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Creating illegitimacy.
Marriage, motherhood and conflicting moralities in Northwest Namibia

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Abstract
As elsewhere in Southern Africa, during the past four decades the institution of marriage has been substantially altered in the rural community of Fransfontein, Northwest Namibia. While until the end of the 1960s it was common to be married, since the 1970s the number of people marrying has steadily declined. Currently, only about 30 percent of the population 15 years and older is or has ever been married. Related to these changes in marriage, the number of children born out-of-wedlock has increased. In 2004, 85 percent of all births in the Fransfontein region throughout the last sixty years have been out-of-wedlock births. Nevertheless, stigmatization of children born out-of-wedlock is not yet widespread in Fransfontein. Comparable to other regions of Southern Africa the birth of a child is still very much valued and welcomed independent of the parent's marital status. However, these perceptions are gradually changing. During Sunday mass in the local Protestant church the term */ai-/gôan*, 'sin child', is becoming more common to name children born out-of-wedlock, especially if they are children out of extramarital affairs. Further, inheritance rights of children born out-of-wedlock are increasingly contested. Slowly, yet steadily, a moral and legal discourse of 'illegitimate' children is being created. The contribution will trace these developments and discuss their entanglements with changing notions of marriage and reproduction.

Introduction: More or less moral

"The 'illegitimate child' and the 'unmarried mother' can be approached critically as particular social identities extruded as part of the cultural process of making and maintaining the illegitimate birth category." (Reekie 1998: 7)

In the rural community of Fransfontein, Northwest Namibia, children born within and children born outside of marriages are in general differentiated by descriptive and not pejorative terms. Children born to a married couple are called *!game /gôan* in the region's language Khoekhoegowab, i.e. 'marriage children', or 'inside marriage children'.[1] Children born out-of-wedlock are called *!gameb !auka /gôan*, 'outside marriage children'. This terminology reflects the still low level of stigmatization against children born out-of-wedlock. However, these perceptions and practices are gradually changing. Similar to Gail Reekie's European observations, the more recent moral creation of 'illegitimate births' in Fransfontein

[1] Damara and Nama, the two most important ethnic groups in the region, share a common language, i.e. the Khoisan language Khoekhoegowab (for more details on other Khoekhoegowab and more general Khoisan speakers cf. Haacke and Eiseb 2002 Barnard 1992, Widlok 1999).

has to be understood against the background of specific historic developments. Here, I want to trace the linkages of these political-economic developments with on the one hand demographic transformations, especially a strong decline of marriage rates, and on the other hand the influence of Christian institutions on reproduction and sexuality. I want to begin with two ethnographic observations that provide some first insights into these entanglements.

The fist vignette took place in August 2006. During Sunday mass in the local Protestant church Norbert, Eulalie and Maria publicly asked for forgiveness.[2] Before, there had been a lot of gossip and popular outrage in the community. Norbert, an influential administrator in his late thirties, and Maria, slightly elder than her husband, had married almost ten years earlier and had four children together. Their last child had been born two years earlier. Now, the parents planed to baptize the child. However, parallel to Maria's pregnancy Norbert's girlfriend Eulalie, then in her early thirties, had also become pregnant. Wife and lover gave birth the same week. Many people pitied Norbert's wife and criticized Norbert and especially Eulalie for the out-of-wedlock pregnancy. For example, one of the female elders of the Evangelic Lutheran church remarked that it is one thing to have sex with a married man. She described herself as realistic, knowing though not approving of the extra-marital affairs of almost all of the influential community and church members. However, getting pregnant from a married man was a different story and she and many others were rather outraged by Eulalie's and Norbert's behaviour. Contrary to the otherwise common *!gameb !auka /gôas*, 'outside marriage child',[3] to describe a child born to an unmarried mother like Eulalie, the church elder used the term */ai-/gôas,* 'sin child' to address the little girl.

After the children's births it took Norbert's wife almost two years to publicly forgive Eulalie and allow the baptism of the child. Only with Maria's consent did the community congregation and the church elders agree to baptize Eulalie's 'sin child', */ai-/gôas*. During Sunday church service, Eulalie, Maria and Norbert, all of them crying and clearly emotionally shaken, had to step in front of the pastor, heads bowed. Then, with an almost incomprehensible voice, Eulalie asked first Maria and then God for forgiveness, followed by Norbert. This practice is called *!gaes tsî ores tsîra xa*, to become free of sin. Often, only an abbreviated term, *ores*, is used. After the *ores* the two children were baptized and Norbert and

[2] All names and some personal information have been changed to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors. The findings presented here are based on a total of 18 months of joined ethnographic fieldwork together with my husband and colleague Michael Schnegg in the rural Namibian community Fransfontein and its surroundings in the former Damaraland (from 2003 until 2006). Our research has been part of the interdisciplinary ACACIA project (SFB 389) based at the Universities of Cologne and Bonn, Germany and funded by the German National Science Foundation.

[3] In Khoekhoegowab, 'b' indicates a male ending while 's' stands for a female ending. Eulalie gave birth to a daughter, i.e. a */gôas.*

Eulalie were again allowed to take the Holy Communion. However, Maria's consent was not cost-free for Norbert and Eulalie. Several times Maria had stressed that she is unhappy in Fransfontein and wants to move away. Only a few months after the *ores* and the baptism Norbert, Maria and their children left the community.

