* men. Wealth and money are what transforms a man into a husband. Thus, women have increasingly decided not only against marriage, but against specific men (see also Boehm 2006: 178). That many men are economically and socially marginalized is tightly connected to decades of exploitation by colonial powers and the apartheid regime.

Even if women want or have to stay single, they will most likely become mothers. Until recently, children born out of wedlock were not stigmatized. Yet, with the emergence of a new discourse of "illegitimacy" and "illegitimate children", this is gradually changing. I turn to this in the last section of this chapter.

BETWEEN SEX AND SIN: CREATING THE "ILLEGIMATE CHILD"

Attending the Sunday service in the Lutheran church one Sunday in the summer of 2005, Michael and I witnessed Norbert, Eulalie and Maria publicly asking for forgiveness (Pauli 2012). There had been a good deal of gossip and popular outrage in the community about the relationships between these three ahead of this. Norbert, a

wealthy administrator in his late thirties, and Maria, slightly older than her husband, had married almost ten years earlier and had four children together, the last one born one year earlier. The parents now planned to baptize the child. However, parallel to Maria's pregnancy, Norbert's girlfriend, Eulalie, in her early thirties, had also become pregnant. Wife and lover gave birth in the same week. Many people pitied Norbert's wife and criticized Norbert and especially Eulalie for the out-of-wedlock pregnancy. One of the female church elders described herself as a realist, knowing though not approving of the extramarital affairs of almost all of the wealthy married male church members. She remarked, however, that it was one thing to have sex with a married man, but quite another to get pregnant by him. She and many others were outraged by Eulalie's and Norbert's behaviour. And rather than using the common term *!gameb !auka /gôas* (outside marriage child) to describe Eulalie's child, she used the term */ai-/gôas* (sin child) when talking to me.

After the children's births, it took Norbert's wife almost one year to publicly forgive Eulalie and allow the baptism of Eulalie's child. During this time, the church only permitted Maria to remain an active member of the congregation and take Holy Communion; Norbert and Eulalie were excluded from all church meetings and Holy Communion. Only with Maria's consent did the congregation and church elders agree to baptize Eulalie's */ai-/gôas*. During this Sunday service we attended, all three of them, crying and clearly emotionally shaken, had to stand in front of the pastor, heads bowed. Then, in an almost inaudible voice, Eulalie asked first Maria and then God for forgiveness, followed by Norbert. This practice, the *!gaes tsî ores tsîra xa* (abbreviated as *ores*) is held for a repenting person to receive redemption and become free of sin. After the *ores*, both children were baptized and Norbert and Eulalie were again admitted to Holy Communion. However, Maria's consent came at a cost to Norbert and Eulalie. With no close kin in the community, Maria had frequently mentioned that she was unhappy in Fransfontein and wanted to move away. Norbert, however, did not want to leave the town in which many of his relatives and also Eulalie were living. Nevertheless, acknowledging Maria's forgiveness of his and Eulalie's behaviour, Norbert started looking for another job in a different community. A few months after the *ores* ceremony and the baptism, he was successful and Norbert, Maria and their children left the community.

Stigmatization of children born out-of-wedlock is still rare in Fransfontein. Children born within and outside of marriage are in general differentiated by descriptive and not pejorative terms (cf. Schapera 1933). Children born to a married couple are called *!game /gôan* (marriage children or inside-marriage children), whilst children born out of wedlock are called *!gameb !auka /gôan* (outside-marriage children). However, the story of Norbert, Eulalie and Maria shows that these perceptions are changing. During the redemption and baptism mass, the term */ai-/gôan* (sin child) was

Table 15: Percentage of out-of-wedlock births by marital status

	Number of births	Percentage of births
Births to women who never married	739	54%
Births to women who married later in life (out-of-wedlock births)	422	31%
Total births out-of-wedlock	1161	85%
Births to married women	218	15%
Total births	1379	100%
Total births to married women (including those born before marriage)	640	46%

sometimes used. There is thus some indication that slowly, yet steadily, a discourse on illegitimacy and illegitimate children is being created.

Given the strong decline in marriage rates and, consequently, the decreasing number of married women, it is not surprising that most children in Fransfontein are born out of wedlock. We collected information on the birth and conjugal histories of 369 women of 15 years of age or older living in the Fransfontein region. These women had a collective of 1379 births, with 12 per cent not having given birth yet. 115 women, or 31 per cent, were married or widowed. There are various ways in which out-of-wedlock births can be defined. I first take a birth to be out-of-wedlock if the mother was unmarried at the time of the child's birth. Following this definition, 85 per cent of all births in the Fransfontein region throughout the last sixty years have been out-of-wedlock births (row "Total births out-of-wedlock") (see Table 15).

