

**SOCIAL AND SPATIAL MOBILITY ALONG THE KUISEB**  
**RIVER IN THE NAMIB DESERT, NAMIBIA**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explain the unusually high rate of circulation of individuals between local domestic units of the rural settlements along the Kuiseb River as well as between these and domestic units in the closest urban centre. It is argued that these movements form part of a general state of flexibility of personal relationships, which subsequently affects household composition. An explanation for this flexibility is suggested in terms of one strategy of survival pursued by relatively poor individuals, which involves the sporadic attachment by poorer individuals to relatively more economically stable relatives. As these attachments, whether residential or not, are of short duration, they produce rapid and unpredictable changes to the composition of existing households. Material is presented of three areas of social life illustrating these sporadically shifting alignments. These areas are subsistence relations, conjugal relations and parent-child relations.

These examples of sporadic shifts of domestic alignments are contrasted with a few examples where households were seen to show facets of cyclical changes in their social composition. Evidence suggests that these few households were headed by economically secure individuals, who also reflect a considerable stability in their residence. The question is raised whether a cyclical development of domestic groups can be recorded in situations as flexible and variable

as those along the Kuiseb River. This in turn raises the issue of the usefulness of a framework postulating such a development.

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The new Nama orthography as devised by the Bureau for Indigenous Languages in Windhoek has been used as far as possible. I was assisted by the following members of staff of this institution: Mr. Boois transcribed Nama terms and expressions; Pastor Eiseb discussed certain aspects of Nama social life with me and Mr. Willie Haacke gave the others permission to do so under conditions of extreme time pressure. I wish to thank them for their interest shown in this regard.

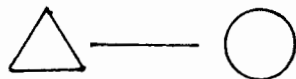
In an attempt to disguise the personalities of individuals, I have made use of pseudonyms in the case studies. I have chosen names often used along the Kuiseb River, in order to maintain as much of the atmosphere as possible.

In the diagrams accompanying text, I have had to refer to people by numbers for the sake of brevity.

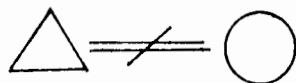
The following symbols were used in the kinship diagrams:



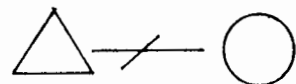
formal marriage



informal marriage



termination of formal marriage



termination of informal marriage



fostering relationship



termination of fostering relationship

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM AND DIVISION OF THE THESIS

The Topnaar people with whom this study deals live in the central Namib Desert of Namibia. They form a concentration of people by that name, while others are distributed far wider geographically. Some individuals considered to be Topnaar live in commercial and other centres in the rest of Namibia. Yet other Topnaar are residents in the Sesfontein and Fransfontein Reserves in the north-west of the country (see Map I). These groupings are not considered in the study, which concentrates primarily on those Topnaar living in small flexible domestic units along the Kuiseb River and, secondarily, those living in the coastal town of Walvis Bay. Topnaar living along the Kuiseb River interact with other residents not referred to by that name. The role of these latter individuals and their relation to the Topnaar will be discussed.

Interest in the present study developed as a result of fieldwork conducted in the area for an Honours degree. After only a short period in the field, it seemed that men, women and children were involved in movements between various settlements along the river and between the river and Walvis Bay in a way that seemed totally devoid of any pattern. Individuals who at one time were living in a particular settlement, were gone a few days later. Their absence was explained by those remaining as being because of visits, looking for work or simply having moved. Even after some time in the field, individuals yet unknown to me would arrive almost daily. Very often they would be introduced by informants as relatives. This constant stream

of people both coming and going resulted in the pronounced expansion and depletion of local domestic groups. That this was by no means a recent phenomenon, was evident from the large number of abandoned sites along the river.

In short, the impression gained of Topnaar social life was one of extreme flexibility and fluidity, not all of which could be attributed to the confusion facing a relatively inexperienced fieldworker in a novel situation. As time went by it turned out that this flexibility is an important feature of Topnaar social life in general and relations between household members in particular. It is the 'plastic' nature of relations between individuals and its effect on household composition which is the theme of the present study.

At the time of conducting fieldwork for the Honours Project, my interest was of an ethno-botanical nature and the movement of people was considered only insofar as it was related to the seasonal harvest of the local melon, the !Nara. It soon became evident, though, that these particular movements of people formed only a part of a far wider and more complex process of movements. Consequently, certain movements could be understood only by considering this area in its wider regional and historical context. This study shares this approach with other rural studies, but its prime concern is the description and analysis of shifting alignments on a micro-level scale.

The need for individuals to take on formal employment along the river, in Walvis Bay or elsewhere in the country is a consequence of a process of impoverishment caused by the Orlam Wars and the expansion of White commercial interests in the area. Some aspects of this process of impoverishment are discussed in Chapter 2. Following upon this is an ethnographic sketch of the economic, religious and political situation of the population along the Kuiseb River, with secondary material on the Walvis Bay residents (Chapter 3). This sets the scene for the second part of the thesis, which deals with the actual process of shifting alignments. In Chapter 4 consideration is given to social composition of domestic groups along the river and in Walvis Bay. I consider the problems involved relative to the definition of 'household' as used by recent authors. I distinguish such aggregates in the three geographical areas, into which I have divided Topnaar occupied territory for analytical purposes. These three areas are the Kuiseb River itself, the river delta and Walvis Bay, the coastal town at the mouth of the river. Domestic groups differ in these three areas, and I discuss the reasons for this. In the second half of Chapter 4 change in the size and social composition of households in space and over time is discussed and an attempt is made to illustrate this diagrammatically for a few such households. This diachronic consideration of households introduces the question of the applicability of the framework of cyclical development of such aggregates in a situation as variable as that of the Kuiseb River. The factors leading to shifting alignments along the river

seem ultimately to be related to the kind of subsistence economy found along the river. The exploitation of resources results in both structural movements between the river and the places of employment, as well as sporadic shifts by individuals between local domestic groups following shifts of alignments to such individuals who have access to desired resources. In the rest of the thesis the focus shifts from households as a unit of analysis to relationships, mostly of a dyadic nature, between individuals which bring to household composition sporadic rather than cyclical changes.

I consider the sporadic shifts of alignments within three areas of Topnaar social life: Chapter 5 deals with shifting social and spatial alignments in the sphere of subsistence and primarily from the point of view of men. I show how in the process of exploiting certain resources along the river, men form flexible alignments with other individuals. I then consider the flexible nature of conjugal relations in Chapter 6, and how they, too, change in space and over time. But conjugal relations generate affinal alignments, which individuals have a choice to activate or not. These, too, shift with change in conjugal relations. Finally, in Chapter 7 I consider the Topnaar practice of fostering of children and the fluid nature of these fostering relations. Like conjugal relations, fostering relations generate fostering alignments between foster-parents and parents, which likewise are ephemeral. The 'plastic' nature of relations within these three social spheres hence produce some of the

changes in household composition described and illustrated in Chapter 4. In the final chapter I raise some issues related to the utility of the household as a unit of analysis in a situation of poverty such as is found along the Kuiseb River, where the manipulation of relations with others is one strategy for survival and where this leads to an unusually high rate of changes in household composition.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A concentration of Nama-speaking Topnaar now inhabit the lower reaches of the Kuiseb River and parts of Walvis Bay. They were once a pastoral people, one of the seven Nama 'tribes' of Namibia. Today their pastoralism is only a shadow of what it used to be. Consequently young men and women sporadically seek employment in Walvis Bay or other towns in Namibia, with the Namibian administration or on White-owned farms on the edge of the Namib Desert. Until recently the Topnaar had virtually been forgotten by the authorities in their desert enclave. Over the last two decades certain proceedings have brought the question of rights of the Topnaar to the area they occupy to the forefront of political discussion in pre-independence Namibia. At the same time a strong sense of community feeling has emerged which had not previously existed.

#### THE PEOPLE

The Topnaar are said to have been one of seven traditional Nama 'tribes' or hordes. The other six were the Kai//Khaun (or Rooi Nasie), the !Gami#nûn (or Bondelswarts), the //Haboben (or Veldskoendraers), the !Kharakaikhoen (or Fransmann or Simon Kopper People), the //Khau/gôan (or Swartboois) and the //Okain (or Groot Dode). Except for the #Aonin (Topnaar) and the //Okain the other five groups are linked by a legend, which holds that they were all founded by one of five brothers. The Topnaar and //Okain are said to be direct off-shoots of the Rooi Nasie (Schapera, 1965:224; Hoernlè, 1925:4).

A further five Khoe groups, known collectively as the Orlam, are said to have crossed the Orange River into Namibia at the beginning of the last century. They were the !Aman (or Bethany people), the //Aixa//aen (or Afrikaner), the Kai/khauan (or Khauas- or Lamberts people), the /Hai/khauan (or Berseba people) and the /Khowesen (or Witboois). The Afrikaners and Witboois will be mentioned presently for they played an important role in certain historical events in the last century.

The Dutch name 'Topnaar' is a direct translation of the Nama term #Aonin, mostly translated as 'the people of the point', referring to their occupation of the West coast of Southern Africa. This is considered to be the most extreme point of Nama occupied territory. It may be the most westerly point of Nama occupied territory (Budack, 1977:1; Hoernlè, 1925:6). According to Moritz (1980:37) it may also be the most northerly point, as a group of Topnaar live at Sesfontein, some 500 km north of the Kuiseb River. These Topnaar also call themselves !Gomen.

Presumably the Topnaar were given this name by other Nama speakers. Historical records are not precise as to when the Topnaar received this name, but it is mentioned in the mid-forties of the last century by the two missionaries Hahn (1916:186) and Tindall (1959:70). The other name by which the Topnaar are known is !Naranin, the !Nara people. This refers to the important role the !Nara fruit, a local gourd, plays in the culture and diet of the Topnaar (Budack, 1977; Dentlinger, 1977; Moritz, unpublished).

(For a detailed discussion of the Nama names ≠Aonin, !Naranin and !Gomen, see Köhler in Ethnological and Linguistic Studies, 1969:99-101.)

One hypothesis holds that the Topnaar migrated southwards from the Kaokoland in the north. In about 1820 they are said to have reached the Swakop River, just north of the Kuiseb, and within the next decade to have settled in their present habitat along the Kuiseb River. This hypothesis is suggested by Baumann sen., a Rhenish missionary in the area between 1878 and 1883, who claims in the Swakopmund Chronicles to have evidence for this (Köhler, 1969:106; Moritz, 1980:37). Budack (1977:5) disagrees with this hypothesis and provides historical evidence to show that Khoe occupied the West Coast for the last three centuries, long before the alleged Topnaar migration was supposed to have occurred. He maintains that the people involved in the alleged Topnaar migration were one of the many other groups of Khoe living along the West Coast, namely the Mu-//een, who replaced the /Namixan along the Kuiseb River. This indicates a general flexibility and mobility of Khoe groups along the West Coast, as they are known to have existed south of the Orange River during the 15th and 16th centuries (Elphick, 1977; Wilson, 1969). Köhler (1969:106), Dart (1965:175) and van Warmelo (1951:45) provide data which support Budack's argument. The view of Khoe groups along the West Coast during the last two centuries as being highly flexible and mobile, would also explain the presence of a group of Topnaar (namely the !Gomén) living at Sesfontein who are said to

have returned from the Kuiseb River to the north "... the region in which they originally lived" (Hoernlé, 1925:II). Their previous presence at Walvis Bay is substantiated by its Nama name !Gomén//gams, the water of the !Gomén.

#### 'TRADITIONAL' RESOURCES

The Topnaar were pastoralists, hunters and gatherers until the end of the 19th century. Their cattle, sheep and goats grazed in the Kuiseb River valley. They collected !Nara, a local gourd, in the dunes and fished and collected a variety of marine animals on the beaches. Owing to certain industrial and political processes, which are still continuing today, their traditional subsistence economy has been undermined, so that today most Topnaar have to spend a part of their life-time as wage-labourers, particularly in Walvis Bay. I see the following factors as instrumental in the eroding away of the natural resources of the people: the Orlam wars, the interests of colonial powers in the area and, more recently, the interests of the White Namibian administration. I will consider these in turn. The recent and present role played by the administration along the Kuiseb River will be discussed in Chapter 3.

In spite of the scanty historical material on the west coast and its inhabitants prior to the present century, the reports that do exist seem to confirm the means of subsistence of the coastal dwellers. Consequently, we have a record of resources exploited over the last two and even three centuries.

As was the case with other Khoe groups, the sea provided a wealth of food to the coastal dwellers along the west coast and the Topnaar in particular. The first written record of the use of marine foods along the west coast dates back to 1793 (Van Rheenen, 1915), an indication that marine foods have been exploited by Topnaar and other Khoe over the past 200 years. It is only during the last few decades that this source of food has become inaccessible to Topnaar owing to the development of Walvis Bay into an urban centre and port.

Budack's paper (1977) is the only work on the Topnaar dealing with this topic. He provides a wealth of Nama terms for the various species of fish, sea-birds, mussels and other marine animals. He describes and gives Nama terms for the tools used in fishing and collecting of seafoods, the structures used to store fish, the medicinal uses to which marine animals were put and finally a song of praise or gare-tsanati of the sea. All this points to the cultural and economic importance of marine life to the Topnaar, which was probably second only to that of the !Nara melon. In fact, Budack argues that a section of the Topnaar were called to Hurinin, or Sea people, as opposed to the !Khuisenin or Khuseb people. The former allegedly lived in settlements close to the beaches, whereas the latter section was to have lived along the Kuiseb River, even though there was seasonal mobility of the !Khuisenin to the coast. This distinction, Budack argues, still exists today (1977:12).

Budack lists a number of ways in which marine life was exploited. The most popular way of obtaining fish was by spearing it. This was done at the lagoon at Walvis Bay, when, during low tide, a wealth of fish got caught in the shallow waters. This method of fishing was mentioned by Anderssen in 1856 (1967:15), Chapman in 1864 (1971:175), travelling with the artist Thomas Baines, and McKiernan in 1874 (1954:34). It was the bigger species of fish that were hunted in this way, such as the sting-ray, sandshark and salmon.

Coastal fishing was limited because it was done without angling hooks or lines, nets or boats. However, the Topnaar also used the meat and blubber of stranded whales. This was a popular source of food, because quantities of both meat and blubber were preserved by burying them in wet sand. American, French and English whalers soon became interested in the area and were frequenting the Walvis Bay waters in the 1830s (Cécille, 1918; Alexander, 1967:84 ff). With the developing scale of whaling and fishing, these marine resources became increasingly scarce along the west coast.

Before White seal hunters came, the Topnaar had been clubbing seals and using their skins as clothing. The first written record of this practice was in 1825 (Owen, 1833:229). Later when White seal hunters became active in the area, the Topnaar would move to where they could get offal (Schultze, 1907:185). The clubbing of seals is at present prohibited, since the South African government has taken over all

concessions from private White parties, to whom they had first been issued. This has meant that yet another food source is no longer available to the Topnaar. Other marine sources of food included the catching of sea-birds and the collecting of their eggs, the collecting of mussels, turtles and other marine animals. Today mussels are still collected but are not an important source of food.

The incidence of pastoralism is recorded as far back as the landing of the "Boode" of Capt. Wobma in 1677. The "Boode" was the second of the ships sent from the Cape Refreshment station to do a survey of the West Coast. Near the present Lüderitz Bay (see Map 1), they came across 'Hottentots' "... who were being robbed of their stock by another group, with whom they are continually fighting". A little further north near Sandwich Harbour they met another group of 'Hottentots' who, when asked whether they had any livestock, "... answered yes ... and came to the beach with 12 to 16 cows ..." (Wobma, 1918:51). Herding is mentioned by all the subsequent travellers and missionaries who passed through the area - for instance, Van Rheenen in 1793 (1915:194), Schmelen in 1824/5 (1918:222), Cécille in 1836 (1918:140) and Alexander a year later (1967:84). The earlier reports mention cattle only, but in 1836 Cécille mentions goats and Sir James Alexander a year later mentions sheep as well (Alexander 1967:84). From 1845 onwards the loss of cattle as a result of raiding and the 1840 wars of Jonker Afrikaner, the Orlam leader, is mentioned. I suggest that the wars between the 1840s and the 1880s contributed greatly to the loss of cattle and possibly led to the increase in goat-farming found today.

The third major source of food of the coastal dwellers, and the Topnaar in particular, was the !Nara melon (Acanthosicyos horrida), a local gourd, growing in the sandy soil all along the coast as far north as Angola. Today the

!Nara is processed and the kernels sold, but its commercial use is recent. In all instances referred to by the early travellers it was used solely as food. As in the case of pastoralism, the earliest historical record referring to the !Nara is that of Captain Wobma of 1677, namely "... These (Hottentots) had left in flight and had left behind ... a pot ... with kernels ... from something similar to a paw-paw ..." (Wobma, 1918:51). The collecting and eating of !Nara is mentioned by most subsequent reports on the inhabitants of this part of the West coast (Van Rheenen, 1915:194; Cécille, 1918:140; Alexander, 1967:84; Anderssen, 1856:15 and Palgrave, 1877:6). The collecting and processing of !Nara is the only natural food resource exploited to the present day, albeit to a limited extent.

Like other Khoe groups the Topnaar hunted game and collected veldkos: Game was found in considerable abundance even up to 1940 in the river and on the gravel plains north of the river, as two German geologists found when they spent two and a half years living in the Namib Desert for fear of being interned (Martin, 1974). Particularly after the occasional rains, Topnaar would collect veldkos, herbs, medicinal plants and honey on the gravel plains. In 1846 missionary Hahn mentioned that following the raids on their cattle the Topnaar would revert to hunting and collecting veldkos (Hahn, 1916:186). Up to the present day a variety of veldkos and the preparation thereof is known to elderly men and women, who recall that in their youth they subsisted on

is the one Orlam group which will most concern us at present.

Under their leader Jager Afrikaner, the Afrikaners had left the Cape and had settled just north of the Orange River at Blydeverwacht. After the death of Jager his two eldest sons quarrelled over the succession. Jonker Afrikaner, the younger one, rather than take a subordinate place, decided to leave Blydeverwacht with some followers and moved in a northerly direction.

Until then the authority over all Nama hordes had been vested in the senior clan of the Kai//Khaun, the senior of the seven Nama hordes. In the 1820s this position was held by a female regent, Games. At this time a drought prevailed in the country as a whole, causing pastoralists heavy losses of animals.

The pastoral Herero, a Bantu-speaking people, who had occupied the territory in the north, the Kaokoland (see Map 1), slowly overstepped their tacitly accepted boundary, the Swakop River, and progressed ever further south into the pastures of the Nama-speaking pastoralists. Games was powerless against the encroaching Herero and elicited the help of Jonker Afrikaner. He beat the Herero in three bloody battles in 1835 and, in return, was able to settle at /Ai-//gams (later Windhoek) in 1840 (Goldblatt, 1971:11). This was in the heart of Kai//Khaun territory and in this way the authority of the 'kaptein' of the Kai//Khaun over the other Nama-speaking groups passed into the hands of the Afrikaners. The Topnaar,

one of the seven Nama hordes, were consequently also subject to the authority of Jonker Afrikaner.

One of the instances in which Jonker displayed his authority was in 1845 when the Rhenish Mission wanted to establish a station along the Kuiseb River. Jonker came to Walvis Bay himself in March that year to give his permission personally to missionary Scheppmann (Moritz, 1978:6).

By 1840 a number of missionaries had visited Walvis Bay, French and British whalers were active along the coast and some trading was done at both Walvis Bay and Angra Pequena (later Lüderitz Bay) to the south. With the years an increasing number of coasters landed at Walvis Bay to supply particular missionaries with provisions. Jonker, being dependent on trade goods, had a road built from Walvis Bay along the Kuiseb River to link with the existing road, the 'Bai-Weg', over Otjimbingwe (Hahn, 1916:186) (see Map 1). The remnants of Jonker's road can still be seen today on the southern bank of the Kuiseb River opposite the research station at Gobabeb (see Map 2) (pers. comm., Frank von Blottnitz). This greatly accelerated the transportation of trade goods, but also enhanced the contact between the Afrikaners in the centre of the country and the Topnaar. In fact, some of Jonker's people came to stay at Walvis Bay (Köhler, 1969:109). This direct contact with the Orlam who had acquired a Westernised lifestyle far beyond the other Nama-speaking groups, as well as the development of Walvis Bay into a notable port, had created a basis of Western

commerce in which the Topnaar would become increasingly involved as their own resources disappeared or became inaccessible.

Under normal conditions raiding had been part of the Khoe pastoral existence (Elphick, 1973). Following the years of Jonker's settlement at Windhoek, fighting and raiding became more prevalent. The Topnaar were victims of many of these raids and became directly involved in the fighting, which resulted in great loss of human and animal life.

During Hahn and Kleinschmidt's trip to Walvis Bay in 1844, the former mentioned the effects of the raid of the 'kaptein' of the Swartboois, one of the seven Nama hordes living in the vicinity of Rehoboth to the south of Windhoek (see Map 1). Hahn says that, because of the raid, only sheep and goats were to be found along the Kuiseb River, but adds that "the people did not know what it meant to be hungry, (because they) had a variety of foodstuff: fish, all sorts of veldkos ... the !Nara and game" (Hahn, 1916:188).

The Reverend Tindall of the Wesleyan Mission, who came to the river a year later, describes a slightly different situation. Willem Swartbooi "... without any provocation came upon them, killed a great many men, and carried away women and children captive ...". The result of this was that "the tribe of Hottentots (i.e. the Topnaar) ... has been much diminished by war and scattered in consequence of being robbed of their cattle ... nearly losing their independence, many of them

having to become cattle watchers to Jonker Afrikaner's tribe" (Tindall, 1959:70).

Unfortunately no figures of stock-holdings are available for these years, so that the process of pauperisation cannot be substantiated more convincingly than by quotes as brief as those of Hahn and Tindall, both of which may be only fleeting impressions. Furthermore, following Elphick (1973) it could be argued that raiding always formed part of pastoral life. I argue that this was less the case with the Topnaar. Firstly, only one incident of raiding by the Topnaar was recorded, namely of Herero stock-farmers living in Walvis Bay (Hahn Papers, Vol. 9, Diary 3; pers. comm. B. Lau). Instead, the reports of poverty were further substantiated by Scheppmann a year after the visit of Tindall (Scheppmann, 1916:238). Scheppmann had a more intimate knowledge of the people, being their resident missionary at the time. Secondly, the degree of pauperisation must have increased during the following decades as the Topnaar began actively to take part in the fighting involving the Afrikaners, Nama and Herero groups. Fighting became more prevalent because of the opposition to Jonker's rule from those he had placed under his 'protection', particularly the Herero faction under Maharero. The Topnaar were to play a major role in this expression of opposition.

For instance, in 1852 Jonker had ordered the men to leave the Kuiseb River and settle closer to Windhoek. Vedder (1934:297) suggests that the reason for this was the loss of

men he had sustained in the battles against the Herero, and the consequent need for some recruits for his diminishing army. Thus, 300 Topnaar men moved to the vicinity of Windhoek. At the time the Topnaar consisted of two factions, one under Khaxab, the senior 'kaptein', and the other under Naixab, the sub-'kaptein'. The faction under Naixab returned to the Kuiseb at the end of 1852, seeing no reason to remain at Windhoek. Khaxab and his followers settled to the west of Rehoboth (see Map 1) in the mountains close to the area where the Swartbooi people lived. It was here that this faction of Topnaar were attacked by members of the Kai//Khaun and had some of their cattle stolen. The Topnaar complained to Willem Swartbooi, who in his turn complained to Oasib, the new 'kaptein' of the Kai//Khaun. Oasib solved this question in a just way: he took the matter before the Nama 'raad' or traditional council. The Topnaar and others involved were compensated for their losses and the culprits punished (Vedder, 1934:298). By those actions, Jonker, who until then had been considered the head of the Nama groups and others living around Windhoek, had been ignored. In March 1854 he punished Khaxab and his people, attacked them and drove off a large number of cattle. The cattle he gave to the traders, to whom he was indebted. The Topnaar intended to recoup their losses, but Willem Swartbooi intervened. Three hundred head of sheep and goats and one hundred and thirty head of cattle were returned (Vedder, 1934:299). Encouraged by this course of events, the Topnaar started moving their herds into Jonker's pastures, as well as taking some of his cattle. On the 15th May 1954, four hundred

ox-riders, three hundred men on horseback and others carrying guns and bows and arrows moved towards Windhoek. On the 19th May a battle was fought at the hot springs of Windhoek, from which the Topnaar returned victorious.

This extended warfare left its mark on the people along the river. The loss of cattle and the increased dependence on fish and veldkos rather than on cattle was noticed by Hahn in 1845 (1916:188). He suggested that it was because of the loss of cattle that only goats and sheep were then grazing along the Kuiseb River. Subsequent reports mention the alternative resources exploited by Topnaar, for instance becoming cattle herders to Jonker's people (Tindall, 1959: 70) and always that recourse was taken to working at Walvis Bay (that is, Sandwich Harbour) off-loading coasters. Moritz (1978:21) mentions that after the departure of the men from the river in 1852, the women left for Sandwich Harbour, where food was more easily obtainable. The population along the river became so small that the missionary at the time cancelled his sermons at Rooibank and closed the school (ibid.). But by far the saddest picture is that described by Palgrave, when he came to Walvis Bay in 1876. The fighting and raids in the 1860s must have cost the Topnaar ever increasing stock losses.

"They were once of importance, but they have gradually deteriorated until they are now perhaps the most degenerate members of a rapidly degenerating family. Those of them who live in Walvis Bay do not number more than 150 to 200 souls. They have been led to choose this arid coast, particularly on account of an edible gourd

... capturing fish ... and because of remuneration they can ... obtain for their labour carrying from the beach to the warehouses cargoes landed by the coasters from the Cape. For his day's work each man receives two to six pence with which he purchases rice, coffee, tobacco." (Palgrave, 1977:6).

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF WALVIS BAY

The poverty resulting from the Orlam wars was instrumental in the Topnaar men and women taking on jobs in Walvis Bay in a sporadic fashion. At first this sporadic employment in Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour, a bay to the south of the former, provided a welcome source of income and food during times of emergency. But the very powers that were making employment possible were exploiting the vital resources of land, water and fish on which the Topnaar had depended for a livelihood. With time wage labour became a necessity. At present the situation along the Kuiseb River is such that Topnaar there cannot subsist without a section of the people being employed in Walvis Bay or elsewhere for some part of their lives (see Chapter 4). We will now concern ourselves with how, in conjunction with the poverty resulting from the period of war, the development of Walvis Bay into a port eroded vital resources, forcing Topnaar increasingly to take refuge in wage labour.

Walvis Bay and the West Coast became known to Europe in the 15th century through the voyage of Diego Çao who, on the instructions of King John II of Portugal, was to find a sea-route to the East. He landed at Cape Cross north of the

Kuiseb River (see Map 1) and erected a cross there to commemorate the spot. King John II still intent on finding a sea route to the East in 1486 sent another ship with Bartholomeu Diaz, who landed south of Walvis Bay, at Angra Pequena (later called Lüderitz Bay). On his return voyage Diaz discovered the Cape, but also a secluded bay which he called Golfo de Saint Maria Conceiçao, later named Walvis Bay. From then onwards the development of Walvis Bay was directly linked with the Cape.

The Portuguese had the monopoly of the Cape maritime route to Asia from 1498 to 1595 (Katzen, 1969:187), after which it was broken by the Dutch and English. In 1652 a refreshment station was established by the Dutch at the Cape. Even though the Dutch East India Company, the company controlling the trade, had no plans to develop the station at the Cape, this inevitably happened. With time exploratory expeditions were undertaken to investigate the surrounding territory. Two voyages were made to the West Coast to establish who the inhabitants were and whether there was any possibility of trading with them. The first vessel was the "Grundel" which landed at Sandwich Harbour just south of Walvis Bay in 1670. Captain Muys of the "Grundel" mentions a rather unfortunate meeting with the local inhabitants. When he and two of his men, all of them armed, left their ship, they were met on the beach by a group of local men. As the sailors proceeded further inland, a fight ensued during which one of them was wounded by an assegai. Captain Muys describes the local inhabitants as yellow-skinned, having applied fat to their

bodies "... and who seemed to be a different type of Hottentot, because the words used by them sounded different from those spoken by proper Hottentots" (own translation, Muys, 1918:36). The report written by Captain Wobma of the "Boode" seven years later repeats many of the statements of Captain Muys. The exception is that the people whom Captain Wobma met were also !Nara collectors and owned cattle (Wobma, 1918:51).

In spite of these two surveys conducted along the West Coast, nothing further was undertaken until rumours of vast herds of game and cattle became rife and hopes were raised concerning alleged large deposits of gold. For fear that the English might occupy Walvis Bay and the West Coast, they despatched the "Meermin", whose Captain Duminy took possession of Walvis Bay on the 26th February, 1793, in the name of Holland. This was the first time Walvis Bay was taken possession of by a foreign power. The next occupation was to take place two years later by the English. By that time the Cape had passed into the hands of the English who, fearing the French would expand their interests in the rich whaling and sealing grounds, prevented this by proclaiming it English territory in 1795. None of the standard historical publications mention any compensation to the local inhabitants or even consultation with them in connection with the taking possession of this area. Because neither this occupation nor that of the Dutch two years earlier had been officially proclaimed, this was done on the 1st March 1878 by Commander R.C. Dyer. This declaration of annexation is also considered to be the

founding date of the port. This annexation too seems not to have involved any consultation with the local inhabitants. It is of importance to the present study, not only because the boundaries of Walvis Bay as outlined by Commander Dyer posed some problems when the German government wanted to declare the land outside Walvis Bay a Germany protectorate, but also because the boundaries set up by Commander Dyer are operative still today, affecting the lives of the Topnaar living within them and ultimately their movements. For this reason we will consider them in some detail.

At the time, Dyer recognised a future need for fresh water should Walvis Bay be developed. The closest spot where fresh water was available was at Rooibank, some 13 km south of the bay along the Kuiseb River. He made a tour of the area and noticed, too, that pasture was to be found in the river bed east of Rooibank. It was therefore his intention to secure these resources for the future settlement and drew up the boundary of Walvis Bay to include the area around Rooibank. Instead of referring to the river bed as such, he called it a plateau. Another misinterpretation was that he referred to the 'plateau' as lying between Rooibank and Scheppmannsdorf, the mission station. He did not realise that Rooibank and Scheppmannsdorf were one and the same place. The wording in his report to the admiralty concerning the boundary of Walvis Bay reads as follows: the area was to be bounded "on the south by a line from a point on the coast fifteen miles south of Pelican Point to Scheppmannsdorf; on the east by a line from Scheppmannsdorf to

Rooibank, including the Plateau, and thence to ten miles inland from the mouth of the Swakop River; on the north by the last ten miles of the course of the said Swakop River, on the west by the Atlantic Ocean" (Wilkin and Fox, 1978:16) (see Map 2). The inconsistencies in Dyer's outline of the boundary became apparent when in 1884 the German government queried the southern and eastern boundary of Walvis Bay. They pointed out the mistaken assumption of Rooibank and Scheppmannsdorf being two places instead of one, and, secondly, the river bed being called a plateau. They suggested that 'Rooibank' should read 'Rooikop', lying to the east of Walvis Bay and presently used as a military training centre by the South African army (see Map 2). The eastern boundary, they argued, would then run from Rooibank to Rooikop in a north-easterly direction, cutting across what they considered to be the plateau, namely the elevation of gravel plains north of the Kuiseb River. Hereby the larger part of the "oasis thickly covered with grass and well-watered" would have been excluded from the Walvis Bay area (Dyer in Report to Admiralty, Wilkin and Fox, 1978:6).

The problem was eventually settled in 1911 after a commission had investigated the situation, and following that the appointment of an arbitrator, King Alfonso of Spain. It was decided that the English were to keep that section of the Kuiseb River which Dyer had referred to as a 'plateau' and that the boundary run, as at present, from the coast to Uraras and from there northwards to the Swakop River (see Map 2).

As Walvis Bay was part of the Cape Colony it automatically became part of the Union of South Africa in 1910. When Namibia became a "C" mandate of South Africa in 1920 following the peace treaty of Versailles, Walvis Bay was administered as part of the mandated territory. It remained thus until the 1st March, 1978, when following the proclamation of the Walvis Bay Municipal Ordinance of 1978 it was once again administered as part of the Republic of South Africa.

Walvis Bay is thus still administered under South African law, and the recent repeal of apartheid laws in Namibia (for instance, Urban Residential and Public Amenities Act, 1979) excludes Walvis Bay.

The implication of the political manoeuvres in which Walvis Bay has been involved over the years has had profound implications for the Topnaar people, who have for some centuries inhabited this part of the coast and the lower reaches of the Kuiseb River. I will discuss some of these implications.

Firstly, the boundary of Walvis Bay running as it does, means that a section of the Topnaar people live in the Republic of South Africa, and the rest live in Namibia. No legislation exists at present prohibiting the movement of individuals between these two countries. One wonders, however, what may happen in the future with independence for Namibia being imminent. Secondly, the people within the municipal area suffer from the attitude of the municipal authorities, who consider their settlements as squatter camps

and temporarily destroy them. Thirdly, White residents of Walvis Bay are able to lease land from the municipality within Topnaar territory and establish business enterprises there. These provide sources of employment for the Topnaar and others, but at the same time they reduce the resources previously of vital importance to the people, who fished and collected !Nara in this area.

Fourthly, the most vital resource of a desert, namely water, is being exploited in vast quantities by the local authorities. The Topnaar derive no direct benefit from this, nor have they received compensation for loss of a vital resource.

From its establishment in 1878, Walvis Bay has had a water problem (Wilken and Fox, 1978:43 ff). When the early travellers came to the area they were given water at Sandfontein, a settlement in the dunes a few kilometres outside Walvis Bay. In later years water was conveyed in barrels over the five kilometres of dunes to Walvis Bay. It was, however, extremely brackish and was used for washing only. Water was shipped from Cape Town to Walvis Bay every five weeks to alleviate the problem. This, too, was no adequate solution, and when a condensing plant also proved inadequate, the tapping of the subterranean water at Rooibank began in 1923. In 1878 Dyer had foreseen the necessity to include Rooibank within the municipal area of Walvis Bay for this purpose. The Rooibank Water Scheme was completed by the South African Railways and Harbours in 1927. As Walvis Bay developed the water requirements rose, and the scheme at

Rooibank was extended. At present water is supplied to Walvis Bay and Swakopmund, but by far the largest amount goes to the Rössing Uranium Mine outside Swakopmund. Thus, Rooibank which was once the most fertile and well-watered Topnaar settlement, has now become inaccessible to the Topnaar for farming purposes, since large scale development has taken place. Topnaar living there today are all employees of the Department of Water Affairs (see Chapter 4). A further point of both political and economic importance is that the central pumping stations, reservoirs and pipelines fall within the municipal area of Walvis Bay, west of Ururas, and not in Namibia. Since Walvis Bay is part of the Republic of South Africa, almost the complete water scheme and, hence, the only source of water in the radius of a few hundred miles, belongs to South Africa.

Long before the Orlam wars or the political manoeuvres involving Walvis Bay began - both of which contributed towards a process of depletion of natural resources - the marine life along the West Coast was exploited by foreign powers. American whalers began calling at Walvis Bay from 1784 (Wilkin and Fox, 1978:2) and when the English took possession of the area in 1793, it was out of fear of losing the rich whaling and sealing grounds to the French. A monopoly over these two resources was immediately proclaimed and a cruiser, the "Star", was sent to protect their interests (Wilkin and Fox, 1978:4 ff). From 1789 to 1795 an average of seven American whalers per year made the trip to the West Coast. Alexander, who came to Walvis Bay in

1836, met these American whalers and reported on their activities (1967:87). But French, Portuguese and English whalers also frequented the bay. The voyage of the French corvette, "L'Heroine", in 1836 was mentioned. During good seasons up to 527 whales were caught, as was the case in 1912 (Wilkin and Fox, 1978:68). Whaling continued until 1923, when a whaling station still existed in the bay, but was closed down shortly afterwards following the appearance of factory ships.

The exploitation of seals and guano was on a similarly large scale. In 1923 it was estimated that between 30 000 and 40 000 seals were to be found at Cape Cross, just north of Walvis Bay. When the Germans occupied the area outside Walvis Bay, licenses for culling had to be obtained, and unlawful sealing was heavily punished. In the following years concessions for sealing became the monopoly of the government.

Guano was discovered by an American, Captain Morrell, at the beginning of the last century (Schultze, 1907:27). Schultze mentions that in 1844 there were 300 ships with a total crew of 6 000 lying alongside islands like Itschabo. They were interested in having these islands declared British territory. This, however, did not happen until the Germans began to show interest in the mainland.

These brief impressions of fishing activities are mentioned to give some idea of the scale on which the coastal life was

being exploited by foreign powers. The effect of this on the local Topnaar population was twofold. Firstly, the resources on which they depended for survival were being depleted on an unprecedented scale, and they were forced to seek alternative resources. Secondly, the very powers that were exhausting the natural resources were creating commercial enterprises offering employment to the impoverished Topnaar.

In the wake of the whalers came traders in 1843, missionaries in 1864 and finally settlers at the beginning of the century, all of whom continued the process of undermining the 'traditional' subsistence economy, which had begun with the arrival of the Orlams at the beginning of the previous century. So that, in order to survive, Topnaar were left no alternative but to involve themselves in wage labour.

#### THE GERMAN COLONIAL PERIOD

The previous section dealt with the expropriation of land and the exploitation of resources vital to the subsistence of the Topnaar along the coast, particularly around Walvis Bay. The same process outside the British territory of Walvis Bay took a slightly different turn.

At the beginning of the 1880s a German trader, Adolf Lüderitz, became interested in the area round Angra Pequena, later Lüderitz Bay, and on the 1st May 1883 he purchased the first

tract of land from Josef Fredericks, the 'kaptein' of the Nama-speaking group at Bethany. This sale included Lüderitz Bay itself, as well as the surrounding land within a 5 mile radius. The price for this sale was laid down as £100 cash in gold and 200 Wesley Richard guns and accessories. The gold was never paid. Josef Frederick was also left under the impression that by the term 'geographical miles' as used by the representative of Lüderitz were meant English miles. It later transpired that what was understood to be English miles were, in fact, German miles, namely five times the length of English miles. This comprised more than half of the territory of the Bethany people. This deception was intentionally upheld (Drechsler, 1966:23). The same principle was followed when, on 19th August 1884, Koch, in the name of Lüderitz, bought from the Topnaar 'kaptein' for £20 a tract of land twenty geographical miles inland from the coast between the 26° and 22° south latitude, plus the first option on the sale of prospecting rights (Lenssen, 1966:22). Because of the irregularities involved in these purchases, the validity of this contract of sale is at present being questioned by the Topnaar (see Chapter 3). This land and that bought from Josef Frederick was placed under the protection of the German government on 23rd December 1884. In the Kaokoland where a small group of Topnaar and others lived at Sesfontein, a similar process was followed. In 1895 the Kaokoland was bought from the Topnaar 'kaptein' Jan Uixamab, for £5 (Lenssen, 1972:27).

