

**CHILDHOOD: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF
ITINERANCY AND DOMESTIC FLUIDITY
AMONGST THE KARRETJIE PEOPLE
OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN KAROO**

by

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submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the subject

ANTHROPOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR M. DE JONGH

MARCH 2009

Dedicated to my children, Luke and Sarah-Anne

In memory of my siblings, Doria and Francois



I declare that *Childhood: An Anthropological Study of Itinerancy and Domestic Fluidity Amongst the Karretjie People of the South African Karoo* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

S A Steyn

2009.03.05

“The only difference between them and us is that we are ready to learn from them but they are not ready to learn from us ... in everyday life they must come to recognise us, respect us, value us ... for what we are. Only then will each one of us be able to discover the other”.

(Words of a Roma delegate at a Conference organised by the *Centre for Gypsy Research* at the Université René Descartes, Paris, 1993)

ABSTRACT

The Karretjie People, or Cart People are a peripatetic community and are descendants of the Khoekhoen and San, the earliest inhabitants of the Karoo region in South Africa. As a landless and disempowered community they are dependent upon others for food and other basic necessities specifically, and other resources generally. Compared to children in South Africa generally, the Karretjie children are in every sense of the most severely deprived. Their fathers are by and large sheep-shearers, often their only specialised skill, and which is primarily required only on demand and on an irregular and/or seasonal basis. The children's mothers as keepers of the *karretjie* (cart) overnight shack, with other adult caretakers, are without predictable income for most of the year. The service that the adult men deliver to the farming community necessitates continuous spatial mobility and is made possible by a cart and donkeys, which also enable them to adapt to changing circumstances. High levels of spatial mobility as well as economic demands on individual domestic units result in inventive utilisation of scarce resources and entails, amongst others, in children oscillating between different *karretjie* (cart) units.

In essence, the dissertation comprises the following:

- an account of the children's and their families' itinerant lives, and in particular an explication of the effects of spatial and domestic mobility and fluidity on domestic circumstances, including fragmentation of families, patterns of residential instability, disrupted schooling and violence.
- an explanation of the factors resulting in a more sedentary lifestyle, not only including loss of mobility, but also disintegration of support networks, deteriorating relationships with other communities and pragmatic considerations on the part of parents and caretakers.

Keywords

Anthropology; Karretjie People; South African Karoo; Childhood studies; Peripatetic communities; Domestic fluidity; Spatial mobility; Socialisation; Informal education; Formal education.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the following people and institutions that have contributed to what has become a unique experience in my life:

- My supervisor, Professor Mike de Jongh, for his endured support and guidance, generous time and invaluable advice. I can never thank you enough.
- The K. S. Birch Trust whose financial support from 1995 to 1998 was the mainstay of the project.
- The University of South Africa for providing financial support since the initial stages of fieldwork. (The views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and do not reflect those of the University.)
- My family, especially my husband, Deon and my parents, Koos and Anna who believed in, supported and encouraged me and always assured me it was possible.
- My former colleagues in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, Unisa.
- Many others emanating from the Karretjie People project, especially Harry and Belinda Gordon for their friendship and hospitality.

The completion of the dissertation would not have been possible without the participants in the study and I am sincerely grateful to the following:

- The Karretjie families at the different outspans who kindly invited me into their homes and shared their lives with me over a period of many years.
- Landowners who gave me access to their property to spend time with the Karretjie children, and teachers for allowing me to attend classes and interview the children during school breaks and after school.
- And finally, the Karretjie children for their insights, cooperation, enthusiasm and passion. They have taught me much about human resilience and humanity in general.