Another way of conceptualizing out-of-wedlock births is to differentiate between women who married at some point in their lives and those that never married. By this definition, a later marriage of the mother legitimizes earlier out-of-wedlock births. When this definition is applied to our survey data, 54 per cent of all births are still defined as out-of-wedlock births. However, Schapera (1933) already criticised this approach in the 1930s when he remarked that the rights of children born out-of-wedlock differ from those held by their legitimate siblings, even if the mother should later marry. Yet, another figure is of interest here: only 15 per cent of all births occur *after*

Table 16: Cohort analysis of out-of-wedlock births

Birth cohorts	Number of women	% of out-of-wedlock births	% of women who married
1916-1934	35	55	80
1935-1944	44	81	59
1945-1954	47	90	29
1955-1964	57	91	38
1965-1974*	68	93	(22)
1975-1984*	90	97	(5)

* Still in childbearing age

marriage. These are the only cases where legitimacy, defined in terms of the marital status of the mother at the time of birth, is beyond doubt.

A chronological perspective adds further complexity to these findings. Table 16 provides information on the development of marriage rates and out-of-wedlock births. It includes only women who have given birth, thus reducing the sample to 341 women. Especially women in the youngest cohort have not yet given birth.

Table 16 shows that the number of out-of-wedlock births has steadily increased. For the last four decades it has remained at very high levels with around 90 per cent of all births occurring out-of-wedlock while the percentage of women who married at any one point in their lives has continuously declined. Finally, only six of the sample of 341 Fransfontein women, or two per cent, gave birth to their first child within marriage.

Giving birth outside of marriage is thus the norm in Fransfontein. This normality was demonstrated in the way one mother who gave birth to her child out-of-wedlock presented herself during Sunday mass. As an unmarried mother, twenty-two-year-old Barbara was required to ask for forgiveness before she could ask for the baptism of her newborn. This was the second child Barbara had had with her boyfriend, Michael, who was eight years older than her. Neither had finished high school, and they relied on support from their kin groups and temporary petty economic activities like washing clothes and collecting firewood. Barbara and Michael were unmarried, living in a so-called *#nu gomans omi* (black cow marriage) in Barbara’s mother’s house. Barbara hoped that one day they would be wealthy enough to afford

a wedding. When Barbara stepped forward in church for the *ores*, she was rather self-confident: she barely bowed her head and there was no emotional outburst as in the case of Eulalie, Maria and Norbert. Instead, Barbara looked at me and smiled. Neither before nor after the service was there any gossip or talk about her behaviour or of her and Michael's relationship.

Although Barbara's and Eulalie's children were both born out-of-wedlock, the moral evaluation of the two births differs strongly (Pauli 2012). The "illegitimate" birth of Barbara's child is of little moral concern in the community and her child is treated like just another *!gameb !auka /gôas* (outside marriage child) so common in Fransfontein. Eulalie's sin child (*/ai-/gôas*), in contrast, stirs moral outrage and emotions. Thus, while in some situations intimacy, sex and children born out-of-wedlock are possible and tolerated, in other constellations moral distinctions and boundaries between good and bad women and/or children are being drawn. Variations in moral treatment of unmarried mothers and their out-of-wedlock births have been noted across history. They range from severe punishment of single mothers for their "misbehaviour", as in Victorian England, to a perception of normality of non-marital births in an urban US neighbourhood in the 1960s (Stack 1970), a situation very similar to Fransfontein. In one of the first anthropological treatises on marriage and legitimacy, Bronislaw Malinowski (1927) concluded that parenthood, and not sexuality, was universally tied to marriage. He assumed that societies risked disintegration if they had more than a minimal number of out-of-wedlock births. Peter Laslett and others later showed that "social survival was apparently scarcely ever in question", even in societies like some provinces of Austria in the mid-nineteenth century with nonmarital birth rates far beyond 50 per cent for over a generation (Laslett 1980: 62).

Schapera (1933) applied Malinowski's ideas and especially his "principle of legitimacy" to prevailing changes in attitudes towards premarital pregnancy among a group of Sotho-Tswana. He finds that punishment against premarital pregnancy has decreased. However, a child born out-of-wedlock is not entitled to the same privileges as his legitimate siblings: "In the case of children, again, they labour under a social disadvantage which clings to them until their mother is married, and even then they do not always attain to equal rights with legitimate children in regards to succession and inheritance". (ibid: 85) Overviews of illegitimacy unquestionably demonstrate the many prejudices and disadvantages children born out-of-wedlock have to face (Abrahamson 1998; Reekie 1998; Teichmann 1982): significantly higher infant mortality rates, higher rates of infanticide, little or no maintenance and support from the father, and limited or no succession and inheritance rights are among the most severe (see also Teichmann 1982: 103-121).