The second ethnographic vignette occurred a week later. We observed another *ores* during Sunday mass. Again, an unmarried mother asked for forgiveness in order to baptize her child. It was the second child of 22 year old Barbara and her eight years elder boyfriend Michael. Both had not finish high school and relied on support from their kin groups and temporary petty economic activities like washing clothes and collecting fire wood. Like everybody their age Barbara and Michael were unmarried, living in a so called *#nu gomans omi*, i.e. 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* it was rather self-confident. Her head was hardly bowed and there was no emotional outburst as the week before. Instead, she looked at me and smiled. Neither before nor after church service was there any gossip or talk.

Although both ethnographic vignettes describe out-of-wedlock births, the moral evaluation of the two births strongly differs. While Barbara's 'illegitimate' birth is of little moral concern, it is just another *!gameb !auka /gôas*, 'outside marriage child', so common in Fransfontein, Eulalie's 'sin child', */ai-/gôas*, stirs moral outrage and emotions. The central aim of my paper will thus be to understand these varying moral evaluations as they are tied to the broader political-economic, religious and reproductive context. The following paragraph will focus on different anthropological perspectives on illegitimacy, marriage and reproduction. Then, I will outline some central political-economic transformations of the Fransfontein region and in a second step discuss in how far these processes are linked to marital and reproductive dynamics, especially out-of-wedlock births. Finally, I will analyze how as part of the creation of illegitimate and morally problematic births Christianity is acted upon as both disciplining and enabling.

In-between reproduction and marriage

One of the first anthropological treatises on marriage and legitimacy was written by Bronislaw Malinowski in the 1930s. Through comparison of premarital and extramarital patterns in different societies Malinowski concluded that parenthood, and not sexuality, was universally tied to marriage (Malinowski 1927). He assumed that societies risk 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 percent for over a generation (Laslett 1980: 62).

In an article from 1933 Isaac Schapera applies Malinowski's ideas and especially his 'principle of legitimacy' to – at that time – recent changes in attitudes towards premarital pregnancy among a group of Sotho-Tswana (Schapera 1933). In general, Schapera 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." (Schapera 1933: 85). Overviews on illegitimacy unquestionable demonstrate the many prejudices and disadvantages children born out-of-wedlock have to face (Abrahamson 1998; Reekie 1998; Teichmann 1982). While there are some cases in which out-of-wedlock births are little stigmatized and rather common, e.g. an urban US neighbourhood in the 1960s (Stack 1970) or in many parts of the Caribbean (Smith 1988), in more general perspective children born out-of-wedlock face significant higher infant mortality rates, higher rates of infanticide, no or little maintenance and support from the father, and limited or no rights to succeed or inherit (cf. Teichmann 1982: 103-121).

However, such negative ascriptions operate on the basis of two questionable premises: first, that it is possible to determine "wedlock", i.e. marriage, and with it children born out-of-wedlock, and second, that there is a (moral) connection between marriage and reproduction. Both assumptions have been scrutinized within the African context.

The difficulties in defining certain types of unions as marriage (and others perhaps as not) are closely connected to two central characteristics of African marriages: 1. polygyny and its transformations and 2. the procedural character of marriage already mentioned by Radcliffe-Brown ((Radcliffe-Brown 1987 [1950]) and then repeated in much research on African marriage.[4] Although polygyny has declined in many parts of Africa and some African countries even have prohibited polygyny the practice and transformations of the practice are nevertheless vital, as many studies indicate.[5] Bledsoe and Pison conclude in their review of multiple partner unions: "Many of the new marriage forms that outwardly resemble monogamy actually follow patterns of *de facto* polygyny" (Bledsoe and Pison 1994:7).

[4] For example Bledsoe 1980, Bledsoe and Pison 1994, Cole 2004, Comaroff 1980b, Griffiths 1997, Helle-Valle 1999, Lewinson 2006, Murray 1976, Solway 1990.

[5] Cf. Anderson 2000, Blanc and Gage 2000, Bledsoe and Pison 1994, Cole 2009, Comaroff and Roberts 1977, Spiegel 1991, Timaeus and Reynar 1998, Van der Vliet 1991.

Consequently, a range of conjugal relationships exists, dynamically combining customary practices, residence arrangements, state and religious laws, and sexual and other types of exchanges. Depending on one's definition, some of these relations will be classified as marriages, others not (for more details cf. Pauli 2009a)

Additional to the difficulties in defining certain types of unions as marriages, for many African regions it has been observed that (customary) marriage is often a process taking years rather that a single event (Helle-Valle 1999; Murray 1981; Radcliffe-Brown 1987 [1950]). Fatherhood is defined socially and not necessarily biological. Both fatherhood and marriage may depend on the status of bridewealth payments. Accordingly, it might be highly complicated to define a child as being born in- or outside of wedlock (cf. also Launay 1995). Further, reproduction and marriage are not necessarily linked to each. As Rebecca Upton has shown for Botswana, births and children are often welcomed and desired independently of their parent's marital status upon their birth and "marriage and childbearing have become increasingly separate domains of life" (Upton 2001: 354). Equally, Robert Gordon has described the disentanglement of marriage and reproduction and the central importance of reproduction for identity creation for the Namibian community Okombahe at the end of the 1960s: "It is preferable to have a dozen illegitimate children by different fathers than to be married and barren" (Gordon 1972:132).