The land purchased by the Germans from Piet #Eibib was a

desert and not of much value. A section of it north of the Kuiseb River was declared a game park, but it was not until two decades ago that it was developed by the South African government. Except for a police station built at Ururas (see Map 2) in 1893 to control the trade of guns and ammunition into the interior of the country, the Topnaar were left to follow their largely pastoral existence in their desert enclave.

Farms on the eastern edge of the Namib were surveyed at the beginning of the century. This did not interfere with the Topnaar residents along the Kuiseb River, but it presumably did influence their movements in search for pasture between the Kuiseb River and the centre of the country.

During the time that Curt von Francois was governor of Namibia (1889 to 1893), the policy had already been laid down that the indigenous population should eventually be consigned to reserves. It was Leutwein, following von Francois in 1893, who put this policy into practice. With some pressure from missionaries a 'Verordnung' or Imperial Decree was passed on the 10th April 1898 providing for the establishment of reserves (Goldblatt, 1971:36). The first of these reserves applied to the Witboois, another Orlam group. Then in 1902 the Hoachanas Reserve was established for the Red Nation, a Nama group. The Topnaar along the Kuiseb were never included in this ordinance nor in any subsequent ones passed by the German government.

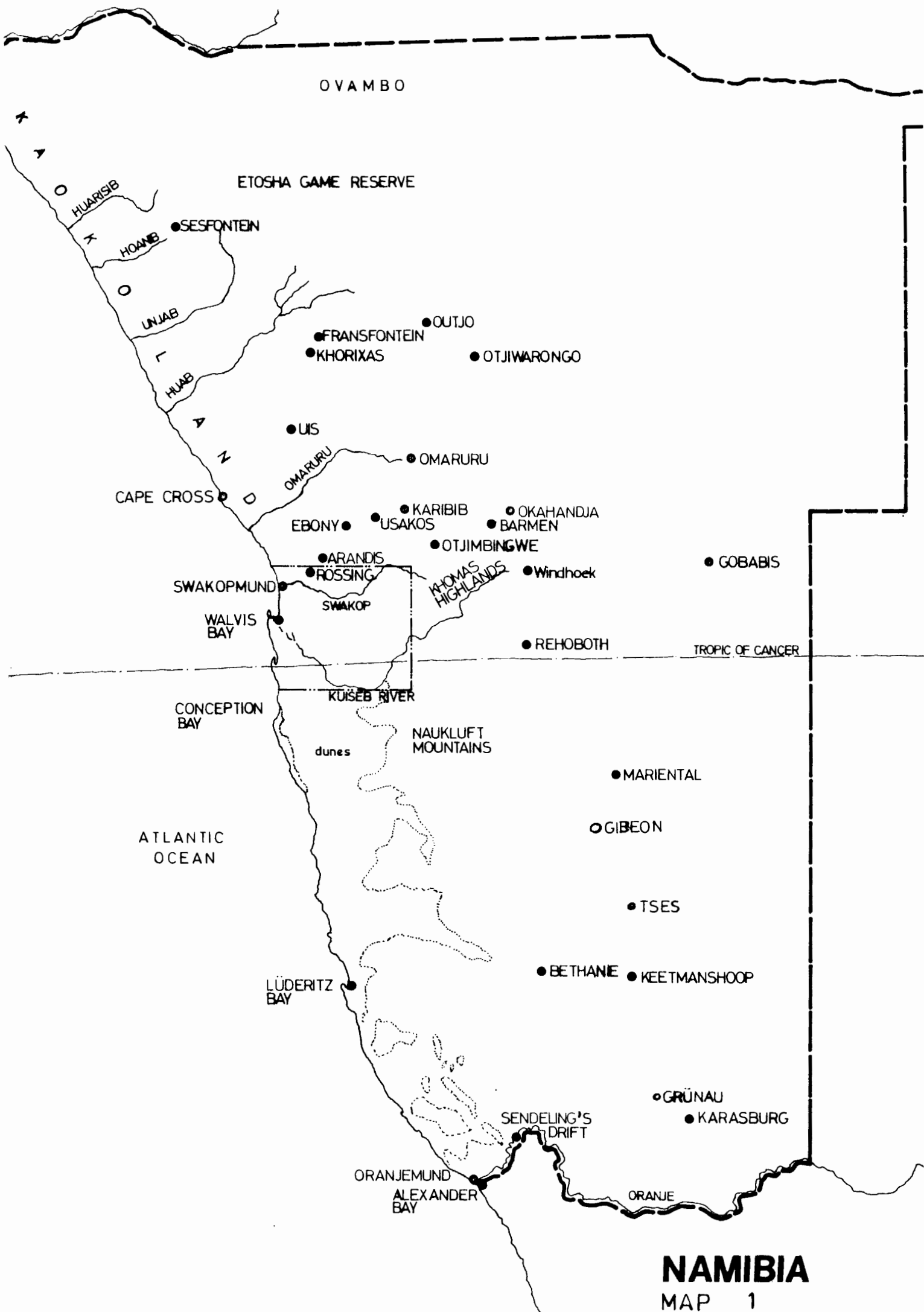
Unlike the important role played by the Topnaar along the Kuiseb during the wars of Jonker Afrikaner, they were not involved in the uprisings against the Germans at the beginning of the century. On the other hand, the Topnaar at Sesfontein together with the Swartbooi people residing there were actively involved (Drechsler, 1980:102,184) and were consequently punished by the Germans by the Ordinance of 1905 which confiscated all their land (pers. comm., K. Gottschalk). Under South African rule the Topnaar along the Kuiseb seemed also to have been forgotten. The South African Notice 122 of 1923 proclaimed Sesfontein and Fransfontein in the Kaokoland as reserves (ibid.), but again this was not instituted for the Topnaar along the Kuiseb River. At present the authority in these two reserves is maintained by a resident Native Commissioner. The lower Kuiseb River area has never had any administrative representative living there.

The complete absence of legislation involving the Topnaar seems almost ominous. Possibly the reasoning behind this by the respective administrative authorities was that a handful of people hardly warranted the effort, and that with time they could be accommodated in any one of the existing reserves. This would explain some current attempts to have the people removed to an area in the Namaland Reserve. The Germans had already intended that confining the indigenous population to reserves would produce a labour force for the urban centres and the German owned farms, and it is probable that this was the intention behind letting the Topnaar remain along the Kuiseb River. This policy may then have been

continued by the South African Government as Topnaar labour was required in Walvis Bay. There was, therefore, hardly any need to pass legislation which would force the Topnaar into wage-labour. With the depletion of fish, the large-scale exploitation of their water and the establishment of farms on the eastern border of the Namib Desert, this came about automatically.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PRESENT SITUATION



**NAMIBIA**  
MAP 1

Two historical developments have contributed towards the situation of poverty within which the Topnaar in the Kuiseb River area find themselves at present. These were, firstly, the arrival of the Orlams and the subsequent wars they and others in Namibia were involved in during the last century; and, secondly, the expansion of white political and economic interests along the west coast. At present the Topnaar find themselves caught between the presence of white owned farms in the east, the municipal area of Walvis Bay in the north-west and the presence of mines and the administration in the north. Along the Kuiseb River they are subject to the authority of various administrative departments and the laws pertaining to a game park. Until recently this depletion of resources by others went hand-in-hand with a total absence of any form of political representation. The present chapter deals with the current situation along the river and in Walvis Bay and the newly evolving political channels, which promise to be some means whereby Topnaar may in future express their opposition to their condition.

#### PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Before dealing with the nature of settlements along the river and the domestic groups constituting these, some short reference needs to be made to the use of the term 'Topnaar' in this study. The debate on ethnic groups and their boundaries was raised by Barth (1969), but has since been revived in South Africa (Sharp, 1980; West, 1979). This revival has taken the form of a

rather one-sided attempt at debate between social anthropologists at English-medium universities and volkekundiges at Afrikaans-medium universities. The latter have been criticised by the former as following a methodology very similar to that of the previous structural-functionalists, which selects ethnic groups as their unit of analysis. Some theoretical implications of this approach, for instance its dualistic nature on economic issues, as well as some suggestions for alternatives, for instance to see ethnicity as a form of group mobilisation, are outlined by Sharp (1980).

The present study attempts to avoid two basic errors South African anthropologists have been accused of. They are ...

"... to view ethnicity as a primordial bond of attachment (and) to take 'ethnic' boundaries as self-evident limitations on the field of one's study"  
(Sharp, 1980; 14).

Firstly, the grouping of people referred to as Topnaar are not considered as being a primordial category, but rather a flexible entity, the boundaries of which shift. The theme of flexibility of human relations and domestic groups would not permit a conception of the study field as a static entity. Secondly, throughout the thesis reference is made to such individuals who are incorporated into the Topnaar section of the residents along the Kuiseb River and those who leave the area for different lengths of time. Other residents within the area are not ignored, but the effect of their

presence on the Topnaar section of the population is dealt with and the interactions between the various categories is discussed where applicable to the theme.

For instance, all published histories suggest that Namibian yellow-skinned herders have at different times had relations with groups calling themselves 'Damaras'. This applies to the historical as well as the present situation along the Kuiseb River (Schepmann, 1916:239: Hahn, 1918:188). During the time of fieldwork most individuals who were in the process of incorporation into the Topnaar section of the population were of this description. The majority came from the Okombahe Reserve to the north of the present area (see Map I). The term 'Damara' is as problematic as the term 'Topnaar', and the same considerations mentioned above with regard to the category of 'Topnaar' refer to 'Damara' as well. I would, therefore, like to define the two terms loosely as such individuals that are referred to as being 'Damara' or 'Topnaar' in most situations most of the time. This presupposes the notion that ethnic identity may change situationally and that it may be manipulated. Furthermore, the tacit assumption is that the criteria of race, culture/language and territory do not necessarily coincide. In spite of the difficulties involved in an attempt at a definition, it is helpful to make these distinctions as it is the belonging to either category which enables individuals to exploit resources along the river or not, and this in turn influences the kinds of alignments established with others.

POPULATION, SETTLEMENTS AND THE TOWNSHIPS

In July/August 1978 a census was conducted along the river with the aid of an adapted Rhodes-Livingstone Census Card (see Appendix I). The total Topnaar population was recorded as 256. In this connection the considerations mentioned above with regard to the use of the term "Topnaar" become relevant. Table 1 below shows the age and sex distribution of the population as recorded.

With the population being extremely flexible and mobile the number of inhabitants of settlements often changed almost immediately after our recording. Such individuals were interviewed but were not included in the figure of 256.

TABLE 1: Age and Sex Distribution of the Population Along the River: July/August 1978.

| Ages (Years) | Number of People        | Totals |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------|
| 0 - 5        | Male : 30<br>Female: 16 | 46     |
| 5 - 15       | Male : 28<br>Female: 42 | 70     |
| 15 - 25      | Male : 15<br>Female: 18 | 33     |
| 25 - 35      | Male : 11<br>Female: 17 | 28     |
| 35 - 45      | Male : 14<br>Female: 12 | 26     |
| 45 - 55      | Male : 16<br>Female: 9  | 25     |

(Continued overleaf)

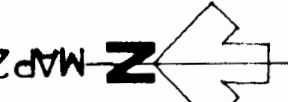
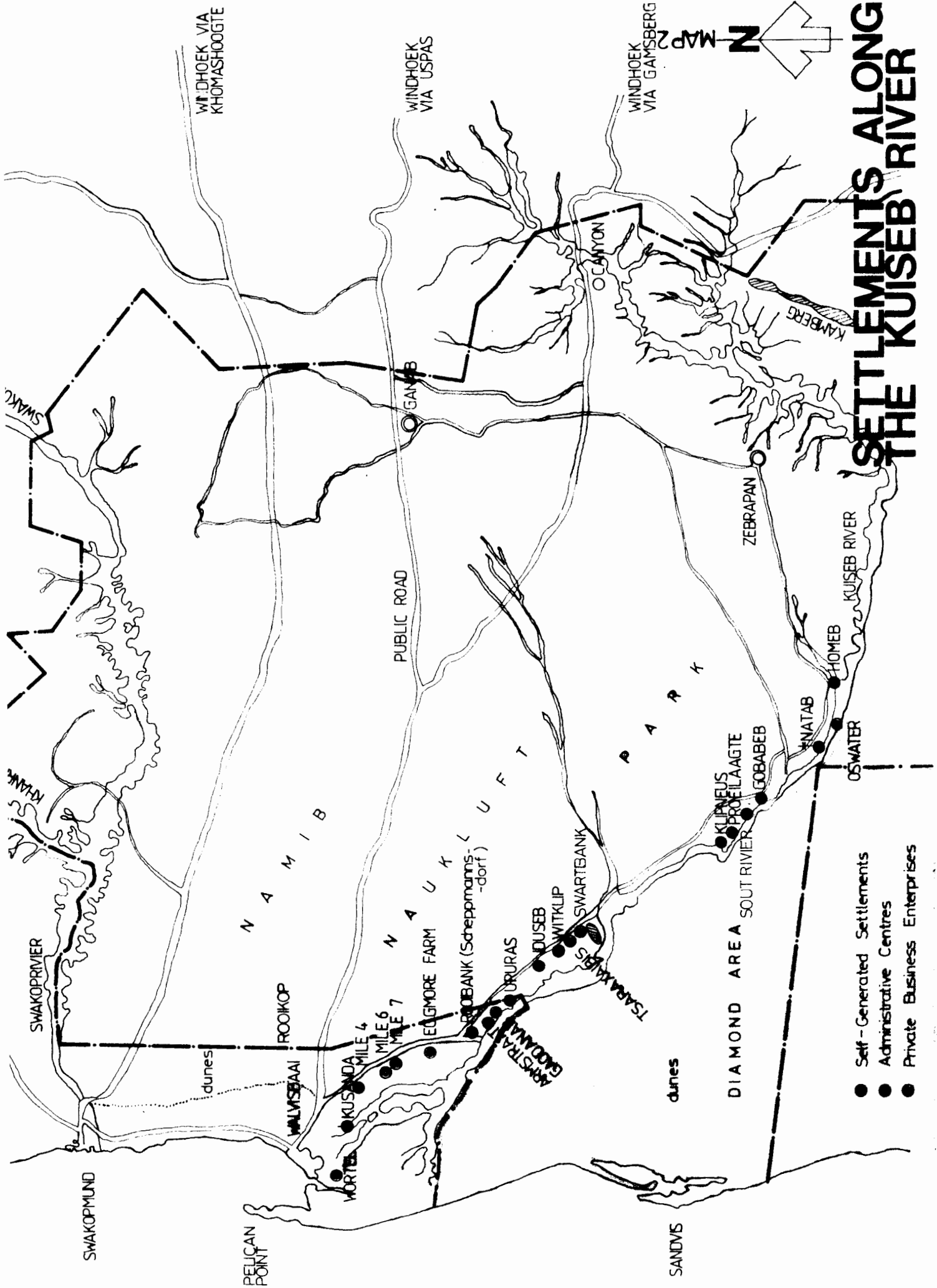
(Continued)

|         |                       |     |
|---------|-----------------------|-----|
| 55 - 65 | Male : 9<br>Female: 8 | 17  |
| 65+     | Male : 7<br>Female: 4 | 11  |
|         |                       | 256 |

Noticeable about the age distribution is the relatively high incidence of children, amounting to almost half the total population. One reason for this is the necessity for young single mothers or couples residing and working in Walvis Bay or elsewhere to send their children to kin along the river in order for them to remain employed. Usually children are sent to female maternal kin and most often to maternal grandmothers. Hence the high incidence of grandchildren in the (self-generated) settlements along the river (see Table 13, p. ).

The relatively equal distribution of males and females between the ages of 25 and 45 reflects the political status of the area, namely, that it was not subject to the legislation of influx control regulations even prior to their repeal in the rest of Namibia in 1979. Consequently, men could take their wives with them to places of employment in the rest of the country, but women, too, were not prohibited from accepting employment away from the river. Hence, there was no exodus of males from the area, while women remained behind. This position is synonymous with those rural areas in the Republic of South Africa known as "Coloured Reserves" and falling within the "Coloured Labour Preference Area", which also show an absence of influx control regulations.

# SETTLEMENTS ALONG THE KUISEB RIVER



- Self-Generated Settlements
- Administrative Centres
- Private Business Enterprises

In order to discuss the distribution of the population within domestic units and the nature of these, something must be said about the settlements and the area within which they fall.

For analytical purposes I will divide the area occupied by the Topnaar into three different parts, namely the river, the river delta and Walvis Bay. In each of these three areas the Topnaar exploit different resources, which ultimately affects their mobility.

The river I take as being the area upstream from Rooibank. It is different from the other two areas because it is the only one in which stock-farming is possible, even though conditions become more difficult closer to the delta. The second area, the river delta, I consider to be the sandy stretch of 13 km between Rooibank and Walvis Bay. Stock-farming is impossible in the dunes, but instead it is the area of the majority of Nara fields. Walvis Bay, the third area, should really be considered as consisting of the two townships, Narraville and Kuisebmond, where the Topnaar primarily live, and the urban centre of Walvis Bay, where they work.

In the first two areas, namely the river and the delta, I distinguish between three types of settlements. These are self-generated settlements, administrative centres and sites of privately-owned business enterprises. Again this division is for analytical purposes only.

Self-generated settlements are established out of the immediate interests and needs of Topnaar or those incorporated

into the community. The prime reason for their existence is stock-farming. Administrative centres exist because of the presence of administrative personnel along the river and in the delta. The two administrative departments active along the river are the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism and the Department of Water Affairs of Namibia. In the delta it is the Department of Forestry of the Republic of South Africa and the Department of Water Affairs. The historical background to this situation was given in the previous chapter.

The third type of settlement, private business enterprises, exists only in the delta. The presence of these has been made possible because of the curious political state of the delta. As is indicated in Chapter 2 (also see Map 2) the municipal boundary of Walvis Bay extends as far south and south-east as 2 km beyond Ururas on the river. The political manoeuvres involving Walvis Bay, beginning with its occupation by the Dutch in 1793 and ending with the return to Pretoria of administrative powers in 1979, was dealt with in the previous chapter. It is because the delta and that part of the river as far as Ururas is municipal ground, that White residents are able to rent land from the Walvis Bay municipality to establish business enterprises there (see Map 2).

### 1. The River

In order to discuss the population and its distribution, something must be said about the unusual topography of the

area. The Kuiseb River starts in the centre of the country near Windhoek, its course running down the Escarpment through the coastal Namib Desert in a westerly direction, entering the sea at Walvis Bay (see Map 1). This river is of particular interest to geomorphologists, because it divides the central Namib Desert into two geomorphological zones. North of the river are gravel plains with scant vegetation. Animal life has lately become protected there, since most of the area is a game park. South of the river, almost as far south as the Olifants River, the gravel platform is covered with a layer of red sand. The dunes to the south of the river are kept in check by the perennial flow of the river, which clears the river bed of sand which may have accumulated there (Seeley, Buskerk, Hamilton and Dixon: 1981:60).

The local inhabitants of the river area live in two types of settlements, described as self-generated settlements and administrative centres. In 1978 these were all situated on the northern river bank. Archaeological and historical evidence does exist for reasonably permanently occupied sites on the southern bank (Köhler, 1969: 102), as well as temporary !Nara camps. Even though remnants of settlements and camps existed on the southern bank during field work, they were not occupied. Informants gave the reason for this as the difficulty of living in the sand for any length of time; and a possible reason for the absence of !Nara camps on the southern bank was that collecting was done in the richer fields of the delta, daily trips only being made to the fields along the river.

In 1978 there were eleven settlements along the river. The total number of Topnaar in these was 213. This figure excludes temporary visitors, White employees and Black employees working on a contract basis in the administrative centres. Table 2 below shows the distribution of people among the different settlements.

TABLE 2: Distribution of Population In Settlements Along The River: July/August 1978.

|             | Self-generated Settlement | Administrative Centre |
|-------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Oswater     | x                         | 30                    |
| Gobabeb     |                           | x 14                  |
| Sout River  | x                         | 25                    |
| Proeilaagte | x                         | 2                     |
| Klipneus    | x                         | 15                    |
| Swartbank   | x                         | 22                    |
| Iduseb      | x                         | 7                     |
| Ururas      | x                         | 28                    |
| /Gaotanab   | x                         | 8                     |
| Armstraat   | x                         | 25                    |
| Rooibank    |                           | x 37                  |
|             |                           | 213                   |

The two administrative centres along the river were Gobabeb and Rooibank; Gobabeb being the centre for the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism and Rooibank that of the Department of Water Affairs. The total Topnaar population

in these two centres amounted to 51. The Topnaar men living in these administrative centres were all employed by one of the administrative Departments; as were three of the women.

In 1978 there were nine self-generated settlements along the river. Following the downstream course these were: Oswater, Sout River, Proeilaagte, Klipneus, Swartbank, Iduseb, Ururas, /Gaotanab and Armstraat. The total number of inhabitants of these settlements was 162. The sizes of these self-generated settlements varied between two individuals at Proeilaagte and thirty at Oswater.

For various reasons which will be discussed these self-generated settlements grow and decline at a swift rate, whereas the administrative centres remain more stable in size but change in composition. In 1978 Proeilaagte had just been established. By 1979 four more settlements had been built, namely Homeb, ~~Natab~~, Witklip and Tsaraxaibis. By 1980/1 Witklip had been abandoned and the group of people from Tsaraxaibis had split and joined others at Ururas, building some new houses in the process.

In 1978 inhabitants in all self-generated settlements were involved in some degree of stock-farming. Suitable vegetation exists as far as Ururas. Beyond this point towards the delta farming becomes virtually impossible, particularly during years of little rain. In spite of this people did own goats both at /Gaotanab and Armstraat in 1978. By 1979 these animals had been sent elsewhere.

Iduseb, lying between Ururas and Witklip, needs to be specifically mentioned. In 1978 its character changed drastically following the opening of a primary school. At present the school-buildings (class-rooms, dormitories, a kitchen) have been extended, but the original inhabitants still follow a pastoral existence. The major part of the population consists of children from other settlements along the river and in the delta, who come to Iduseb during school-terms only and return home over week-ends and holidays. In the tabulation of population distributions these 57 children were considered as living at their home settlement and not at Iduseb. The three teaching staff were from outside the Kuiseb River and Walvis Bay area and were thus also not included in the tabulation. Non-teaching staff in 1978 consisted of two young women, who had previously lived at Rooibank which they considered to be their home. They, too, were tabulated under Rooibank and not Iduseb. The seven individuals recorded as living at Iduseb, are its continuous inhabitants.

## 2. The Delta

The geomorphology as described along the river has been reversed in the delta area, lying between Rooibank and Walvis Bay. Whereas along the river and sand dunes are neatly separated from the gravel plains by the river, in the delta the red sand has crossed the river course and a thin strip of sand extends northwards for some 45 km parallel to the coast to just south of Swakopmund (see Map 2). The reason

for this is that the river only rarely spills into the sea, its arms having become obliterated. Therefore, a situation has been created which has given the dunes a chance to cross the river. This process has been accelerated by the dams built to redirect the occasional flow of the river away from Walvis Bay. The Topnaar claim that this has also caused many Nara plants to die, since they no longer get adequate water.

Most of the settlements lying in the delta are therefore situated in this mass of dunes. In 1978 there were six settlements in the delta area. The distribution of the 43 people among the six settlements is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Distribution of Population in Settlements in the Delta: July/August 1978

|              | Self-generated Settlement | Administrative Centres | Business Enterprises |
|--------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Eggmore Farm |                           |                        | x 7                  |
| Mile Seven   |                           | x                      | 10                   |
| Mile Six     |                           |                        | x 1                  |
| Mile Four    | x                         |                        | 13*                  |
| Kusanda      | x                         |                        | 3                    |
| Wortel       |                           | x                      | 9                    |
|              |                           |                        | 43                   |

(Note \* : At Mile Four, ten men, who were not interviewed were said to live in the delta but were working in town. This raised the total from 33 to 43).

In the delta the three types of settlements previously mentioned

are represented. The two administrative centres are Wortel near the coast and Mile Seven. Both were once old Topnaar settlements. Today Wortel has been built up as a centre for the Department of Forestry. Mile Seven is a subsidiary pumping station of the Department of Water Affairs. The 19 people living at these two centres consisted primarily of male employees and their families. Administrative centres in the delta are slightly different from those along the river, in-so-far as they do not house senior White administrative staff. White administrative officials supervise Topnaar and other Black employees by daily trips from Rooibank in the case of Mile 7 and Walvis Bay in the case of Wortel. There are three persons living at Mile Seven, who are not employed there and subsist primarily on !Nara.

The self-generated settlements are Mile Four and Kusanda. The inhabitants live under very poor conditions with no sanitation and no running water, eating !Nara, scraps from the municipal dumping grounds and whatever else they can find. A few men, particularly at Mile Four, live there, but work in town. The municipal authorities classify these settlements as squatter camps and have repeatedly destroyed them, only to find the tin and card-board shanties have later been re-erected.

In 1978 the two business enterprises were Eggmore Farm and Mile Six. The former was a chicken farm, the latter a piggery. The total of 8 Topnaar inhabitants consisted of a woman and her 6 children at Eggmore Farm living with a male employee from outside the area (who was not included

in the census) and one single man working at Mile 6. By 1979 the situation had changed: Eggmore Farm was now a vegetable farm, the piggery at Mile 6 had been closed down, and a quarry which had existed before 1978 was re-opened. Informants maintained that no Topnaar were employed in any of these new enterprises.

In 1978 about half the total Topnaar residents in the area, lived in the 17 settlements along the river and in the delta. They interacted with other White residents and with Black staff in the administrative centres and business enterprises. Budack (1977) and Köhler (1969) conducted similar surveys in 1975 and 1957 respectively, and report a total population of 195 in 1957 and 232 in 1975. (See Appendix 3). Although it is problematic to compare population figures in so fluid a situation, it seems justified to suggest that there is a slight increase in the population. This seems to dispel the predictions of some authors, who have suggested that the 'Topnaar' will probably disappear from the ethnological stage in the not too distant future' (Sydow, 1973: 77).

### 3. Walvis Bay

The coastal town of Walvis Bay is the third part of Topnaar-occupied territory with which I wish to deal. According to Budack the Topnaar living in this town constitute about half the total 'Topnaar' population in March 1975. He records a figure of 253 (1977: 2). As in all other South

African towns, the urban Black population is by law required to live in segregated townships. The two townships of Walvis Bay are called Kuisebmond, reserved for Nama and African people, and Narraville, reserved primarily for those people classified as Coloured. Although the Topnaar are classified as Nama, some stay in Narraville, and among them is the new headman.

Housing provided by the municipality in both townships is of standard design: two small rooms and a kitchen. The facilities in both townships consist of a beer-hall, a mobile post-office a police-station, a shop and (in Kuisebmond) two churches, one of which is used by the Topnaar section of the Lutheran congregation, who do not have their own church.

With this background, I now propose to discuss the economic pursuits of the people.

In view of uncertain employment opportunities the final source of security for many Topnaar men and women is a herd of goats or the more prestigious sheep and cattle. Children are given goats when they are born or baptised, or just as presents. Some young men and women working in Walvis Bay or elsewhere will save money and invest in some stock, which relatives will herd for them along the river. People use goats in a number of ways, as sustenance, as currency for paying or establishing debts, as a source of income, and particularly as presents. This is done with both live goats or with some of the meat of a slaughtered animal. Of a survey of

256 people living along the river and in the delta, between 75 and 80 (that is 35 - 38%) owned at least one goat. In my urban sample of 47, only five people owned goats, although this figure may be distorted by the small number of people interviewed (see section on fieldwork: Appendix 1).

Owners who are in employment in the administrative centres and those who are absent in town, are of course compelled to arrange for their animals to be herded: this may be done by relatives, and more rarely by employees. In the river and delta areas 24 of a total of 115 men and women over the age of 18 years herded their own goats, or those belonging to others.

TABLE 4: Stock-Holdings: July/July 1978

| Settlement  | Sheep | Cattle | Goats |
|-------------|-------|--------|-------|
| Oswater     | 32    | 17     | 520   |
| Sout River  |       |        | 135   |
| Proeilaagte |       |        | 50    |
| Klipneus    |       |        | 100   |
| Swartbank   |       | 6      | 132   |
| Iduseb      |       |        | 130   |
| Ururas      | 41    | 6      | 360   |
| /Gaotanab   |       |        | 1     |
| Armstraat   |       |        | 27    |
| TOTALS      | 73    | 29     | 1 435 |

TABLE 5: Sizes of Herds of Goats: June/July, 1978.

| Settlement   | Herd 1 | Herd 2 | Herd 3 | Totals |
|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Oswater      | 420    | 100    | -      | 520    |
| Sout River   | 59     | 76     | -      | 135    |
| Proeillaagte | 50     | -      | -      | 50     |
| Klipneus     | 58     | 42     | -      | 100    |
| Swartbank    | 53     | 64     | 15     | 132    |
| Iduseb       | 32     | 98     | -      | 130    |
| Ururas       | 110    | 250    | -      | 360    |
| /Gaotanab    | 1      | -      | -      | 1      |
| Armstraat    | 27     | -      | -      | 27     |

Informants never fail to mention that the sizes of herds have decreased drastically over the last few decades. This is partly owing to hunting having fallen away as an additional source of sustenance and the resultant increased need of stock for food. The largest single herd amounted to 420 goats, 14 cattle, 32 sheep and 10 donkeys. Needless to say these belonged to the richest man along the river. The size of his goat herd, however, was about a quarter the size it was twenty years ago. Tables 4 and 5 show the stock-holdings and herd sizes as they existed in 1978.

The figures of 1,435 goats, 73 sheep and 29 cattle are very likely lower than actual stock-holdings. Goat owners in particular claim to have experienced indirect pressures from the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism to reduce

their herds. They will, therefore, only very reluctantly divulge actual herd sizes.

A further source of sustenance as well as income is the harvesting of the !Nara melon. !Nara patches or fields are owned by individual families, the only case of land ownership among any Khoe people (Schapera, 1930: 290). During the summer months groups of people will camp at their respective patches, living in rudimentary structures for the duration of the harvest, lasting anything from a week to a few months. There the melons are picked, placed in hessian bags and carried to a temporary camp, where the flesh of the fruit is cooked and separated from the kernels or !naran. Once the kernels have been dried in the sun, they are repacked into hessian bags and are ready for sale at various retailers in Walvis Bay (see Budack, 1977; Dentlinger, 1977; Moritz, unpublished).

Individuals and families sometimes have long standing relationships with these Walvis Bay retailers and debts with the retailers may be settled during the summer by payment in !Nara kernels. Temporary partnerships for harvesting and processing are formed with certain relatives, which may last but often dissolve at the end of the harvest.

The harvesting of !Nara is not a very popular means of making a living. Of a total of 115 adult men and women (18 years and above) 41 had made !Nara during the 1977/78 season (see Table 6). Weather and living conditions make the work extremely hard. Except for the occasional use of a donkey

as a pack animal, the people carry the heavy bags of fruit on their backs. Wood has to be collected for the cooking in an area where there is virtually no vegetation apart from the !Nara bushes. Standing next to a big fire and a 50 gallon container of boiling !Nara pulp in the seething hot sun, only to crawl into a make-shift hut of hessian and be exposed to the cold damp fog at night, are hazards many Topnaar try to avoid. Therefore, many consider making !Nara as an emergency solution or else as a means of augmenting their income. In spite of this, R2,421 worth of kernels were sold in 1975 (Budack, 1977: 8). The highest individual income made for the season of 1978 (by a woman) was R190, followed by R180. Most other individuals had made between R20 and R80 or less, indicating that this does not often bring in a large income.

The distribution of income made from the sale of !Nara kernels is indicated by Table 6 below.

TABLE 6: Range of Income from !Nara Harvests: Summer 1977/1978

|               |            |             |             |           |           |
|---------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
|               | -R15       | R15 - R25   | R25 - R35   | R35 - R45 | R45 - R55 |
| No. of people | 5          | 9           | 4           | 8         | 3         |
|               |            |             |             |           |           |
|               | R55 - R100 | R100 - R150 | R150 - R200 | TOTAL     |           |
| No. of people | 9          | 1           | 2           | 41        |           |

The Topnaar today live on a diet of meat, milk, maize and whatever Western foodstuffs they can obtain. Favoured items are tinned fish, tinned meat, soup and polonies. !Nara is used as an additional or an emergency food supply. Except when freshly picked and well ripened, the !Nara is not eaten on its own. More often the dried pulp is preserved in the form of a large pancake or !oaxaribeb. Cooked or dried kernels are ground and mixed into maize porridge or cooked meat. Kernels are also used as a snack and it is not unusual to see people walking round carrying a little pouch containing kernels which they crack between their teeth.

Formal employment or wage labour is by far the most lucrative source of income. The most readily available formal employment is in Walvis Bay and at the administrative centres and business enterprises along the river and the delta. For many years the fishing industry provided the best paid and most popular form of employment for local inhabitants. Lately this situation has deteriorated considerably, and, following the closing down of many factories many people have been left unemployed. Many unemployed Topnaar have been forced to return to the river temporarily.

In my sample of 47 urban Topnaar, 6 out of a total of 19 economically-active people are employed. One of the two formally employed men earned a monthly salary of R244 as a checker at one of the local garages. Four of the formally employed women each earned a salary of between R30 and R100 as domestic workers. In the delta, men and women are

employed at the Forestry station at Wortel, monthly salaries range between R75 and R90 for men and women earning R65. Monthly salaries at privately-owned business enterprises were far below the levels of those paid at the administrative centres.

Along the river men could take on employment with either the Department of Water Affairs at Rooibank and Mile Seven, or with the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism at Gobabeb or Ganab (see Map 2). Salaries paid by the Department of Water Affairs were slightly higher (between R113 and R188) than those paid by the Department of Nature Conservation. Apart from the high salaries paid (in Kuiseb terms), employees at the administrative centres have additional benefits such as housing, weekly trips to Walvis Bay and access to medical facilities (such as being taken to a doctor in emergencies). Recruitment for these formal positions of employment takes place country-wide and local males have to compete for them. In 1978 eight of the seventeen male employees at the administrative centres had come from elsewhere, the majority being from the Okombahe Reserve to the north-east of Swakopmund (see Map 1). Most men from outside the area are single. Topnaar women recognising the potential temporary security, will vie for the favour of these men. Bringing their young children with them, they will set themselves up as mostly informal conjugal partners to unattached

young men<sup>1</sup>. Of the eight male employees from outside the Kuiseb River area, seven had Topnaar conjugal partners and children. This is often the first step in the men becoming members of the community, for following these liaisons they may eventually decide to stay along the river. But in addition to the security provided by the monthly salaries of their conjugal partners the provision of housing and the ready and highly valued accessibility to Walvis Bay, by weekly or supply trips women are attracted to the administrative centres for further reasons. Firstly, some are themselves able to become formally employed as domestic workers of the White employees. Secondly, with a relatively large male population in these centres with a regular income, women can brew and sell beer there far more profitably than in other settlements<sup>2</sup>.

- 
1. I distinguish between those conjugal relations that have been preceded by negotiations between the two sets of kin, contracted in church and followed by certain ceremonial festivities along the river and those conjugal relations to which the above conditions do not apply. The former I refer to as a 'formal', the latter as an 'informal marriage' after Van Velsen (1964: 120 ff ). The differences made by the Topnaar in this regard will be discussed in Chapter 6.
  2. During the period of field work there were three cases where relatively poor Topnaar became employees to more wealthy individuals, not connected to either of the administrative departments mentioned. The employers in these cases were men, who were in the process of being incorporated into the Topnaar section of the population along the river. (For reference to one case see Chapter 4; p. 95). There was no kinship relation between employer and employee, the term of employment (such as wages, duties, hours of work) being clearly defined. As the nature of this relationship is similar to the one of wage labourer to employer, I refer to them as 'formal employment'. This I will contrast below with the more casual relationships of employment between kin, which I refer to as 'informal employment'!

Kin relations among the Topnaar are such that arrangements of mutual assistance are sometimes made between relatives. The terms of these arrangements are ill-defined and extremely flexible and changeable. They cover a range of relationships from what could be termed informal employment to kin obligations with a strong emphasis on reciprocity. An example of informal employment at one extreme would be the case of a relative herding the goats of a man employed in Walvis Bay. 'Payment' in this case would amount to provisions for the rural relative, clothes for himself and his immediate family and some financial remuneration. In actual fact, though, provisions are delivered very irregularly, and payment in cash is often delayed or granted only when the urban relative can afford it. At the same time the rural relative can help himself to the milk of the goats, as well as slaughter within limits.

On the other end of the extreme is the situation where, for example, younger, literate and mobile individuals will fetch the monthly old age or sick pension of their older, often handicapped relatives. The young relatives or 'hands', as they are called, buy provisions with the pension and the tacit agreement is that for their efforts they are allowed to take a reasonable share of the pension. Apart from a share being taken, the provisions bought from the pensions are sometimes the only income of a household and may feed up to 16 mouths. Therefore, household members welcome pensioners as new members of the household, as this means a remarkably high financial input into the household on a regular basis. For the pensioner, however, this is an extremely precarious

arrangement. Most of them complain of having to go without adequate supply of food for up to months, let alone without new clothes, an adequate supply of tobacco in the case of men or other necessities such as soap or occasional sweets. When the amounts of pensions were increased following their revision by the Budget, all pensioners still quoted the old amount, not having been informed by their assistants of the increase. None of them were aware of the higher amount due to them for the month of December. Until recently they had no power over the way in which this money was spent by their assistants and others of their family. The former are kept in check only by a vague fear of 'strong gossip'; the belief that censure spoken by the old relative may cause them emotional and possibly physical harm (see section on Beliefs, p. 61). Recently, a pensioner was persuaded to lodge a complaint with the 'raad', concerning the spending of his pension. The ruling of the 'raad' was that access to the pension was to be transferred to another relative. As this took place after 1979, I could not establish whether this has had any warning effect on other assistants.

Table 7 overleaf indicates the most tangible sources of income. It must be remembered that the categories are not exclusive and that any number of sources of income could have been utilised by any number of people. Also these sources are sporadically exploited by individuals. Therefore, the number of individuals represented in each category will not add up to the total of 115 people over the age of 18 years found along the river and in the delta in 1978. Notable is the

TABLE 7: Sources of Income of Adult Men and Women: July/  
August 1978

| !Nara | Pension | Herding<br>Goats | Formal<br>Men | employment<br>Women | Women supp.<br>by men | No<br>Income |
|-------|---------|------------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| 41    | 12      | 24               | 19            | 4                   | 19                    | 27           |

high number of individuals who exploited the !Nara as a source of income. The implication of this figure is not that !Nara is a favoured source of income, but that it includes some people who needed to collect !Nara as an emergency solution. This figure should therefore be considered in conjunction with the number of adults with no income whatsoever. The twenty-seven people with no income would rely on kin to feed them, collect food at the municipal dumping ground or else occasionally collect some !Nara to help them temporarily. These figures confirm the view of most Topnaar, that they are very poor people.