GLOSSARY

- Gang** A corridor next to a dirt road and close to a windmill or watercourse. An area situated between privately-owned land and property demarcated for official use (i.e. a road).
- Ge-êg** A man and a woman living together as a married couple without having formalised such a union.
- Karretjie** A donkey cart which is the focus of a domestic, social and economic unit because it provides transport for each family and becomes part of the overnight shelter, or is associated with the overnight shelter that each family erects at an outspan. The term *karretjie* (in italics), denotes the Afrikaans use of (donkey) **cart**, as opposed to the use of the term Karretjie, representing a noun and referring to the people themselves.
- Outspan** A vacant, 'neutral' piece of land belonging to a local or provincial authority which may be legally occupied for no more than 48 hours at a time.
- Currency Conversion** 1 USD = ± 10 ZAR; 1 EUR = ± 13 ZAR; 1 GBP = ± 15 ZAR



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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The itinerant or peripatetic¹ sheep-shearers of the Great Karoo of South Africa are known and acknowledged as the *Karretjiemense* (i.e. Donkey Cart People) or Karretjie People and are usually seen migrating on secondary and tertiary roads in pursuit of a shearing assignment on farms or camping at an outspan next to a road.

¹ This term is used to describe and identify “preferentially endogamous, non-food producing communities who subsist predominantly on the sale of goods and services to sedentary customers and employ spatial mobility in varying degrees as a survival strategy” (Rao 1987:1). The lifestyle of the Karretjie People corresponds with this description as will be explained in following chapters.

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They are primarily descendent² from the gathering-hunting /Xam-speaking San (Bushmen) and/or the nomadic-pastoral KhoeKhoen (mainly Griqua and Korana), that is, of the earliest inhabitants of the Karoo. However, due to various factors the lifestyle of both the /Xam and the Griqua/Korana were transformed. In the case of the /Xam, for example, they changed from nomadic hunters to become so-called 'tame Bushmen' farm labourers. They retained their mobility, first on foot, later with the help of pack animals and eventually they adopted the donkey cart as mode of transport, constructing their carts from materials salvaged from discarded parts of horse carriages and motorcars. With the mobility made possible by the donkey cart, the Karretjie People, as they became known, developed a flexible and mobile lifestyle in order to exploit employment opportunities on farms. Their means of livelihood necessitates spatial mobility and therefore the donkey cart allows them to utilise discontinuous opportunities, primarily for shearing.

² Using the techniques of (maternal) mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) and (paternal) Y-chromosome analysis, research conducted by the Human Genomic Diversity and Disease Research Unit at the Medical Research Council (MRC), headed by H. Soodyall, in collaboration with M.de Jongh (affiliated with the University of South Africa), has revealed that the DNA of the Karretjie People can be traced directly to the KhoeKhoen and San (cf. De Jongh & Soodyall, Forthcoming).



Photograph 1.1 *En route*

Until relatively recently they inhabited most regions of the Great Karoo, totalling not more than a few thousand and are unique in the South African context in the sense that they are unilingually Afrikaans-speaking, still almost generally illiterate

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and lead a peripatetic way of life, an uncommon phenomenon in the country.

The *karretjie* (donkey cart) can be regarded as the focal point of a domestic unit because not only does it provide transport for each family, it also becomes part of the overnight shelter, either on a farm or at an outspan. For domestic purposes like preparation of food and consumption, the *karretjies* (donkey carts) of parents and married children or of married siblings may function together as a subsistence and travelling unit. Each Karretjie family constructs its own shelter, normally in the *gang* or corridor next to the road (i.e. an outspan). Sheets of corrugated iron, plastic and hessian are used to construct such a shelter which consists of a single space with no partitions. The number of people at an outspan is relatively small and an average of two to fourteen domestic (*karretjie*) units occupy a particular outspan.

An itinerant lifestyle has become increasingly more difficult for the Karretjie People in recent years. Many communities (i.e. entire communities, as well as individuals within particular communities) nowadays settle near town in designated informal settlements and under even more impoverished circumstances. Although domestic factors have had a major influence on their decision-making in this regard, mostly economic and social factors beyond their

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control forced them to give up their relatively flexible lifestyle for a more sedentary one with its associated problems.