However, highlighting only the disentanglement between marriage and reproduction and the flexible, dynamic and multiple aspects of African marriages poses the problem of ignoring how certain actors and institutions strongly attempt to solidify and fixate both marriage and reproductive moralities. Claude Meillassoux in his role as discussant at a conference on anthropological and demographic approaches to African marriages explicitly highlighted such novel dynamics of distinction and exclusion:

"Claude Meillassoux, a discussant at the seminar, drew forceful attention to these sweeping changes in nuptiality and to their economic underpinnings. He stressed that these criteria become encoded into the marriage system, making conjugal hierarchies more entrenched: élite women are more likely to become 'legitimate' or 'insider' wives, while the status of other women deteriorates." (Bledsoe and Pison 1994:19).

To understand the varying moral evaluations of out-of-wedlock births in Fransfontein, i.e. the normality of premarital and the immorality of extramarital births, I want to suggest that both conceptions are important and have to be viewed together. On the one hand, conjugal relations continue to be flexible and procedural, welcoming the birth of a child no matter if the parents are married or not. Barbara and Michael, introduced at the beginning, view their relation and their childbearing as steps toward marriage, a perception very much in

accordance with the procedural character of African marriages described above. On the other hand, a small but influential group of wealthy Fransfonteiners has emerged that stresses the difference between married and unmarried people and in- and out-of wedlock births. Their approach is not procedural or gradual but dichotom – one is either able to marry and have legitimate children, indicating one's elite status, or not. Further, with the gradual establishment of expensive weddings as normative since about the 1970s the majority of the population has become unable to finalize their relations and marry. Thus, the moral interpretation of out-of-wedlock births in Fransfontein has to be understood within these changing political, demographic and economic conditions which I will outline next.

Emergence and consolidation of economic inequalities in the Fransfontein region

Around 1880 a group of Nama/Swartboois pastoralists (*//Khau /gôan*) migrated from Southern Namibia into the area and called the place surrounding a major fountain Fransfontein. At that time the region was sparsely inhabited by Damara. In December 1891 the German Rhenish Mission sent its Missionary Riechmann to Fransfontein. Riechmann built a protestant church and stayed in Fransfontein until his death in 1904.[6] Parallel to the Christianization of the region the former grazing lands of the indigenous population surrounding Fransfontein were gradually expropriated by 'white' farmers, starting around 1900 and continuing until mid century (cf. Schnegg, Pauli, and Greiner in print; Schnegg and Welle 2007). While 'white' settlers continued to expand their land claims, both German colonial power and then, after the end of World War I, South African colonial power (as a mandatory power) forced the indigenous population into what at the time were termed 'reserves' and, because of the impossibility to survive from Pastoralism within these 'reserves', into labour migration. As life histories show, the majority of the elder Fransfontein population worked for significant periods of their lives as very low paid labourers on 'white' commercial farms.

Although elite formation processes occurred in Fransfontein before the establishment of Apartheid and homeland politics, i.e. there existed a small pre-Apartheid elite of priests, religious teachers, nurses and a few traditional authorities, pace and extension accelerated from the 1970s onwards (Pauli 2010). The implementation of Apartheid was the central consequence of Namibia's full administrative 'integration' into the Republic of South Africa in the late 1950s and 1960s. In 1962 the so-called 'Odendaal commission' suggested the

[6] Riechmann has portrait his life and work in Fransfontein in two booklets (Riechmann 1899, Riechmann 1900). This is only a brief sketch highlighting the most far-reaching changes. For more historical details on the region and Fransfontein cf. Pauli 2009a: chapter 3, Schnegg 2007.

creation of ten ethnically homogeneous and self-administered 'homelands' in Namibia, among these 'Damaraland', including the Fransfontein reserve. Beginning in the 1960s several new buildings, like health stations and schools, were built in the Damaraland's administrative capital Khorixas and – to a lesser extent – also in smaller communities like Fransfontein. This significantly enlarged the 'modernizing elite' (Tötemeyer 1978), i.e. teachers, clerks and health personnel.[7] Additionally, the number of people who were able to work as 'traditional' leaders and councillors also increased with the establishment of new bureaucratic and political structures within Damaraland in the 1970s and 1980s. Consequently, for a minority, living conditions significantly improved from the end of the 1960s onwards.[8] For the majority, however, the situation even worsened. Because of the poor quality of land out of which 'Damaraland' was created, the Odendaal plan itself stated that for the majority of the population survival within the homelands was impossible.[9] Many people were not able to live in the 'homeland' but had to work on 'white' commercial farms or move to the Windhoek township Katutura in order to find employment.