TABEL 8: Number of Sources Exploited: July/August 1978.

| None | 7  | 2  | 3 | 4 | Total |
|------|----|----|---|---|-------|
| 27   | 50 | 29 | 5 | 4 | 115   |

Table 8 above shows the number of resources exploited by adults in 1978. The figure of 19 formally employed men includes 17 wage labourers with the two administrative departments and 2 men employed in the self-generated settlements by a wage-labourer.

Some of the reasons for this extreme poverty have been discussed. One of the prime factors involved is the relatively low level of education, particularly among the rural population. Until 1978 children were sent to Walvis Bay for their schooling. As a result of the interest shown lately in the Topnaar community, a primary school (partially financed by the Department of Nama and Rehoboth Affairs) was built at Iduseb. Even today most young people do not continue beyond primary school and the margin of the adults are illiterate or near-illiterate, as Table 9 below indicates. It is only in exceptional cases that children complete high school and even more rarely do they do any training following that. I know of only two such cases. One girl trained as a nurse, another as a secretary.

TABLE 9: Levels of Education of Total Adult Population Along River and Delta and 35 Adults of the Urban Sample.

|                  | No Educ. | Sub A | Sub B | Std. 1 | Std. 2 | Std. 3 | Std. 4 | Std. 5 | Std. 6 | Std. 8 | Total |
|------------------|----------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Number of Adults | 67       | 6     | 10    | 17     | 10     | 16     | 11     | 5      | 7      | 1      | 150   |
| %                | 45%      | 29%   |       |        | 21%    |        |        | 5%     |        |        |       |

#### RELIGION AND BELIEF

Except for five individuals, who are Catholics, all the other Topnaar of my sample are Lutheran. The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELK), of which the Rhenish Mission was the forerunner,

has a long history in the area, as well as in the country as a whole. In spite of the fact that in 1824/25, the London Missionary Society (in 1840 and again 1845) and the Wesleyans expressed an interest in the area (Schmelen, 1918: 222; Goldblatt, 1971: 12; Tindall, 1959: 70), it was the Rhenish Mission which established the first station in 1846. It was situated at the present Rooibank on the southern river bank and initially named Scheppmansdorf in honour of the first Rhenish missionary there. During the incumbency of the last Lutheran missionary, a new church was built on the northern bank, as the old one became dilapidated and in 1952 was demolished. Fortnightly Sunday services are held here for the rural community by a local evangelist. Until recently the urban congregation did not have their own pastor, but this has changed with the arrival of a woman pastor for the whole Lutheran community of Kuisebmond. Even though she is stationed at Walvis Bay, she is meant to conduct burials and other special services for the rural community as well.

A small church had existed since 1910 at Swartbank. It was built by a certain Edgar Dunn (Van Sending to Kerk, 1967: 61). After many years, it was demolished and rebuilt in a different place at Swartbank. However, a church is to be re-erected on the original spot and is to be called 'Boskerk' after the original.

On very rare occasions I was given glimpses of what must have once been a wealth ritual and belief, which T. Hahn (1881) has recorded. I witnessed only one ritual during fieldwork, and

that was cursorily performed. It was to bless a new oms or house and to honour the deceased ancestors. This ritual involved the slaughtering of a goat and the smearing of the fresh blood first around the navel and then on the stomachs of the participants. At the same time the ancestors were requested to keep hunger from the new oms. Following this all participants ate from a big pot of meat.

The meaning of the stone cairns all along the Kuiseb River are known to a few people only. Young people in particular say they have seen and wondered about them, but have never bothered to find out about them. It seemed that even adults knew little about them. Those who did called them !o !obob instead of Haitse Aibeb, as elsewhere in the country. Most of them are traditional burial places, (Sandelowsky, 1977) in which the corpse has been buried in a squatting position. When once I was walking towards a modern grave-yard with the usual type of grave, some informants started reciting a verse, which addressed the dead: It started with '!Gâise #nu re ...' (namely, 'Sit well, you ...') referring to the squatting position in which corpses were previously buried. On the same occasion my informants initiated me into their area by again reciting a verse and drawing a black line with coal across my forehead. This referred to an old custom of theirs, whereby the ancestors are requested to help a newcomer into an area to pick out edible plants, so that in spite of his ignorance of the area he would not be allowed to die of hunger. A slightly different interpretation is given to this ritual by Schapera (1930: 289). Basing his argument on Hoernlé, he

claims that it is a means whereby a newcomer to an area protects himself from and propitiates the ancestors who haunt a certain locality.

Certain notions about death and illness being caused by supernatural means exist along the river, but it has been difficult to find any exact information. When I asked informants about these, they would do one of two things: they either appealed to their own Christian beliefs and claimed they did not believe in anything else; or they would (or could) not elaborate, maintaining that White people, for various reasons, had difficulty in understanding these matters. One aspect of these beliefs is that the jealousy of poorer individuals may result in ailments in those possessing coveted material objects, abilities or even conjugal partners. An elderly man once complained about pains in his joints, which I immediately thought were caused by rheumatism or arthritis. I was surprised when he said the cause of it was witchcraft ("Ek is getoor"). When I asked him, why he thought he was the object of witchcraft, he said, pointing to his kraal: "Can't you see? I have the goats. I have the cattle." He was referring to the fact that not only did he have a relatively large herd of animals, in itself a reason for envy by others, but in addition, the herd included some cattle, the ownership of which is particularly prestigious. Similarly it is maintained that a certain young man had been getoor (that is, bewitched) for his ability to preach, and that this had caused his premature death. Sometimes people may not die as a result of the jealousy of others, but may become demented.

It is said of a woman, who seemed slightly mentally deranged, that she had been hard-working once, had dressed well and had had a good informal husband. Apparently the jealousy of less fortunate individuals caused her husband to leave and her to become mentally ill.

Most people along the river claim to suffer from physical ailments owing to supernatural means. In many instances they will refer to it as 'biljas', 'Damara-siekte' or 'kaffer-siekte'. The implication of these names is that these ailments are caused by objects of sorcery referred to as 'medisyne' acquired from people other than Topnaar. Topnaar themselves claim not to be in possession of 'medisyne', but individuals may consult people with such means outside the Topnaar area. These people are mostly Damara in Okombahe, but also in Walvis Bay, or they may be Herero, hence the name 'Damara-' or 'kaffer-siekte'. The implications then is that these 'toordokters' (that is, sorcerers) with the aid of their 'medisyne' (that is, paraphernalia) will produce an ailment in an opponent of the person who is consulting him. Unfortunately I have no further information on this point.

Just as witchcraft produces illness or death, gossip and, particularly when it is mingled with censure, produces the same effects. Topnaar, constantly trying to avoid open conflict, will not accuse or criticize anybody "in" (sic) or to their face. It is said that "a heavy word (that is a direct criticism, attack or censure) will rest heavily on

the heart" of the other person, who will become withdrawn, start pining and may eventually die. It is then said that "die hart het gaan staan" (that is, the heart stopped) owing to the "hartseer" (that is, heartache). When there was open and frequent gossip about a woman, who was said to have had an affair with the husband of another, her adult daughter once asked the gossiping women: "Do you want my mother to die?" She was referring to the fact that individuals are said to die as a result of gossip. Similarly, a young girl was ill-treating a woman slightly older than herself in the homestead of the bed-ridden mother of the other. The female foster-parent of the young girl was extremely upset about this. "What does Juslinde think she is doing? What will happen if the old woman says a word? That word will remain (lying) on her".

Should people want to remind others of money owed or a promise made and not yet kept, this is done in a very round-about and polite manner in an attempt to avoid open and direct conflict. An elderly lady once told me that she had given a man with connections in the south of the country R500 to buy her a second-hand vehicle. He had taken the money, but had not returned to the Kuiseb for many months. This by no means being a small sum of money, I was greatly surprised when she did not approach him directly when eventually he did return. After she had spent about half a day with him, I asked her rather anxiously: "Did you not ask for your money back?" By this time I was certain that he was not going to buy her the vehicle, as he had come back without it, nor had he

offered an explanation. She stalled by saying: "No, he looks tired. The sun must have been very hot at Oswater". I did not find the eventual turn of conversation, but when I returned she had her vehicle.

#### PRESENT POLITICAL ISSUES

As has been shown the Topnaar community in Walvis Bay and along the Kuiseb River have been virtually ignored by the authorities since the turn of the century, in-so-far as they have had no formal political representation, nor been allocated a Reserve. The Germans started allocating reserves to the Herero and Nama after the Nama revolt of 1904 - 1907. The Topnaar were not included in this process. Similarly the South African Government which ruled Namibia under mandate after the first World War and which continued the resettling of Black people into reserves, did not include the Topnaar in this process. Even the small group of people at Sesfontein to the north were put under the jurisdiction of a resident Native Commissioner. Possibly the reason behind this apathetic political approach was that a handful of people ( $\pm 500$ ) hardly warranted the administrative effort and that the eventual plan was to resettle them in the south of the country.

Elsewhere in the country as a whole, land was expropriated from Black inhabitants by colonialists setting up farms. This started at the beginning of the century only on the eastern side of Topnaar occupied territory. Farms on the

edge of the Namib desert were surveyed at the beginning of the century, but the presence of White farmers did not immediately affect the largely pastoral existence of the Topnaar in the central Namib desert.

At Walvis Bay Topnaar have been accustomed to the presence of Europeans for the last three centuries (see Chapter 2). during the inauguration of a new headman in 1981, speakers repeatedly mentioned, '... we sold Walvis Bay to the English with (that is, for) a cup of water'. This refers to the historical fact that the English landed at the coast and being in need of fresh water, asked this of the resident Topnaar. This, it is maintained, was the beginning of the subsequent procedures which ended in Khaxab, the Topnaar 'kaptein' at the time, losing Walvis Bay to the English.

Thus, Walvis Bay, with its large surrounding territory, has always been associated with White rule. This is not the case with the land along the river. The expropriation of this land by the administration and the negation of Topnaar rights to it began in earnest two decades ago. In 1904 a large tract of land north of the Kuiseb River was declared a game park by the German colonial authorities. 'Wild Reservat 3' as it was called was developed by the South African administration only in the 1960s and has since been enlarged on at least two occasions. The present 'Namib-Naukluft-Park' encompasses an area of 2 340 150 hectare. Most of it extends to the north and only a small section to the south

of the river. The municipal area of Walvis Bay is excluded from it. The Topnaar living along most of the river are consequently subject to the regulations pertaining to a game reserve whereas those living near and in the delta fall within the municipal area of Walvis Bay. Nature Conservation regulations include prohibition of hunting (an important traditional source of sustenance for these people), an indirect constraint on mobility and the sizes of herds. The symbol of the presence of the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism is its administrative and research station at Gobabeb. The Topnaar strongly resent the role played by the Department in an area which on the basis of continued and long occupation they consider to be theirs. Hand-in-hand with this issue are the numerous and repeated threats and attempts on the part of the Administration to have the Topnaar removed from the river area and resettled in the Nama homelands to the south.

Through the new political channels of the headman and his raad and their possible future representation on the two tier government the Topnaar are trying to fight this obvious disregard for themselves and their rights to the area. They are less concerned with the removal of the Department itself, for they realise this to be an impossibility. In this regard they mention the filming crews who come to the park to make films on desert life. In these films, they claim, it is animal life that is portrayed, and viewers of these films will never know that human beings too are part of the desert. Similarly, they were never consulted or informed

by the authorities concerned about plans to establish a game park. Gobabeb itself began as a result of a scientist from the Transvaal asking permission to park his caravan at the site. Subsequent developments such as the fencing of the immediate area of Gobabeb, the erection of buildings and the fencing of ever bigger areas of the land around, were all done without consultation. To a lesser degree the Topnaar are also concerned with the exploitation of resources, that is pasturage and water, of which they were previously the sole users.

Similar sentiments are held with regard to the presence of the Department of Water Affairs. The activities of this administrative department are directly related to those of the Rössing Uranium Mine which is the largest uranium mine in the world and situated some 50 km north-east of Swakopmund (see Map 1). Water is pumped across the desert to Rössing from the central pumping station at Rooibank through a network of pipe-lines and substations. In this way vast amounts of the most valuable resources of the desert are exploited with no immediate benefit for the Topnaar. On the contrary, they claim, the water level has been dropping in their man-made wells, and up-stream trees and shrubs providing the only fodder are dying. This is substantiated by the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism, who in this regard support interests strongly conflicting with those of the Department of Water Affairs. In their defence officials of the latter department make the following claims: Firstly, concerning the Kuiseb River they are tapping only approximately one

seventh (that is, 9 million cubic metres per annum) of the total underground storage, which consists of 70 million cubic metres. Secondly, that the average recharge rate equals the amount extracted. Thirdly, that the extraction of water from the Kuiseb River was to be augmented by a similar but smaller project (an additional 8 million cubic metres) from the Omaruru River north of Swakopmund. Eventually this was to be further augmented by water gained from a desalination plant in the vicinity of Swakopmund (Informal lecture given by Water Affairs officer, August 1979, University of Stellenbosch).

In the meantime the full-scale running of the desalination plant has proved non-viable owing to practical problems; and the Omaruru Scheme produces only brackish water unsuitable for domestic use (pers. comm. H. Nachenius).

Again the Topnaar resent their loss of rights more than they do the exploitation of vast amounts of water. To them Rooibank has come to 'belong to Water Affairs', meaning it is that department which has the right to build houses, sink boreholes and construct roads. In short, it is the officials of the department who make the laws and the Topnaar who have to obey them. This is particularly painful, because Rooibank, apart from being an old Topnaar site, also has historical significance for it was there that the first mission station was established and it is there that the last Topnaar 'kaptein', Piet #Eibib was buried. Resentment runs particularly high when people read in the Walvis Bay newspaper of tenders being called for the building of a picnic site for the Whites of Walvis Bay.

The presence of two administrative departments in the area and the infringement of Topnaar rights, as well as previous attempts to resettle this small group of people have become political issues of some magnitude in a situation where attempts are being made to keep political friction to a minimum.

#### PRESENT POLITICAL CHANNELS

Since their last 'kaptein', Piet #Eibib, died on the 27th October 1910 the Topnaar have had no form of official political representation. In 1974 a certain Argylle Stephenson was referred to as being their leader. Argylle Stephenson was a relative of Piet #Eibib on the maternal side, his paternal relatives coming from a different line, as his name suggests. Argylle Stephenson was accepted only informally as a leader and not as an official 'kaptein'. This situation changed with constitutional alterations in the rest of the country.

In 1975 Dirk Mudge, then deputy leader of the Nationalist Party, defected from his party, and the Turnhalle Conference was formed. The subsequent shift of executive power from the Nationalist party to the Turnhalle Conference has brought with it an emphasis on the necessity of ethnic representation in its three tier system of government. In the summer of 1978 a temporary headman was appointed by the current Administrator-General. At the beginning of 1980 an election was held for

a successor. A leading personality in the urban Topnaar community suggested five candidates, of whom one would be headman, and the rest would form his 'raad' or council. The five were chosen primarily on the basis of their literacy and interest in the community. Three were related to the old headman. The election was held on the 6 March, 1981 at Rooibank with 153 votes cast, mostly by people along the river.

The son of the old headman won the election by a vast majority. The candidates were hardly equally matched. The new headman was by far the most experienced in administrative matters and the most highly educated of all the candidates. During the years in which his father had been headman, he had accompanied the elderly man to meetings and had lately himself dealt with local administrative matters.

In July 1981 the new headman was formally inducted, an occasion of extreme importance to the Topnaar. Informants saw it also as a sad occasion, owing to the small number of White officials present, in contrast to the numbers of Black dignitaries. The occasion was extensively used by speakers to emphasise Topnaar rights in the area and their strong opposition to the infringement of these rights. The intention was expressed of fighting for the recognition of these rights through the new political avenues open to the Topnaar, such as representation on the Nama Raad, the body of Nama representation on the second (ethnic) tier of government. The fight for recognition of their rights was under way at the end of 1981. In every settlement the favourite topic of

conversation revolved round the wrongs perpetrated by the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism.

The latest developments have taken a different turn. Topnaar are now questioning the legal basis for the presence of the administration. The background to the purchase of the rural area by the Germans in 1885 was given in the previous chapter. The validity of this contract of purchase between the Topnaar and the Germans is now questioned and thereby the very basis of the presence of the administration in the area, as this forms part of the Mandate ruled by the South African government after World War 1. This much was put into a letter sent both to the present Administrator-General as well as to the Nama Raad. One result was a visit to the area by members of the latter. The response of these gentlemen was not very supportive, which made many Topnaar consider that possibility of help from that quarter will remain remote. Furthermore, they fear that having officially expressed their claims and complaints, which seem to be considered revolutionary, their future representation on this important body may be in jeopardy. They are, however, determined to continue their struggle, for they are not going to be forgotten people again.

CHAPTER 4

RESIDENCE AND SETTLEMENT:  
THE CHANGING COMPOSITION OF HOUSEHOLDS

The previous two chapters provided some information on the background of the people concerned and the relevant historical and other conditions of the Kuiseb River area. The theme of the present chapter is the nature of domestic groups in the area and their changing social composition. I shall first consider the social composition of all such groups along the river, as they existed in 1978, and then discuss their dynamic nature and illustrate this with special cases. Before turning to the description and analysis of households, some relevant theoretical issues need to be raised.

#### THE DEFINITION OF 'HOUSEHOLD' AND ITS CYCLICAL DEVELOPMENT:

One of the issues central to the present topic is the distinction between the concepts of 'household' and 'homestead' as used by anthropologists.

One notable attempt at a distinction between these two concepts dates back to Fortes's Tallensi material. The 'homestead' he saw as ...

"the domicile of a domestic family. The edifice of pile and thatch and its occupants, (which) constitutes a single entity" (1949: 44).

The 'household', on the other hand, he defined as a single economic unit all the members of which are mutually dependent on one another for production of their common food supply

supply and satisfaction of most other wants. It is essentially a "pooling of labour and skill, of utilising land in common, of drawing on food, livestock and some extent monetary resources built up by joint effort for the benefit of any member of the unit ..." (Fortes, 1949: 54). Two more recent authors Murray (1976a, 1981) and Spiegel (1979, 1980) have also concerned themselves with the distinction between these two concepts and their application to Lesotho. Their definitions follow those of Fortes. They define the two concepts in the following way: "A homestead is the area occupied by those members of the household who are resident in Lesotho ..." (Murray, 1976a:55 ff). The implication of this statement is that there are other members of the household who are not resident in Lesotho but are employed in commercial centres elsewhere. In a descriptive sense the homestead comprises " ... one or two or several huts, often forming the apices of a small enclosure ... bounded by mud-brick walls or a high reed fence". In an analytical sense, the homestead refers to that part of the household members that co-reside as well as the material base of the household, namely the land, the huts and equipment, the stock (Spiegel, 1979:50 ff). Spiegel accepts and uses Murray's definition of homestead for the purpose of recording household membership in the field. He does suggest, though, that once one is concerned with the development of the household, the definition of the homestead will have to be extended.

Whereas the concept of homestead is defined in terms of spatial and material criteria, this is not the case with the

concept 'household', to which these criteria do not apply. As did Fortes, Murray defines households in terms of economic criteria: It is "... an aggregation of individuals within which are concentrated the flows of income and expenditure generated by the activities or its members" (1967a:54). This definition is intended to deal with a situation in which young working males are absent from the rural village for the major of their working lives. Yet these absentee migrants continue to the de jure members of the rural households by their continuing responsibility of contributing towards the livelihood of the village. Hence energies and resources are concentrated in a social aggregate, which is not necessarily a co-residential group. Nor is it, however, a kinship group, because of its varying kinship structure, although it may have a kinship base.

Spiegel (1979:50) points out the difficulty in delineating the rather wide unit or 'aggregate' as used by Murray and mentions that, allowing for more impersonal relationships, this could imply the rural community as a whole. This seems to be a basic problem with the definition of 'household'

using a criterion of economic co-operation. Spiegel tries to avoid this problem and seeks to find boundaries for it by referring to the cyclical development of the homestead (which can be delineated in material terms) and the rights of its members to resources such as land.

The distinction between the two concepts of 'household' and 'homestead' is an important one to make, as each of these may be differently applied to different settlements along the Kuiseb River. I shall show how the concept 'homestead' may only be applied to the self-generated settlements, whereas the concept 'household' is applicable to domestic groups found in either kind of settlement.

Aspects related to the framework of 'the development cycle of domestic groups' is the second theoretical point I wish to consider. This paradigm was postulated by Fortes (1958) and briefly it holds that the lifecycle of an individual is related to the cycle of development of the domestic group or household of which he is a member. Changes in composition of households are determined by intraneous factors, such as the biological maturation of its members, and extraneous factors, such as the politico-jural factors of the society at large. The interplay between these two sets of factors determines the phases of development through which the household will go. These are, firstly, the phase of expansion, secondly, the phase of fission, and lastly, the phase of replacement. The first phase lasts from the marriage of a couple until

the completion of their family of procreation. The second phase begins with the marriage of the oldest child and continues until all children are married. This results in the breaking up of the group, as children leave to establish their own domestic groups. The final phase ends with the death of the parents and the "replacement in the social structure of the family of the parents by the newly created families of their children" (Fortes, 1958:10).

Fortes's paradigm has since become widely accepted and used in Social Anthropology (see for instance, Goody, 1958) as a model which explains the dynamic nature of household units. It has subsequently been adapted in order for it to be applicable to situations diverging economically, politically and socially from those referred to by earlier authors.

Fortes's original paradigm, as well as most of the more recent adaptations, had only limited use to the present area. For instance, it was useful for the analysis of only isolated domestic units along the Kuiseb River. One reason for this was the difficulty in determining an average or normal life-cycle for the majority of individuals, the basic assumption underlying the model. In only a few cases an ideal life-cycle could be established and, hence, the subsequent remotely orderly phases of development of these specific households. This happened under rather exceptional conditions, which will be outlined.

But Fortes's paradigm was of some use to the present study in that it provided a potential for incorporating spatial facets- albeit in a limited way-which are inevitably part of domestic organisation. Fortes holds that "... residence patterns are the crystallisation, at any one time, of the development process" of a particular unit (1958:3); and, more importantly, that certain processes of domestic organisation are reflected in residential, spatial arrangements. The most obvious factor determining residence is that of marriage. It is the change in residential arrangements of the members of domestic units owing to shifting alignments, for instance following marriage, which is the prime concern of the present study. This is the topic of the following three chapters.

In contrast to Fortes, Murray (1976a, 1981) and Spiegel (1979, 1980) are more interested in the material development of households than their changing social composition. Adapting Fortes' paradigm, they have used it to explain social differentiation in Lesotho, which is based on the fact that Sesotho men leave their rural homes to become employed elsewhere. This adapted paradigm, similar to Fortes's original one, has only some use for the analysis of changing households along the river. I have described elsewhere how the Kuiseb River area is different from those rural areas subject to influx control regulations and similar to those rural areas falling within 'Coloured Labour Preference' areas. Hence the kind of oscillating movements which Sesotho

men are forced into are not found along the Kuiseb River. This again has certain implications for the composition of households along the river and their changing composition, since men choose to take their wives and children with them and recruit other kin to look after their homesteads. The framework as used by Murray and Spiegel is, however, applicable in so far as it provides a tool in explaining how existing households in certain settlement change in a cyclical way when their heads establish homesteads in other settlements. These cyclical changes in household composition are, however, not the only ones occurring and another framework needs to explain the more sporadic residential changes.

The paradigm as used by Murray and Spiegel is applicable in the present context insofar as it points out the number of cases encountered where households did not conform to the 'model' developmental cycle, but fell by the wayside. Murray (1981:56 ff) has dealt with this problem particularly as it is related to the breaking up of the marriage bond of the household head and his spouse. He has pointed out how this can produce problems in trying to define the household as a unit considering its fluctuating composition and, further, that these households do not reach the phase of social and material maturity as predicted by any framework of household development. In fact, all paradigms dealing with household development seem to have been built on the basic assumption that marriage should be stable. Along the Kuiseb River marriage is extremely brittle and is characterised by individuals going through a series of monogamous conjugal

relationships. It follows that households where the head has had one stable conjugal relationship should develop differently than those where the head has had a series of conjugal relations. Furthermore, these paradigms imply that the head of a household should be male. Along the river a small number of households have been recorded where the heads were relatively young women, who had built up their own homestead over the years without having had a continuous conjugal relationship with a man. This point will be pursued further in Chapter 6.

One of the criticisms levelled at Fortes's paradigm is that it is unable to deal with "processes of lineal change" (Boonzaier, 1980: i) or such changes emanating from the macro level of society rather than the micro level. Boonzaier reports that in the Richtersveld a process of "social differentiation has taken place ... which has tended to concentrate farming activities in the hands of a few wealthy farmers, while the remainder of the population has become progressively involved solely in migrant labour" (1980:143). Spiegel (1980), too, gives evidence suggesting a process of nascent class formation in Lesotho and holds that this has certain implications for the cyclical development of some households compared with others.

Along the Kuiseb River phases of development of households were ascertained mainly in cases where the heads were considered to be wealthy. In such instances where the heads were not wealthy, there was little indication of change in social composition evolving cyclicly.

Spiegel (1980) further suggests that what seemed to be a 'typical' development pattern for households in Lesotho at one time, may become atypical at some other time. He holds that such extraneous factors as land laws and changing labour recruitment patterns may be the cause of this.

On a more recent visit to the river following the period of more extensive fieldwork, I noticed a considerable increase of personnel in certain households: mostly kin, but a few individuals with no kinship connections with Topnaar household members, had taken up residence along the river. This I suggest is related to two extraneous factors: firstly, the severe droughts in the whole of the country over the last two years in particular and, secondly, the progressive decline of the fishing industry in Walvis Bay. These extraneous factors, it seems, could contribute towards changing any 'typical' development pattern of households that may have existed along the river.

Using the analytical distinction made between 'household' and 'homestead', I shall describe how these may be differently applied to different domestic units along the river. I will point out the differential composition, firstly, from a synchronic point of view. Secondly, I shall show how changes in social composition vary between settlements. Where applicable I shall attempt to compare the present situation with those of the authors mentioned above.

A SYNCHRONIC VIEW OF HOUSEHOLD(a) The Administration Centres

In 1978 there were a total of 70 Topnaar living in the administrative centres. This figure included all the children normally resident at Iduseb during the school-terms and also those men who were in a marginal position, having been partly incorporated into the Topnaar section of the population. These people were distributed among 17 domestic groups. Four of these units were at Gobabeb and had a total membership of 14; 9 were at Rooibank with a membership of 37; and 2 were at Mile Seven with a membership of 10 and a further 2 were at Wortel consisting of 9 people (see Table 10 below).

TABLE 10: Distribution of Population in Households in Administrative Centres

|                      | Gobabeb | Rooibank | Mile Seven | Wortel | TOTAL |
|----------------------|---------|----------|------------|--------|-------|
| Number of Households | 4       | 9        | 2          | 2      | 17    |
| Number of People     | 14      | 37       | 10         | 9      | 70    |

The average size of these households was 4, which is two-thirds the size of households in the self-generated settlements. The structure of these aggregates, with three exceptions was that of an elementary family, consisting largely, apart from

the male head and his conjugal partner, of her children rather than their common children. The sizes and structure of these units is related to administrative policy, which is enforced to a lesser or greater extent. Administrative officers try to restrict the occupants of administrative apartments in these centres to their male employees and their immediate families. This applies particularly to the main centres of Gobabeb, Rooibank and Wortel and less so to Mile Seven, which is a secondary station only.

Of the 17 males heads of households 10 were Topnaar men or men more or less completely incorporated into the Topnaar section of the population. The other 7 men were still in an intermediary position. All had at the time a Topnaar spouse living with them, except for a widower who, however, had been married to a Topnaar woman.

When I consider household composition from a diachronic perspective in the next sub-section of this chapter, I shall describe how men employed in the centres may establish a homestead in one of the self-generated settlements very much along the lines reported by Spiegel (1980, 1981) and Murray (1979, 1980) for Lesotho. Of the 17 males employed only 3 had done so by 1978, although this figure increased considerably by 1981 (see Chapter 3). Two of the 3 men with homesteads in one or the other self-generated settlement were considered Topnaar, whereas the third man had lived in the area for over 25 years. These household heads were on

average older than other male employees, namely 50 compared with 35 years. Two of the three were formally married, whereas the third had an informal conjugal relationship of long standing, which was considered by all as a formal marriage.

In addition to these households there were others, which were not included in my discussion, as they are not relevant to the present analysis of mobility. They included the following people: white administrative staff living spatially separate from the Topnaar section of the population, and further black staff, mostly from Owambo, working on a contract basis. These latter were also involved in a degree of movement, but for reasons very different from those determining the movements of Topnaar. I shall include individuals belonging to these latter households in my discussion only where they are relevant to questions related to movements of Topnaar.

Households in the administrative centres showed a similarity with those in the privately-owned business enterprises. I shall briefly discuss the latter, before suggesting some analytical questions relating to both areas.

(b) The Privately-owned Business Enterprises

In 1978 there were extant two households in the two business enterprises. One of these was Eggmore Farm and consisted

of a male head from outside Topnaar-occupied territory, his conjugal partner and four of her own children and one foster-child, all from the river. The other unit consisted of a single man. He had recently severed a conjugal relationship and was living at Mile 6. Hence 8 Topnaar lived in the business enterprises in 1978, excluding the man from outside the area.

As in the administrative centres, housing was provided by the employers, but it was of extremely low standard compared with, for instance, Gobabeb. At Eggmore Farm housing consisted of a shack within the chicken enclosure, a makeshift protection against the wind and sand. At the piggery at Mile Six the dilapidated room stood within a few metres of the sties. In both these settlements there was no running water nor any washing facilities close to the buildings.

No homestead had been established by any of the individuals living at either Eggmore Farm or Mile Six.

I have mentioned elsewhere how Topnaar men mostly are forced to become wage labourers at some time during their lives. The administrative centres and business enterprises offer such possibilities which some men choose to make use of. The men who take up this employment become heads of households, while women set themselves up as their conjugal partners. This is in contrast to households in the self-generated settlements where women, too, may be heads. Because of the administrative

and other regulations pertaining to these particular settlements, the household groups are two-generational and have the structure of an elementary family. Exceptions to this are such cases where the head has established a homestead in one of the self-generated settlements. These households show a variability in social composition and size which I will deal with presently. Households in these two types of settlements, again excluding the three cases mentioned, are readily definable in spatial and economic terms. In fact the criteria of commensality, co-residence, kinship and economic cooperation all coincide, namely the elementary family occupies an apartment spatially distinct from other similar apartments; it is fed from the monthly salary of the household head and in domestic and other economic activities the couple (and children) co-operate. This situation changes once the household surpasses this phase in its development.

As I am considering shifting alignments from the rural rather than from the urban perspective, my material on households in Walvis Bay is less extensive than that on households along the river. From less detailed information on six households in Kuisebmond, but from more intimate knowledge of two, they seem more similar in size and composition to those in the self-generated settlements than to those in the administrative centres and business enterprises. This is very likely related to the fact that there are no restrictions on residence in the locations apart from the

initial allocation of housing. People along the river make excessive demands on relatives living in town, particularly for providing lodging for school-children and themselves. Consequently in some houses, there is a constant flow of visitors and it is often difficult to establish who the more permanent members of these extremely flexible households are.

#### A DIACHRONIC VIEW OF HOUSEHOLDS

##### (a) The Administrative Centres and the Privately - owned Business Enterprises

The social composition of households in the administrative centres changes at a different rate and for different reasons from that in the self-generated settlements. I shall consider the change in residential composition of households in one of the administrative centres, namely Gobabeb, as recorded on three different occasions. The first of these occasions was during my initial census of the population along the river and Walvis Bay in June/July 1978. The second was in April 1979 and the third in July 1981.

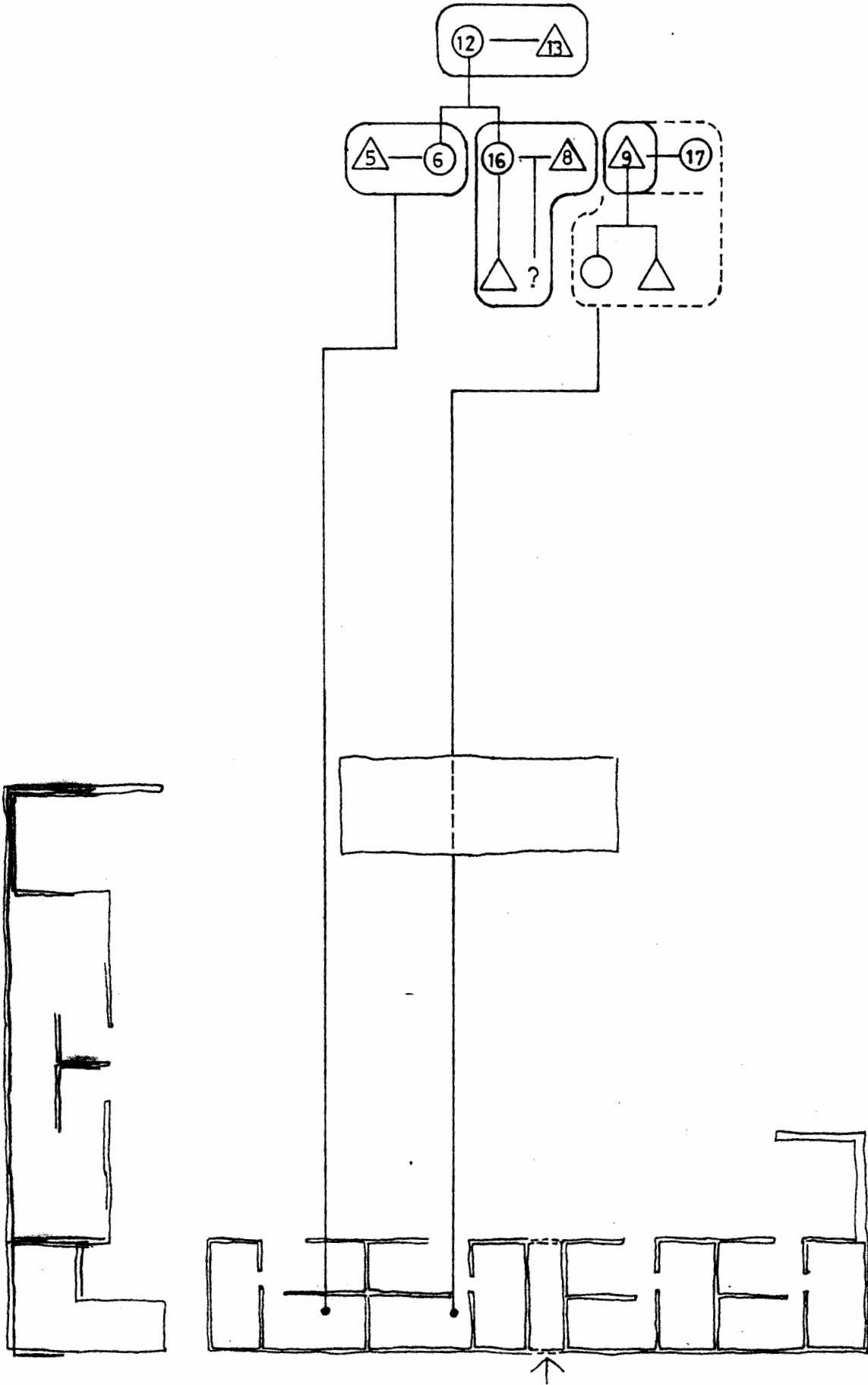
Gobabeb is the administrative centre which lies furthest up-river. Some 4km. down-river from it lies Sout Rivier and up-river from it lies #Natab, both self-generated settlements (see Map 2). It has been established as the centre for the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism.

It contrasts strongly with the surrounding desert and domestic structures found in the settlements. Approaching it one drives through an elaborate entrance beyond which is the brightly painted complex of white offices, garages, a library, common room, laboratories and a number of bigger and smaller houses and bungalows used by permanent and temporary staff. A few hundred meters beyond the ablution block intended for tourists are the houses occupied by the black staff, referred to as the lokasie (that is, location) or compound. The eight brick and cement apartments have been built by the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism and each consists of a kitchen and two bedrooms. These apartments form a rectangle at the open end of which is the ablution block. Some individuals have at different times made little gardens in the spaces adjoining apartments, growing mainly vegetables.

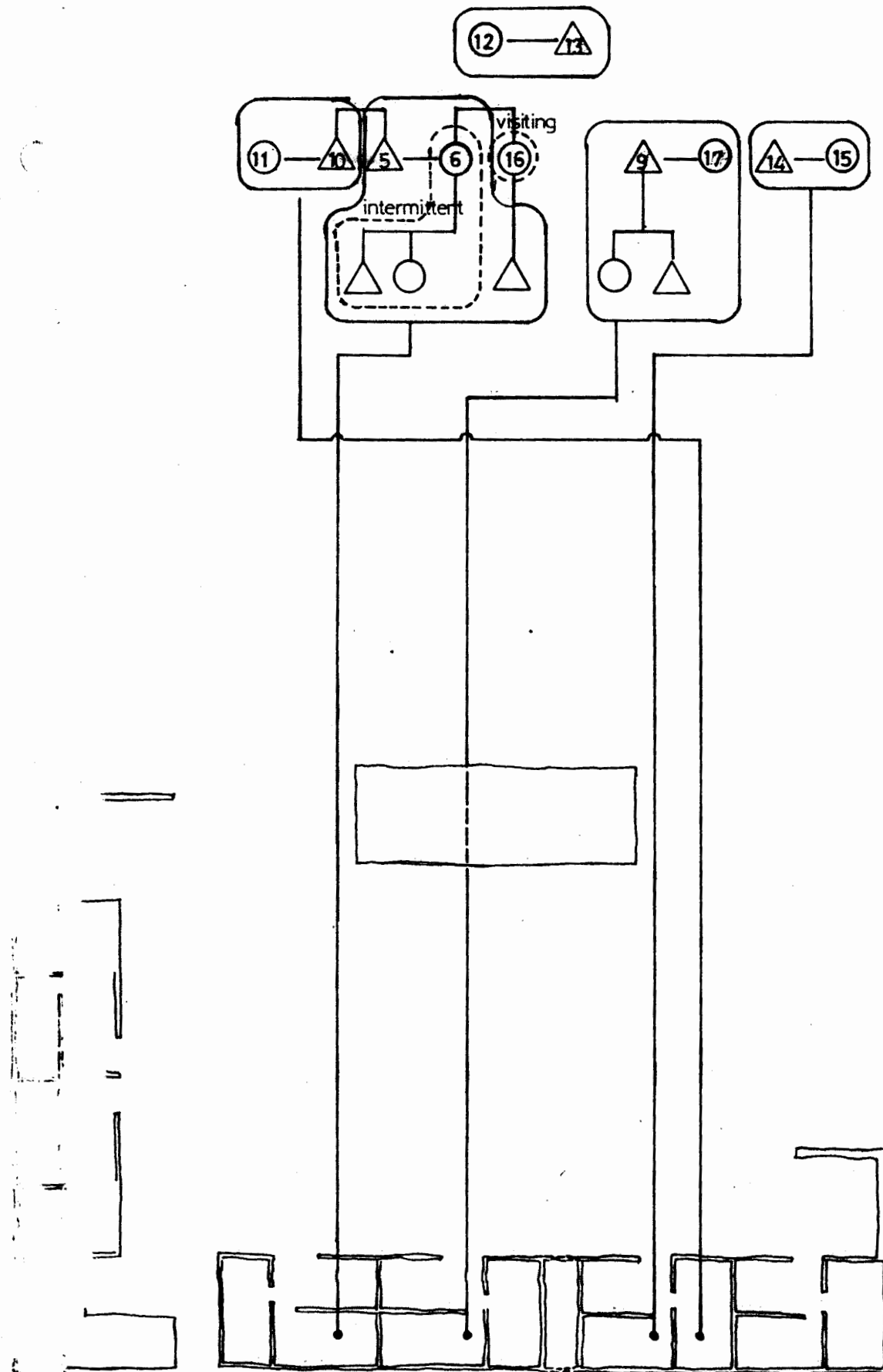
**CASE 1: The Changing social composition of Households at Gobabeb:**

In 1978 five men were employed at Gobabeb. Two of these men were formally married and a third had been informally married for some time. The other two were single. The oldest man, (1), lived in the very last apartment with his elderly wife, (2) (see diagram 4.1). Her daughter (3) was formally married to the second male employee, (4). This couple lived at the other end of the complex of apartments together with two foster children. The third man, (5), was informally married to (6) and they lived together with three of her children and a son of her sister. Two single men, (8) and (9), lived in two separate apartments of the complex. The older of the two, (9), was from outside Topnaar area.