Legitimacy of birth and inheritance are very often linked. Abrahamson (1998: 14) observes that one puzzling question regarding illegitimacy is the use of pejorative

terms. He notes that, historically, pejorative terms such as bastard tend to be applied to the children of unmarried parents rather than to the parents themselves. He argues that the reason for this has to do with inheritance rules, thus the legitimacy of a child's potential claim upon inheritable possessions. The rules that govern which children are entitled to inherit and succeed matter especially to wealthy families and "procedures for transmitting wealth are most explicit among the wealthiest, rather than poorest segments within any society" (Abrahamson 1998: 15). These procedures are of less importance at the other end of the wealth spectrum. Robert Gordon connects the widespread poverty of many Namibians to the insignificance of inheritance rules and the acceptance of children born out-of-wedlock: "Given the general poverty of material wealth in Namibia one could argue that the inheritance of property was not significant and thus female autonomy and bastardy was tolerated. Children born outside of marriage were simply incorporated into the mother's family". (Gordon 2002: 60)

Similar dynamics can be observed for marriage. For elites, marriage and inheritance are closely connected. Some societies have defined marriage as an exclusive right of the wealthy, such as the marriage restrictions that applied during the Roman empire (Herlihy 1985) or marriage prohibitions for large parts of the German population during the 19th century (Mackenroth 1953). Marriage and inheritance can be kept exclusive through laws. Where no laws prohibit marriage, *de facto* exclusion from marriage through exorbitant marriage costs, as in Fransfontein, has similar effects. Framed like this, low rates of marriage, high rates of "illegitimacy", and inheritance rules that tightly link inheritance rights to marriage all support the interests of the wealthy. The unmarried and the illegitimate are excluded.

In August 2006, we collected information on inheritance practices of 23 Fransfontein households that had suffered from death within in the last five years. Inheritance practices are rather flexible in Fransfontein (Schneegg/Pauli 2006). Most people have painstakingly little to give: many people only own some clothes, a few pieces of simple furniture, a plate, a cup and a spoon, and some smallstock. Only comparably wealthy people own more than one cow (the majority of the population only owning smallstock) and only wealthy families can afford the high wedding costs necessary to marry. Unlike for most people, it thus plays a role for these wealthy individuals that they identify their legitimate heirs. Consequently, one of the most valuable assets, cattle, is almost exclusively transferred to legitimate children. This is particularly crucial in a situation where wealthy married men like Norbert have children born out-of-wedlock, either from relationships before marriage (premarital) or from relationships parallel to an existing marriage (extramarital).

Mara, a woman in her thirties, described how challenging it can be for children born out-of wedlock to claim inheritance from a deceased father who was married to another woman. When her father died, she had hoped to inherit a cow from him. Her

father, a wealthy school principle, had married a fellow teacher. He had fathered 20 children, of which only four were with his official wife. Mara's mother, one of her father's lovers, gave birth to Mara a few years before his official marriage. She had four children with three different men and never married. Mara attended her father's funeral. At the */umis* (the kin gathering to discuss the inheritance) that followed, there was a prolonged discussion whether the *!gameb !auka /gôan* (outside children) should be allowed to participate. Finally, they were allowed in. Each of them was promised a cow as their inheritance. Yet four years later, when we spoke with Mara she had still not received anything. When she had enquired about the cow from her father's official wife and her father's mother two years after the funeral, they just laughed. Mara felt very humiliated. During our talk she was bitter, lamenting how difficult it was for out-of-wedlock children to claim their rights.

Wives of wealthy men are often especially harsh towards their husbands' out-of-wedlock children. Lina, born in the early 1960s and housewife, mother of six and married for twenty years, suffered deeply due to her husband's extramarital affairs. He had fathered more than fifteen children outside of their marriage. These relationships so affected her that at one point Lina had tried to commit suicide. Lina was a very active churchgoer. I often met her in church and talked with her, but we never talked about her suicide attempt. Yet on several occasions during and after church services and also at informal gatherings, I observed how she condemned */ai-/gôan* (sin children) born to married men like her husband.