With Namibian Independence in 1990 these economic differences have not changed but consolidated. While the majority of the Fransfontein population faces great difficulties to make ends meet, largely depending on pension money for the elderly, remittances and some petty economic activities, a small group of Fransfonteiners continues to be rather wealthy. To access the current level of economic stratification, table 1 presents some information on the occupations of the Fransfontein household heads and gives the distribution of several selected consumption items for the households. Only households of the community of Fransfontein itself are considered.[10]

[7] Tötemeyer (1978) analyzes political and economic dynamics within the so-called 'Ovamboland'. For further information on elite formation in Namibia cf. Melber 2007, Tapscott 1993; For a focus on the Kavango cf. Fumanti 2002, Fumanti 2007.

[8] Jauch states that "this new black elite earned salaries largely on par with those of their white counterparts and much higher than those of average black workers" (Jauch 1998: 41).

[9] Odendaal 1964: 93

[10] For the surrounding communal area, where Pastoralism is still an important income strategy, Michael Schnegg has analyzed the processes of economic stratification in detail (Schnegg 2009).

Occupation of the household head	Proportion of Fransfontein households		Consumption items per household (in percent)			
	N	Percent	Electricity	TV	Fridge	Car
Teacher/Nurse	5	3,9	100,0	80,0	100,0	60,0
Trad. authorities	6	4,6	83,3	83,3	83,3	67,7
Local GRN/police	9	7,0	88,9	55,6	77,8	22,2[11]
Hostel worker	16	12,4	62,5	31,3	25,0	12,5
Penny economy	68	52,7	22,1	11,8	13,2	17,7
Pensioner	25	19,4	12,0	16,0	16,0	16,0
All households	129	100	35,7	24,0	26,4	19,4

Table 1: Occupation of household head and consumption patterns (July 2004, N=129)

Table 1 indicates a division into three economic groups: (1) wealthy households, i.e. teachers, nurses, traditional authorities and the employees of the local government and police; (2) households of the hostel workers;[12] and (3) low to no permanent income households (rows 'penny economy' and pensioners).[13] In sum, only 16 percent of all households can be classified as wealthy according to the household head's occupation and the consumption pattern while 72 percent of the households consume very little and have to live on insecure and low paying occupations. [14]

With such pronounced differences in living conditions and wealth efforts to express and legitimize such inequalities very much structure the social and political landscape. Similar to Pierre Bourdieu's findings on forms of distinctions through taste (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]) and Abner Cohen's observations on the mystiques of power and myths of legitimization of elites (Cohen 1981), through their lavish and ritually complex weddings the Fransfontein elite performs, demonstrates and legitimizes their distinctiveness. Elsewhere I have described the transformation of Fransfontein marriages from a common practice into the central form of conspicuous consumption in detail (Pauli 2009a; Pauli in preparation). While until the 1960s

[11] The relatively low percentages of car ownership for police and local government stem from the fact that some of the household heads falling into this category have access to government vehicles.

[12] The hostel worker category has by far the highest proportion of female heads: 88 percent of these households are headed by unmarried women permanently employed as domestic workers in one of the government institutions. Elsewhere I have analyzed their middle economic position and their conjugal histories in detail (Pauli 2010).

[13] I have only taken the occupation of the household head as an indicator. Other household members might have additional sources of income that could change the picture. Nevertheless, as additional information on other household members shows, economic activities of household members are in general comparable to those of the head.

[14] 16 percent is the sum of the three rows 'teacher', 'trad. Authorities' and 'local GRN'; 72 percent is the sum of the rows 'penny economy' and 'pensioner'. These percentages are given in round figures.

the outline of Fransfontein weddings was rather simple and weddings were inexpensive, since the 1970s weddings have become increasingly more expensive and elaborated. Parallel to the rise in wedding costs and creativity the number of people marrying significantly declined. In Fransfontein, a couple is considered as married after the wedding celebration and the then following final handover of the bride. Christian marriages are the norm.[15] The large majority (around 90 percent) of the eldest generation of Fransfonteiners, born until the mid 1930s, married. For Fransfonteiners born after 1930s marriage rates steadily decline. In 2004 only 30 percent of the population 15 years and older was married. The increase in out-of-wedlock births has to be understood against the background of these political-economic and demographic dynamics.

General illegitimacy: Out-of-wedlock births in Fransfontein since the 1930s

The earliest birth we have recorded in our census is from 1935, the last birth from 2004.[16] In the more than sixty years that lie between these two dates, getting children and forming families in Fransfontein have thoroughly changed.[17] Not only do women have fewer children today, the circumstances under which they receive and raise their children are also different from the situations previous generations had to cope with. Women born until the 1940s and having their main childbearing years before the 1970s married and gave birth to many children, often ten or more. This reproductive and conjugal pattern changed with the generation of women born between the mid 1940s and the mid 1960s. The political and economic changes of the 1970s, especially the above mentioned establishment of the 'Damaraland', ran parallel to their main childbearing years. Marriage and reproduction became entangled and also disentangled in a historically very specific way. Eventually, two different groups of women emerged: a minority of married women and a majority of unmarried women.