By 1979 the two formally married couples, (1) and (2); and (3) and (4), and the younger man (8) had left



1981



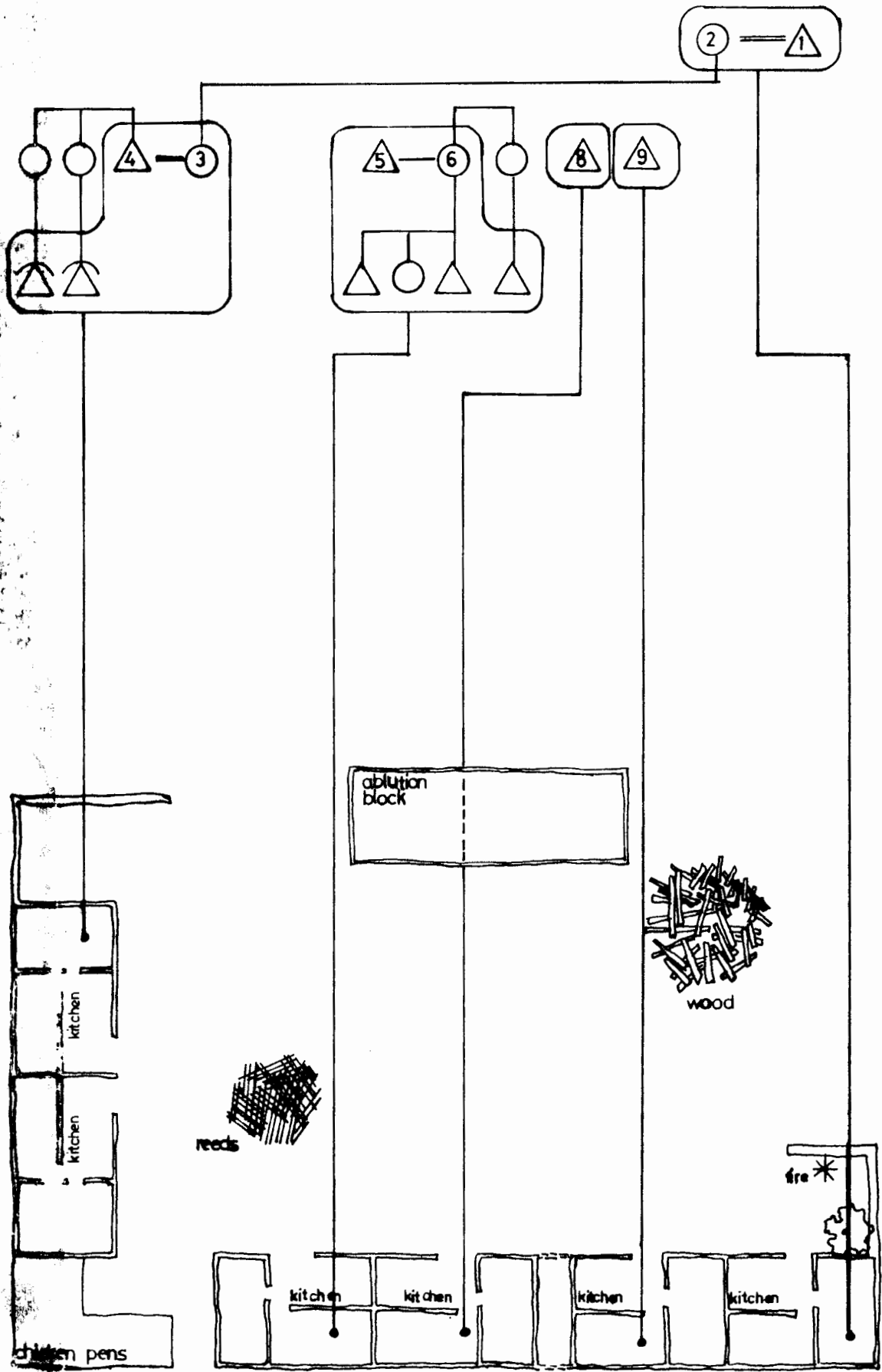
1979

Gobabeb. The two elderly men (1) and (2) had their own homesteads in two self-generated settlements and went to live there. The homestead of (1) was being cared for by his deceased brother's daughter; whereas in the case of (4) a half-brother and his wife's maternal uncle were tending his goats. The younger man (8) tried unsuccessfully to find employment in Walvis Bay. In place of the three men who had left, three other men had been newly employed. Two of these were all recently informally married, and some were related to existent employees and their wives (see diagram). The third (14) had established a conjugal relationship almost immediately after he arrived.

(5) and (6) were still at Gobabeb, their informal marriage was showing signs of breaking up. She had talked about leaving (5), on a number of occasions. At one stage she had actually moved to Rooibank where her previous formal husband lived. During this time, a young girl from Sout Rivier began making advances to (5), and this was extensively discussed by members of the household at Sout Rivier of which she was not a member. It was mentioned in particular, that she had hardly known (5) "when she had already asked him for money, namely R5". This girl was, however, informally married herself, her husband having been away on a !Nara harvest with his foster-parent. When he returned, I was told, he found out about her dealings, gave her "a good hiding" and forebade her to visit at Gobabeb. When other members of the homestead went to the centre over week-ends, she was seen to be staying at home, much to the amusement of the members of the other homestead at Sout Rivier, who had been closely observing her doings.

After some time, however, (6) returned to Gobabeb with her children. Her sister, (16), whose son she was raising, would occasionally come to visit her. By the end of 1979, the man from outside Topnaar area (9) had in the meantime taken a woman (17), from Sout Rivier as an informal wife. He had also brought two of his young children from Swakopmund to be cared for by her.

By 1981 there were fewer male employees at Gobabeb. There were now only four informally married couples. By then (5) had the longest service and his relationship with (6) was once again on a sounder footing. She was now living intermittently at Gobabeb, otherwise at Sout Rivier where the couple had started building a homestead. (12) and her husband (13) were still there. (8) had once again taken on employment, after having left the centre in 1979. He had recently married and this couple, too, had



1978

SPATIAL LAYOUT and SOCIAL COMPOSITION

GOBABEB



started establishing a homestead at Sout Rivier.

The former outsider (9) was still working at Gobabeb and his conjugal relationship with (17) was still going well. At week-ends the couple would go to Sout Rivier where her mother lived. His two children had practically been accepted as foster children by her mother.

Given the administrative constraints on the sizes of domestic units in the administrative centres, households there can change in only a limited number of ways. Those that are of concern to the study are the growth of these units owing to the establishment of a conjugal relationship by the household head with one of the local women; and the growth of these units owing to the household head establishing a homestead in one of the self-generated settlements. I shall consider these in turn.

The case above illustrates how women may vie for the favour of unmarried men employed in the administrative centres, in the light of the economic security offered in return for domestic and sexual favours. Hence most young men, both Topnaar and non-Topnaar, do not remain single for long. In the example of Gobabeb a number of such unions were contracted, some even before the men were employed. This practice of Topnaar women setting themselves up as conjugal partners to male employees was strongly criticised by a white member of staff at Rooibank, who saw his workers as being exploited in this way. He felt this to be the case particularly when the women brought their infants, who are then fed and clothed by the man.

From an analytical point of view these households grow in size as they instantly change from being a one-man-unit to that of being an elementary family. Once the head has become married, his household retains this structure as an elementary family, as new spouses and their children replace those that leave. Such a situation had almost come about in the case mentioned above. Furthermore, these specific households are 'easily definable on the ground'. They all have the same structure, namely an elementary family; they are spatially distinct, namely each living separately in a administrative apartment; and their members co-operate economically. Hence, three of the criteria whereby households have traditionally been defined by anthropologists coincide in these particular instances. This situation changes when the household head reaches a certain level of financial security and establishes a homestead in a self-generated settlement. As already mentioned, it is prohibited for anyone to own stock in any but self-generated settlements, and even in these indirect pressures are sometimes exerted to stop individuals from setting up a farming operation (see the case of Homeb to follow). Consequently, the household unit previously definable in spatial terms, now stretches over two types of settlements sometimes many kilometres apart. Furthermore, both the size and composition of these households change considerably. Whereas previously they could be identified structurally as consisting of an elementary family, they now acquire new members through the existence of the spatially separate homestead. The newly acquired homestead members

may be kin as shown in Case 1 above. In these instances, the kinship base is retained, even although the structure changes considerably. In some cases the new membership consists of non-kin, as will be shown presently. The only criterion whereby these households may now be defined is in terms of economic co-operation, and the theoretical issues that Murray (1976) and others have grappled with in an attempt to find a consistent definition become applicable here.

With a total population amounting to only 250 people, a comparison with ethnographic material from other areas can be done only tentatively. It is in this vein that the following comparison should be considered: on the whole, Topnaar men prefer to live with their wives and children and recruit other kin to tend their animals in the self-generated settlements. This situation should be similar to that found in other rural areas not subjected to the regulations of influx control. Along the river it is only those isolated cases as at Gobabeb and Sout Rivier where it is the wives and children who are homestead members. In all other cases, the homestead seems to lie too far away from the administrative centre to warrant men and their spouses being separated.

Secondly, men establishing a homestead in a self-generated settlement include men that are in the process of being incorporated into the Topnaar section of the population. They are granted permission to start farming on the basis of their continued residence in the area and their conjugal relations with a Topnaar spouse. In contrast to Topnaar men, these men

do not have a large body of kin to recruit from and they are thus forced to find other individuals to tend their goats during their absence from their homestead. This has certain implications for the composition of these particular households, for these household heads would recruit individuals other than Topnaar to their homesteads. An example in this regard is the following:

**CASE 2: The Changing Social Composition of  
the Household of an Outsider**

Ambrosius had lived in the area for over 25 years. He had come from Owambo and in 1952 started working for the Department of Water Affairs. When I arrived in 1978 he was in the process of digging a water-hole at Proeilaagte (see Map 2) having just finished the building of the houses or omdi. He was being helped by two men, who were working for him. These two men were not related to each other nor to the household head nor to anyone along the river. The wife of the household head later told me that "... Ambrosius (her husband) found them at the 'tip' (that is, the municipal dumping grounds, where individuals with no source of income often live and feed off the refuse). We brought them here, so that they may live on goat milk". One of the men was said to be an Angolan refugee, whereas the other was from Owambo, but had previously worked in Swakopmund for some time.

The composition of the homestead mentioned above shows that household heads in the process of being incorporated as Topnaar do not as yet dispose over the wide range of kin as do Topnaar heads. Hence, these household heads are forced to pursue other strategies in order to find personnel for their homesteads. As in the case above, this personnel may consist of outsiders, who are employed by the household head. The relationship between the two takes the form rather of a patron-client

relationship, than that couched in kinship morality as found between Topnaar. Following this, these household heads as well as the outsiders they employ, will not be involved to the same extent in the shifting of alignments as a means to gain access to resources as are their Topnaar counterparts.

The composition of households in the self-generated settlements firstly from a synchronic and then from a diachronic point of view will now be discussed.

#### HOUSEHOLDS IN THE SELF-GENERATED SETTLEMENTS: A SYNCHRONIC VIEW

The concept of 'homestead' as defined by Fortes (1949:44) and Murray (1976a:55 ff) is particularly applicable to the self-generated settlements and less so to the administrative centres. Homesteads on the northern bank of the river consist mostly of spatially distinct clusters of huts. An exception to this is Swartbank, which resembles a village. There homesteads are concentrated in an arc, merging into each other with little spatial boundaries between them (see diagram in appendix 2).

A homestead is composed of a number of domestic structures. A domestic structure is referred to as oms (omdi pl.). Schapera (1930:229) translates oms as hut, whereas in the Rust-Krönlein Nama-German Dictionary (1969:313) it is translated as 'house'. I have heard Nama speakers use the term oms both as is recorded by Schapera (1930:229) as well as for a number of adjacent

rooms, that is, huts with common 'walls'. Because of the difficulty in finding a suitable English equivalent for oms, I will use the Nama term as outlined above.

The homestead as a whole is most often referred to in the genitive as in Johanna di omdi (that is, the omdi of Johanna), and each oms is differentiated from other similar omdi on the basis of the most important activity performed within them. For instance, the cooking hut is called sīsen oms, that is, working-oms. An alternative term is steir, a word of Dutch origin referring particularly to a roofless shelter. It may also be referred to as a skerm, whereas the Afrikaans term kombūūs (sic) is used for a roofed cooking oms. A sleeping-oms is called a //goe!nā-oms (sing.) or //goe!nā-omdi,<sup>1</sup> if spatially distinct structures are implied, but //goe!nâ-oms (sing.) or //goe!nâ-omdi (pl.) when contiguous structures are implied. Nama speakers make this distinction, namely between an oral and nasal 'a' respectively, to distinguish between these two types of domestic structures.<sup>2</sup> There are however, no strict divisions of activities performed within these omdi. Cooking, sleeping, washing and socialising can be done within any of these omdi, including the domestic space surrounding them.

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1. There seems to be alternative interpretation of the two versions of this word; namely that //goe!nā-oms refers to a modern version, whereas //goe!nâ-oms is an older version, no longer used extensively. (W. Haacke, per comm.).
  2. I would like to thank Mr. J. Boois of the Bureau of Indigeous Languages for having pointed this out to me.

Furthermore, omdi are flexible structures, in contrast to the administrative apartments, and 'walls' are easily dismantled and re-constructed to expand or diminish space to suit new requirements.

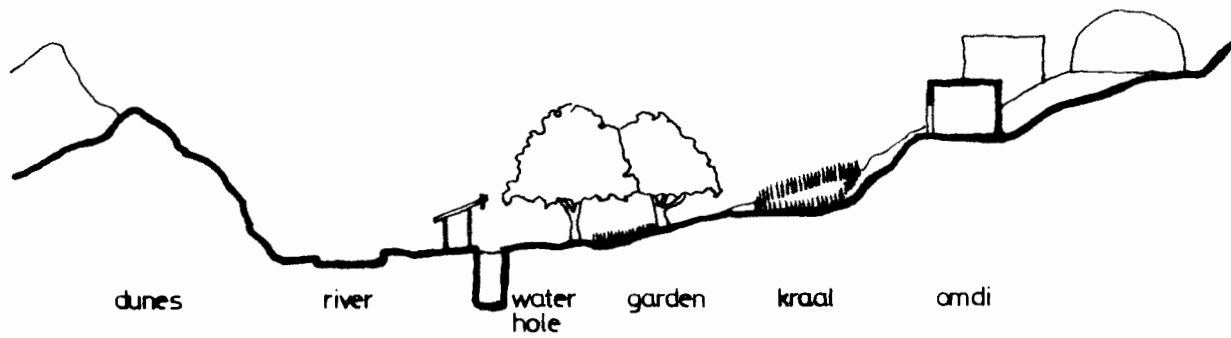
Haacke (1982) and Schultze (1907:277-232) give extensive descriptions of the appearance and method of construction of the traditional Nama rush-huts. These were once built along the Kuiseb as well, as is shown by Schultze (1907:262). Today omdi are constructed of the branches and bark of the two types of acacia (Acacia giraffae and Acacia ereola). Only a few still have a conical shape. The majority are rectangular, and are called haire-omdi (hais being wood (fem.)). They mostly are found further up-river. Further down-river and particularly in the delta where there is a shortage and even an absence of vegetation, omdi are built of synthetic materials such as sheets of corrugated iron and plastic sheeting. This building material is collected at the municipal dumping grounds just outside Walvis Bay. A trend towards more 'modern' Western-style omdi is noticeable.

This seems to be connected with status of individuals. Young relatively wealthy people will say: "I don't like these old-fashioned haire-omdi. They are for old people. I am still young. I want a square house of hard-board". It seems as though people are more prone to use Afrikaans terms for domestic structures in those homesteads where omdi are built in the 'modern' fashion, in contrast to Nama terms being used in those homesteads where this is not the case.

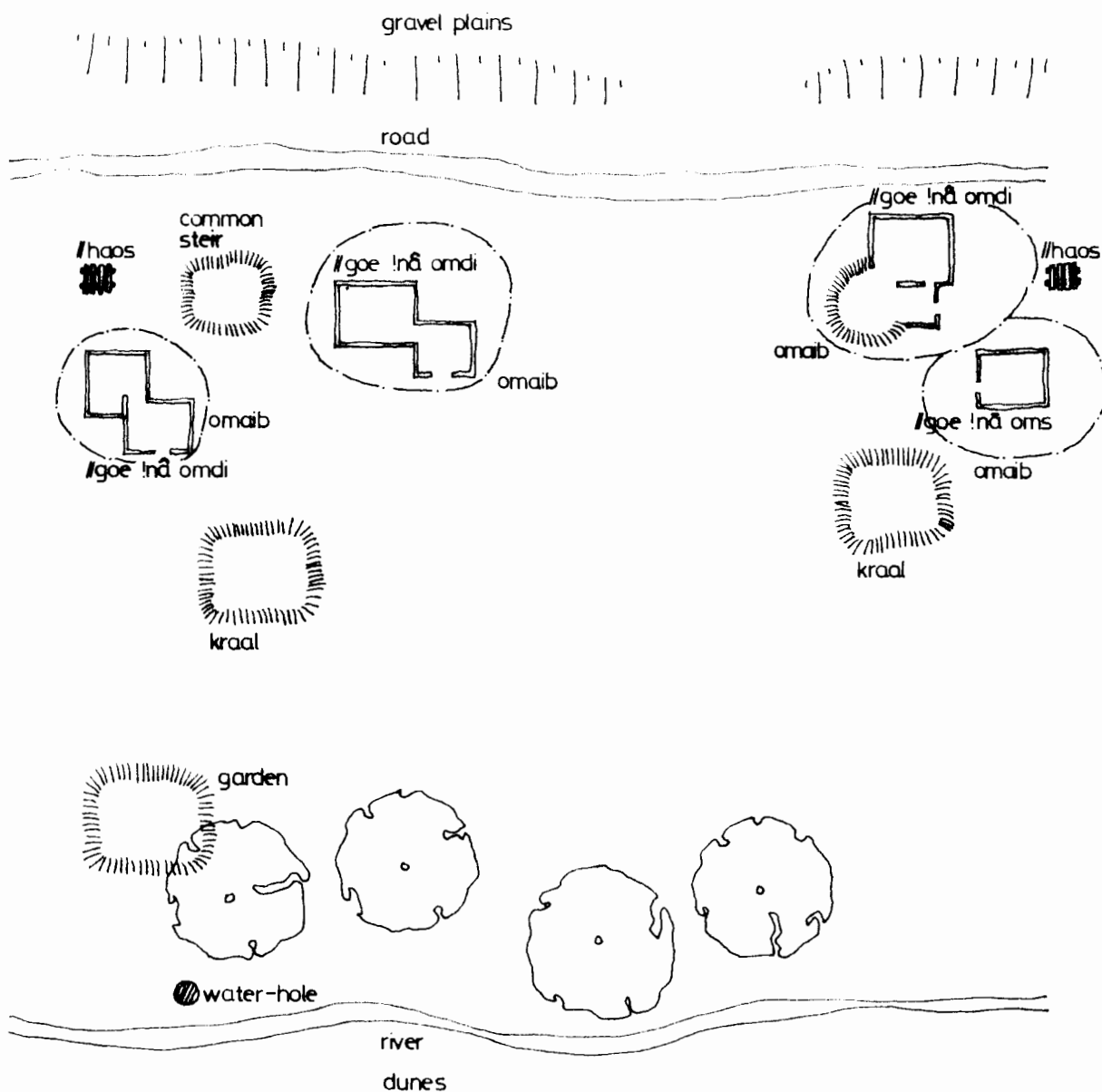
'Traditionally' every homestead had a roughly circular space surrounding it, which is called the omaib. Depending on the weather, entertaining, cooking, drinking of beer and children's games would take place within the omaib. Nobody was allowed to walk through it, unless he was a visitor. It was regularly raked or swept and kept meticulously clean. Today the term is still used, but it has lost much of its cultural significance. Informants could still point out various parts of it to me, such as oms!gâb (literally, 'the back' of the oms) or oms xoris and oms xō/khab, both terms meaning 'the sides of (the space around) the oms'. I have rarely observed people sweeping the omaib as a whole, even though they did sweep in front of omdi.

Many omdi, have, within immediate distance of the steir, a multi-purpose high table. It is built of tree trunks and branches and called a //haos. This is an extension of the steir, and cooking utensils not in daily use are stored on it. It is also used to store food, well out of reach of children and animals. A //haos is found at most !Nara patches as well, where the hessian bags filled with the processed !Nara kernels are kept until they are sold. In pre-European times these structures were also used along the coast for drying fish (Budack, 1977:20). These structures are, however, not particular to the Topnaar, but are known to be built by other Khoe as well (Schultze, 1907:232).

Homesteads often lie on the higher river terraces, because people fear the occasional heavy floods which destroy omdi



# SECTION



# IDEAL LAY-OUT OF A SELF-GENERATED SETTLEMENT

lying to close to the bank. If the terrain permits it, these homesteads are laid out in a way which the Topnaar consider to be the ideal (see Diagram 4.2). This is for the front of the omdi to face the goat kraals, which lie between the river and the homesteads. This is where the goats spend their time when in the settlement, as it is the site of the water holes. In settlements where homesteads are laid out in this fashion, people talk of the Topnaar omdi "facing the life", that is, the water and the ani als. This particular lay-out of omdi is to be found among other present-day Nama people as well (pers. com. Mr Boois). The Topnaar in particular will insist that with this specific location of homesteads, "the oms !gâb (that is, the back of the oms) face the Namib (gravel plains)". This pattern has lately been influenced by the Department of Water Affairs sinking bore-holes and erecting drinking troughs for animals in spots in the settlement which break up this pattern.

In June/July 1978 there were a total of 28 homesteads in the self-generated settlements. Twenty-five of these were households, 14 of which were headed by men and 11 by women. The remaining 3 were partial households, whose male heads and their families lived at Gobabeb Rooibank (see Table 11). At the time there were no homesteads where the household head and his family were living in Walvis Bay, even though a number of these were established during subsequent field-work periods. Some of these will be discussed presently.

A total of 90 people lived in the 14 male-headed homesteads. The average size of these was approximately 6, this being

higher than the average size of 4 in male-headed households in the administrative centres. The 11 female-headed households had a total membership of 71 people, with the same average size as those households headed by men. The remaining 17 people were distributed among the 3 homesteads that were partial households. The average age of the male household heads in the self-generated settlements are relatively higher (40) than that of household heads in the administrative centres (35). The marital status of these relatively elderly household heads ranged from single (6 out of 14) to formal marriage (5) or to informal marriage (3).

TABLE 12: Marital Status of Household Heads in the Self-Generated Settlements.

|                   | <u>Males</u> | <u>Females</u> |
|-------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Single            | 6            | 11             |
| Formal Marriage   | 5            | -              |
| Informal Marriage | 3            | -              |
| TOTAL             | 14           | 11             |

TABLE 13: Social Composition of Households in the Self-Generated Settlements.

|                 | <u>Male Headed</u> | <u>Female Headed</u> |
|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Spouses         | 8                  | 1                    |
| Children        | 14                 | 14                   |
| Grandchildren   | 15                 | 15                   |
| Uterine Kin     | 31                 | 20                   |
| Affinal Kin     | -                  | 6                    |
| Heads           | 14                 | 11                   |
| Foster-children | 5                  | -                    |
| Other           | 3                  | 4                    |
| TOTAL           | 90                 | 71                   |

Whereas the children in the administrative centres were often not those of the household head, but of his recently acquired Topnaar spouse, the majority of the children in the self-generated settlements (11 out of 14) were those of both partners. A rather large category of kin (approximately a third of the total population of these households) was that of uterine kin of the household head. In the majority of cases they were sisters or sister's daughters, who had come to live with their brothers or mother's brothers following the termination of their conjugal relationships. The number of grandchildren amounted to 15 out of a total population of 89 and foster-children to 5. (See Table 13).

The composition of female-headed households was partly determined by the sex of the heads. Daughters were better represented than sons: 10 daughters compared to 4 sons; all of the latter being of school-going age. The ages of daughters ranged widely, and in many cases were young women who had come to stay with their mothers to give birth at their maternal homes. Grandchildren were represented to a similar extent as in the male headed households: 15 out of a total population of 71. They were children of resident as well as absent parents. One instance of a great-grandchild was recorded, making this the only four-generational household along the river (recorded under 'other' in Table 13).

Uterine kin were recorded to a lesser extent than in the male headed households, (that is, 20 out of a total population

of 71), while affinal kin were recorded in 6 cases, and foster-children in 5 (see Table 13).

Literature on female headed households generally holds that they are led by elderly women or widows past their menopause (Smith, 1958). Along the Kuiseb River eight of these households conformed to this pattern, while three did not. These were relatively young women between the ages of 37 and 45 who - despite never having had a formal or informal marriage of long standing - had built up their own herd of goats and were farming. In 1978 one of these women had a man staying in her household, while she remained the de jure and de facto head. This case was not recorded, as this man was considered by all except himself to be an outsider. By 1979 another young woman had become married, living under the same conditions as the one mentioned above. In 1978 two elderly female household heads lived with men. One has been recorded while there was some controversy about the second case being a conjugal partner. This case was recorded under 'other' in Table 13.

It is hoped that with the following discussion of the change in household composition, some impression will be gained of the varied social composition of these units along the river. The wealth of the type of kin co-residing is often clouded by a synchronic representation.

**CASE 3: The Changing Composition of Households at  
Oswater, Homeb and #Natab**

The three settlements lying furthest up-river,

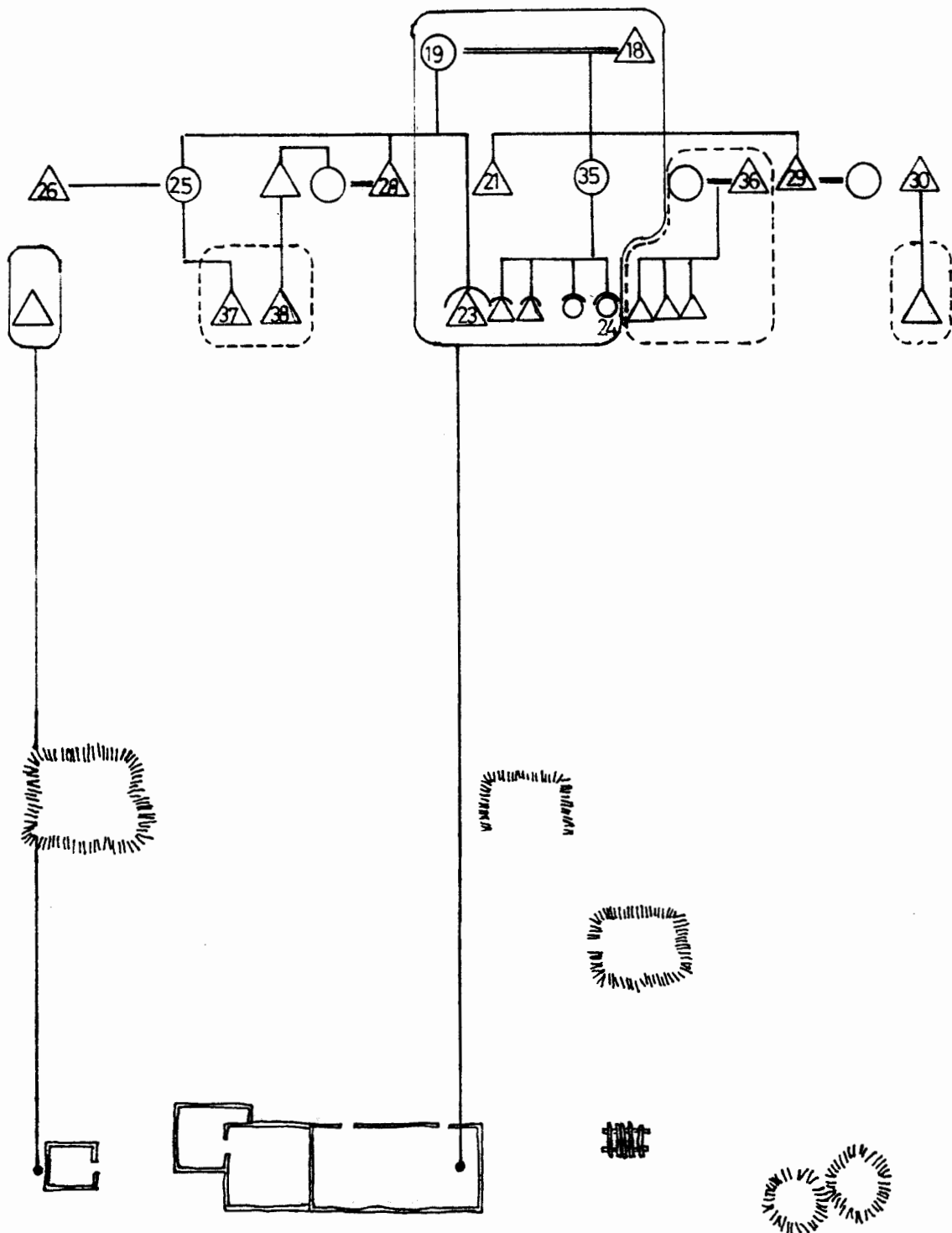
Homeb and #Natab, must be seen in conjunction with each other, as the households at the last two were break-aways from the first. Oswater is not laid out in the way the Topnaar consider to be the ideal. The terrain surrounding it is extremely rugged and the river bank steep. The omdi are therefore situated where ideally the kraals should be, that is close to the river bank; and the kraals lie away from the bank behind the omdi. The household to be discussed presently consisted at different times of different //goe !nâ omdi arranged in a rectangular form. At the one end stood a roofed steir, used communally by the various couples living spatially separate from each other. Beyond the steir towards the hills stood a car port and two kraals. (The second household lay a little up-river from this one). A little distance down-river were two haire-omdi, which were used either as storage huts or were temporarily occupied.

In 1978 the social composition of the first homestead was as follows: the elderly ex-headman (18) and his wife (19) had over the years constituted the stable core of this household. At the time they were living with three of their sons (20), (21) and (22). Two (20) and (21) were still school-going and had come home for their school-holidays. The third son (22) had terminated his employment in Walvis Bay and was temporarily appointed as a driver by his father. The household was also shared by two foster-children (23) and (24) in addition to four grandchildren of the head and his wife. All the above lived in a single rather large modern type oms, to which the sons of the ex-headman were busy adding extensions.

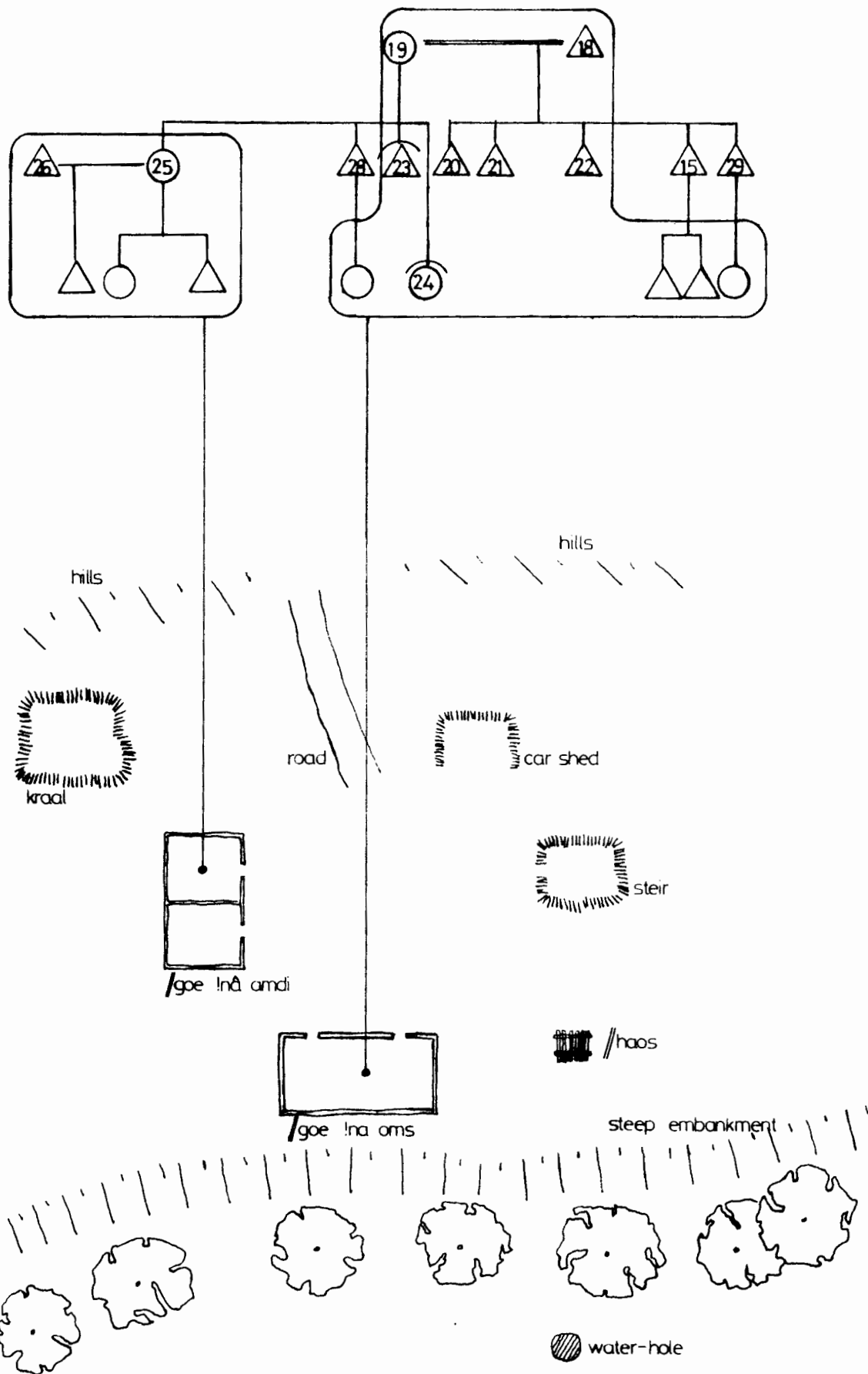
As the ex-headman and his wife had been repeatedly absent from the settlement and as their adolescent sons were away during the school term, they needed someone to tend their rather large herd of goats. This was done by different kin and even non-kin on different occasions. In 1978 the daughter (25) of (19) and her informal husband (26) accepted to do this. They came to stay temporarily at Oswater while trying to accumulate some assets to open their own homestead at #Natab. Because theirs was a conjugal relationship of relatively long standing (having one common child) they lived in //goe !nâ omdi a little distance away from (19) and (18), but shared the common steir. Living with this younger couple in their similarly modern type oms was their common son, and two children of (26) from a previous conjugal relationship.

Three children (25) (resident at Oswater), (28) and (29) (not resident at Oswater) of either the ex-headman or his wife had interests vested in





1981



1978 **OSWATER**  
 SPATIAL LAYOUT and SOCIAL COMPOSITION



this household. The two sons (28) and (29) were employed in Walvis Bay, but had some goats at the settlement, where they were being looked after either by their sister/half-sister or by the elderly couple. Both these adult men were formally married and, according to Topnaar custom, should have taken their goats away to their own homestead. When I returned to the field in 1979 this process was well under way.

In addition, (25) and (26) had separated their goats from those of the household head and had left the settlement for #Natab, while (28) had built some omdi at #Natab and his animals had also been removed from Oswater. The other adult son (29) had not as yet progressed so far. He had started building his omdi at Homeb a few kilometers up-river from Oswater, but over week-ends was still living at Oswater in the old storage huts. The other storage hut was temporarily occupied by an affinal relative (30) of his brother and his wife (31) and child (32). Later (30) was to look after the goats of (29) once the preparations for the move to Homeb had been completed. For the time being (30) was also assisting the ex-headman with his farming operation, the latter once again being away on official duties.

When I arrived some six months later, another couple (33) and (34) were now living at Oswater tending the goats of the absent ex-headman. They were occupying the //goe !nâ omdi used by (25) and (26) in 1978. The building of omdi at Homeb had been completed; the goats had been moved there as had (30) and his wife and child. The storage huts were once again used as such.

The young couple (33) and (34) did not, however, remain at Oswater for long as (33) did not get on well with the ex-headman, and his wife (34) was dissatisfied with the working conditions. They soon returned to their uxorilocal home at Sout Rivier. At this point (29) dismantled the omdi opposite the steir and re-erected them for himself and his family at Homeb.