Lina was thus one of the women who strongly criticized Norbert and, even more so, Eulalie's behaviour and pregnancy, described at the beginning of this section. During an informal interview in her kitchen in September 2004, shortly after both Eulalie and Maria had given birth to their babies, Lina told me that Eulalie had been *//om-mara* (sleeping around) with a married man. For her, Eulalie was the one to blame for the situation. To help me better understand her views, Lina used the vulgar term */ai* for sleeping around, suggesting that Eulalie had prostituted herself and that she was an */ai-aos* (a sinful woman or prostitute). Lina explained that this term, */ai*, is contained in the description of sin children, */ai-/gôan*, thus children stemming from the extramarital affairs of married men. Like other married housewives, Lina perceived herself and also the betrayed Maria, Norbert's wife, as morally superior to unmarried women like Eulalie who have relationships with married men (see van Wolputte 2016 for moralising marriage and sexuality in North Kunene). To Lina, such women were almost like prostitutes and she was very much in favour of publicly shaming such women. It is as a result of this understanding that Eulalie was excluded from all church affairs and activities, including Holy Communion, after the birth of her child; and if Maria had not forgiven her, Eulalie would not have ever been able to have her child baptized. This would have been considered as very shameful for the mother.

During our conversation, Lina's eldest daughter and her out-of-wedlock child, a one-year-old baby boy, entered the kitchen. When I asked Lina whether this boy would not also be a */ai-/gôab*, she forcefully rejected this. While the boy's parents were not married, she explained, the son was a child born *outside* of marriage, thus a *!gameb !auka /gôab*, but not one born as the result of an extra-marital affair, thus a sin child (*/ai-/gôab*). Sin children were only those children born to married men and their unmarried lovers. Both Lina and her daughter underscored that there would be no disadvantages for the baby boy for not having been born within a marriage. When I continued to wonder how the situation of this boy was different from that of an */ai-/gôab*, the women were unsure how to answer. On the one hand, they stressed that no one should blame a child for its mother's immoralities and that baptism *//aa//naas* (washed away all sin). On the other hand, they denied sin children any claims on the property of their fathers.

In this respect, Lina and her daughter are very much in line with the recent codification of "customary law" to cut down any inheritance rights of children born out of wedlock. In the early 2000s, the Swartbooi traditional authority gazetted a new "Swartbooi law of inheritance '*umis*'" (Swartbooi 2005) that tightly linked inheritance to a Christian marriage. When an unmarried person dies, the elders must administer the estate; there is no role given to an unmarried conjugal partner. Further, it explicitly excludes out-of-wedlock children from inheritance: "In the case where both the father and the mother died, the property is shared among all the surviving children. However, children born out of wedlock do not have any rights to the property". (Swartbooi 2005, 63) If a husband dies, the widow (thus the officially married wife) inherits everything. Barbara Harrell-Bond (1975) has shown that the acknowledgment of property rights of children born "outside" marriage is especially threatening to wives and their "legal" children. She describes in detail how elite Sierra Leone wives in the 1960s rallied against law reforms that would have equalized the inheritance rights of all children independent of the civil status of their parents. In Fransfontein these debates have both legal and moral dimensions. While unmarried women stress the flexibility of intimate relations and separate reproduction from marriage, married women are eager to cement the boundaries between the married and the unmarried.

The moral evaluation and labelling of births is an ongoing process in Fransfontein. Gail Reekie (1998) has shown that during the 19th century European political, scientific and social interest groups created and sustained a moral discourse about illegitimate births, turning a biological event, a birth, into a social and moral problem. Creating illegitimacy and illegitimate children in Fransfontein is also connected to wider political economic structures and the aims and agencies of different actors embedded within them. The tension between the still rather flexible and processual character of intimate relations and the low levels of stigmatization against children born

out-of-wedlock, on the one hand, and the boundary-drawing attempts to distinguish “good” from “bad” births, on the other, is linked to an accelerated process of class and elite formation underway in Fransfontein since approximately the 1970s. Although economic inequalities existed before the creation of Damaraland and the implementation of apartheid policies, their extent was much more limited. Since the 1970s, however, an elite group of professionals, administrators and politicians has emerged with a level of wealth that is far out of reach for the great majority of the population. Additionally, specific patronage structures have emerged. As described in previous chapters, since the 1970s male patrons (*kai aogu*) not only shaped the economic sphere but were also decisive in reconfiguring gender relations. The *kai aogu* celebrated conspicuous and expensive weddings while also having extra-marital love affairs and fathering out-of-wedlock children (Pauli 2010b). This allowed the build-up of significant property, with many potential heirs. Like marriage, inheritance thus turned into an issue of debate and distinction. The process continues to the present day, as Mara’s story indicates. What is being negotiated is, first, the legitimacy of any child’s potential claim on inheritable possessions, especially his or her father’s property and, second, the moral status of the birth of a child born out-of-wedlock to a married wealthy man. Consequently, for the new elites, marriage, reproduction and inheritance are closely intertwined. With the creation of “illegitimacy” and “illegitimate children”, local power asymmetries that have emerged since the 1970s are further consolidated. The dynamics of distinction, so vividly expressed in contemporary conspicuous weddings, lead to exclusion and the loss of rights for most people.