The wedding transformations mentioned above gradually lead to fewer and wealthier married women. These married women represented both continuity and change. As the emergent elite they stood for deep going social, economic and political change. Yet as mothers they continued the lives of their mothers. Their reproductive histories resemble the reproductive

[15] Most marriages (78 percent) are Protestant marriages, followed by Catholic marriages (8 percent), Pentecostal marriages (5 percent) and magistrate marriages (5 percent). 4 percent are customary law marriages, a marriage type not practiced in Fransfontein itself. All people married solely by customary law are recent labour migrants from Northern Namibia working for Fransfontein communal farmers. All marriage information stems from a questionnaire we conducted in 2004 for 123 marriages.

[16] Although we have collected reproductive information for both men and women I focus (as is common in demography and anthropological demography) on the birth histories, practices and perceptions of women.

[17] In Pauli (2009) I give a detail account of the reproductive processes summarized here. For a general summary of changes in family and kinship in Africa cf. Alber and Bochow 2006.

histories of the elder generation. Like their mothers, these married women born in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, had a high level of fertility and an early age at first birth. Such an entanglement of marriage and reproduction is contrasted by the behaviour of an increasing number of unmarried women of the same generation (born 1940s to 1960s). In the 1970s, unmarried women started to use contraceptive methods to space their children (cf. also Gockel-Frank 2009). Additionally, the number of men they had children with significantly increased.[18] Regarding fertility, the higher number of reproductive partners also resulted in longer birth intervals and an overall lower level of fertility when compared to their married counterparts.

Given the strong decline in married women it is not surprising that most children in Fransfontein are born out-of-wedlock. In total we were able to collect the birth and conjugal histories of 369 women 15 years or older living in the Fransfontein region.[19] Out of the 369 women 341 have given birth and 115 women, or 31 percent, were married. In total, these women have had 1379 births. The distribution of out-of-wedlock births depends on the definition of 'illegitimacy'. One way to conceptualize out-of-wedlock births is to separate the population in ever married and never married women (see Table 2 below). A later marriage of the mother legitimizes earlier out-of-wedlock births. Perceived like this, 54 percent of all births are out-of-wedlock births (cf. Table 2, percentage of births of never married women). However, already Schapera (1933) criticises such an approach when he remarks that the rights of children born out-of-wedlock differ from their legitimate siblings even if the mother should later marry.

Births of never married women (N= 231)	Births of married women (N=110)		Sum of all births
	Births **before** marriage	Births **after** marriage	
739	422	218	1379
54%	31%	15%	100%

Table 2: Children born in and outside of marriages (N=1379 births)

Thus, another possibility to conceptualize 'illegitimacy' is to define all those births as out-of-wedlock where the mother has been unmarried at the time of the birth. If one adds all births of the never married women (i.e. 54 percent) and all births married women had before their

[18] Jane Guyer has classified this pattern of multiple reproductive partners as the reproductive 'logic' of 'polyandrous motherhood' (Guyer 1994).
[19] Ethnographic census, July 2004.

marriage (i.e. 31 percent), 85 percent of all births in the Fransfontein region throughout the last seventy years have been out-of-wedlock births (cf. Table 2). Further, only 15 percent of all births occur *after* 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.

Given the decline in marriage rates it is not surprising that younger women have a higher percentage of out-of-wedlock births than elder women. For example, 55 percent of all births of women born until the mid 1930s were born our-of-wedlock. Contrary to this figure women born in the decades since the mid 1940s had almost all their children out-of-wedlock. Less than 10 percent of these children are born within wedlock (cf. also Pauli 2007). But as the 55 percent out-of-wedlock births for the eldest generation of women indicate, out-of-wedlock births are certainly not a new phenomenon. To understand the widespread existence of out-of-wedlock births for all generations of women a closer look at the beginning of reproduction is instructive.

Remarkably, over the last seventy years, the average age at first birth has not changed in Fransfontein. No matter if a woman was born in the 1930s, 1950s or 1970s, on average she gave birth for the first time at age 20.[20] However, at age 20 Fransfontein women are hardly every married, independent of their age and generation. For all women the median age at marriage lies at 30 years (Pauli in preparation) and elder women have married as late as younger women. Thus, it seems empirically plausible to understand the age at first birth as very much disentangled from marriage. Independent of a woman's age and her later marital status, becoming a mother has always been a very central moment in identity formation in the Fransfontein region (and beyond cf. Upton 2001) and the great majority of women has gone through this important life cycle ritual at age 20. This reproductive framework explains why there are only 6 out of 341 Fransfontein women who have given birth to their first child within marriage. Thus, for less than 2 percent of all women reproduction has occurred entirely within marriage! A closer look at these women reveals that three of them gave birth for the first time in the 1930s (1934, 1937, 1939), two in the 1940s (1946, 1949) and one woman in 1975. The overwhelming majority of all women, however, had at least one child before marriage. Many elder women even had several premarital children before they eventually married. But almost all of them did indeed marry. Since approximately the 1970s this is not the case anymore. The great majority of Fransfontein women in childbearing age are unmarried and very likely will remain unmarried. Next, I will discuss some social

[20] Further, variations (measured as standard deviation) of the average age at first birth for the different birth cohorts has not increased (Pauli 2009b: 253)

implications of these reproductive changes and scrutinize how varying actors use Christianity to enhance their agency and restrict actions of others.