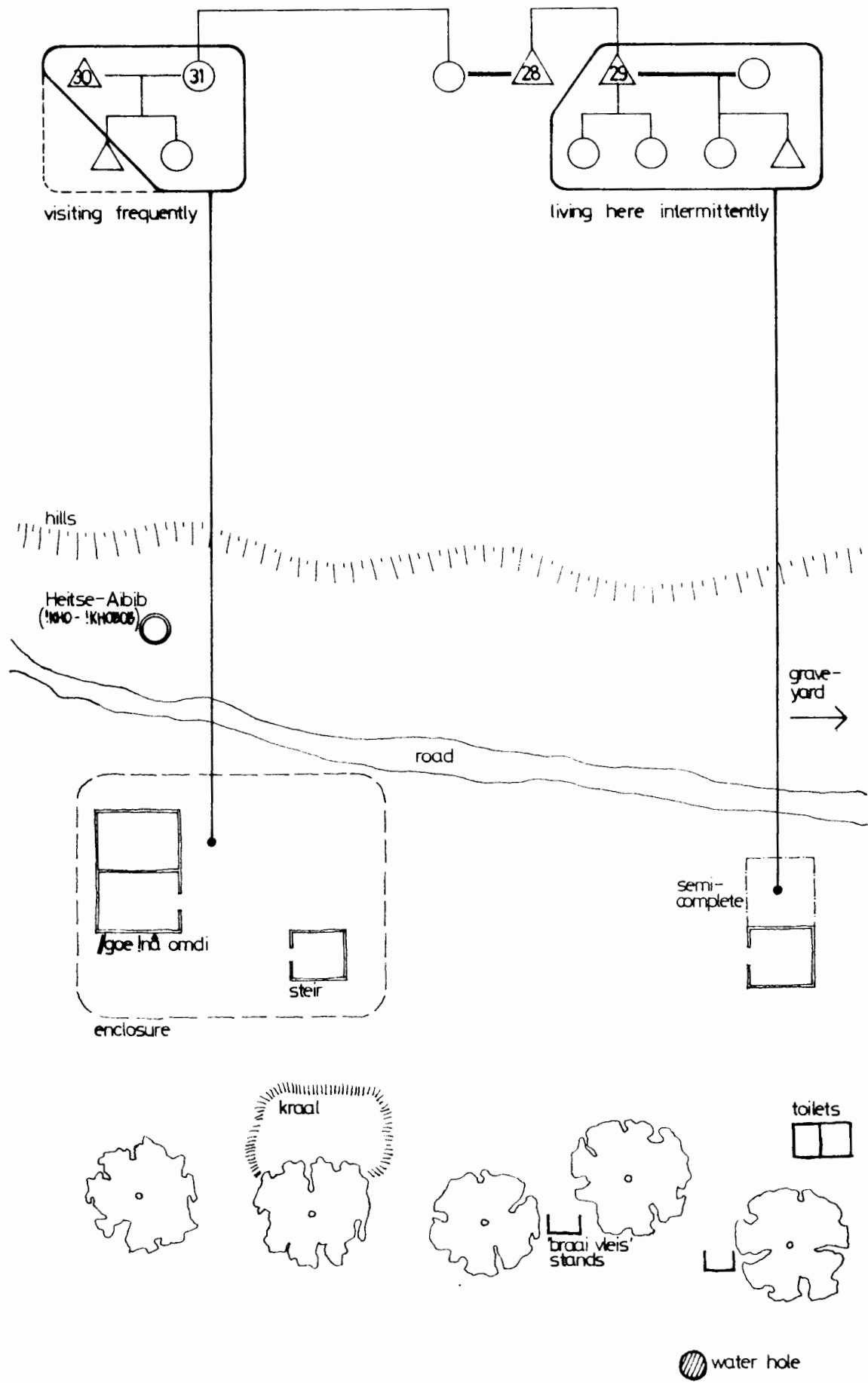
Except for the brief spells of visits home by the ex-headman and his wife, and the return home of children for the school holidays, the settlement was rather deserted. In the absence of adults, a few teenage children had been left behind by the elderly couple to care for the goats.

In contrast to the rather deserted atmosphere of the homestead during my last visit in 1979, it was once again full of life in 1981. The core individuals were again living permanently at

Oswater, including (18) who was no longer required to perform any official duties, as his son had taken over the headmanship. One of their school-going sons (21) had come home, as had their one male foster-child (23). The female foster-child (24) had returned to her parents at Sout Rivier. An adult daughter (35) had come to live with her parents. Following the dissolution of her marriage, she had first been employed at Iduseb for some time; but had come to settle at Oswater. Having no children of her own, she was fostering four children, all of whom had come with her. Another adult son (36) had recently married formally and had brought his wife and children to live in his father's homestead while he was unemployed. Two grandchildren (37) and (38) were visiting, as was the son of (30) from Homeb. The labour problem had been solved in a novel way. The new headman (29) had arranged for a contract labourer from Owambo to come and work for his father. He was living in a little oms built specially for him close to the omdi of the ex-headman, the latter having been extended considerably to accommodate the new arrivals (see diagram).

Homeb had been unoccupied for a number of years. While it was unoccupied, the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism began to develop the area as a tourist camp, and erected 'braai-vleis' stands, tables and a few toilets. There is now considerable conflict between the Department and Topnaar over the re-occupation of Homeb and ≠Natab. Officials of the Department maintain that the Topnaar have taken their site, while the two household heads at Homeb and ≠Natab maintain that they have resettled sites which previously had been occupied by their relatives. This is in line with Topnaar custom and rights to the occupation of sites, as any Topnaar has rights of residence wherever any bilateral relative has previously resided.

The terrain at Homeb is less mountainous close to the river bank and therefore the settlement is laid out in a way which the Topnaar consider to be ideal. The omdi lie on the higher river terraces. On the lower terraces and well within the shade of the trees lie the kraals; and in the river bed is a water-hole. As yet no bore-holes have been sunk at Homeb. Since its re-occupation in 1979 the social composition of this homestead has remained constant. The cluster of omdi at the east end of the settlement belong to the absent household head (29) and his family. They are used only occasionally, when he comes to the river. These structures are the modern type omdi having a rectangular shape and constructed of materials other than branches and bark of acacia trees. One



1979 1981

# SPATIAL LAYOUT and SOCIAL COMPOSITION

# HOME

of these structures had been dismantled at Oswater and re-erected here.

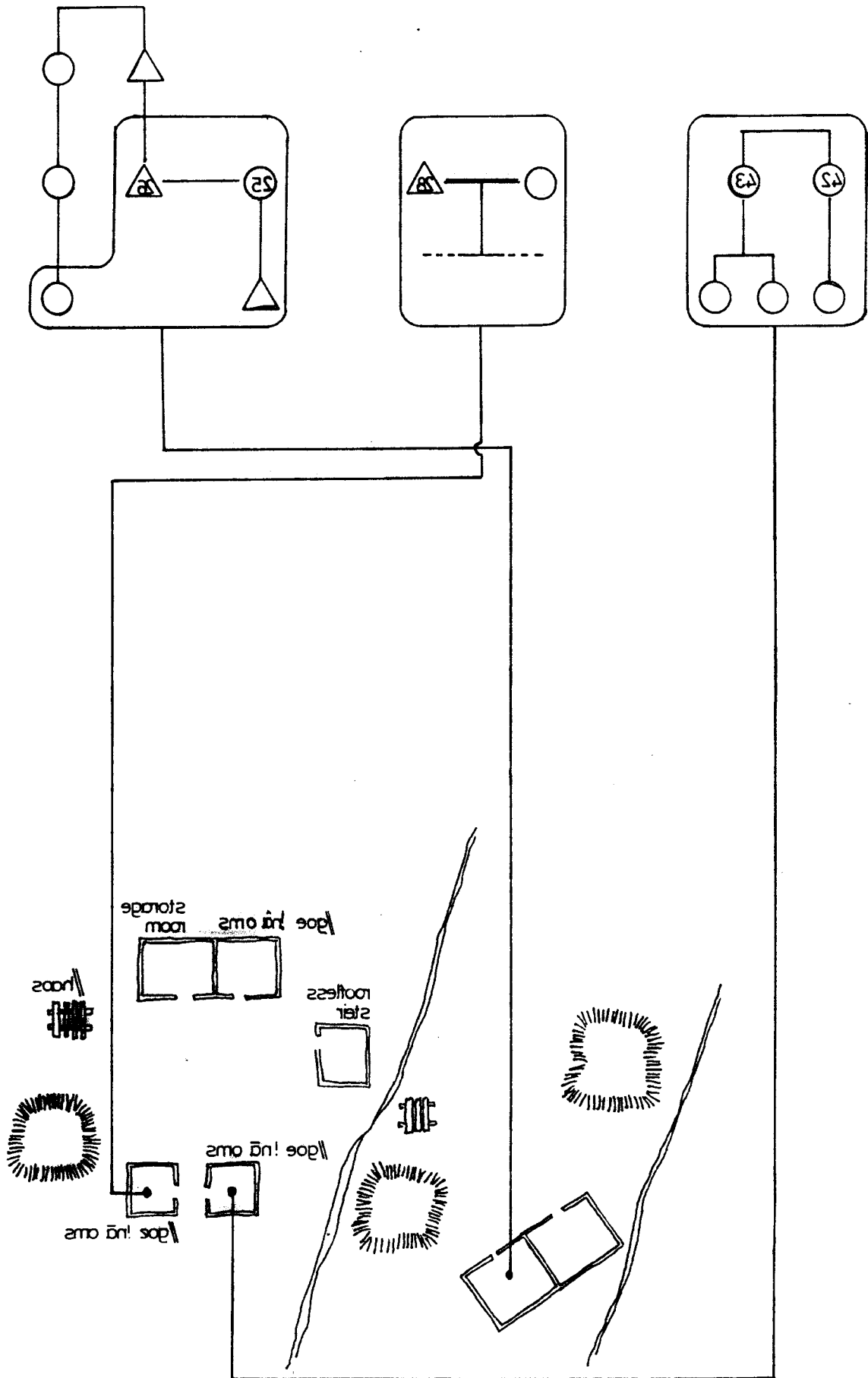
The other cluster of domestic structures, a //goe !nâ oms or sleeping structure and a spatially distinct steir, are situated west of these and some hundred metres away from the former. These are inhabited by (30), his wife and sometimes two of their common children.

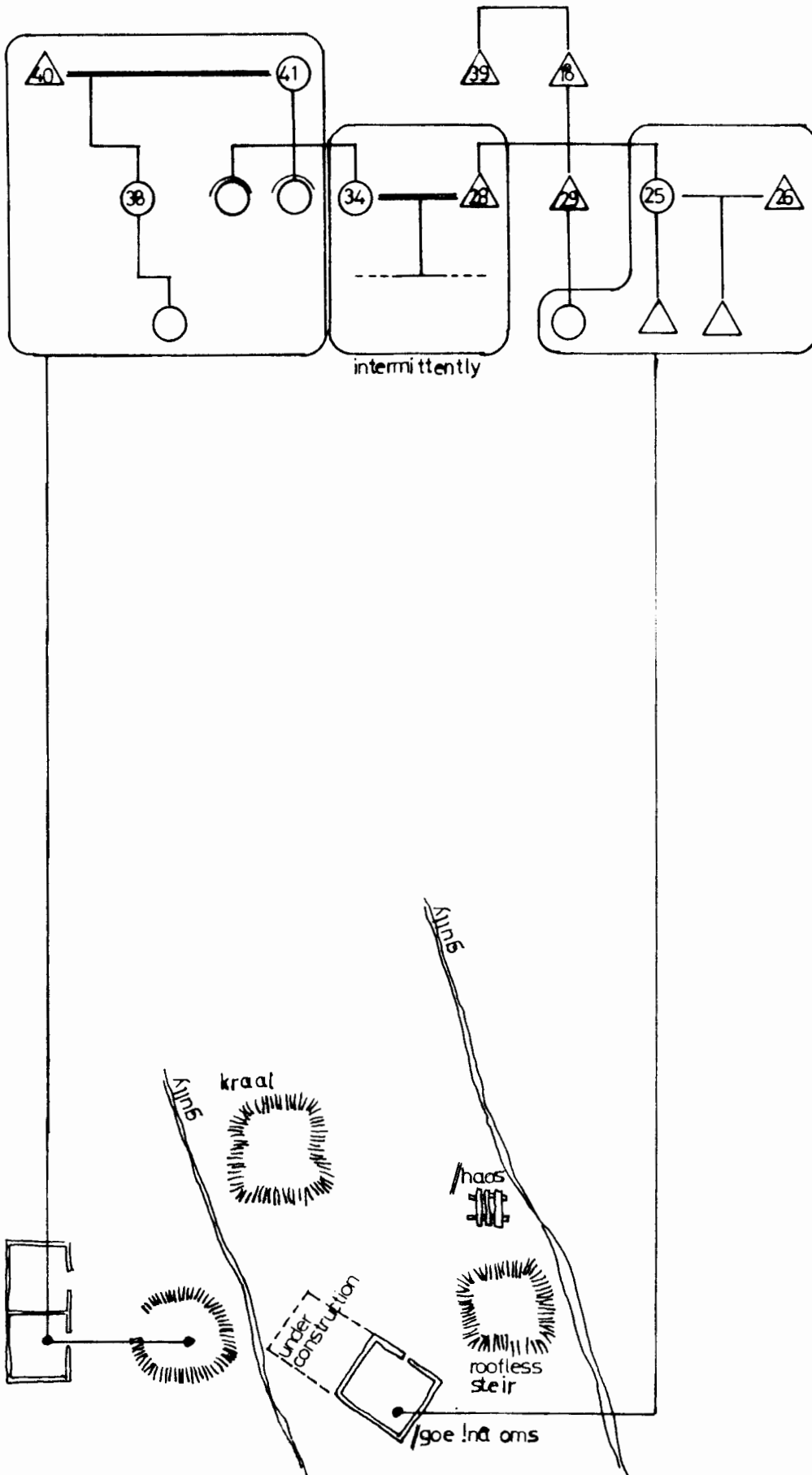
Unlike most other settlements along the river, the social composition of Homeb has remained constant over the two years of its existence. This has not been the case with ≠Natab, which shows a considerable residential turnover.

≠Natab lies a few kilometres down-river from Oswater within a setting which is probably one of the most beautiful along the Kuiseb River. Since 1979 it has consisted of two homesteads. In the north-east of the settlement stand the //goe !nâ omdi and a roofless steir of (25) and (26). At different times they had different numbers of children living with them, including a daughter of (29). For a while in 1979 the classificatory father (39) of (28) was staying at the settlement. It was, however, never clear whether he had come to live with (25), and (26) or had done so by the request of (28).

The second homestead to the west of this was headed by (28), the absent brother of (25). He would come intermittently to stay at ≠Natab. He had solved the labour problem in a different way from his half-brother (29) at Homeb. Instead of appointing an informal employee to tend his goats, he had built some omdi for his parents-in-law (40) and (41), who left their omdi at Armstraat and had come to settle at ≠Natab. In 1979 they lived in a big round haire-oms, one of the few along the river, together with two foster-children and one daughter. They had, however, left their omdi at Armstraat and had not dismantled and re-erected them at their new domicile, as people are wont to do when making a definite move. People who want to retain their rights of residence will leave their omdi standing. On my subsequent visits to ≠Natab, I rarely found (40) and (41) there. On most occasions they were found to be living at Armstraat again, implying that they were not going to live at ≠Natab in the future either. The reason given for this was that ≠Natab lay too far away from Rooibank and Walvis Bay (see Map 2).

By 1981 the omdi of this particular group had been shifted further up-stream beyond those of the homestead of (25) and (26). This was as a result of some heavy rains having washed away parts of the





1979

SPATIAL LAYOUT and SOCIAL COMPOSITION



omdi and deepened the gully close to where the homestead previously stood. Instead of the elderly couple (40) and (41) being there, two of their daughters (42) and (43) were tending the goats. One of them (43) had just given birth at this homestead. Two pre-school age children were living with them.

With regard to questions related to the definition of the concept of household, certain problems are suggested by the material presented above. In this regard Homeb provides a theoretically interesting case. Since 1979 it has been occupied by one elementary family, namely that of the informal employee (30) of the absent household head and his immediate family. Each of these two families has their own cluster of omdi, giving the appearance of two homesteads. Now (30) is irregularly paid by the household head, is given reasonably regular supplies of provisions and has been promised a share of the progeny of the herd. The question now arises, according to the definitions of Fortes (1979 : 54), Murray (1976a:54) and Spiegel (1979: ), whether the two families constitute one household or not. Are these two income-generating units or only one? I argue that from a synchronic perspective this is one single household, as it is the wage earned by (29) in Walvis Bay which is the vital source of income generated. The presence of the homestead of (30) at Homeb is only possible because of (29) being employed in Walvis Bay. If, however, we consider this situation from a diachronic point of view, I would argue that a process of building up two homesteads may be obviously in operation here. The question arises whether

the one homestead will eventually generate its own income distinct from that of the wage earned by (29) in Walvis Bay. (30) may over the years accumulate a herd of goats and having established his claim to residence at Homeb on the basis of continued habitation there may at some time in the future generate his own income from his herd, an old age pension and assistance from his children. Thus (30) would pose an exception to the trend which I am going to argue presently: young men are forced to become employed as wage labourers and those whose lives have followed an ideal cycle will in their old age become heads of households along the river. But (30) would neither have been employed formally, nor have recruited kin other than his wife to look after his interests along the river. He would, however, have attained economic security for his old age by having aligned himself with someone considered relatively wealthy. This, no doubt, is the strategy employed by relatively young women, who become heads of their own households. These kinds of alignments will be discussed in one of the following chapters.

The point about the difficulty of drawing the boundaries of households can be pursued further: I described how until 1979 the two adult sons (28) and (29) of (19) had their goats tended by the ex-headman, while they were employed in Walvis Bay. Furthermore, at different times they had some of their children looked after by their mother (see Diagram 4.3). I have no information on any payments made for these services. From other cases along the river I

know that daughters remunerate their mothers in one way or another for looking after their children. If this is so, should the two elementary families of (28) and (29) be considered as co-operating economically with the other members of the homestead. In other words is the homestead as it was composed in 1978 at the same time a household or not? I suggest it is, as the rather indefinite form of remuneration to the mother by her children does not entail a "pooling of resources ... and the drawing on (resources) ... by joint effort." (Fortes, 1949:54).

Some of the changes in social composition of the ex-headmans's household at Oswater are a result of its cyclical development. This requires the life of the household head to have followed an ideal life-cycle. Whereas other authors have been able to describe this cycle more exactly, I have been able to ascertain only broad trends of this along the river: It presupposes that a man takes on wage labour during his younger years and invests a share of his income on a herd of goats. He then recruits mostly kin, on whom he can rely to tend his goats while he remains employed. Informants repeatedly pointed out to me that some people, even kin, are "twee voet jackals", (that is, a two-legged jackals). This implies that people may steal one's animals in the same way as a jackal does. The result of this is that "jy gaan agteruit", that is, your farming regresses while that of the other progresses ("gaan voorentoe"). Successful old men can often pursue this strategy and live on an old-age pension from

the government and in turn assist their children with the accumulation of a herd.

The ex-headman had been fortunate in having had continuous employment in Walvis Bay and in having found reliable affinal kin to guard his interests along the river. He is considered wealthy by other Topnaar, being nicknamed 'the Kaiser of the Kuiseb' on account of his large herd, which some twenty years ago amounted to some 2,000. It is partly because of his economic security that he was able to marry formally and has remained so ever since.

The economically secure position of their father has made it possible for three of his children to follow a similarly ideal life cycle. I described how they set up their own homesteads in #Natab and Homeb. The other two adult, but younger sons (36) and (22) have not yet shown signs of returning to the river, though the one owns stock at the homestead of the mother of his informal wife at Iduseb. There is opportunity for them to open a homestead, for they have ample reliable and economically secure kin.

The position of economic security and lack of movement by the elderly ex-headman is highlighted in comparison with the high rate of movement and lack of income of the parents-in-law (40) and (41) of his wife's son (28). These in-laws have no goats and as yet do not qualify for an old-age pension. They are supported by their son-in-law in return for which they are expected to tend his goats. They, therefore, form part of that category of people along

the river who may become informal employees of more wealthy people and are forced to be mobile: hence their movements back and forth between Armstraat and #Natab.

Similarly the adult couple (33) and (34) can be compared both to the children of the headman and the informal employee (30) at Homeb. While (33) and (34) live uxorilocally at Sout Rivier, they are still informally married with no constant source of income. He (33) had for a brief spell been employed at Gobabeb and occasionally he goes on a !Nara harvest with his male foster parent; but otherwise he is one of a household of 16 people who is fed from the sick-pension of his wife's maternal aunt. The children of the ex-headman of similar age to (33) and (34) are either involved in structural movements between the river and their places of employment; or are relatively immobile, looking after their own homestead. However, (33) and (34) are involved in random movements along the river. They too form part of the category of people who become informal employees of more wealthy Topnaar, but instead of remaining aligned to the relatively wealthy ex-headman in the way (30) is remaining aligned to (29) they prefer to return to Sout Rivier, possibly to maintain their rights to a share of the sick pension. "They all live on the pension. And Johannes is just scared of losing it", the people of the other homestead at Sout Rivier told me.

The above examples have provided some instances where

changes in the social composition of the household were reflected in the spatial constellation of the omdi. For instance, the informally married couple (25) and (26) lived spatially separate from her parents; or when the //goe !nâ omdi opposite the steir at Oswater were no longer occupied, they were broken down and re-erected at Homeb. Spatial features obviously do not reflect all social processes, but in a situation where domestic structures are as flexible as those along the river, this is the case in many instances. Fletcher (1981) has pointed out that people change the layout of structures for pragmatic reasons. This had been the case at #Natab, following a heavy storm and the destruction of the terrain. People also dismantle their omdi and erect new ones because they become infested with "billies" (that is, lice). In these instances the old site of an oms is left to lie for some time "so that the wind and sun can clean it".

#### CONCLUSION

Over recent years the framework of the 'Developmental Cycle of Domestic Groups' has been used by authors on Southern Africa to trace the differential material development of such groups as related to income earned from wage labour by some of their members. The present thesis differs from this approach, in that it is not concerned with the material development of households in the research area, but rather with their social composition and fluctuations thereof, which admittedly is also connected

with the economic status of its members. Hence, this chapter dealt with the differences in household composition in the three areas outlined from a synchronic view. Domestic groups in the administrative centres (and business enterprises) were shown to be similar in size and structure. This particular structure is shown to be the result of administrative regulations, which forbids relatives other than the wife and some children to reside with the male employees. From an anthropological point of view the structure of households in the centres are less interesting than are the changes in composition once the household head employed at the centre decides to establish a homestead in one of the self-generated settlements. By comparison these homesteads/households in the latter settlements are far bigger in size and show an extremely varied social composition. It is the change in composition of these aggregates that is of further theoretical interest.

In discussing the social composition of these units from a dynamic point of view, I have concentrated on such changes that are cyclical in nature and have shown how these are related to the male head having followed an ideal life-cycle. Most individuals have been unable or unwilling to have their lives follow such a cycle. In an attempt to subsist they follow other strategies. The strategies that are of interest to the present study of movement involve the establishment of temporary and sporadic alignments often with relatively more wealthy individuals. These ephemeral alignments produce changes in household

composition that are not cyclical in nature but sporadic. The following three chapters will deal with the theme of these shifting alignments and their effect on household composition.

In the course of data presentation some practical problems arose related to the question of boundaries of households. Two such instances were discussed. Related to this is the problem of the extreme flexible nature of households along the Kuiseb River, which was raised in the second half of the chapter. This poses the question whether in a situation as 'plastic' as that along the Kuiseb River, the household should be retained as a unit of analysis. Should this be done, it would be possible to document further examples of changing composition of households and on the basis of further and more detailed statistical and demographic analysis arrive at varied patterns of changes. This approach has not been followed for two reasons mainly: Firstly, statistical and demographic analyses seem meaningless when dealing with a population of 250  $\pm$ . Secondly, and possibly, more importantly, the central aim of the study has been to deal with the question of movements of individuals primarily, and only secondarily, how this is reflected in household composition. An ideal methodological approach would be one which in addition to being analytically useful, would also capture the dynamics of people moving. It is believed that this aim is best realised by taking dyadic relations between individuals as the unit of analysis. Some of the criticisms that can be levelled against such an approach are discussed in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 5

SHIFTING ALIGNMENTS AND SUBSISTENCE

Subsistence economics is the first sphere of Topnaar social life within which the flexible nature of dyadic relations has been recorded. In order to exploit the most prominent resources along the river and in Walvis Bay individuals form ephemeral and sporadic alignments with others which shift in space and over time. This has certain implications for the composition of households. These implications are discussed.

#### KINSHIP MORALITY, RECIPROCITY AND ALIGNMENTS

The following case illustrates the kind of precarious situations in which people experience a need for an alignment with able-bodied persons to assist them in such everyday chores as the building of an oms. It also indicates the extremes to which individuals may go to try to elicit the co-operation and, ideally, the co-habitation of an assistant.

#### CASE 4: The Building of an Oms

In 1978 Josephine, an elderly single household head at Sout Rivier, was given an oms standing at /Gaotanab (see Map 2). She was then faced with the problem of demolishing it, transporting it to Sout Rivier and re-erecting it there. (I have indicated elsewhere how people will break down omdi and re-erect them in another settlement, unless they intend maintaining residence rights at a particular settlement by leaving the omdi unoccupied). When by 1979 her own omdi at Sout Rivier were in a state of disrepair, she felt an additional urgency to get the building material to Sout Rivier in order to repair her old omdi.

At the time she was living with a physically disabled man, who could do no more than assist her in a limited way. The other female members of her household had left for a variety of reasons, one of which was the difficulty experienced at times to get on with Josephine. Josephine did not have a

trouble-free relationship either with the members of the other household at Sout Rivier. Occasionally they would help her with menial tasks, but this was the exception. She had a grandson at Walvis Bay, who would come to the river on isolated occasions only and dig a water-hole or build a kraal. There was thus every reason for Josephine to repeatedly complain to me about the fact that she had "no hands" (that is, nobody to help her). Her daughter living at Gobabeb with her husband would often mention that the people who should have been helping Josephine were the sons of her mother's sister. The three eldest sons were all employed away from the river, but came back regularly, one to visit his parents, the other two to look after their homesteads. Furthermore, two of them owned motor-cars, a valuable asset along the river.

Finding herself in this predicament, Josephine approached a number of people for assistance. She primarily needed someone to help her in the building process, but a more long-term aim was to recruit some able-bodied person to her household. She first casually tried to persuade a young woman, an affinal relative of her sister's, to come and live with her. This woman declined politely, but indirectly. Josephine then approached another woman, one of her god-children with whom she had lived previously. This woman, too, declined. Then Josephine left Sout Rivier for a while and spent some time living with a couple at /Gaotanab. The oms of the former stood very close to the one Josephine wished to dismantle. She went to considerable extremes in her attempt to establish viable reasons for the man to help her: She emphasised an old association between her parents and his. She commiserated with him and his wife on the death of his father a year earlier and she performed an old ritual, the aim of which is to bless a new oms and placate the ancestors following a death in the family. A goat had to be brought from Sout Rivier and slaughtered specifically for the ritual. This elicited some ridicule from the others participating in the ritual. They wanted to know why she was resuscitating old and long-forgotten customs. In spite of all her efforts, in this instance, too, the required assistance was not forthcoming.

Eventually in the latter half of 1979, she dismantled the oms with the help of myself and a temporarily unemployed man. A woman, owning a car, transported the building material to Sout Rivier at the normal rate of payment (see Chapter 3). When I returned to the river briefly in 1982, the new oms had at last been re-erected by her grandson. The process had taken three years, from the time she had received it as a present until it had been rebuilt. Financially it had cost Josephine about R60.

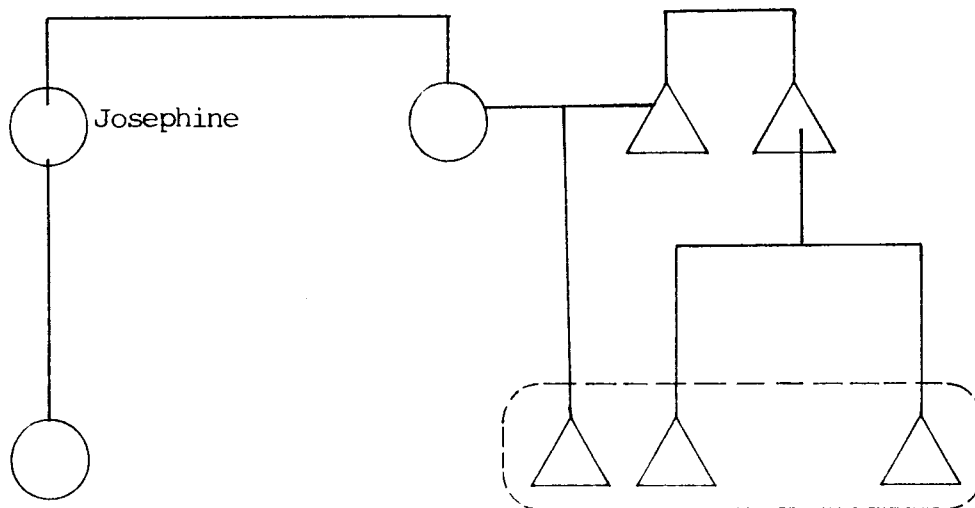
Josephine's position is an example of people along the river who for a number of reasons have nobody to assist them. Assistants such as those Josephine was looking for are referred to as 'hands'. The term is used in a wide context, but it refers to somebody with whom one has a relationship of cooperation which is mutually beneficial. Informants will say 'hands' are recruited to help less fortunate people to "gaan voorentoe" (that is, to get ahead), while the less fortunate will have to reciprocate in some form or another. Benefits flowing from the relationship can have a varied nature, even although they are often based on economic advantages. For instance, the two young men mentioned in the case above are materially relatively well off, as proved by the fact that they own vehicles. Josephine on her part does not own any means of transport, and would consequently welcome access to vehicles for the needs outlined above. But 'hands' may be recruited for reasons other than economic. For instance, old women like Josephine may need a young physically active person to help her with chores around the house, particularly if they themselves no longer enjoy a good state of health. It was for this reason that she was trying to recruit young, physically active women to her homestead, whom she would compensate by supplying with food. Elderly single women will often complain that "Ek het nie man nie. Ek is self man" (that is, "I have no man/husband. I do the work of a man myself"). Thus a husband/man is sought after in this context for his ability to perform physically strenuous tasks, which may prove to be difficult for women. I have mentioned the term in connection with pensioners (Chapter 3), who refer to young, mobile and

illiterate often female relatives as such, whom they recruit as assistants to manage their monthly pension. In these instances yet other capabilities are required by pensioners which they do not possess themselves. The meaning of the very appropriate term 'hand' seems to have some similarity with the English expression "to lend a hand", which equally refers to giving assistance in a number of ways of which material assistance is one.

Most hands are kin, as most Topnaar are related to each other and consequently 'hands' may be the same for different people.

I have mentioned above the kind of kin Josephine was trying to recruit as hands. Similarly an elderly man living by himself, working hard to tend his goats near the delta and also in need of assistants, repeatedly named a number of young men, who "should be my hands, but they have thrown me away". These were the same young men, referred to by Josephine as her potential hands. The reason for this is that Josephine and the elderly man were related in more than one way: Josephine herself had been married to his brother once; and her sister had been married to him once. Hence, the potential hands referred to by both were the sons of Josephine's sister, fathered by the elderly man and the former's present husband. (See Diagram 5.1 overleaf.)

DIAGRAM 5.1 : Potential 'Hands' of Josephine and Elderly Man



But 'hands' need not be kin. Under certain conditions relationships of co-operation exist in farming, for instance, between individuals that are not kin. In fact, in some situations such people are specifically chosen as hands, who are in the process of being incorporated into Topnaar society. These people are often relatively wealthy, partly because they are not initially subjected to the same expectations of kinship morality and reciprocity as the Topnaar are.

It is interesting to note in this connection that when individuals sever one relationship and establish another which seems to them more profitable, it is referred to in Nama as !Garigoro !haos !na ma. It was translated into Afrikaans to me as 'na die sterker hand spring' (that is, to jump to the stronger hand). The term strong in this sense refers to economic stability or even relative wealth and from which one would profit. The term '!haos', however, has been translated in different ways in the literature and is

problematic. Possibly the most appropriate current translation of it may be 'family'. In that case the Afrikaans term hand would have its origin in the Nama term for 'family' or possibly kindred, implying that these relationships of co-operation did exist between kin<sup>1</sup>.

Hence, either to subsist adequately, to 'get ahead', people along the river will establish or attempt to establish relationships of co-operation, usually, but not exclusively, with kin. Relations with kin are more readily established, as this is done in the name of kinship morality, which enables one to ask, beg, demand or sometimes simply take (particularly food in the last case) from relatives. As every Topnaar is in some way related to every other Topnaar along the river and in Walvis Bay, as already indicated, each person therefore has a repertoire of kin. From it he chooses individuals with whom to attempt to have these relationships of co-operation. In this regard the Topnaar show a similarity with such people as the Tshidi as researched by Comaroff and Comaroff (1981), the Ndendeuli by Gulliver (1971) and the Lakeside Tonga by van Velsen (1964). For the sake of brevity only material of Comaroff and Comaroff (1981) will be used as a comparison:

Although most 'members of the chiefdom belong to descent groupings, and the local agnatic segments provide the territorial expression of this, the effective kinship universe (among the Tshidi) is an ego-centered kindred (losika)

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1. I would like to thank paster E. Eiseb of the Nama Dictionary Project for confirmation and discussion on the above terms and expressions.

(Comaroff and Comaroff, 1981: 32 ff). Within the losika, they distinguish between agnates (ba ga etsho), matrilineal kin (ba ga etshe amogolo) and affines (bagwe / bagwagadi)... Each category of relationships is indigenously associated with generalised normative expectations: close agnation is held to be fraught with rivalry and competition; matrilineal ties are recognised as supportive and privileged; affinity is characterised as easy and egalitarian; and more distant kinship is regarded as neutral. But, because the relationship between almost any two members of a losika will be multiple, few ties are subject to unitary or unambiguous normative definition.

In this context, an individual carves out an effective ego-centered universe by selectively activating a number of linkages ...", (ibid.) which the authors refer to as an ego-centered kindred (see above).

Topnaar social organisation showed some similarities to that of the Tshidi. For one, only a few elements of patrilineal kinship reckoning has been detected, as for instance in the rules of inheritance. The extent to which patrilineality was reported of the Nama by authors at the turn of the century ( Schapera, 1930: 225; Hoernlé, 1925: 8) certainly no longer applies. The role played by maternal kin far exceeds the principles of patrilineal kinship reckoning, particularly in the light of serial monogamy being an accepted form of marriage and children tending to remain with mothers and

and maternal kin rather than with paternal kin<sup>1</sup>. Comaroff and Comaroff (1981: 32) report of the Tshidi a "patrilineal ideology" which, for instance, prescribes "succession, inheritance and the definition of segments" (that is, adjacent households whose heads are patrilineally related...) but this is mediated by "an emphasis upon the ego-centered kindred as the effective unit of both kinship and political action" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1981: 30). I argue that the fluid and flexible relations between kin in all spheres of Topnaar social life can best be described in terms of such overlapping networks of ego-centred kindred rather than lineal descent.

Unlike the Tshidi the different categories of Topnaar kin are not associated with generalised normative expectations (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1981: 32) in spite of the fact that they are differentiated on the basis of language. Affinal kin are referred to as /uikhoen, maternal kin as mamas !haos (that is, my mother's family) and paternal kin as dadab !haos. The term khoexagukhoen seems to correspond closest to what Gulliver (1971: 17) has referred to as the kin-set, namely all "those with whom at any particularly time (ego) maintains an active relationship, some kind of operational link involving interaction and interdependence". Except in the case of sibling relations (to be discussed presently), none of these seem to be associated with any expected forms of behaviour,

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1. The only support for this argument found in the literature is a comment by Barnard (1980: 31). He claims to have linguistic evidence pointing towards patrilineal descent giving way to bilateral kinship reckoning among Khoe Bushmen and present day Nama.

and, as among the Tshidi, "most common action is viewed indigenously as an expression of temporarily coincident interest, not enduring ..." (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1981: 33). Hence, these "operational links involving interaction and interdependence" (Gulliver, 1971: 17) are ephemeral and constantly in danger of being terminated, as the following case tries to illustrate.

#### CASE 5: Asking for a Goat

One evening a young man stopped outside the huts of his uterine sister, who together with a number of people (including myself) was sitting around a fire in the roofless steir. The young man was accompanied by two white men, strangers to all around the fire. Shortly after the three men arrived, the young man asked his sister to give him a goat. She did not reply, but continued busying herself putting more wood onto the fire. Under normal circumstances this would have been accepted as a negative reply. But the young man repeated his request. When his sister continued to remain silent, he pleaded with her, and when she still would not respond to him, he threatened that he would simply take a goat. She still remained silent. Her informal husband at the time, also remained silent when addressed by the young man. The omdi of the young man and his sister's parents were standing close by, and he called out to them to intercede on his behalf. They called out to their daughter to give her brother the goat he was asking for. When still she would not reply, he again threatened her and walked to the omdi of his parents. He eventually managed to get a goat from them and slaughtered it in the settlement. Just as he was about to leave, he jumped into his sister's kraal and stabbed one of the goat kids.

The reactions of the people around the fire were all in support of the woman. Another young man with whom I had previously discussed the topic of marriage and the payment of bride-price, was present at the time. He explained to me how one was expected to assist one's kin and how they were entitled to beg from one. He referred back to our conversation on this topic and used the present incident to illustrate his reason for not being formally married. "Do you now see how our families work? Long before I can save my R180 from the !Nara (harvest), my family have begged it off me, as you see happened tonight".

Two elderly women who had witnessed the incident were much upset by it. In fact, the next morning they criticised the behaviour of the father and son. Whereas the former had supported his son's claim admittedly under some pressure, he was persuaded to make his son apologise to his sister when he returned to the settlement. Some days later I was told by one of the women that the young man had in the meantime apologised to his sister and everything was well again between the two of them.

The case above illustrates a number of points concerning the relationships of co-operation between kin. Firstly, it is a further example of the kinds of situations in which individuals rely on kin for assistance. Secondly, it indicates a particular kin relationship, namely that between uterine siblings. Thirdly, it tells us something about the principle of reciprocity on which these relationships are based.

The kinds of situations in which kin rely on others to help them range widely in nature from the asking for a goat or asking for assistance in the building of an oms to the expectation of accommodation and food. This last is a common complaint of older individuals along the river, who maintain that young people leave their jobs in town and come to the river initially to "visit", but then remain for exceptionally long periods. During that time, they expect their elderly relatives to feed them or, alternatively, young men and women living in town hold that relatives from the river overstay their welcome in town where "everything is so much more expensive" than along the river. From an analytical point of view, it has often been difficult to disentangle the differences between single acts involving

exchange of gifts and those that were repeated in a number of situations as one facet of long-term co-operation. This point is raised in a slightly different context by Foster (1967) when he discusses the exchange of food and drink as a means of reaffirming a relationship of co-operation or a "contract" in a Mexican village. He describes how "in a long-term complementary pattern, there are short-term exchanges, often non-complementary, in which a particular act elicits a particular return" (1967: 217), and the exchange of food is one of these short-term exchanges. If in the village of Tzintzuntzan someone professes friendship but fails in "this informal exchange, he is said to be a 'friend with his lips on the outside', that is, not a genuine friend" (1967: 219) and the 'contract' is in danger of being dissolved. In the case cited above it seemed that the asking of a goat was one of a number of requests in a long-term co-operation between a brother and sister. It was in the light of previous experiences that the sister had decided not to give the goat to her brother and therefore endangered the particular relationship. Before discussing that point, however, I must deal with the general relationship between siblings.

Of all kin relations, the one between siblings is best defined, albeit not in exact terms. Ideally the relationship between siblings is close and co-operative. A female informant gave me the following description: "When my daughter died, my brother was there. When his mother was ill, I was there. When I needed help with the goats, he

was there. We are (that is, stand) together". Siblings use each other's omdi and sisters will give each other their children to be fostered. Topnaar in talking about this relationship will often stress the closeness of it by referring to "my eie broer" (that is, my very own brother) or "my eie suster" (my very own sister). This they do to distinguish uterine siblings from classificatory ones or foster brothers and sisters. The normative expectations, however, seem to apply as a rule to all those calling themselves brothers and sisters.

This very close relationship seems to correspond to what Schneider (1968: 52) has called enduring diffuse solidarity and has found to exist between American kin. He describes this solidarity as a supportive and co-operative relationship resting on trust. It is diffuse because it is not specific to a particular situation but encompasses a wide area of social behaviour. This is the kind of behaviour which is the ideal between Topnaar siblings. This is also the ideal the young man referred to when making his remarks about marriage and the necessity of ceding to the begging of kin. These, however, seem to be references to ideal situations. What in fact happens in the case of the Topnaar is that people manipulate these norms to further their own economic ends. This is what the young man mentioned above was attempting to do, and in the attempt jeopardised his relationship with his sister.

The young man was known to be reckless and dangerous. He had only recently completed a prison sentence. He was unem-

ployed, had no goats of his own and was known for his violent outbursts such as the one we witnessed. He had on previous occasions simply taken goats from others without ever having refunded the owners. His sister had been a repeated victim of his whims, as she owned a relatively large herd of goats as well as some cattle. She was, thus, from the point of her relative wealth and her relationship with him, doubly compelled to give him a goat. Sahlins (1972: 211) points out that the greater the wealth gap, the greater the pressure on the wealthy to share with the poor. Yet she too was manipulating the situation in her best interest. Apart from the fact that her brother should have broached the subject in a slow, reluctant and round-about fashion, he was also known not to reciprocate gifts and services rendered to him. Sahlins points out that even in exchanges occurring mostly between kin, which he calls generalised reciprocity and which are "transactions that are putatively altruistic ..." (Sahlins, 1972: 194) there must be a resemblance of a return gift. In the case cited the flow of goods and assistance had gone one way for a long time, as is the case with generalised reciprocity, but then the "donor" decided to put a stop to the flow of goods. Theoretically this should have terminated the relationship of co-operation, but the young man apologised to his sister, thereby trying to maintain the relationship.

At the same time the young man was under considerable pressure from the two White men to obtain a goat, a feature which no doubt influenced the situation extensively. He had been

drinking with them prior to their arrival at the settlement. Presumably he had promised to get them a goat, a case of balanced reciprocity, where they provided the liquor and he would supply the meat. As they had fulfilled their part of the bargain and the liquor had already been consumed, it was left to him to keep his word and supply the meat by whatever means. This would explain his abrupt and forceful manner towards his sister and parents.

The people in the group around the fire supported the action of the young woman and condemned that of her brother. All interpreted the show of violence by stabbing one of her goats as a sign of vengeance and a certain proof that had it not been for their presence, he would certainly have taken a goat. This would have portrayed a type of behaviour not normally associated with kin, but rather with people having no association of this nature with each other. He would have negated the kin relation between himself and his sister. According to the continuum of forms of exchange by Sahlins (1972) this kind of 'self-interested seizure' would have fallen on the pole noted for a lack of kinship association. He calls it negative reciprocity.

I have indicated above that what I have thus far referred to as "a relationship of co-operation" may range widely in 'intensity' (Foster, 1967: 219). On the one extreme, as in the case of Josephine, the co-operation may involve a single activity like the building of an oms. On the other extreme the relationship may be a co-residential one, where

the two individuals involved co-operate daily in a variety of situations. Between these poles lie relationships of co-operation of varying intensities. The following three chapters deal with such 'relationships of co-operation' that have a relatively high intensity in terms of the 'strategic imposition of meanings' attached to them (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1967: 33). These relationships I will refer to as alignments. They are essentially what Foster (1967) has called 'the dyadic contract'. He describes them as follows: "... everyone from an early age begins to organise societal contacts outside the nuclear family ... These contracts are informal, or implicit, since they lack ritual or legal validation. They are based on no idea of law, and they are unenforceable through any authority, even one as diffuse as public opinion. They exist only at the pleasure of the participants. They are noncorporate ... These contracts are dyadic: they bind pairs of contractants rather than groups ... (and) ... each person is at the centre of his ... network of contractual ties ..." (Foster, 1967: 215). These dyadic contracts I shall refer to as social alignments. When they become spatial as individuals decide to co-reside, I will call them spatial alignments. As Van Velsen points out for the Tonga, "although a man can exploit kinship bonds for many ends, one of the most important of these is to persuade his kin to settle with him in his hamlet or village..." (Van Velsen, 1964: 65). He calls these particular alignments local (or residential) allegiance(s) (ibid).

It is in the light of Foster's comment on dyadic contracts

that alignments in the Kuiseb River area should be considered. The nature of alignments in the latter area, however, are such that the flow of goods and/or services is broken and thereby the alignment. Except for isolated cases, the following descriptions are examples of such shifting alignments in various spheres of subsistence.

#### SHIFTING ALIGNMENTS AND EMPLOYMENT

I have argued that households along the river can exist only with the aid of financial input earned from wage labour or formal employment (see Chapter 2). Hence, at any one time a certain number of people, mostly men, are employed in some form of wage labour along the river in the administrative centres, in Walvis Bay, or elsewhere in the country. In the previous chapter I described how some of these men would find a good job, remain employed over a long period and would invest a share of their income in stock, which would be herded along the river by kin during their absence. The success of this venture depends on their ability to find well-paid and permanent employment and to have alignments with reliable kin along the river. In their old age these men can continue to exist on an income derived from farming along the river, augmented by an old-age pension and financial assistance from their children, whose animals they are now herding. The three cases of household composition discussed in Chapter 4, showed this ideal life cycle of individual men, which is then reflected in a cyclical development of the household composition. This ideal is, however, rarely

realised, and the majority of men have a history of occupation which shows a great variety of jobs and constant movement between the river and their places of employment. Men whose lives follow an ideal cycle establish non-spatial alignments with kin along the river, who will tend their homestead for them. Men whose lives do not follow such an ideal cycle have to maintain alignments along the river as well, in order to be able to return there if they fail to make a living away from the river. The following is a case illustrating the shifting alignments of a man whose life has not followed an ideal life cycle:

#### CASE 6: History of Employment

Petrus !Goreseb was born along the Kuiseb River in 1924. During the time "of Hitler's war", he started working. His first job was at the refrigeration plant in Walvis Bay (known locally as 'Cold Storage'). As it operated for six months of the year only, he would return to the river for the rest of the year. Following that he worked sporadically for a Norwegian guano collector, returning to the river between periods of employment.

During the first few years of his working life, Petrus maintained contact with two sets of relatives: firstly, his foster-brother and present foster-parent of one of Petrus's daughters: and secondly, his maternal aunt. With one of these groups Petrus would live during his regular return to the river.

Following employment with the guano collector, he started working for the South African Railways just outside Walvis Bay. During this time he met a man who owned a hotel in the central part of the country. Petrus was persuaded to change jobs again. He worked at this hotel for five years, until the owner sold it and returned to South Africa. Petrus remained in the town for a while and soon found work, but he had a fight with his new employer and was sentenced to thirty days imprisonment. Once he had served his sentence, he returned to the river, but then went back and worked at the same hotel for another five months, now under the new owner.

He then met a man who sunk bore-holes for farmers. He worked for him for a year, after which he returned to the river. For another year he did odd jobs here and there.

At that time a copper mine in the river area was in full operation. Petrus worked there for three years, returning home over week-ends. During these three years he met his wife and began to live at her home-stead.

Following the employment in the copper mine, he and a few other men took on employment with the South African administration building road bridges on the Windhoek road. They started along the Kuiseb River and then moved towards Windhoek. Once there some found employment and remained. Petrus stayed for a month only, after which he went back to Walvis Bay and then moved back to the river. After a few months of staying at home, he did temporary work for scientists at Gobabeb or for the Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism. Recently he was asked to tend the goats of the ex-headman of Oswater, but declined because his wife would not leave her sick mother at Sout Rivier.

Lately, so he maintains, he "works with the !Nara only".

Consequently, at the age of 58 Petrus is fed on the sick pension of his wife's maternal aunt together with the 16 other household members. In return for this Petrus helps around the household in various ways. In spite of his modesty, there is more to his position in this household than his comment indicates. Petrus is the only member who has been away from the river for any considerable amount of time and who is able to speak Afrikaans relatively fluently. As a result of this background he is au fait with white administrative and commercial procedures; and he is the one who opens access to these two areas for the other members of the household.

The case above illustrates how economically insecure men are forced to exploit other resources along the river, for instance, the !Nara or an old-age pension of a relative. As these resources are often controlled by others, these men will attempt to align themselves with these relatives. Some of these alignments are long-lived, as that of Petrus and his

affinal relatives or that of Petrus and his foster-brother. The reasons for the first alignment persisting have been indicated above. The reason why the second alignment has maintained itself are the following: his foster-brother and his wife have adequate means, consisting of their own homestead, two old-age pensions and an elderly son employed away from the river, who contribute towards the homestead of his parents. This alignment has in fact been strengthened by Petrus giving his youngest daughter to be fostered by the couple. Consequently, whenever he is in need of food (or money) it is to this couple that he goes. I have repeatedly watched him leave their settlement with a hessian bag filled with food. According to Sahlin's classification of reciprocity the relationship of Petrus with the two kinds of kin could be seen as being of the generalised kind and hence persisting for this reason.

Most alignments formed by economically insecure men are of short duration, while new ones are established and severed. It is these shifting alignments that are of prime interest for the theme of movement of individuals between households, for they are the cause of the growth and decline of households in a sporadic rather than a cyclical way. The spatial and social alignment of Petrus's with his maternal aunt's household is one which had been severed, despite the fact that during 1979 these maternal relatives had taken his side over a marriage conflict. It is important to note that these relatives did not have the means to support him materially. Conversely, they were not in need of a foster-child or Petrus's capabilities

in dealing with white officials, the resources Petrus was able to offer to the former parties. Hence, it was not in the interest of either side to maintain this alignment.

In Chapter 4, I argued that economically insecure men constitute a labour force, albeit a small one, which is exploited by those who are economically secure. For reasons similar to those mentioned above, this means of an income is only sporadically exploited at times. Such employment adds to the sporadic change in household composition, in a way very similar to that caused by other types of shifting alignments. Oswater is an appropriate example of the rapid turnover of informal employees: In 1978 the daughter (25) of the wife of the ex-headman and her husband (26) were working at Oswater. In 1979 an affinal relative (30) of the headman's family and the wife (31) of the former were temporarily assisting at Oswater. Six months later the couple (33) and (34) from Sout Rivier were helping, and when this too proved to be just a temporary arrangement, the ex-headman's son recruited a contract labourer from Owambo (see Diagram 4.2, Chapter 4).

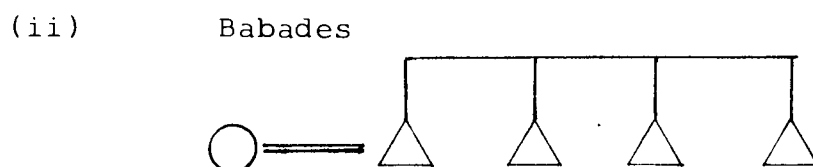
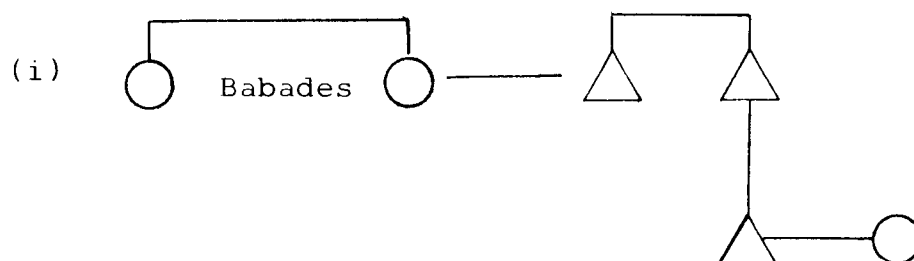
#### SHIFTING ALIGNMENTS AND THE HARVESTING OF THE !NARA MELON

Men are tempted to give up their jobs sporadically and come to live along the river with kin in the light of resources being available locally. The most readily available resource is the !Nara melon, which is harvested seasonally (see Chapter 3). Harvesting the !Nara implies

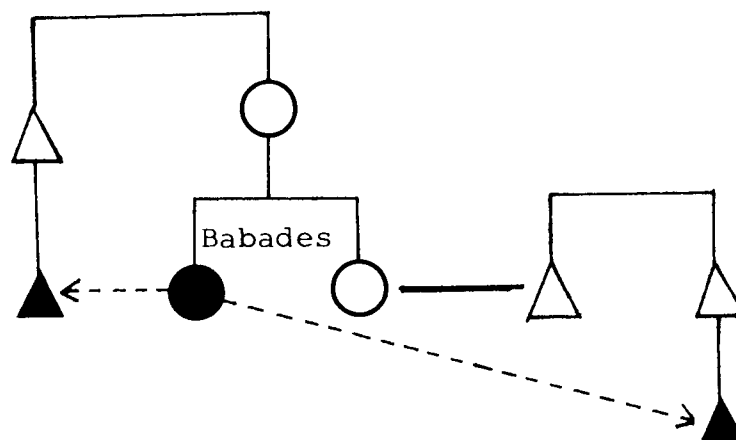
firstly, having access to a !Nara patch (see Chapter 3) and then leaving one's current residence and camping in the dunes for a number of weeks. As the picking, processing and finally transporting of the kernels to wholesalers in Walvis Bay involves strenuous work, men and women form partnerships for the duration of the harvest. These partnerships rarely consist of more than four people. Very often brothers or half-brothers combine their forces, but as is indicated by the diagrams below these relatives may include a variety of kin. Sometimes these partnerships are continued for other activities such as stock-farming; in other instances they are established for the harvest only.

The following diagrams represent the different kinds of alignments an elderly woman, Babades, had established specifically for the harvests. These alignments were activated on three different occasions:

DIAGRAM 5.2: Shifting Alignments for !Nara Harvests



(iii)



**CASE 7: Shifting Alignments in the !Nara Harvest**

During the first harvest discussed Babades aligned herself with a young man and his informal wife, the former being the son of her sister's deceased husband's brother. This alignment was again activated for a later harvest (diagram (iii)), but then it excluded the young man's wife and included a cross-cousin. On another occasion, Babades joined forces with her husband's brothers (see diagram (ii)).

These three examples show the flexibility and variability of !Nara alignments. Within three seasons Babades had aligned herself with three different sets of kin. The individuals taking part in these !Nara harvests usually are members of different homesteads along the river, as some adults of each homestead need to remain behind to tend the goats during the absence of those harvesting. As mentioned elsewhere, the harvests are mainly conducted in the sandy delta area and the individuals taking part in them live in small groups in make-shift omdi on the !Nara patches. Thus, every year during the time of the harvest, households experience a depletion of some adult members (as well as children) as members leave for the !Nara fields, and they again experience a growth in their membership, as these members return to the river. As different individuals may participate each year, and as these individuals align themselves differently, according to the principles

outlined above, the changes in household composition generated by the harvests are consequently often radically different each year. As these harvests occur at roughly the same time, the annual fluctuation of household membership can be predicted, but not the precise way in which the households will change.

#### MOBILITY OF PENSIONERS AND THEIR ASSISTANTS

Mutually beneficial attachments similar to those between partners in a !Nara harvest or between an informal employer and employee, are established between pensioners and their young, often female, relatives. The nature of the relationship and the duty of the young assistant (or 'hand') has been mentioned in Chapter 3. Briefly, it requires that the assistant look after the needs of her elderly relative; to cook, mend and wash the clothes. It is for this reason that most assistants are women. But the most important chore is to fetch the monthly sick or old-age pension in Walvis Bay.

This requires a considerable amount of organisation, in the process of which assistants may be forced to establish secondary alignments to be able to fulfil their duties. For instance, in order to get to Walvis Bay she either has to depend on the rare lifts from white administrative staff or else make some arrangement with one of the few Topnaar car owners. In Walvis Bay she needs a place to stay, while arranging her affairs. This may need some manipulation

of relations with kin residing in town. Should she have a herd of goats along the river, she may need to recruit someone to tend the animals during her regular absence. This would involve persuading some relative to come and live in her homestead. Hence, in order to gain access to an old-age pension, a number of secondary alignments need to be established, all of which to some degree feed on the monthly pension payment. As can be imagined, not much remains for the use of the pensioner following this distribution of money or supplies bought from it.

In spite of this, people welcome pensioners to their households and some degree of competition exists to recruit them. Even an amount reduced by payment to others may still change the amount of income of these households considerably. I have already mentioned the example of a household of 16 that had a pension as its sole income and the importance of this source of income should be stressed. The existence of some households hinges on the access of its members to a pension. Should this source fall away, the composition of the household would change drastically, the younger members possibly being forced to leave to find employment.

Case 8 below illustrates how alignments between pensioners and their hands are similarly ephemeral in nature as alignments already described. For a number of reasons pensioners change hands rapidly. Some of the reasons are that the alignment ceases to be mutually beneficial. As pensioners and their hands reside together, this produces

a change in the homestead, and often household, composition as the spatial alignment is severed. Furthermore, this break in pension alignment may produce a shift in all the secondary alignments which had been generated to make the former possible. This may result in a chain reaction of alignments being severed, which will affect a wider range of households as new alignments will now have to be forged.

On rare occasions pensioners are also involved in movements of their assistants for reasons not connected with them.

#### CASE 8: The Shifting Alignments of a Pensioner

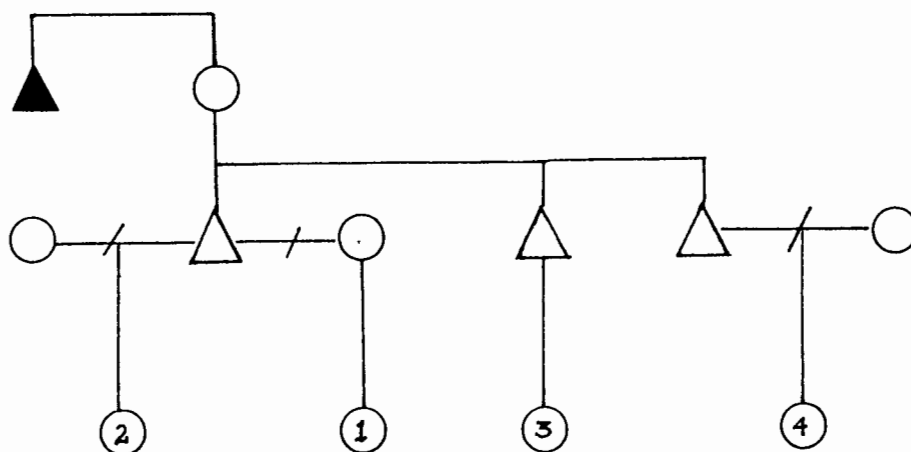
Johannes is a physically handicapped man, receiving a sick-pension of R42,50. Before 1978 he had been living in Kuisebmond, and was looked after by a young female relative, a grandchild of his deceased sister. He was constantly ill-treated by some residents of the township, and was brought to Ururas by a cross-cousin. While there, he was looked after by a daughter of his cousin. But this woman moved to become informally employed. Following her departure, Johannes' cross-cousin took him Sout Rivier to be looked after by his classificatory daughter. Johannes stayed at Sout Rivier for two years, until the daughter's husband gained employment at the school at Iduseb. She decided to follow her husband and consequently took Johannes with her. They stayed at Iduseb for only nine months and were then forced to return to Sout Rivier. Johannes returned with her.

During 1981 Johannes was persuaded to complain to the 'raad' about the misuse of his pension by his current assistant. Subsequently, the right to fetch the monthly money was taken away from her and given to her classificatory sister.

This last assistant had recently terminated her conjugal relationship with a man from outside the area, when he left Gobabeb. In 1982 she considered leaving the river to look for work in town. What would happen to Johannes under such conditions was uncertain.

Diagram 5.3 below shows the kin Johannes had been aligned with during the course of 1978-1982.

DIAGRAM 5.3: The Shifting Alignments of a Pensioner.



His assistants were all female and they were all daughters of various sons of his sister. Over the period of four years Johannes had changed his alignment with four of these women. All in all he had moved five times: first from Walvis Bay to the river, and then four more times between various settlements along the river. As a result he was a member of four different households during this time.

#### SHIFTING ALIGNMENTS AND STOCK-FARMING

Social and sometimes spatial alignments are also formed between individuals who assist each other with stock-farming. These alignments have the same temporary and ephemeral nature as those mentioned previously, and as men and women shift their alignments, household groups grow and decline in a sporadic and unpredictable manner. The following case

is meant to illustrate the process of re-alignment of an individual in an attempt to make the most profitable use of stock-farming:

**CASE 9: !garigoro !Haos !nâ mâ" (that is, "Jumping to the stronger 'Hand'")**

Ururas has always been associated with a particular family. During the time of fieldwork four, sometimes five, brothers and a sister lived there. Three of the brothers had long co-operated in farming. Their goats were all in one or two herds and they would assist each other with the tasks involved.

For a while, the daughter of one of the three brothers, came to live at Ururas. Together with her husband, she would assist her father, Lizius, and his brothers in herding.

Some time before 1978 another family came to settle at Ururas, a few hundred metres away from where two homesteads of the brothers stood. This family was not from the Kuiseb River, but had come from the Cape more than twenty years ago. Consequently, they were called 'die Kaapenaars' or 'die Kleurlinge' by the Topnaar, in contrast to 'ons Hottentots'. They were considered a rather wealthy family as they owned a large herd of goats and even a few sheep. They employed a Topnaar woman to tend the animals, as the male household head worked in Walvis Bay. They were able to sell meat on a regular basis to a butchery in Kuisebmond, and also had wealthy affinal connections with the present headman.

Recognising the benefits of such an association, Lizius, the eldest of the four brothers, "jumped to the stronger hand", that is, he aligned himself with the wealthy family of outsiders and to some degree severed his co-operative relationship with his brothers. Lizius' goats were separated from those of his brothers and were made to "walk in the herd" of his new partners. However, conflict developed between the new family and Lizius. Neither party wanted to be too specific about the reasons behind the conflict, each claiming that their good intentions were misinterpreted by the opposite party. The result was that the recently arrived family asked permission from the headman to build a new homestead at Witklip, the next deserted settlement up-river from Ururas. The reason for their wanting

to leave was put down to a lack of forage at Ururas. Permission was granted, and the goats were once again separated and the family moved to Witklip. Lizius decided not to align himself with his brothers again, but instead took his herd to his classificatory daughter at Sout Rivier. After having lived at Sout Rivier for some weeks, he left for Walvis Bay, as it was becoming too difficult to go back and forth over 85 km. between Sout Rivier and Walvis Bay where he had to get his monthly disability pension. During his stay with relatives at Walvis Bay, he reached an agreement with a previous informal wife and her informal husband. The three of them together with one of this sons made arrangements to set up their own farming operation at a settlement called Tsaraxaibis. Claiming that his classificatory daughter at Sout Rivier was not looking after his goats properly, Lizius brought them to Tsaraxaibis in 1979. During that year he spent the time between trips to Walvis Bay at this newly established settlement, while his son was tending the goats.

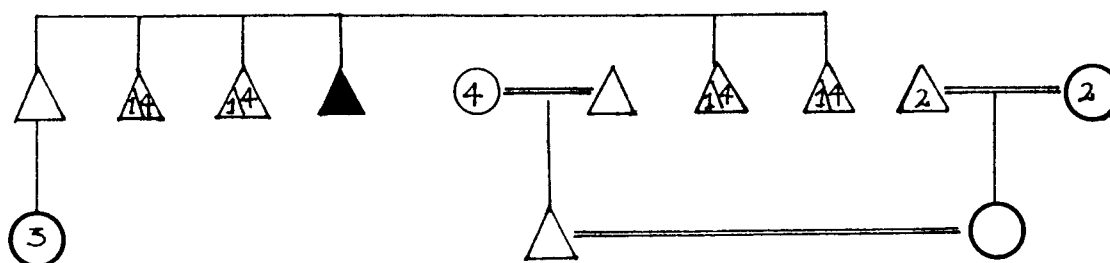
By 1981 Lizius was in the process of moving back to Ururas again. Two of his brothers had in the meantime built a new homestead about half a kilometre up-river from the previous site. Lizius was now making arrangements to have his goats transported back to Ururas. At Tsairaxaibis, he maintained, nobody took farming seriously. His goats were being slaughtered by the new arrivals. The settlement was now being occupied by a number of young people, including two female relatives of his former informal wife. They had come to the river, following the dissolution of their marriages. Lizius feared that he would lose too many goats if he stayed there.

The omdi of the new homestead occupied by the brothers were only a few metres away from those of the remaining members of the family with whom Lizius had previously co-operated. The latter had returned to Ururas, following the death of the wife of the household head. The widower was still working in Walvis Bay and coming to the river only over weekends, while the goats were still being tended by the formal female employee. As yet there were no signs of renewed cooperation between this family and the brothers.

The diagram below represents Lizius' changing alignments.

All in all he had changed alignments five times: from his brothers to the family of outsiders, from them to his

DIAGRAM 5.4: Shifting Alignments of a Stock-Farmer



classificatory daughter, from her to his previous informal wife and from her back to his brothers.

The alignment with the latter had never been severed completely, for he returned to live with them in between his movements between other households. Similarly, the initial alignment with the family of outsiders seemed to involve at least two of his brothers as well. They, too, seemed to have transferred some of their stock to the herd of the other family. I, however, have no detailed information to what extent this had been done.

Furthermore, Lizius changed his residential alignment three times. He was a member of three different households during this time. Firstly that of two of his brothers at Ururas; secondly that of his classificatory daughter; thirdly the homestead started both by himself and his former informal wife. As in the cases mentioned before, the composition of the households concerned changed in a sporadic and unpredictable way.

CONCLUSION

The economic position along the Kuiseb River is one of poverty. To combat this situation people follow certain strategies. One of these has been touched on in a previous chapter. This involves men becoming employed as wage labourers and setting up a homestead along the river. Others whose lives have not followed an ideal life-cycle will align themselves temporarily and sporadically with relatively economically stable individuals along the river. These alignments are of a dyadic nature, and are manipulated by individuals to further their own economic ends. Consequently, these alignments are shifted rapidly and the evidence of this 'on the ground' is a sporadic and unpredictable growth and decline of households, which is in contrast in nature to the cyclical changes of household composition described and analysed in the previous chapter. The next chapter will deal with the shifting alignments of conjugal partners.

CHAPTER 6

WOMEN, MARRIAGE AND SHIFTING ALIGNMENTS

In Chapter 4 I discussed four households in the settlements and the cyclical changes in social composition of these households. The four couples forming the core of these households were all involved in stable conjugal unions irrespective of their jural status, and I suggested that this was related to the stable economic situation of the men involved. Individuals who do not find themselves in such situations of economic stability devise other strategies to gain access to available resources along the river. In the previous chapter I discussed some strategies economically insecure men employ. These involved manipulating kin connections with relatives and temporarily activating these alignments. These dyadic alignments, however, shift over time and through space, and consequently men find themselves between households, adding to the constant flux of these domestic groups.

This chapter shows how women continue to strive towards a formal, stable conjugal union, which provides economic security for themselves and their children. As the majority of women do not attain this ideal, an alternative means of survival for them as well is to manipulate ties with temporary conjugal partners and kin. The shifting nature of these ties further affects household composition.

#### FORMAL VERSUS INFORMAL MARRIAGE

Topnaar distinguish between two types of marriage. I will refer to these as formal and informal marriage after Van Velsen

(1964:120 ff), even although they have been referred to by such terms as "living together relationship" (Pendleton, 1974), common-law-marriage, consensual union for the first kind and church marriage for the second (Ibid). A formal marriage is the result of a formal and public contract involving the normatively accepted negotiations, the payment or (as in the case of the Lakeside Tonga) part-payment of the bridewealth and, a formal wedding ceremony. An informal marriage does not involve the formalities mentioned above, but follows a personal arrangement between the partners.

A formal marriage is referred to by Nama speakers by the verb !game (to marry formally) or by the phrase !game hâ (to be married formally). My informants maintain that when the bride-payment was previously made in the form of cattle, such a union would be called goma!gameb (from gomas/b cow, ox). A man may refer to his formal wife as !gametaras (formally married wife), and a women may refer to her husband as !game-aob (formally married man). The Afrikaans terms getroude man and getroude vrou (meaning the same as above) are also used.

Formal marriage requires a man's relatives to instigate a process of negotiation with the relatives of the woman, the transfer of bride-wealth of anything between R100 and R180, and a church wedding followed by a ceremony and celebrations at home. Ideally this is followed by the couple beginning to live neolocally, either in their own homestead along the river or in Walvis Bay, or elsewhere. As pointed out by Schapera (1930:224) there was

no single Khoe marriage custom. Variations have been described by Schultze (1907:298), Schapera (1930:245), and others. I was given different versions of contemporary formal marriage proceedings, all of which diverged in some way from the description given of proceedings of the pre-contact period. The following is one version given by two elderly female informants Louisa and Eva. They were referring to an actual example, the marriage of Eva's daughter Erika to Gert.

#### CASE 4: An Example of Formal Marriage Proceedings

Gerts's mother Louisa related the ideal form of proceeding with a marriage:

"Once the two of them have decided to get married, Gert will tell me. I will tell my family. We must then get together (amongst ourselves) and 'hoor mekaar' (reach an agreement) before we go to Eva. She will (merely) say to us: 'Go home. I must first tell my family'. Eva will then tell her family. Maybe she will have to write to some of them. Some may write back and say: 'We have no money, (to contribute towards the wedding). We cannot come'. Then I will make out one day (decide on a day). I will not call Eva, she must see for herself (that we are ready). Then they will come.

My family will say: 'We have heard this business. Where are the children who want to marry?' The next day Gert and Erika will come. Then Eva will say to Erika: Do you know these people?

Erika: Yes, I know them.

Eva: Is it you who brought together these people, so that you may marry?

Erika: Yes.

Eva: You, who are untidy, cheeky and lazy. You, who have no respect for grown up people or for a man. You, who drink, who is a drinking person. Will you be able to carry these people? Perhaps this man's mother falls ill; will you be able to care for her? This man you want to marry has many family who have 'no life' (no source of income). Will you

be able to give them food? Will you not later chase them away? They are dirty. I see you pretend to be a White person. Those people are poor, they have lice. Will you be able to carry them? They have many children, who may steal. Will you not later grow tired?

Erika: No, I will carry.

Eva: Do not later come running to me. Today I give you into the hands of Louisa. She is now your mother. With all your problems you must go to her, not to me.

I will then say to Gert:

Do you know these people? Have you brought them together, so that you can marry?

Gert: Yes, I have.

I: Are you sure you can carry this woman, who is so cheeky and has so many children from other men? You are a drunkard and cannot keep money without spending it on drink ....'

Then I will give Eva R150. 'for the back that has carried Erika'. She will give Erika five or ten goats, so that Gert and Erika can go and make their oms. She and her other daughters will also get together an iron, a wash basin, pots and pans, maybe a wardrobe and a table. The car must be heavy when they leave. I will give some goats to Gert, so that Erika cannot later say: 'What did you build the oms with?' "After the wedding they will leave and we will cry as though somebody has died".

Certain details of procedure have been omitted from this account, which I will add from accounts of other informants. Firstly, the negotiations may be drawn out for up to three months, not because the two sets of relatives may not reach

an agreement on the amount of bride-payment, but rather because any elderly, mostly female relative may withhold her consent to the marriage. Schapera (1930:245) mentions in this regard that it was customary in the pre-contact period for the girls parents to show reluctance in giving their consent to the marriage. Pendleton, writing about conjugal relations in Windhoek, reports that it may be necessary for the relatives of the groom to make three or four trips to the girl's mother's house before they can finally start negotiations (1974:148). He does, however, not give a reason for this. My informants never failed to mention this point, which they saw as an impediment to formal marriage; but they also always referred to it being a female relative, who would stall the negotiations. She could, for instance, claim that during the period of courtship the bridegroom had not given her sufficient gifts. In such cases the negotiations would be called off to give him a chance to placate the women concerned by making the required gifts, after which negotiations were resumed. This may very well relate to the custom mentioned by Schapera of the pre-contact period. (1930:245).

Secondly, from the day of the agreement between the two sets of relatives until the celebrations start following the church service, the couple should be separated. This ideally applies even to such cases where they have been living together previously in an informal conjugal relationship and may even have common children. Separation is, however, not observed by all, even although the custom is known even by young girls.

The church ceremony is held some time following the agreement between the two sets of relatives and the handing over of the bride-payment. Previously, and even in some cases today, the church ceremony was held in Walvis Bay. A new church now stands at Rooibank (see chapter 3) and many wedding ceremonies are held there. The couple separates again after the church service.

On the same day, following the church-service, the festivities begin in one of the self-generated settlements. Even before the church service food and drink will have been prepared at the homes of both the girl and the man or their relatives. The guests will refresh themselves at either of the two homesteads. Finally they will start dancing around the oms of the relatives of the bridegroom. Eventually they will take the bridegroom and dance towards the homesteads, where the bride is still kept in seclusion. They will dance around the oms together with the bridegroom while chanting: 'Give us the breath, you keep the body' (that is, "give us the spirit, you may keep the body)". Eventually the bride will emerge and will be joined by her husband. From then onwards they partake in the festivities together with the other guests, until they finally leave for their new home, taking their gifts with them.

In the above example it is interesting to note that the negotiations were initiated by both mothers of the couple. In this instance it could be explained by the fact that both husbands of the two mothers were not the biological fathers of the children and, hence, the mothers were their closest relatives.

Informants did not suggest that relatives initiating the negotiations need necessarily be female.

In fact, the loosely defined term 'family' as used by Louisa in the example above can best be translated by the Nama term khoexagukhoen (see Chapter 5), meaning "those (relatives) with whom at any one particular time (ego) maintains an active relationship ..." and hence coincides with Gulliver's concept of kin set. (Gulliver, 1971:17). In this regard Comaroff and Comaroff mention in connection with marriage negotiations among the Tshidi "... that it is not agnatic units that participate in the negotiations, but rather those individuals who form part of the effective ego-centered kindreds of the respective parents" (1981:34). This seems to be the case among the Topnaar as well, and instead of norms prescribing who should play a role, it is such factors as residence and relative wealth that are the determining factors. As in the example above, many relatives live away from the river and although they may be informed of the impending wedding, few, and sometimes none, will attend. Informants also point out that relatives taking part in the negotiations need to be versed in the relevant customs and traditions. One woman maintained that she would play the leading role in the negotiations of the formal marriage of her classificatory brother, because his mother, even though living along the river, "knows nothing about these matters".

Thus, the set of kin on either side participating in the negotiations is composed of a variety of relatives, and if there is a tendency for maternal female relatives to be represented

more than others, this is not because of normative factors. This is supported by Pendleton's evidence from Windhoek (1974:148). This may very well be a further example of the increasingly important role played by maternal, particularly female, relatives in the light of brittle marriages and the subsequently marginal one played by husbands and fathers.

In those cases where a woman has been raised by foster-parents and this fostering relationship has endured, the foster-parents, or the foster-mother, will form part of her set of kin. In the case of a middle-aged woman living at Sout Rivier the relatives representing her were the following: her foster-mother, her foster-mother's sister and two brothers of her deceased father. The involvement of her foster-mother's sister is related to the fact that children are very often not fostered by a individual, but by members of a specific family. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

All my informants indicated that the bride-payment was always paid in full and not in installments. As already mentioned, it was previously paid in the form of cattle, giving this kind of marriage a particular name. Most aspects related to marriage and the bride-payment reported by Pendleton of Windhoek coincide with my evidence from the Kuiseb River area. He mentions, for instance, that there can be no church-marriage without a bride-payment and, consequently, without the two, the children from such a union are primarily the responsibility of the mother (1974:144). This applies to the Kuiseb River as well, even though fathers are required to pay some form of maintenance for their children.

Furthermore, Pendleton points out that in an urban situation where there are no corporate groups bride-payment is made to the parents of the girl for the upbringing and costs involved in the training of their daughter. Hence, the better the training, the higher the payment (ibid). This is implied by Louisa's metaphoric comment in Case 9, namely "I will give Eva R150 'for the back that has carried Erika'". Other informants put this point in another way. They will say: "I have suffered and sacrificed, now that she is married, I must relax". On the whole, figures of bride-payments mentioned to me did not range too widely. This may be related to the fact that Topnaar girls as yet do not receive as high an education as girls in Windhoek, and that therefore bride-payments along the river and in Walvis Bay have not had to keep up with this trend.

A further point mentioned by Pendleton as well (1974:148), is that a formally married wife is no longer allowed to go to her own mother in the event of domestic problems, but should go to her mother-in-law, and conversely, a man should go to his mother-in-law under such circumstances and not to his own mother. This is stipulated by Eva to her daughter Erika in Case 9 above: "Do not come running to me. Today I give you into the hands of Louisa. She is now your mother. With all your problems you must go to her, not to me". I omitted to inquire further about this point, for which Pendleton, too, does not give an explanation. Possibly this custom too is related to marriage procedures prior to the contact period.

Few men and women get married formally in the Kuiseb River area. Out of a total of 23 conjugal relations in 1978 only 8 were formal marriages. The reasons given for the low incidence of formal marriages differ from men to women. Women maintain that they are apprehensive of marrying men who may not be able to support them and their children over the years. Petrus !Goreseb was mentioned in a case study in the previous chapter as having had a long informal marriage with a woman with whom he had been living uxorilocally at Sout Rivier. When the last Lutheran pastor pressed him to get married formally "because you have so many children already", his wife refused. She maintained that he had no goats, and no job, and was reaching old age without economic security. Another man in a similar position who had been looking for a wife since 1974 was told by a woman to whom he had made advances in this regard: "You do not even own a chicken. How can I get married to you?"

Men on the other hand claim that it is difficult to save up a bridewealth of between R100 and R180 particularly in the light of the demands made on them in the name of kinship morality. Ultimately both men and women seem aware of the more binding effects of a formal marriage, even although formal marriages also break up.

A further reason for the relatively low incidence of formal marriages may be the present lack of pressure exerted on couples by the church. In the previous decades until 1972 a Rhenish missionary had been resident at Walvis Bay and had at the same time served the people along the river as well.

These resident missionaries had obviously exerted some pressure on couples to marry formally. In fact, the 8 formal marriages existent in 1978 had all been sealed by the last two missionaries.

What I refer to as an informal marriage, Nama speakers refer to as soregu-ha (that is, to have a lover). A woman may be referred to as a sores by her informal husband, and a man may be called soreb by his informal wife. Here, too, the Afrikaans terms geliefde vrou and geliefde man or alternatively the wide-spread shortened version of this lief-vrou and lief-man are also used.