Between fluidity and fixation: Contesting motherhood and marriage within Christian contexts

In Fransfontein, tension between the fluid and ambiguous aspects of heterosexual relations typical for African marriage systems (Comaroff 1980a: 163; Launay 1995: 111) and more recent attempts to fixate and morally distinguish marriage from other types of conjugal relations has emerged. While fluidity and ambivalence continue to be acceptable for premarital births of unmarried couples, extramarital births between a married man and an unmarried woman are viewed as morally problematic.

Although the *#nu gomans omi,* i.e. black cow marriage, meaning that an unmarried couple cohabits and has children together, is not viewed as a marriage (*!gameb*) it is considered as a step towards marriage. As life histories of elder women reveal such a perception has been common at least since the 1930s. This is exemplified in the life histories of many elder women, e.g. Julia's narration. Julia was born in 1928 on a commercial farm near Fransfontein. Her husband Johanes was born in 1922. Between 1942 and 1969 Julia gave birth to 10 children. With 15 Julia had her first child, two years later another daughter followed. Both daughters have different fathers. Then, Julia met Johanes. Before their marriage in 1958 three sons were born. After the marriage five more children followed. When I asked Julia and other elder women if as teenagers they were aware that sexual involvement with their first boyfriend might result into pregnancy they just shrugged their shoulders. An early pregnancy was and is not considered as a problem in Fransfontein. A similar observation is reported by Iken in her study on Nama woman–headed households in Southern Namibia: "a first child born out of wedlock is generally considered by the community to be the result of 'ignorance' and not an obstacle to finding a marriage partner." (Iken 1999:183). Only one woman I talked with told me that her father had demanded compensation from her boyfriend's family for having impregnated her. At the time of our conversation, Lydia was 21 years old. Her daughter was born the year before. After six months pregnancy Lydia had told her parent that she is pregnant. They wanted to know the name of the father and if he accepts his responsibility. Then, Lydia's parents and her boyfriend's parents met and Lydia's father demanded compensation for the premarital pregnancy of his daughter. However, a year later, the demanded cow was still outstanding. But the boyfriend's family had bought baby clothes and supported Lydia financially. None of the other women I have talked with in-depth about their first pregnancy and birth have described similar demands. Nevertheless, Lydia's experiences are insofar

remarkable as she comes from an influential and wealthy family. Her father is also involved in the customary law codification process for the area. Thus, the narration might imply that the normality of premarital pregnancies and births may also become morally contested in the future.

Yet until now, women of all ages stress that independent from a pregnancy a later age at marriage is better than to marry young. For example in August 2004 I was sitting together with four married women in their forties. One of them stated "Young people must experience something, have friends, good friends and experience things in life and love before they decide to get married." The others agreed, highlighting that 30 years or older is a good age to marry. Similarly, during a discussion with women in their twenties the women agreed that it is important to 'test' the qualities of a potential partner. Reflecting on the importance of an engagement and the time between engagement and marriage, Vanesa, then in her early twenties, commented: "You check your boyfriend in that time, what is he doing.".

Testing of conjugal partners to access their reputation and character is not only widespread in Fransfontein.[21] 'Tests' may range from evaluations of the public reputation of a person, tests on how a partner behaves in certain crucial situations (e.g. giving gifts or providing money in times of need), cohabitation, and the birth and support of children. In times of AIDS, other dimensions of 'testing' have been added, e.g. 'examinations' of the partner's bodily surface in search of 'suspicious' bodily marks. Love is often constructed as the result of successful testing (Johnson-Hanks 2007; Lewinson 2006; Pauli and Schnegg 2007), i.e. love is perceived as the central expression of a partner's involvement, caring and investment into a relationship that becomes visible through 'testing'. As Bledsoe and Pison remark (1994:5) the sometimes yearlong liminal phase of 'testing' a partner is a central aspect of the procedural character of marriage.

Isabel's narration exemplifies some of the most central dimension of testing in Fransfontein. In 2004, 22 year old Isabel meets Robert at a local pub (called *shebeen*). Seeing and liking someone for the first time is called *sen* in Khoekhoegowab. Robert 'proposes' to Isabel, *tē-am*, i.e. indicating that he is interested in a relation and wants to become her boyfriend (in Khoekhoegowab called *soreb*).[22] In the following two weeks Isabel makes inquiries about Robert's background. Robert is a recent migrant to the village, working for the local police. Through her friends she learns that Robert has had a girlfriend in the place he stayed before.

[21] For other African examples cf. Bledsoe and Pison 1994:5, Dilger 2003, Gulbrandsen 1986:13, Johnson-Hanks 2007, Lewinson 2006, Smith 2003.

[22] Sometimes, the term */hob/s* is also used for a boy/girlfriend. */hob/s* is sexually more neutral than *soreb/s*. */hob/s* can also apply to a same-sex friend while *soreb/s* indicates a lovers' relation.