Historically the sore-relationship had a completely different basis. The term soregus referred to an intimate bond of association and assistance, particularly in economic matters (Schapera, 1930:243; Schultze, 1907-318). To seal this bond the two individuals had ceremonially to share the sore-drink, initially water, but later extended to include any liquid. At the same time they could declare their mutual loyalty to each other. This sore-relationship could be established between two individuals of the same as well as of the opposite sex. Another interpretation of this custom is given by Schultze (1907:319), who holds that the sore-relationship was a secret agreement by a couple to enter into an extra-marital relationship. Recently the term has come to be used for a particular conjugal relationship. Old people still speak of these conjugal relations as a deur-drink relationships, in memory of its original meaning.

To establish an informal marriage or sore-relationship along the river is far less costly than getting married formally. A

sore-relationship like the ukuthwala relationship mentioned by Manona (1981) does not require a man's relatives to enter into the process of negotiations, nor does it require him to pay the bridewealth. A couple may fall in love and with the permission of her relatives begin to live uxori-locally. They may build their own //goe! nā-oms, set some distance away from those of her relatives. Initially the woman may use the common steir together with the other female members of the homestead. Eventually the man may build her a steir attached to their //goe! nā-oms, in which she will cook light meals, tea and coffee. However, as uxori-local residence of the couple implies economic dependence on her kin, cooking of communal meals for all members of the homestead will be done in the main steir. The men, in turn, will assist with the goats and other chores round the homestead. This may be related to the custom of bride service in the pre-contact period (Von Francois, 1896: 214), although this was not mentioned by informants.

This rather subordinate position of men living uxori-locally may lead to conflict between them and their affinal kin, and may contribute towards the high rate of dissolution of these marriages. Yet there are men who have lived in this manner for many years, as will be illustrated presently. In some cases these men eventually get married formally and establish their own homestead in another settlement. An example of this was mentioned in Chapter 4, when the daughter of the ex-headman came to live at Oswater with her informal husband in 1978. By 1978 the couple had moved to their own homestead at #Natab, even although

they had as yet not been formally married. In other cases informally married couples live uxori locally for a number of years until the older relatives of the woman die and she becomes de jure head of the homestead. However, many break up before this stage is reached.

Although the Topnaar make the linguistic distinction between formal and informal marriage, when questioned closely about the latter, they will admit that not all informal marriages are the same. For instance, many men consider co-habiting as a test for an eventual formal marriage. They claim that "if a woman can live peacefully with me for some years", there is a good chance of the relationship lasting once they get married formally. As children are born from these relationships, it is often the number of children the couple have in common rather than the number of years spent living together that is used as a criterion for predicting the stability of a potential formal marriage. A woman mentioned the possible formal marriage of her classificatory brother in these terms: "I will first wait and see whether Rita will stay with Dawid. They now have one child. I will wait until the next one comes. I had four children from my husband before we married (formally) and yet he left me". However women, and particularly younger ones, increasingly claim to consider living together with a man in a similar light, as a test for a formal marriage. In general, whereas male informants were concerned to find out whether the woman would be able to live with them without continually fighting with them, women saw informal marriage

as a test to find out whether the men would be able to "support" them.

Sometimes couples who have lived together for some years in a sore-relationship marry formally. Others remain living like this. These informal marriages are later seen in a similar way to formal marriages by kin and neighbours, irrespective of their jural status. This happens more readily with informal marriages between Topnaar partners. The process takes much longer for outsiders. In this connection, informants distinguish between those relationships where the man has come to work along the river and 'has taken a wife', lives with her and feeds her children, but shows no intention of staying. In contrast to this, other men from outside the area will establish a homestead in one of the self-generated settlements. It was these latter men who were given a vote during the election of the new headman in 1980. Topnaar further distinguish between extra-marital relations such as concubinage and prostitution. Spiegel (1981) refers to the incidence of bonyatsi relationships in Lesotho, as a kind of concubinal relationship entered into by some female household heads. In order to make ends meet, they rely on gifts and occasional small sums of money from their lovers. It is in this way that they help to maintain their homestead and feed themselves and their children.

Such relationships may have occurred along the river at various times, but I have evidence of only one case of an older woman said to have been a prostitute. Informants, particularly female

ones, would refer to her as being 'stout' (naughty). She did not have a homestead of her own, and shifted between households. In 1978 she was staying with the brother of a previous informal husband. By the beginning of 1979, she was living with female relatives, brewing beer to increase her income. By 1981 she was living with a man in the delta. As with many other facets of Topnaar social life, there was little consistency in the role of this woman. Within a few months she changed her role from informal wife to prostitute to informal wife again. This is yet another case, albeit an isolated one, of the strategies women employ to survive, but also an example of the flexibility of roles in a situation of general flexibility.

John Comaroff in his Foreword to Essays on African Marriage in Southern Africa pleads for analysts to consider the processual aspects of marriage rather than following the anthropological tradition of regarding marriage in terms of its jural status - he quotes Roberts in this regard - which is rooted in the concepts of western jurisprudence (1981:29). It is therefore not my intention to develop ever more detailed typological differences of conjugal relations along the river and Walvis Bay, but rather to follow Commaroff and see marriage as a process. The types of conjugal relations mentioned must therefore be seen as possible relations which women go through during their lifetime. Van Velsen and others have called this process of marriage serial monogamy. The term best describes the number of consecutive monogamous relationships found along the river. It

is defined by Van Velsen as "a condition whereby a person has experienced several marriages but has only one spouse at any particular time", (1964:75).

Certain points about marriages along the Kuiseb River are best illustrated with the following cases: Firstly, these cases demonstrate the kind of shifting conjugal relations along the river which I have also called serial nomogamy. Secondly, they introduce the discussion on the 'resource potential' of marriage, which holds that apart from the effective and reproductive functions of conjugal relations, they have an economic function as well. For women to set themselves up as conjugal partners to men represents one means whereby they can gain access to resources, such as the income of men employed in the administrative centres along the river. Thirdly, this 'resource potential' of marriage is extended to affinal relatives generally. Relationships with affines can be manipulated and alignments forged, as described in Chapter 4. As with all other alignments along the river, these contribute yet again to sporadic changes in household composition.

#### SHIFTING CONJUGAL ALIGNMENTS

##### CASE 10: Josephine

Josephine is a woman of 73. Admiring the conjugal relations of others, she has on occasion mentioned difficulties in her relationships with men. This may be the reason why she has had only two conjugal relations during her marriageable age. The first was with a young policeman, while she and her family were still

living in Walvis Bay. One child, her deceased son, was born from this rather brief relationship. The fact that she and her mother moved to Ururas along the river probably contributed to its termination. At Ururas she began living in a similar sore-relationship with a man. After some time the couple decided to move to Walvis Bay, where they stayed for some years, until Josephine took over the homestead at Sout Rivier after her mother's death. For a number of years she and her husband lived at Sout Rivier, until he decided to return to work in a fishing factory at Walvis Bay. At first he would return to the river regularly and would send and bring food for her, but then the relationship deteriorated. For many years she tried in vain to persuade him to return to Sout Rivier, but he remained living in Kuisebmond, even after giving up his job at the fishing factory. In 1979 she heard that he was in hospital in Walvis Bay and that he wished to see her. Fearing the worst, she asked me to drive her to Walvis Bay. On this occasion she again repeated her suggestion that he should return to the river, particularly now that he was no longer working. When he was discharged from hospital, however, he went back to board at her sister's house.

Josephine still lives in Sout Rivier in a homestead which she heads and which is also occupied by a daughter, Mathilde, from her second relationship (see Case 12) and another affinal female relative, Anna, and some children. (see Case 11) After all these years, she has never given up the hope of her husband returning one day. Although they have now been apart for over ten years, other people along the river still consider them as a couple.

#### CASE 11: Anna

Anna is the daughter of the deceased brother of Josephine's second informal husband. Her first conjugal relationship was with a man who no longer lives along the river. She gave birth to her two eldest daughters, but the couple soon parted ways and Anna went back to Ururas to live with her paternal uncles. There she met her second husband. She had four voorkinders (that is, children before the formal marriage), while she and her husband were living uxorilocally at Ururas. Once they were married formally the couple moved to Walvis Bay. Anna would come occasionally to visit her relatives along the river. It was during this time that her formal marriage dissolved. Her husband remained in the council house at Walvis Bay with a new informal wife, and Anna

returned to the river. She remained with her maternal uncles for some time, until Josephine (see Case 10 above) persuaded her to come to live at Sout Rivier. This coincided with the break-up of the informal marriage between Josephine and her husband, classificatory uncle of Anna.

In Sout Rivier Anna met her third husband, who came to live with her in Josephine's household. Anna says she has four children from this relationship, but residents of the settlement maintain that one daughter is from a man with whom she had a short affair. During the time of fieldwork, she lived with Josephine for most of the time, with visits to Iduseb where her husband had been employed in 1979.

#### CASE 12: Mathilde

Mathilde is the middle-aged daughter from Josephine's second conjugal relationship, Mathilde left the river when she was young. Her first informal relationship was with a man in Walvis Bay, from whom she had her first and only child, by now an adult working in Walvis Bay and a member of the raad. He occasionally comes out to the river and helps his mother and grandmother with strenuous manual tasks such as the building of kraals or omdi.

After her first conjugal relationship dissolved, Mathilde returned to her mother at Sout Rivier. She left again, however, to look for employment, and met a man working on a farm in the Khomas Hochland in the central part of the country. She moved there with him, but had no children. She then left the farm "because when he was drunk he would not stop hitting me, and I could no longer stand it", and returned to her mother along the river. This was in 1979. After having lived there for some months she began co-habiting with an employee at Gobabeb, who claims to have come from Botswana. She would stay at Gobabeb during the week and come to the settlement over weekends. By 1981, however, this relationship, too, had come to an end. Her husband had lost his job at Gobabeb, and not having a homestead of his own along the river was forced to leave the area leaving two children behind with Mathilde. When I returned briefly in 1982, Mathilde had still not heard from him. She assumed that he had found work elsewhere or had returned home. She was thinking of leaving the river and finding employment to feed herself and the two children.

The above cases illustrate the norm that women contract at least two, but often three or more conjugal relations mostly during their child-bearing years.

Men, like other individuals, are considered a resource potential by women, who vie with each other for the favour of economically secure men. I described elsewhere how a young woman from Sout Rivier tried and almost succeeded in setting herself up as a conjugal partner to a man employed at Gobabeb, whose informal wife had temporarily left him following a disagreement. Members of the other homestead at Sout Rivier relating this accident to me, emphasised that she had been demanding money from him long before she had finally established her position as his informal wife. I mentioned further how women are often in need of people who are physically and financially able to assist them. These individuals are referred to as 'hands'. The most obvious 'hand' for a woman would be a husband. Women who are single and yet are heads of homesteads have to recruit other relatives to assist them with manual and other tasks.

The ideal for women is to become married formally to relatively wealthy men. I showed in Chapter 4 how these couples were involved in structural movements between the man's place of employment and their homesteads along the river. But few women attain this ideal. Most, like Josephine, Anna and Mathilde, form a number of monogamous unions during their lives. Josephine, for reasons stated above, had two such conjugal alignments; Anna had three (or four) and Mathilde has so far had three.

Like many other alignments between individuals along the river, conjugal alignments have a local concomitant. Marriage is defined, except in rare cases, in terms of co-residence. Conjugal alignments are, thus, implicitly also spatial alignments. Therefore, each alignment contracted - and severed - implies at least one spatial movement by at least one member at its inception, and another following its dissolution. Further movements may follow as a result of other factors. In Anna's case the following movements were undertaken: Anna's first husband came to live with her at Ururas. The marriage dissolved, he left and she remained at Ururas. Then her second husband came to stay with her at Ururas and they moved from Ururas to Walvis Bay in order for her husband to take up employment there. While living at Walvis Bay the marriage was dissolved and Anna returned to Ururas. She was then persuaded by Josephine to come to live at Sout Rivier, where she met her third husband. She subsequently made some moves between Sout Rivier and Iduseb, as a result of her husband having employment there.

Thus in the process of establishing and severing marital relations women move between settlements and households. Anna has during her life made at least six movements between settlements along the river and Walvis Bay, which were related to her marital relations at the time. She was a member of her classificatory father's, her second husband's Josephine's, her third husband's at Iduseb, and again at a later stage, Josephine's households. The other two women, Josephine and

Mathilde, went through similar movements.

Under the circumstances of the brittleness of marriage, women are forced to maintain links with other relatives on whom they can depend in the event of their marriages breaking up. These relatives very often include their mothers, as is shown in Case 12, Mathilde would return to her mother between conjugal relationships and maintenance of the link was most evident during her last conjugal relationship. While living with her husband at Gobabeb, she would supply her mother with groceries and other articles which she was able to get on her weekly trips to Walvis Bay. Her informal husband would also occasionally help around the homestead over week-ends. In this way, he too, was able to gain access to resources along the river, such as a supply of meat. Thus, not only does the mother remain an important individual in the lives of women entering relatively fluid marital alignments, but men who come into the area and marry Topnaar women, find that affinal relationship open certain resources to them to which they would otherwise have had no direct access.

#### THE FEMALE KINDRED AND THE 'DOMESTIC NETWORK'

But apart from the relationship women maintain with their mothers, women build around them a body of kindred, from which they sporadically activate certain ties. Stack refers to this body of kin as the domestic network. She holds that among urban-born Black Americans "the basis of familial structure and

cooperation is not the nuclear family of the middle class, but an extended cluster of kinsmen related chiefly through children but also through marriage and friendship, who align to provide domestic functions. This cluster, or domestic network, is diffused over several kin-based households, and the fluctuations in individual household composition do not significantly affect cooperative arrangements" (Stack, 1974: 114). Out of this domestic network households form around women, who are forced to deal with child care and socialisation.

This concept is useful in analysing the flexible nature of households composed largely of women along the Kuiseb River. The noticeable characteristic of domestic networks, as well as these households, is that they consist largely, but not exclusively, of women. This point is illustrated along the Kuiseb River by Josephine's household, which during some time between 1978 and 1980 consisted of herself, Anna and her children and Mathilde and the children of her former husband.

Stack mentions further that her material shows a strong sense of independence of women from men and that "social controls are evolved against the formation of conjugal relations ..." and, hence, the limited role of the husband-father within the mother's domestic group (1974:115). Her examples quoted further show a certain attitude of pride, vengeance and self-defense (p.122) of women towards the exploitations of men. This is not necessarily the case along the Kuiseb River where, as is shown in the case of Josephine, a woman will go to

considerable extremes to get a conjugal partner, provided he is not in a worse state of poverty than she is. Topnaar women, in an attempt to avoid open conflict, will selectively enlarge their domestic network, maintaining those links which are profitable and neglecting unprofitable ones. Stack stresses that in a situation of limited resources, "people need help from as many others as possible" (p.128). This is easy to accomplish along the Kuiseb River, for with each successive marriage new potentials arise. At the same time affinal relations of previous marriages need not be severed, unless the woman chooses to do so. As one woman explained to me: "You see, I should have come to visit old Charlotte (the mother of her previous husband) a long time ago, especially now that she is so sick. What has happened between Paul and myself does not affect my relationship with her, but I now live so far away. How can I visit her?" In this case, the former mother-in-law, Charlotte, of the informant lived in a settlement which she passed at least once a month on her way to get a pension in Walvis Bay. However, Charlotte had no assets except her own old-age pension, which was already being cared for by someone else. Hence, this informant had chosen to let this alignment lapse.

Yet another elderly female household head was working at re-establishing an alignment with the son of her deceased husband's brother. The young man had recently moved to a settlement closer to her, and even although there had been no previous cooperation between the two, the situation was now more congenial. She

was acting as midwife to the wife of the young man and, in return, expected some favours from him. She had repeatedly asked him to cut her wood and transport it to her omdi with his donkey-cart. When early one evening he drove away without having cut the wood, she called after him: "You will not come here again, without helping your mother. I never thought that a child of mine could be so disrespectful. Don't you remember your father's brother? Go and don't come here again!" In the process of trying to get him to do her the favour of cutting the wood, she was appealing to the affinal kin relationship between them, but also depicting it as a child-mother relationship.

Affinal relations are often a means of informal employment. I mentioned the case of a man being offered informal employment with the ex-headman. When his wife refused to move to Oswater, he was forced to decline. As the headman insisted on some form of assistance, the man was able to suggest his brother-in-law, who subsequently accepted the job at Oswater.

Thus affinal relations are manipulated by individuals in the Kuiseb River area in the same way as relationships with other kin are manipulated. They are activated and severed in a spontaneous and sporadic way. Women recruit affinal kin to their domestic networks and sometimes to their households. Their residential alignments with female affinal kin are severed in a similar sporadic and unpredictable way, resulting in fluctuations in such households composed largely of females. Stack repeatedly refers to the high rate of residential changes

made by women and the subsequent elastic boundaries of households as women leave for conjugal or other reasons. In spite of this, she argues for a continuity of the domestic network over time and the successive recombination of the same domestic network. "Residential histories, then, are an important reflection of the strategy of relying on or strengthening the domestic network .." (p.115). Some features of the process of recombination of women in a residential alignment, in spite of temporary re-alignment and even conflict, may be illustrated along the Kuiseb River in the extension and elaboration of the three cases previously presented.

#### SHIFTING AFFINAL ALIGNMENTS AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

In Case above I described how Josephine had persuaded Anna to come to live with her at Sout Rivier, following the break-up of the conjugal relations of both women. Anna had lived with Josephine for many years prior to 1974 (my first arrival in the field). In 1979, though, Mathilde arrived at Sout Rivier, following the dissolution of her latest conjugal relationship. With the arrival of Mathilde and particularly when the latter established a conjugal relationship with an employee at Gobabeb a re-alignment started, whereby Josephine tended to side in a number of ways with Mathilde rather than with Anna. This eventually resulted in Anna moving away.

**CASE 13: The Splitting of a Female-Headed Household**

When Mathilde arrived some changes had been brought about in the living arrangements at Josephine's household. Some twelve paces from Josephine's omdi stood a caravan which she had specifically bought for Mathilde to live in. For a while the common steir opposite Josephine's //goe!nâ-oms was used by the three women together. As time went on, however, Anna seemed to become increasingly withdrawn and would spend most of her time in her omdi some fifty paces away. Cooking would no longer be done communally, Mathilde and Josephine would cook for themselves in their steir, Anna for her family in hers which she had previously never used. Tension increased as each party kept to themselves. There was no carrying back and forth of food, as had previously been the custom.

Conflict erupted one day, when Mathilde accused Anna of not giving Johannes, an elderly pensioner living with them, his accepted share of the pension. Whenever Anna was away on extended visits to Walvis Bay, presumably to get the pension, but also to Iduseb, where her husband was working, it was Mathilde who had to feed Johannes. To me Mathilde said that Anna was spending the pension buying liquor and selling it at a profit at Iduseb. Instead of giving Johannes something of this profit, she was spending it on her husband, who surely was not entitled to a share in the pension as he was employed.

Some time after this, Anna sent her goats to #Natab and she, her children and Johannes moved to Iduseb. During two short visits during 1981 and 1982 the following had evolved with regard to this case: Johannes had in the meantime been persuaded to complain to the 'raad' about the management of his pension. After the case had been investigated, the management of the pension was taken from Anna and given to Mathilde. By 1982, however, Anna had returned to Sout Rivier and was once again living with Josephine. Mathilde was also staying with her mother at Sout Rivier, following the departure of her informal husband from the river.

The case above illustrates two points in particular. Firstly, it shows how women may shift their alignments even within the household and how this may cause a change in household composition. Secondly, it provides a good example of the continuity of domestic networks of women.

In the above example both Josephine and Anna shifted their alignments and the long-standing relationship of cooperation which had previously existed. With the arrival of her daughter Mathilde, Josephine seemed to have shown increasing interest in the former. Apart from the emotional benefits she may have gained, she also benefited economically from the presence of her daughter particularly when Mathilde started to co-habit with an employee at Gobabeb. As mentioned elsewhere, a salary from employment in any of the administrative centres is one of the most prized resources along the river. Through Mathilde's conjugal alignment, Josephine had indirect access to the salary of her daughter's husband.

Anna, on the other hand, had access to the pension of Johannes, on which Josephine's household had partially subsisted prior to Mathilde's arrival. But, as the case relates, Anna was away from Sout Rivier much of the time either in Walvis Bay, but to an increasing extent in Iduseb, where her husband was employed. It follows that Anna may no longer have invested the customary share of the pension in the household of Josephine. For when the conflict between her and Mathilde eventually erupted, it was the mismanagement of the pension by Anna which was the crucial criticism of Mathilde.

Whereas Josephine may have as the result of these circumstances been tending to side with Mathilde, Anna may have recognised better prospects for herself at Iduseb. A number of attractions existed at Iduseb. Firstly, her husband was employed there.

she had lately been approached by the local headmasters to come to Iduseb towards the end of the month in order to ensure that she and the children got some share of her husband's salary who was in the habit of spending the whole amount all at once. Should Anna want some control over her husband's spending, she was forced to spend more time at Iduseb. Secondly, because of the large earning population at Iduseb, she was able to sell liquor there at a profit. Thirdly, Iduseb was far more exciting than Sout Rivier, being closer to Walvis Bay. Fourthly, four of her children were staying at Iduseb. Hence, Anna could very well have been in the process of investing her efforts in Iduseb rather than at Sout Rivier. This trend of her thoughts were confirmed, when following the conflict, she did move to Iduseb and thereby caused the splitting of the household at Sout Rivier.

The second point which is illustrated by the case above, is that the women involved in this household repeatedly seem to fall back on each other for help and, hence, produce a repetition of the same residential arrangements. Mathilde was in the habit of returning to her mother at Sout Rivier in between conjugal relationships. This she had done in 1979 and again in 1982. What is interesting to note about Anna's behaviour is that, following the conflict with Mathilde and the return of the latter to Josephine's household, one would have expected her to remain at Iduseb with her husband. Instead, she returned to Sout Rivier to live in the homestead of Josephine

once again; hereby restoring the previous composition of the homestead.

One reason for her return may have been that she found it impossible to subsist at Iduseb without having the additional source of money from Johannes's pension. By returning to Sout Rivier, she sacrificed a share of her husband salary, but benefited from the share of the pension which was invested in the household at Sout Rivier by Mathilde. So that, in the end, her security lay at Sout Rivier rather than at Iduseb.

#### FEMALE HOUSEHOLDS AND THEIR COMPOSITION

Apart from marrying formally and remaining so or establishing shifting conjugal alignments with men, a few women along the river have been very successful at yet another strategy. I have mentioned four cases of relatively young women, who at some time of the fieldwork had maintained their own homestead and farming operation, in spite of having no lasting relationship with a man. These homesteads came about in one of the following three ways: either the woman had inherited the homestead, usually from her mother or other female relative; or she had manipulated her alignments with relatively wealthy kin and thereby gained the assets to establish such a homestead; or she had been employed for some years and, as men do, had invested some of her income in a herd of goats along the river.

Two points are particularly interesting about these households. Firstly these women temporarily attract men to their households who will live with them for a while, father their children, while the women remain the de jure and de facto heads of these households. Men temporarily exploit this situation of relative economic security of the women, but then leave again. An additional reason for the brittleness of marriage in these particular conditions may be that men find it difficult to cope with their subordinate positions. They do, however, temporarily increase the size of these households, as they occasionally bring other relatives with them. A case in question is that of the husband of Mathilde in Case 12, who brought two of his children from a previous conjugal relationship to be cared for by Mathilde or her mother. Secondly, daughters and other female kin of the female household head also exploit the position of relative economic security and send their children to be tended by their mother, while they remain employed in Walvis Bay. The head of such a household at Swartbank was looking after two of her grand-daughters, children of her daughters who also were not married, but needed to remain employed.

Thirdly, these homesteads are passed from female to female, mostly from mother to daughter. The homestead of Josephine is a case in point. She had inherited it from her mother, and already by 1979 she maintained that the goats and the right to residence at Sout Rivier were "already under Mathilde's head". She was merely "looking after everything". Mathilde

herself was, however, contemplating leaving the river and working at Walvis Bay, particularly after the departure of her informal husband from Gobabeb. In this case she would be forced to leave his two children with her mother. I explained elsewhere how mothers remunerate their mothers for looking after their children. In this case the same would apply, but more so. Mathilde would show an active interest in the homestead, as it is rightfully hers. Hence, her decision to work in Walvis Bay and not further away, where she had previously gone to seek employment.

At this point in the development of these few households, they show certain principles in common with those households which Preston-Whyte has referred to as "female - or woman-linked" (1982:170). She uses this term to distinguish certain domestic groups from those that have been referred to in the literature as "matrifocal families" or "female headed households". She coined this term on the basis of her material collected in Durban and applies it to the situation where unmarried, widowed or deserted women set up homes run by other women, while they themselves remain the de jure heads of these. The underlying factor is that these women are forced to become migrants to white towns, where they are prohibited from settling permanently. While they, thus, remain to be the breadwinner of these units, the child-caring and socialising activities are performed by other female kin, often living in the country. She points out that this is a strategy adopted by single women to adapt to urban conditions.

Even although the legal restrictions mentioned by Preston-Whyte for the Durban area do not apply to the Kuseb and surrounding area, single women would send their children to be reared by female kin. This was also seen as a solution for married couples to solve the problem of earning money as well as raising a family. Of the specific kind of "female-linked" domestic units described by Preston-Whyte only two cases were found. The one has been mentioned above. The other was that of a woman still employed away from the river, but being considered by the remaining members of the homestead at Armstraat as being its head.

#### CONCLUSIONS

This chapter dealt with some of the strategies women employ to survive. I argue that the ideal is for women to become formal conjugal partners to economically secure men. The kinds of movements these women would be involved in are of the structural kind and are reflected in cyclical changes of household composition. The majority of women, however, do not attain this aim. They have a series of monogamous marriages and consequently shift between households as they sever old unions and establish new ones. However, to safeguard themselves during times of being single they develop around them a 'domestic network' consisting primarily of other women with whom they have bilateral or affinal connections. Ties with these relatives are activated sporadically as the need arises. Like all other alignments discussed, these,

too, have an ephemeral nature, and a high rate of re-alignment is evident. The process of re-alignment may be a repeat activation of ties previously utilised. Should these repeat-activations be residential, certain constellations of households will be repeated. Whatever form these re-alignments take, the result is some movement by women, producing sporadic and spontaneous changes in household composition rather than cyclical ones.

CHAPTER 7

THE FOSTERING OF CHILDREN AND SHIFTING ALIGNMENTS

In the same way as affinal ties are manipulated by individuals to add a further value to often already existing kinship ties, so the process of fostering children establishes, maintains or strengthens relationships of exchange between foster-parents and parents. Like marriage, fostering has a local implication, as it presupposes co-residence between foster-child(ren) and parent(s). This process then is a further reason for the fluctuating composition of household groups. But fostering does not only involve a one-time move by the foster-child from his parental home to that of his foster-parents. Firstly, norms surrounding fostering prescribe repeated visits of longer or shorter duration to parents; secondly, alignments are ephemeral and may be severed by either the foster-child, the foster-parent(s) or any other member of the fostering family; and thirdly, foster-children may be passed between different members of the fostering family - all of which are additional factors producing changes in household composition.

#### KIN REARING AND FOSTERING OF CHILDREN : GOODY'S MODEL

Mayer mentions that most African societies emphasise kin rearing (as opposed to parent-rearing) in one form or another. He states that among the present-day Xhosa "... the use of kin in the country to discharge pro-parental functions is not merely a device to suit the migrant's distrust of town education ... but fits in with some distinctive features of rural Xhosa tradition, in themselves apparently unconnected with labour migration" (1961:173). He refers to the practice of urban labourers sending their young children to be raised by kin in the rural areas. Gray's observations are in line with those of Mayer. She maintains

that in the rural areas of Lesotho, fostering is not clearly defined, but rather is "... a continuum of arrangements for the sharing in the activities necessary to raise and support a child" (Gray, 1980:77 ,unpublished). She uses the term 'fostering' as synonymous with 'kin rearing'!

Another form of non-parent rearing of children is that of adoption. Goody, one author who deals with the topic of fostering in any depth, distinguishes between the two in the following way. Whereas adoption involves a legal change in status of the adoptee, this is not the case with fostering by kin, which involves "... no permanent forfeiting of rights or duties in order to assume a new set, no change in kinship terms used between the people concerned and no change of status in any sense" (Goody, 1973:181). Thus she uses the term fostering (from foster, nourish or feed) to describe the institution of children being given away by their parent(s) to relatives to be raised by them. Thus, fostering takes place within the range of kin, who already share rights and property. Secondly, a fostering relationship becomes established only when the potential foster-parents actually raise their claim and ask for a child.

What Gray (1980:77) therefore, refers to as fostering, I will call 'kin rearing', namely the wide-spread practice whereby children, for whatever reason, are reared by kin other than their parents. This includes the practice described by Mayer (1961:173) of parents living in town sending their children

to be reared by kin in the country. Fostering, I will define in terms of Goody's use of the concept, namely a certain type of kin rearing which is surrounded by special rights and duties and beliefs, not to be found associated with other types of kin rearing.

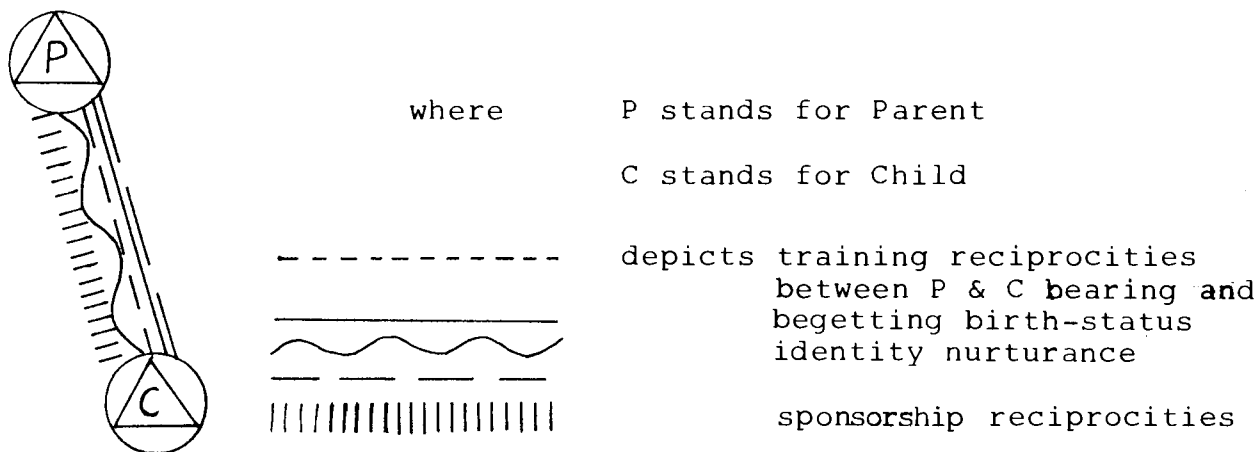
Goody (1973:182 ff) mentions of the Gonja of Ghana that the foster-parent is ideally determined by the sex of the child: the first-born girl is given to the father's sister, whereas the second son may be claimed by the mother's brother; first sons are not given away by their biological parents. But the sending away of a child to be brought up by his mother's brother does not satisfy these claims for all time. If the union is a fertile one, it is the prerogative of the mother's people to ask for additional foster-children; two out of a total of four or five, three if there are five or six (Goody, 1973:186). But she shows that this ideal is far from being frequently practised and that the 34 foster-children of her sample are distributed over ten categories of kin. This kind of fostering she calls voluntary fostering, and points out that it presupposes that the child's family of orientation is intact. However, 58% of her sample of foster-children came from families where the conjugal union had been dissolved and where foster-parents raised their claims as a result to this. This kind of fostering Goody calls crisis fostering.

In principle fostering along the Kuiseb River and in Walvis Bay has a lot in common with the practice as described by Goody

among the Gonja, although the elements that differ between the two areas will also be discussed. In order to distinguish between such different child-rearing practices as those mentioned above and others, Goody (1982) has devised a framework for the analysis of parental roles. Parenthood, she sees, as being concerned with social replacement, namely the task of bearing and begetting children and establishing them as effective adults in their turn. She isolates five universal components of parenthood. These are

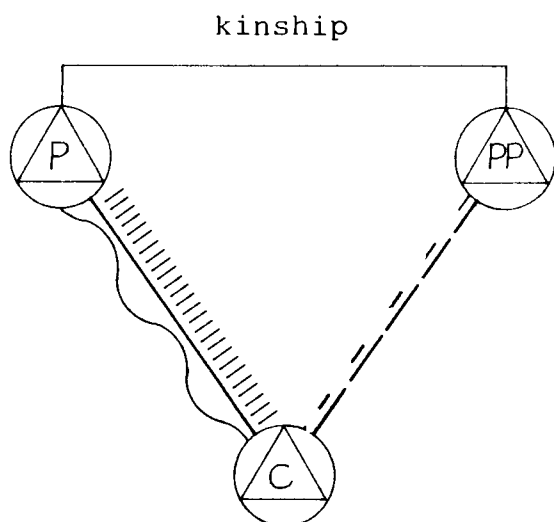
- (i) bearing and begetting
- (ii) endowment with civil and kinship status
- (iii) nurturance
- (iv) training
- (v) sponsorship into adulthood

Each of these parental tasks are potentially separable from the others and can hence be performed by different individuals. For instance, whereas bearing and begetting is a biological fact which cannot be altered once conception has taken place, it is possible "to transact about the consequences of bearing and begetting by defining birth-status identity separately, or allocating responsibilities of rearing to others..." (Goody, 1982:8). By teasing apart the roles of parenthood, a number of non-parental rearing practices can be distinguished from each other by determining the roles performed by different individuals. For instance, a situation resembling the Western ideal is one in which all parental roles are performed by the same two individuals. This can be represented diagrammatically as shown:



This is a very strongly cemented parent-child relationship, with no sharing of the child rearing responsibilities with anybody. A less strongly cemented relationship which will be of more concern presently is that mentioned by Mayer (1961:173) namely kinship rearing. This practice can be represented as follows:

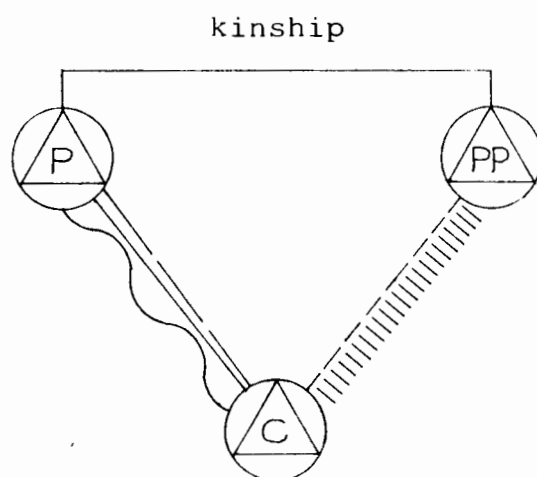
where PP stands for Pro-parent.



In this incidence the roles of bearing and begetting, sponsorship and the giving of birth-status identity are performed by the socially accepted parents, whereas the roles of nurturance and training are done by a pro-parents. Admittedly there are

variations to this practice, in which the task of nurturance may not be performed by the pro-parent, but the child given away only after it has been nurtured. The above representation refers to such situations found repeatedly along the Kuiseb River as well, where children are given mostly to kin at a very young age. In these cases they are not only raised and trained by female kin but also nurtured by their pro-parent.

The other non-parental rearing practice of concern presently is that of fostering. Goody discusses the various kinds of fostering relationships (for instance, fostering by a wet nurse in fourteenth and fifteenth century Europe or ritual fostering as found in Latin America). The kind of fostering found along the Kuiseb River is kinship fostering and can be represented as follows:



The difference between kin rearing and fostering as found along the Kuiseb River, is that in the case of kin rearing the parents are still responsible for the sponsorship of their child in the process of gaining adult status. This

is not the case in fostering, where the duties of training and sponsorship are that of the foster-parents, whereas the tasks of giving of birth-status identity, bearing and begetting and nurturance are those of the parents. In the latter case this is the responsibility of the foster-parents; for along the Kuiseb River it is specifically poorer parents who give their children to be fostered by relatives relatively wealthier than themselves. Following this transaction a relationship of reciprocity and debt is established not only between foster-parent and foster-child, but also between parents. This will be elaborated on in the present chapter. This relationship or fostering alignment is representable in Goody's diagram by the connecting line between the two sets of parents.

#### KIN REARING AND FOSTERING ALONG THE KUISEB RIVER

In 1978 of a total of 73, there were 23 children along the river who were not living with either biological parent. Of these 23, 13 were being raised by their grandmothers, while their mothers or parents were employed in Walvis Bay; 5 under similar conditions by relatives other than their grandmothers; and 5 were being fostered by kin other than their grandmothers. (see Table 14 overleaf).

TABLE 14: Incidence of Kin Rearing and Fostering

| Kin Rearing   |       |       | Fostering | Total |
|---------------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Grand-mothers | Aunts | Other |           |       |
| 13            | 4     | 1     | 5         | 23    |

More than half of the children not raised by their biological parents were thus being raised by their grandmothers. This is a relatively common way for parents or single parents to solve the problem of being employed in town and having off-spring. This problem was already been referred to in the previous chapter.

The same applies to those children being reared by kin other than their grandmothers. In four of the five cases these were the mother's sisters. The fifth case was of a woman not related to the child but having taken it, as its own mother was mentally deranged.

Women or parents who gave their children to be reared by their mothers or sisters usually made some form of payment to them. It was impossible to establish the exact amount, as these payments are couched in terms of kinship morality. Payments were made either irregularly or else in non-monetary form, like

groceries brought from town or clothes. This stands in strong contrast to fostering alignments where payments of this particular nature were not made, even though debt relations did evolve with a consequent form of exchange of gifts and services. Kin rearing by sisters and mothers of parents was also not preceded by the practice of "asking" for the child, nor the beliefs in witchcraft. accusations surrounding the institution of fostering.

The children mentioned so far were being kin-reared, according to the distinction already made. The rest of this chapter will deal with those children who are being kin-fostered, an institution in Topnaar social life which has elements not found in other kinds of kin rearing.

The number of foster-children along the river in 1978 were relatively few, only of a total of 73 children in all. A similarly small number of foster-children at any given time was recorded by Goody (1973:191) for a Gonja village Buipe. She attributes this low incidence to the particular norms surrounding Gonja fostering, as for instance, claims on fostering being with respect to sibling groups and not individuals, and maternal kin only having rights to the second or third children of a couple.

The incidence of fostering along the river may be related in parts to the availability of schooling in the area, but there is

insufficient information on this point. No cases of fostering were found in the brief survey in Walvis Bay. However, in spite of the incidence of foster children being low at any given time, I have been able to collect information on many more cases. So that it seems likely that because of the flexibility of fostering relationships, some of which shift as rapidly as do other alignments, synchronic data do not reflect the true picture, and that the topic should be considered processually.

As among the Gonja where certain relatives "beg" a child, relatives along the Kuiseb River "ask" for children and are "given" them. Nama speakers refer to this practice in the above vague terminology. The term for foster-parent is similarly vague, namely /gôakaikai-ao-i (that is, the person who raises the child). The way in which the "asking" of children is put by informants, is that somebody may have "begun to love the child" (that is, raak lief vir die kind) and wants the child to live with them. As will be explained presently, in such cases the children have to be given for fear of being 'getoor' (i.e. 'bewitched'). Particular individuals may have only very vaguely defined rights to certain children, but may still lodge their claim. For instance, the mother-in-law of an informally married wife claimed that she as yet "had no child of Anna's, even though all the other wives of her sons had given her a child". Anna was consequently forced to give her youngest daughter to her mother-in-law even though this is not a generally accepted norm. Other individuals who have claim to children are those who have "baptised" the children. They

pay the fees involved in the church ceremony and on the basis of this have a primary right to claim these children. If this right is not exercised, these children may be "asked" for by other relatives. Relatives who establish claims through baptism are very often mothers' sisters. In these cases the foster-parents are referred to as mâba//gûn in Nama or peet-ouers in Afrikaans. The literal translation of the Nama term is "people standing in".

But a child may also become fostered for such simple reasons simple as being a good friend of another child. The following incident was related to me: While the former headman was living at Sout Rivier his second eldest son was a good friend of a child from another family in the settlement. When the ex-headman moved from Sout Rivier to Oswater, his son's friend was determined not to be separated from his son. As they drove out of the settlement, his son's friend jumped onto the donkey-cart "with only the trousers he was wearing", and refused to be left behind. When they had been living at Oswater for some time, it became evident that he would not return to his parents at Sout Rivier. So some time later the wife of the ex-headman went to his parents and "asked" him. Since then he has been living with the family at Oswater.

#### REASONS FOR FOSTERING

Fostering along the Kuiseb River can occur for both social and economic reasons, although the distinction is not always

clear-cut. In order adequately to consider the social reasons for fostering, the social value of children generally in Topnaar social life should be considered.

According to Topnaar values a woman who has not had children is still considered as /goas, that is, a child, in contrast to a taras, which is a married women, who more likely than not, has children. The same applies to a man. When childless he is called /goab, a boy, and once married, aob, a man. Newly-born children and infants are treated with unlimited affection and attention. Both men and women will encourage every step in their physical and mental development. Even though they are later treated with seemingly far less affection, it is the desire of most women to have children. Childless women who are still in their child-bearing years will foster children of others who have large numbers of off-spring. Of the five foster-children along the river in 1978, two had been fostered by a woman who herself could bear no children. By 1979 she had fostered a further two making her the individual with the most foster-children in the area. Because of the social value attached to children and the status attained by women who do have children, women past their menopause try to extend their child-bearing years by also fostering children. This was the case with the incident mentioned above concerning the informally married woman's mother-in-law. Of the five children fostered in 1978 one was fostered by an elderly woman past her menopause. Goody (1973:205) sums up the combination of economic and social reasons why Gonja women foster children.

"When a woman is infirm or tied down by several children, the services of a foster daughter are very welcome. The tasks of carrying firewood and water, most often delegated to older girls, are tiring and may involve carrying heavy loads for several miles. For the older woman particularly, a foster-child may mean the difference between an assured supply of these necessities and an uneasy dependence on the other women of the compound. Where a woman has returned in old age to live with her kin she will be in a much stronger position if she has her own kapita (that is, female foster-child), with her. As with a woman who has never born her own children, but is still young and strong, she values a foster-child both for companionship and help".

This is a situation very similar to that found along the Kuiseb River. Presently reference will be made to a case where a woman, who was weighed down with her own children and commitments, and who obtained a foster-child "to help me with the other children", or to the case of an elderly woman, who wanted a foster-child for companionship and help round the homestead. These two types of reasons for having foster-children often cannot be separated. I have previously mentioned women commenting about the help children are in the annual !Nara harvest for such tasks as fetching water or carrying firewood. Even in the daily chores around the home such as separating of the goats from the lambs, many households would be far worse off without young children.

Children are also "asked" for by relatively wealthy parents for what seems to the outsider to be economic reasons only. This is obviously not stated as such, but the relationships of debt established as a result of such a fostering alignment between foster-parent and biological parent are clearly

recognised by each. For instance, the case quoted above of the child who was such a good friend of a son of his foster-parent's son was quoted to me as a case in point. The son's father would demand free lifts to town from the ex-headman on the basis of their fostering alignment and people would say of the ex-headman's family: "Who do you think would look after his goats if it had not been for Petrus's children whom he is raising?" It is noticeable in this regard that children from poorer families become fostered by more wealthy ones. One mother who had given away four of her children to be fostered at some time or another put in this way: "You see, I am poor. If I should keep all my children and we have no food we will all suffer. If I give away some children, maybe they will be better off". From an analytical point of view these particular fostering alignments between the family of orientation and the child's foster-parents are similar in nature to those alignments dealt with previously which are established for the tapping of resources of others. For analytical purposes I shall refer to the relationship between foster-parent and foster-child as a fostering relation, whereas the relationship between biological parent and foster-parent evolving as a result of the fostering relation I shall refer to as a fostering alignment.

#### CERTAIN FEATURES OF TOPNAAR FOSTERING

Certain norms and beliefs surround and prescribe the interaction between foster-parents, foster-children and parents, which are not associated with other forms of kin rearing. Some

of them can best be illustrated with the aid of a case study:

### CASE 11: Fostering and Witchcraft

One day in April 1979 Petrus !Goreseb came to ask me for a lift to Klipneus for himself, his wife and his youngest daughter, Handjie, who had been visiting Sout Rivier for some time. He seemed agitated and said it was imperative for us to leave immediately. During our drive to Klipneus the conversation revolved round the practice of fostering and the following came out. He had been fostered by the mother of Frederick, the husband of a woman called Elsa at Klipneus to whom we were going. Elsa had once "asked" Petrus for his youngest son. Petrus would not part with him and the child subsequently became ill and died. Following the death, which by implication had been caused by Elsa, he promised her his next daughter. Handjie had now lived at Klipneus for a number of years, but whenever Elsa went to visit her family at Okombahe, Handjie would come to Sout Rivier for a while. This had been the case at the time. Elsa had, however, returned from Okombahe and had sent a message to Petrus, that she now wanted Handjie back "by his own hand", that is, to be brought by himself and not sent by someone else. Petrus was thus under some pressure to bring back his daughter to her foster-mother as soon as possible for fear of further witchcraft activities directed at him and his family.

During this conversation and the drive to Klipneus, Handjie had become nauseous and started crying, partly perhaps because of not being used to driving in a car. At the omdi of her foster parents the crying increased and she started clinging to the skirts of her mother. The latter initially paid no heed, but continued drinking her tea in what seemed a relaxed fashion. As her daughter continued crying, now much louder, and would not respond to the sweets, toys and new clothes offered as an enticement to stay with her foster-parents, she responded in the typical Nama fasion: "Ai, !Ghutse, ne /goas! Etse, !ghû tog!" ("Oh, my God, this child. Why don't you leave me alone"). Petrus himself was rather quiet during the whole episode. When we eventually wanted to leave, Handjie had to be held back by her foster-father, otherwise she would have got into the car or run after it. We drove away with her screaming and straining to free herself from the grip of Elsa's husband.

Her parents were obviously shaken by their daughter's emotion. The incident did not, however, end there. We went to visit at a homestead at Klein Klipneus some

3km away from Elsa and Frederick. Suddenly Handjie came running across the gravel plains. She had wrested herself free and in the process tore her clothes. She was still screaming and would not listen to the scolding of the people of the homestead. When we left Klein Klipneus, the same precautions of holding her back had to be repeated.

The extent of emotion expressed by Handjie at the parting and the lack of it expressed by her parents on the occasion described above is exceptional. Many foster-children seem to feel very easy about seeing their parents or parting with them. For instance, a son of Petrus fostered by the ex-headman would often come to Sout Rivier with the rest of the family to visit an affinal relative, but would not walk over to his parent's homestead nor would they or his other siblings come to see him. If he did on very rare occasions visit his parents, no emotions even remotely similar to those shown by Handjie would be expressed at the parting. Thus, the severity of the case above was emphasised by the witchcraft activities surrounding it.

I have mentioned in Chapter 3 how difficult it is to distinguish between gossip, strong gossip, jealousy and witchcraft activities linked with these, which may cause illness or even death to individuals concerned. In the present case, Elsa is suspected along the river of being involved in witchcraft activities. She is "a Damara" from Okombahe, has a strange high voice and is slightly physically handicapped. All these traits add to her image as having strong 'medicines', which she brings with her from Okombhae. It is further believed by others as well

as by Petrus himself, that the death of his son had been caused by Elsa. It is with this background that Petrus's agitation in taking Handjie back to Klipneus himself as soon as possible should be seen. He feared being accused of not wanting to return Handjie and thus exposing her to the danger of being getoor (bewitched) by Elsa.

Under normal conditions, however, it is accepted that parents should not "give their children away with a heavy heart". When children are given to foster-parents, they should be given "freely" and not "with longing". This would otherwise cause the children to become ill, pine for their parents and possibly die. Thus, when they are given away initially or when they return from visits to their parental homes as little emotion as possible should be shown at their parting. But while they are away, too, parents should not continuously think of them, but remember them occasionally and bear in mind the fact that they are being given a material support that they themselves would not be able to provide. This further explains the apparent lack of emotion shown by Petrus and his wife at parting with Handjie.

As regards the emotions of the parents or parent, the following was pointed out to me: The practice of giving away children does not imply lack of feeling by the parent(s) for their children, but the contrary. It is because parents are so fond of their children and want them to "gaan voorentoe", (to get ahead) that they give them to families who can afford to provide the kind of material surroundings they themselves

are unable to give. Parents, therefore sacrifice the chance of being with their children, in order that they may gain economically, and as they are parted for increasing lengths of time, the love for them and pride in them grows (Pastor Eiseb, pers. comm.).

But further factors are illustrated by this case, which are of significance for the theme of shifting alignments. It is interesting to note in this regard that a history of fostering has linked the two families. Petrus himself was fostered by the mother of the Elsa's husband, and with Handjie being given to Elsa, a second generation of fostering had been established. The resulting economic alignment between Petrus and Frederick and his wife were dealt with in Chapter 5, and Petrus's economic instability was discussed, along with the fact that, in difficult times, he was able to rely on his daughter's foster parents. Thus, the case of Elsa's fostering of Handjie is an appropriate example of true fostering, namely where economically poor parents give their children to relatively wealthy kin and thereby establish a means whereby resources are mutually exploited.

#### SHIFTING FOSTERING ALIGNMENT

It is expected of foster-parents to send their foster-children to visit their biological parents, so that "they may remember who their parents are". This in itself results in fluctuations in household composition, which admittedly are not of great

significance because the total number of foster-children is not large. However, this process is further enhanced, firstly, by the practice of foster-children being passed around within the fostering family and secondly by the easy dissolution of fostering relations which are as flexible as marital relations and may be broken for a variety of reasons. The dissolution of a fostering relation results in a foster-child leaving the household of its former foster-parent and more likely than not returning to that of its biological parent(s). This change in residence represents at the same time a change in household composition (see diagram chapter 4). If a fostering relationship is not severed, foster-children like children may leave the home of their foster-parents when they have reached employment age. At this stage, they will decide for themselves whether they wish to remain with their foster-parents, return to their own parents or leave the river to become employed, or any other option that may be available (H. /Guibeb, pers. comm.). Often a further consequence of the dissolution of a fostering relation is the dissolution of the economic alignment which had been established as a result of the fostering relationship. This may have implications for the composition of households. Again the shifting fostering alignments are best illustrated with the aid of cases:

The family of the ex-headman was the one which during the course of fieldwork, had the largest number of foster-children.\*

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\* Goody (1973) deals with the question of 'big men' in Gonja gathering a following around them by a high incidence of fostering. The present situation seems to have some similarities with the situation found in Gonja. During the time of fieldwork various members of the family of the headman's family had at different times six foster-children. This is an extremely big number by Topnaar standards. However, as this topic is not directly related to fostering and shifting alignments it will not be discussed further.

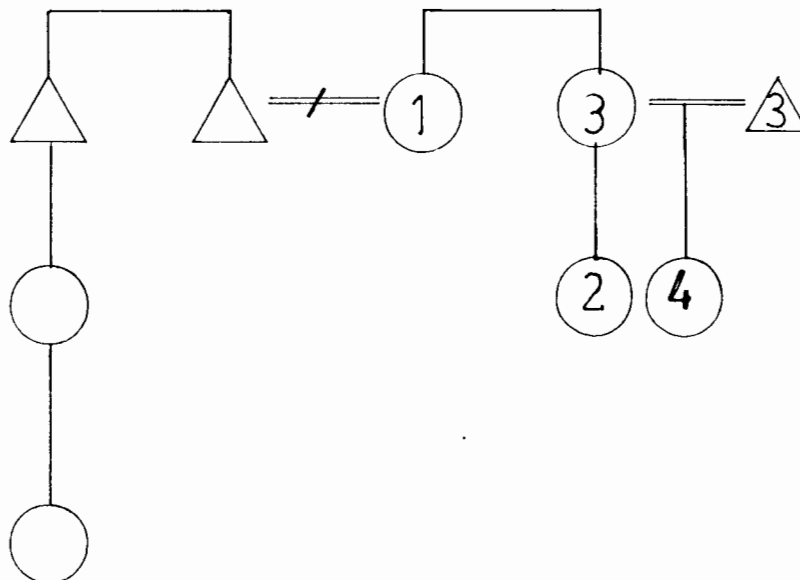
**CASE 12: Changing Foster-parents**

(Numbers refer to the diagram)

In 1974 the sister (1) of the wife of the ex-headman's sister had a foster-child Sophia living with her at Sout Rivier. When I returned to the river in 1978, Sophia was living with the daughter (2) the ex-headman's the wife of the ex-headman and her husband at Oswater. "She helps me with the other children", I was told when I inquired about the reason for her being there. At Sout Rivier I was told however, by Sophia's former foster-mother that "... Ruth (the ex-headman's wife) had longed for her and had taken her to Oswater". On subsequent trips to Oswater, Sophia was then actually living with the elderly couple, (3) her daughter (2) having moved to Natab without Sophia.

During the second half of 1979, Sophia had a fight with another daughter (4) of the ex-headman and his wife's daughter. This adult daughter had recently returned to the river and was working at the Iduseb school. During the fight with Sophia, she told the latter "... and you will not come back to Oswater to my parents' home". For the subsequent school holiday, Sophia went to Sout Rivier to her parents, instead of to Oswater. Her father, when asked about the incident, said that he still intended speaking to the ex-headman about the incident.

(The diagram below shows the different foster-parents of Sophia and her relation to them).



The case above illustrates how foster-children may be passed among various members of a family. Sophia had shifted between three members of the ex-headman's family. During the course of this she had moved spatially between two settlements and had been a member of two different households. According to the norms surrounding fostering, the claim to Sophia was held by (2), who had baptised her. This claim had, however, not been lodged, because the sister (1) of the wife of the ex-headman had initially fostered her. Thus, the other members of this family all had rights to and over Sophia. This is not unusual in Topnaar life, and the fact that (4) was able to terminate the fostering relationship proves this point. The fact that various members of a family have rights to foster-children can be illustrated by a further case.

The daughter (4 in the diagram) had herself fostered twins of a woman living at Sout Rivier. At the time she was still married to a man from outside the area. During their marriage, they left the area and had travelled "... as far as Johannesburg". When this conjugal relationship terminated she returned, to the river, but without the twins. She said that her ex-husband had "longed to have the children" and so she had left them with him. For a number of months, nobody knew where he or the children were. Eventually the ex-headman and his wife mentioned getting together some money to get back "their children" from wherever they were being kept by their former son-in-law. After some time they were found and returned to the river. Instead of going to Iduseb where their former foster-mother lived, they went

to live at Oswater with the elderly couple.

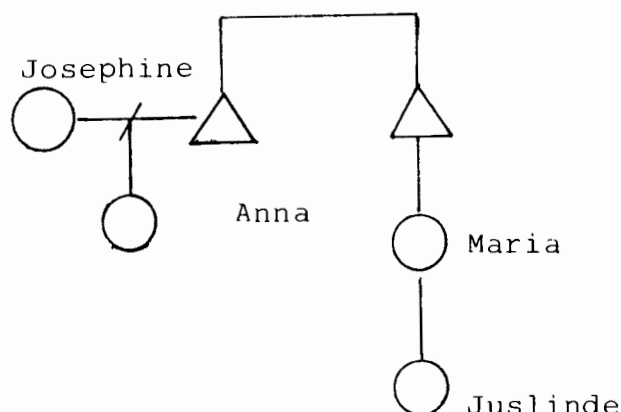
In the present case as in the one above, it was often difficult to ascertain who the foster-parents of the children actually were. Both cases illustrate that more than just one person may be considered the foster-parent, and that the family as a whole may have rights to foster-children. Hence when I was told by Sophia's former foster-mother, that her sister had taken her to Oswater, this did not necessarily imply that she was actually living with the latter. As was indicated, the fact that members of a family have rights to foster-children of other members results in their shifting between the various members. This further results in a considerable flexibility of household groups.

But relations of fostering may be terminated by both the foster-parent(s) or the child. The consequence of this is for the foster-child to return to its parental home. During the course of fieldwork I have been able to collect information on three such cases.

**CASE 13: The Dissolution of a Fostering Relation  
and the Splitting of a Household:**

Just before my return to the field at the beginning of 1979, Anna, the daughter of the head of one of the two households at Sout Rivier, had returned home. She brought with her her foster-child Juslinde, who was the daughter of an affinal relative, Maria, who lived with Anna's mother Josephine (see diagram overleaf).

Tension started to develop between Anna, Josephine and Maria, and eventually culminated in Maria and her immediate family breaking away from Josephine's household. In this process, the fostering relation between Anna and Juslinde also was severed.



Fostering Relations Between Members of a Household:

At first Juslinde would call Anna "mother" and her own mother by her /goan/ens (literally, child name, meaning the name given to somebody as a child). The /goan/ens of Maria was ≠Khabakhas, which means "the thin woman". Gradually Juslinde, spent less time with Anna, and began living at her mother's omdi, some 50m away. Eventually she would no longer refer to Anna as "mother" anymore and had virtually moved into her mother's omdi. Occasionally afterwards Anna complained about Juslinde's behaviour. She had begun to "walk around with a man at Gobabeb" and had once physically maltreated a woman at another homestead at Sout Rivier. "When one speaks to Maria about this, she only gets cross", said Anna, who, only a few weeks previously had treated Juslinde with unusual authority, but now did not dare to speak to her directly about these matters. The conflict eventually came to a head, as a result of which Maria moved to Iduseb and Juslinde to her classificatory brother at ≠Natab.

In 1981 the conflict still not been resolved. Juslinde was now expecting a baby. Josephine was still extremely upset about the incident, particularly because fostering alignments between her and Maria had existed for two generations and she feared that Juslinde's child would not be brought to Sout Rivier. The conflict was eventually resolved by 1982 when Anna and Maria returned to Josephine's homestead and Juslinde's baby was raised by her mother, Maria.

Had it not been for the conflict at Josephine's homestead, it could be argued that Juslinde had reached the age where foster-children normally decide to break a fostering relation or not. However, I argue that it was fact conflict between Anna, Maria and Josephine which elicited the dissolution of the fostering relation between Anna and Jusline. The factors surrounding this case are particularly severe, as it resulted in the splitting of the household concerned and this had certain economic implications for Josephine, which will be discussed presently.

Other cases of the severance of fostering relations do not necessarily result in the splitting of households, but they have similarly serious implications for the fostering alignments between foster and biological parents. I mentioned in regard to Case 12 that the reason for the breakdown of the fostering relation between Sophia and the ex-headman's family was conflict between her and a daughter of the ex-headman. Sophia's elder brother had also been fostered by the ex-headman's family. In 1979 this fostering relation had also been dissolved (see diagram, Chapter 4). Because of the expulsion of Sophia's brother from the Iduseb school, following a disagreement between the headmaster and him, his foster-parents consequently told him to find work, as they were no longer prepared to pay for his upkeep under these conditions. He returned to his parental home at Sout Rivier for a while, and tried unsuccessfully to find permanent employment at Gobabeb. During a brief visit to the river in 1982, I was told that he had joined the army.

The break-up of these fostering relations had consequences for the economically insecure father of the siblings, Petrus !Goreseb who has been mentioned previously. I explained that owing to the fostering alignment between the ex-headman and him, he had gained access to certain resources. After his two children had left their foster parents, these benefits presumably ceased. Unfortunately, I was not able to follow up this case, as fieldwork was terminated at the end of 1979.

Josephine's homestead suffered a similar loss, following the dissolution of the fostering alignment between her and Maria. I have described elsewhere how in 1979 she battled to find someone to help her re-erect an oms. This incident happened when she was living alone at Sout Rivier after the conflict. I have mentioned how she tried to recruit other members to her household (see Chapter 5). Her problem was eventually solved as a result of the return of both her daughter, Anna, and her affinal relative, Maria. The spatial alignment was once again established by Juslinde's baby being sent to her homestead at Sout Rivier, for by implication it belonged to the homestead as a whole, although formally fostered by its grandmother. Josephine referred to the termination of the conflict as: "Dit is reg so" (meaning the fact that the baby was brought to Sout Rivier). "Dit is ons kind. Ons sal hoeka sommer vat, as ons wil". (It is correct like this. It is our child, which we will take if we want to.)

CONCLUSION

The present chapter dealt with the nature of fostering relations and alignments. It showed how these relations are to be distinguished from other forms of kin-rearing, because they are associated with specific features not to be found in the other forms. The aspect which has been of prime importance for the theme of sporadic changes in household composition is their flexibility. This implies that foster-children are shifted between different family members of the fostering family. But furthermore, fostering relations between foster-child and parent can be terminated at will. Consequently, for both reasons foster-children shift between different households. The termination of fostering relations has certain implications for the alignments existing between foster-parents and biological parents, for these, too, shift, as old ones are terminated and new ones are forged. This further adds to the already flexible and 'plastic' nature of Topnaar society.

## CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study was to account for the unusually high incidence of movement of individuals in the Kuiseb River and surrounding area. The most obvious visual evidence of these movements was the growth and decline, appearance and disappearance, of local domestic units. It was evident from the large number of deserted sites along the river that this was by no means a recent phenomenon, but had been an on-going process for the last few decades at least. The second aim, therefore, was to consider how these movements affect household composition.

I have argued that due to certain political and economic processes over the past 300 years (Chapter 2), the Topnaar today live under conditions of extreme poverty (Chapter 3). In order to deal with their situation of poverty, people develop certain strategies for survival. One of these is to take on a steady position as a wage labourer in a commercial or administrative centre, but to invest resources in a homestead along the river. This strategy is followed by mostly male household heads and results in structural movements between the places of employment and the river (Chapter 4). The equivalent for the majority of women is to become formally married to an economically secure man, maintaining this marriage and subsequently being involved in the same structural movements between the river and his place of employment. Many men and women, however, fail to attain this aim. An alternative strategy under such circumstances is for them to rely on kin in their body of kindred or domestic network and align themselves sporadically

and temporarily with carefully selected individuals. Two individuals have repeatedly appeared in several cases, illustrating this process. They are Petrus !Goreseb and a woman called Josephine: I sketched Petrus' extremely sporadic spells of employment between which he would rely on different kin along the river to house and feed him. Nearing old age, he is dependent on his affinal kin. To make ends meet, he has maintained alignments with two relatively wealthy families along the river by giving some of his children to be fostered by them. These alignments are avenues to such resources as food or the possibility of informal employment. Josephine is in an equally insecure position, being sickly and single. She is forced to rely on other female kin, whom she sporadically recruits to her household, but who follow their own movements to and from her homestead.

I have isolated three important areas of Topnaar social life within which I have illustrated this process of alignment formation, and argued further that the purpose of the formation of alignments is to secure economic gains by the access they provide to limited resources along the river. I show by means of case studies how extremely flexible and ephemeral these alignments are due to their being manipulated; and that consequently they shift in space and over time, causing numerous sporadic changes to household composition. This high incidence of sporadic as compared to cyclical changes contrasts with data collected from other areas in southern Africa (Murray, 1976a; Spiegel, 1979).

This raises the question of the reasons for this difference. I suggest an answer has to be sought in the specific strategies people along the Kuiseb River employ in order to combat their position of poverty.

The pronounced instability of household groups along the river raises the question of the utility of the concept 'household' as currently used in anthropology. Some issues related to this point were mentioned in Chapter 4. In terms of the objective of the study, I found a solution to this problem by choosing dyadic relations as an alternative unit of analysis. This solved some practical problems in the field, but raised certain theoretical issues.

It seems as though anthropologists have been able to deal most adequately with societies showing an absence of corporate groups in terms of the network analysis method (Barnes, 1962:8). This approach has been criticised for a number of reasons, the most important ones of which are that it is ahistorical and that it has a low level of theoretical sophistication because of its focus on individuals rather than structures (Boissevain, 1979; Webster, unpublished). The problems raised by network analysis apply to the approach chosen for the present study. For example, dyadic relations, as referred to in this study, represent only certain links of people's networks at any point in time, disregarding other similar links. At the same time I have tried to minimise these problems by setting the study in its historical context (see Chapter 2) and to view dyadic relations in their wider

social context.

In spite of some theoretical limitations, the present analysis was deemed to be useful within the limits of the project, and has raised some theoretical questions. Apart from the problem revolving around the concept of 'household', one of these concerns Fortes' implication of each area showing some form of cyclical development of its domestic units. The data presented seem to suggest that only a minor number of domestic groups existed in the study area which evolved in a form showing a resemblance to that reported in other areas of Southern Africa. Otherwise the data hint at the incidence of individuals constituting a stable core of homestead membership (see, for instance, Josephine), but that the additional 'members' around these residentially stable individuals fluctuate in a fashion which, while exhibiting certain regularities in strategy, is devoid of a cyclical pattern. This was documented to a considerable extent in the latter three chapters. Hence, this process seems to rule out any form of cyclical development.

During the seven months of intensive fieldwork a basic assumption had been that factors emanating from the macro-level of society had remained constant. Towards the end of the fieldwork period the effects had been noticed of the dramatically declining fishing industry in Walvis Bay and the extreme drought in the rest of the country. Certain households had been established by individuals with only very tenuous ties with the local Topnaar inhabitants. In

other areas of southern Africa research is being conducted to uncover the relation between the effects of macro-level changes such as a change in Land Laws (Spiegel, 1981) or the effects of increased immigration to certain rural areas (Sharp, 1982). With regard to the two factors mentioned above further fieldwork in the Kuiseb River area at this particular point in time could provide useful data in line with the studies mentioned above.

As outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 the Kuiseb River and its vicinity has over the years been subjected to the consequences of different forms of White commercial and administrative expansion and exploitation. There seems to be no sign of the decline in the process. On the contrary, there are rumours that new deposits of uranium have been found in the very places where Topnaar settlements are presently situated. There is also no indication that the exploitation of resources by administrative powers is diminishing.

Anthropologists as a rule have no control over the use to which their data is put by various parties. This may result in either harm or benefit for the people they have studied. As the present study deals to an extent with the adaptive strategies local inhabitants have developed under increasing difficulties of survival, there is a danger that data may be used in a manner which may adversely affect the people concerned. May it be used in order to reduce rather than increase the extent of conflict among the parties interested in the area.

APPENDIX 1

FIELDWORK ORIENTATION AND EXPERIENCES

The fieldwork for this study was done over a period of eight months between 1978 and 1981. During these eight months four fieldtrips were made to the study area: one of about a month in June/July 1978, two of three months each during 1979 and a fourth in July/August 1981.

The first period was spent doing a household survey along the river and interviewing an arbitrarily chosen number of 47 people in the township of Kuisebmond outside Walvis Bay. For this survey an adapted form of the Rhodes-Livingstone Census Card was used (see copy attached). At the same time sketches were made of the layout of settlements and the constellation of omdi along the river. Changes to both the social composition of households and the spatial features of domestic structures were recorded on two further occasions.

During the first two weeks of the month spent doing the survey, I was assisted by a third year Sociology student from the University of the Western Cape. This proved to be extremely useful for a number of reasons, the most important one being that his first language was Nama. Even although I speak some Nama myself and many, but by no means all, informants can communicate in Afrikaans, this facilitated the collection of data on delicate topics. The advantages of being able to communicate in the vernacular, albeit to a limited extent, had never been clearer to me than in instances such as the following: One of the questions in the census was directed at the marital status of the respondent. When this question was phrased in Afrikaans it contained words which

have certain connotations attached to them, which are not part of Topnaar conception of marriage. Consequently, responses to this question were invariably negative in spite of the fact that women usually had a number of children around them and the assumption was that they had some form of conjugal relationship. It was only when we started using the Nama terms (for instance, soreb for informal husband) that a wealth of data on the various conjugal relations was forthcoming. Naturally some command of the vernacular further assisted the general approach of re-establishing rapport, following my absence of a number of years from the field.

As I was temporarily employed in Swakopmund during August 1978, I was able to return to the river or Walvis Bay over week-ends. This enabled me to attend the opening of the new school at Iduseb. This event, as the inauguration of the new headman in 1981, was of great importance to the Topnaar, as it represented one step forward in their fight for political recognition. Concerning the opening of the school, the Topnaar argued that this was a sign for the change in administrative policy, which previously insisted on their eventual re-settlement in the south of the country. Some individuals assumed that this was a result of their obstinate opposition to this policy and the public support they had been given by the press. Conversely, others argued that in their continuing fight against the administration the existence of such an institution along the river would strengthen their arguments in the event of possible future threats by the administration.

The first three months' period between April and June 1979 was spent living in one particular settlement, namely Sout Rivier. This settlement was chosen for the following reasons: Firstly, I had worked there before and knew the inhabitants relatively well. Secondly, Gobabeb, the closest administrative centre and place of wage labour, was only four kilometres away. Thirdly, Sout Rivier was on the edge of the !Nara area, another important resource along the river.

During this period of fieldwork, as well as the second period of three months, no specific fieldwork techniques were made use of except participant observation. As far as it was possible, I partook in the daily activities and chores around the settlement such as the fetching of water and collecting of fire-wood, the picking !Nara and tending of goats. Towards the end of my time there trips to Walvis Bay would be planned as a joint venture involving all adult inhabitants of the settlement. In spite of careful attempts at the beginning of my stay to remain neutral and not show favouritism to one specific household in opposition to the other, it was inevitable to avoid becoming more closely associated with one. This proved to be particularly helpful, when I was able to move into one of the huts of this homestead after the relentless East Wind had blown away my tent. Although I had virtually become "aligned" to this particular household, I maintained a friendly, open relationship with most members and even had a working relationship with individual members of the other household. This was particularly difficult, as these two households had lived under conditions

wrought with tension before my arrival. My "alignment" with this household and the consequent intense co-operation during this period resulted in the collection of very personal data and a valuable insight into the lives of people which under other conditions may not have been possible.

On both three month periods I repeated an open-ended interview on marriage to selected informants, but these interviews usually developed into discussions. One of these was done with a group of both men and women at Rooibank. This was valuable in having elicited the discussion on topics related to marriage not only between men and women, but also between different generations. The collection of genealogies of a number of household heads produced some valuable data on fostering stretching over a few generations, which was not obtained from the rather superficial survey data.

The second period of three months over October, November and December 1979 was divided between living at Rooibank and Swartbank or else moving along the river between the four newly established settlements. Rooibank and Swartbank were chosen because of their contrasting sizes and household composition to Sout Rivier, as well as their distance to Walvis Bay. Both these settlements were far bigger and resembled villages bustling with life, compared to the rather sluggish pastoral atmosphere at Sout Rivier.

It was during this time that I finally became aware of the extent of the discontent of the Topnaar with their political

and economic lot. This had not been so evident among the inhabitants further up-river, but living closer to Walvis Bay brought me in continuous contact with the family of the headman living there at the time, as well as other Topnaar residents of Walvis Bay, who were far more politically aware than the majority of individuals along the river.

The prime aim of the particular trip in 1981 had been to attend the inauguration and therefore no specific plans had been made for further research, except to collect some more data on the spatial aspects of the layout of settlements. As it turned out, the inauguration of the headman elicited a number of historically interesting questions, which I had time to pursue. Furthermore, it gave me an opportunity to follow up some cases, some of which had developed in a direction of interest for the theme of the thesis.

DATE:

VILLAGE:

NAME (doopnaam)

NAMA/NICKNAME:

SEX:                      EG.                      CLAN                      MS:

BORN ? DATE:                      PLACE:                      REARING:                      DIED:

REL:                      FX-REL:                      ED:                      OCC:

REASON FOR RESIDENCE:

PHYS. CHAR:                      RES. (If temp. away):

FATHER ? NAME:                      REL:                      MS:                      DEATH:                      ORG:

                    S  
MOTHER    b  
                    S

SPOUSE ? NAME:                      REL:                      ORG:                      RES:                      ED:                      OCC:

SIBLINGS? NAME:                      SEX:                      BORN:                      DIED:                      RES:

                    MS:                      ED:                      OCC                      FATHER

CHILDREN? NAME:                      SEX:                      BORN:                      DIED:                      RES:

                    MS                      ED                      OCC:

Who is the head of the household ?

Who is the owner of the house ?

Ownership of animals ?

Ownership of    'kara patches ?

INCOME:                      PENSION:                      RELATION:                      'KARA SALES:

OTHER:

**APPENDIX 2**

THE SPATIAL LAY-OUT OF SWARTBANK

Compared to other settlements, Swartbank has a completely different appearance (see diagram). Firstly, it is much larger in size. In 1978 the population was 22 and it had remained approximately the same size during two subsequent visits. Secondly, whereas most other self-generated settlements usually consist of two homesteads spatially distinct from each other, at Swartbank homesteads merge into each other with very little distance between them at times. In 1978 the lay-out of omdi were in the form of an arc with the kraals lying between the huts and the river in the manner considered to be the ideal. By 1979 people were building omdi behind the existing arc (see diagram for 1979), further adding to the size of the settlement, even although the number of inhabitants had not increased. This process was continued in 1981 with another hut being built behind the initial arc. The lay-out of the settlement and the social composition of homesteads are shown in the accompanying diagram.



APPENDIX 3

Table of Distribution of Population in 1957 from Köhler, 1969: 116/117 (recording "Topnaar" and "Damara" separately).

| Name of Settlement  | Adults | Children | Total | Families |            |    |
|---------------------|--------|----------|-------|----------|------------|----|
| <b>"Topnaar"</b>    |        |          |       |          |            |    |
| 1. !Haob            | 2      | 4        | -     | 2        | 8          | 3  |
| 2. !Uri-nanis       | 2      | 3        | 8     | 7        | 20         | 4  |
| 3. Rooibank         | 5      | 5        | 6     | 10       | 26         | 7  |
| 4. /Gao-tanab       | 1      | -        | 1     | -        | 2          | 1  |
| 5. Uiuras           | 9      | 5        | 5     | 8        | 27         | 10 |
| 6. Ituseb           | 3      | 2        | 1     | 5        | 11         | 4  |
| 7. Swartbank        | 6      | 7        | 7     | 2        | 22         | 9  |
| 8. Klipneus         | 2      | 1        | -     | -        | 3          | 2  |
| 9. Breuergu - !goab | 1      | 1        | -     | -        | 2          | 1  |
| 10. Sout Rivier     | 6      | 5        | 6     | 4        | 21         | 5  |
| 11. Gobabeb         | 3      | 2        | 3     | 1        | 9          | 2  |
| 12. #Uatab          | 1      | -        | -     | -        | 1          | 1  |
| 13. Homeb           | 1      | 1        | -     | -        | 2          | 2  |
|                     | 42     | 36       | 37    | 39       | 154        | 51 |
| <b>"Damara"</b>     |        |          |       |          |            |    |
| 1. Rooibank         | 3      | 3        | -     | -        | 6          | 3  |
| 2. /Gao-tanab       | 1      | 2        | -     | -        | 3          | 1  |
| 3. Ururas           | 1      | -        | -     | -        | 1          | -  |
| 4. Klipneus         | 2      | 1        | -     | 1        | 4          | 2  |
| 5. Breuergu - !goab | 3      | 4        | 2     | 2        | 11         | 2  |
| 6. Gobabeb          | 1      | -        | -     | -        | 1          | 1  |
| 7. #Uatab           | 3      | 4        | -     | -        | 7          | 2  |
| 8. Homeb            | 2      | 2        | 1     | 5        | 10         | 2  |
|                     | 15     | 14       | 3     | 8        | 43         | 14 |
| <b>GRAND TOTAL</b>  |        |          |       |          | <b>197</b> |    |

**Note:** The figures recorded above were taken directly from Köhler and the mistake in the column recording female "Damara" adults was not corrected.

Table of Distribution of Population in 1975 from Budack, 1977: 3 (recording "Damara" in brackets).

| Name of Settlement   | Men | Women | Children | Total      |
|----------------------|-----|-------|----------|------------|
| 1. Mile 4            | 8   | 8     | 8        | 24 (6)     |
| 2. Mile 7            | 3   | -     | -        | 3 (-)      |
| 3. Quarries          | -   | 2     | -        | 2 (2)      |
| 4. Rooibank          | 11  | 8     | 14       | 33 (2)     |
| 5. Armstraat         | 6   | 8     | 13       | 27 (1)     |
| 6. Dawedraai         | 2   | 2     | 5        | 9 (7)      |
| 7. /Gao-tanab        | 2   | 1     | 1        | 4 (-)      |
| 8. Ururas            | 5   | 6     | 8        | 19 (6)     |
| 9. Ituseb            | 1   | 1     | 1        | 3 (-)      |
| 10. Swartbank        | 4   | 5     | 5        | 14 (-)     |
| 11. Klipneus         | 1   | 1     | -        | 2 (2)      |
| 12. Breuergu - !goab | 3   | 3     | 3        | 9 (9)      |
| 13. Sout Rivier      | 5   | 7     | 7        | 19 (10)    |
| 14. Gobabeb          | 2   | -     | -        | 2 (1)      |
| 15. Oswater          | 4   | 3     | 7        | 14 (-)     |
| 16. Tsoa-xaub-!gaos  | 1   | -     | -        | 1 (1)      |
|                      | 58  | 55    | 72       | 185 (44)   |
| <b>GRAND TOTAL</b>   |     |       |          | <b>232</b> |

NOTE 1: Apart from the slight increase in population over an 18 year period between the figures given by Köhler and Budack, it is interesting to note the difference in settlements occupied during the respective years. Köhler records !Haob, !Uri-nanis and Breuergu - !goab to have been occupied in 1957, all of which were uninhabited between 1978 and 1981. On the other hand, Budack reports Quarries and Tsoa-xoub-!gaos to have been occupied in 1975, which similarly were uninhabited during my time of fieldwork.

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