Nevertheless, Isabel comes to the conclusion that Robert will be faithful to her as long as he is with her in Fransfontein. Robert visits Isabel and her mother daily, bringing them little gifts. Especially the present of a goat for Isabel's two year old daughter delights mother and daughter. [23] Eventually, Isabel agrees to become Robert's girlfriend. About a month later, Isabel and Robert start to appear together in public. In conversations Isabel stresses how important this is to her, especially in church. She remarks that now everybody can see that she is Robert's girlfriend and that his previous lover has become history. Their joint appearance is especially conspicuous during Sunday mass in the local protestant church. Unmarried couples are only allowed to sit in the back of the church and most colourful and impressive fashion is on display in the church's back rows. Several months later Robert moves into Isabel's mother's compound and Isabel reflects about getting pregnant. When I ask her if they plan to marry she laughs and comments that they are too young to marry. Marriage is only a distant dream while her love is real. Also, they lack the necessary economic background. When her unmarried mother joints our conversation she comments that for all of them marriage is far away. She gave birth to eight children from four different fathers. More than once in her life she had believed that all the testing and trying would come to an end and that she would eventually become a married woman herself. Yet, this never happened.

Thus, although testing and trying and a gradual approach to marriage has been common in Fransfontein for a long time, embedded in a 'normal' life cycle and thus not morally problematic, the great difficulties to end the testing and marry are more recent developments. I want to now focus on married couples and their attempts, especially from the wife's side, to reduce ambivalence in conjugal relations as much as possible and define what is morally wrong and right in terms of marriage, sexuality and reproduction.

Tina was born in 1963. She is an attractive and impressive woman, working as a teacher. Some four years before our interview in 2004 she married a wealthy man occupied in the local administration. Before she met her current husband she had a daughter with another man. But that man was 'penniless'. Some time after her daughter's birth she left him and took a job in distant Fransfontein. With her husband she has two daughters. When we start with our conversation about her marriage Tina is uneasy. This is surprising as Tina actively approached me to be interviewed about her wedding. After some time Tina more or less out of the blue tells me "Now, things are better. Now he almost stopped. Now he is an elder in church.". I ask her if she is talking about her husband whom I heard preaching one of the

[23] The material basis of many conjugal and love relations in Sub-Saharan Africa has been repeatedly stressed in the respective literature (Cole 2004, Cole 2009, Helle-Valle 1999, Masquelier 2005, Mufune 2005, Tersbøl 2002).

previous Sundays in the local Protestant church. Tina smiles and affirms my question. Step by step the story of how her husband turned into one of the elders of the local church is being unravelled by Tina. I have the impression that I am one of the first persons with whom Tina is talking about the events. The more she tells and reflects the better she seems to feel. A year ago Tina has found out that her husband is having an extra-marital affair. There have been lovers before but this time her husband seems to be really in love. Tina is desperate and very worried. What is especially hurtful to her is that he is not very discreet, even appearing in public with the other woman. At that point in time Tina starts to attend Sunday mass more regularly. And he joints her. When new elders are nominated she grasps her chance and suggests him. He is flattered and happily takes the new responsibility. However, he has underestimated that with the position comes more public attention. There is gossip about his 'polygynous life style'. Although he is not leaving his girlfriend he is nevertheless more discreet. And he promises Tina to use condoms, an issue that because of fear of AIDS and an extramarital pregnancy has worried her for a very long time.

All of the middle aged and younger married women (i.e. born since the 1950s) I got to know better have mentioned extra-marital affairs of their often comparable wealthy husbands.[24] Like Tina they are worried about AIDS and extramarital pregnancies, but also about a loss in inheritance rights for themselves and their children. For Tina, earning a good salary herself, inheritance issues are not so prominent. However, for women who have become 'housewives' this is a central concern.

The category of 'housewife' emerged parallel to the formation of a local elite and the celebration of elite weddings in the 1970s (Pauli 2009: chapter 3). The discourse surrounding these married women is that their wealthy husbands provide for them. But being a housewife is also perceived with ambivalence. On the one hand the status of the housewife implies that the husband is wealthy enough to marry and finance such a living. Thus, women classifying themselves as housewives take pride in their status. On the other hand being a married housewife is also perceived as loss of agency. Consequently, married nonworking women are especially eager to express their distinction from other women (especially lovers of their husbands) and define the boundaries between morally good and morally dubious women. For example Lina, born at the beginning of the 1960s, housewife, mother of six and married for twenty years was so depressed by the extra-marital affairs of her husband that she wanted to commit suicide. Yet she worried about the fate of her children. Like Tina, Lina is an active church goer, someone who again and again cautions against */ai-/gôan*, 'sin children' born to

[24] As outlined above the situation is different for the eldest generation of women. Only a few of the eldest women mentioned that their husbands cheated on them.

married men (like her husband). She also supported her husband during the codification of 'customary laws' to cut down any inheritance rights of children born out-of-wedlock.[25] This active creation of illegitimacy by influential married men and women is not only limited to the Fransfontein case.

Inheritance rights between children born inside marriage and children born outside marriage continue to differ in Namibia: "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." (Hubbard and Zimba 2004: 17). Similar to Fransfontein and Namibia in general, for Sierra Leone in the 1960s, Harrell-Bond has shown that the acknowledgment of property rights of children born 'outside' marriage is especially threatening to wives and their 'legal' children (Harrell-Bond 1975).[26] Harrell-Bond describes in detail how elite Sierra Leone wives have 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 can be found not only in the legal sphere but are also part of religious negotiations. While unmarried women stress the flexibility of conjugal relations and disentangle reproduction and marriage, married women are eager to cement the boundaries between the married and the unmarried as much as possible. To achieve this Christian institutions and discourses are one important means.[27]

Conclusion

The moral evaluation and labelling of births is an ongoing process in Fransfontein. Similar to Gail Reekie's (1998) observations on the construction and manifestation of 'illegitimate birth' categories in Europe, 'creating illegitimacy' in North-western Namibia is connected to the wider political economic and reproductive context and the aims and agencies of different

[25] The Swartbooi traditional authority gazetted in Fransfontein has formulated a "Swartbooi law of inheritance '/umis'" (Swartbooi 2005). There, inheritance is tightly connected to a religious marriage. If an unmarried person dies, elders should administer the estate. There is no mentioning of an unmarried conjugal partner, the by far most common form of conjugal partnership. Further, out-of-wedlock children are explicitly excluded 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 the husband dies, the widow, i.e. the official wife, will inherit everything cf. also Schnegg and Pauli 2006.

[26] For similar cases cf. Karanja 1987, Karanja 1994, Mann 1985.

[27] It will be interesting to observe in how far a possible spread of Pentecostal churches will amplify or transform these local practices and perceptions. During our fieldwork only 5 percent of the adult population (15 years and older; N=734) said that they belonged to a Pentecostal denomination. However, while less than 30 percent of all Roman Catholic and Protestant believers are married, 60 percent of the male and 52 percent of the female Pentecostal believers are married. For more information on the entanglements between marriage, reproduction and Pentecostal churches cf. Bochow 2010, van Dijk 2004.

actors embedded in this context. The tension between on the one hand the still rather flexible and procedural character of conjugal relations and the low levels of stigmatization against children born out-of-wedlock and on the other hand the boundary drawing attempts to distinguish the 'good' from the 'bad' births results from accelerated class formation process underway in Fransfontein since approximately the 1970s. Although economic inequalities did exist before the creation of Damaraland and the implementation of Apartheid, the extent was much more limited. Since the 1970s, however, an elite of professionals, administrators and politicians has emerged whose wealth is far out-of-reach for the great majority of the population. With wealth come the attempts to defend and transmit it along specific social lines, often kinship and family (Cohen 1981). While I could not observe any marriage politics yet, i.e. endogamous marriages along class lines (Douglas and Isherwood 2006 [1979]: 59-63), class politics increasingly influence reproduction. Inheritance has turned into an issue of debate and distinction.[28] What is being negotiated is not only the moral status of a birth and child but the legitimacy of any child's potential claim upon inheritable possessions, especially his or her father's property. The rules that govern which children are entitled to inherit and succeed matter foremost to wealthy families and "procedures for transmitting wealth are most explicit among the wealthiest, rather than poorest segments within any society." (Abrahamson 1998: 15). Consequently, for elites, marriage, reproduction and inheritance are closely intertwined. Thus, that mainly extramarital births are constructed as illegitimate, as */ai-/gôas*, 'sin child', at the moment can also be interpreted as an attempt to morally and legally exclude potential heirs.[29] The demand for compensation of Lydia's father, however, may indicate that labelling extra-marital births as morally wrong might only be a first step towards questioning the morality of all out-of-wedlock birth, including the until now extremely common and non-stigmatized premarital births.

What role does Christianity play within this broader context of class formation processes and reproductive reinterpretations? It is important to underline that at least according to the life histories I have collected and the expert interviews with church elders and the local priests I have conducted a moralization of out-of-wedlock births is only recently becoming more pronounced. Although women and men of all ages have asked in church for forgiveness for premarital births in form of the *ores*, they nevertheless do not in general morally dismiss the most common form of birth in Fransfontein. Yet, this is changing for extra-marital births as

[28] Cf. Chris Hann for a call to study the linkages between inheritance and reproduction (Hann 2008).

[29] In Schnegg and Pauli 2006 we give an example for the exclusion from inheritance rights of extra-marital children.

the gossip and indignation surrounding Eulalie's and Norbert's extra-marital child demonstrate.

In this respect it is especially interesting to see how some married women have used Christianity as a tool to trigger and influence the behaviour of their unfaithful husbands. Their actions affect the overall normative structure, creating and sustaining new moral categories such as 'illegitimate births'.

Unmarried women often lack the means to create such moral discourses. Yet as Isabel's narration has shown, unmarried women also use Christianity to pursue specific goals. The Protestant church is the most important stage to display relations and express moralities within the local setting. Unlike the political and economic arenas, e.g. meetings of the traditional authority or cattle auctions, Sunday mass is open to everybody. Church attendance is very high in Fransfontein and people of varying Christian denominations attend mass. Reflections and evaluations of relations and behaviours are an integral part of every church service. Sometimes they are as expressive as the two *ores* I have described at the beginning. Often, however, expressions of relations and moralities are more subtle. It needs some local knowledge to read the clues expressed in a joint church visit by a new couple. And the community is more than eager to interpret and morally judge what is on display.

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