This dissertation subsumes an ethnographic study which examines the daily lives of a group of Karretjie children³ from a particular outspan in the Great Karoo, but within the context of the town and district of Colesberg in the Northern Cape Province and the Great Karoo region of South Africa. The study forms part of a departmental project⁴ “*Itinerant or Sedentary: Researching the Karretjie People of the Karoo, Dilemmas of Development and Childhood*”. In essence, the study is informed by one central question: How do high levels of spatial mobility and domestic instability and fluidity affect these children’s existence and lifeways at their *karretjie* homes, albeit at an outspan or on farms where their parents are involved in labour practices, or at school?

³ The Bill of Rights of the Republic of South Africa, **as adopted by the Constitutional Assembly on 8 May 1996**, states that “a child means a person under the age of 18 years” (<http://www.polity.org.za>).

⁴ It is an on-going project registered within the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of South Africa. The bibliography lists published material on the subject (cf. De Jongh, Steyn and De Jongh & Steyn).

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In general, all Karretjie children whom I encountered during the entire research period were research participants and sources of information of my research endeavour. However, I decided to largely incorporate children from a particular outspan in the district of Colesberg as the focus of my study for the following reasons: Firstly, during the most intensive stages of fieldwork, children and their families from this community⁵ were actively mobile and covered many different routes in the district. Secondly, intricate domestic patterns developed over a period of time and were investigated on a continuous basis. Thirdly, after an extended period of time good rapport was established with this community which in turn generated well-founded data. Lastly, the size of the community was a manageable sample since logistical factors such as wide-ranging mobility and unpredictability presented some challenges.

When fieldwork commenced during the mid-1990's all the key participating children⁶ in the study were living semi-permanently in a corridor, next to a dirt road, on neutral land (i.e. outspan) and under a bridge next to the Seacow

⁵ The term 'community' is used throughout the dissertation as an analytical and methodological tool. It is used to denote the Karretjie People as a network of people who share a particular lifestyle, communal knowledge and language/dialect. Although the concept represents a sense of belonging, it is not intended to indicate stability.

⁶ Although the dissertation contains the key testimonies and perceptions of children belonging to this particular Karretjie community, the lives and circumstances of Karretjie children from other outspans in the district of Colesberg as well as other towns in the Great Karoo, and in particular Karretjie children from Victoria West are also incorporated in the dissertation.

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(Hippopotamus) River in the district of Colesberg. The total of fourteen children are all 'Coloured'⁷, Afrikaans-speaking and of rural descent. They ranged from the ages of four to seventeen, had never attended school when fieldwork commenced and belonged to domestic units in which their fathers, as sheep-shearers, with or without their families, migrated with their donkey carts and make-shift homes between different farms and their semi-permanent outspan in the district of Colesberg.



7

The of A referred to in inverted commas because alternative designation has not gained currency in the new democratic dispensation of the country. Karretjie People themselves reject the racial classification of 'Coloured' associated with them. during the era ('Coloured') are

Photograph 1.2 Karretjie children

1.2 The Key Participants in the Study

All the Karretjie children who participated in the study were born into an itinerant lifestyle. Their lives are characterised by residential and domestic impermanence - a lifestyle which revolves around high levels of spatial mobility and domestic fluidity.

The following cryptic introduction to each of the children is intended to set the parameters for the central theme of the study namely: the ways in which the children's lives are influenced and determined by continual spatial mobility and fluid domestic units. It provides a profile of the elemental circumstances of the key participating children in the study and should be read in conjunction with the case studies and genealogical diagram presented in later chapters of the dissertation.⁸

Children are often perceived to be more vulnerable than adults during the research process mainly because of cultural and social ideas associated with children's minor status but also because of the generational divide between them and adults (cf.

⁸ The purpose and aims of the study were explained to the children and adults and consent was obtained to use their information in this dissertation. Published and video-recorded material emanating from the project has also been shared with them.

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Alderson et.al. 1995). The ethical guideline of 'informed consent'

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was used during fieldwork to ensure that the children and their parents understood what the process entailed and what possible implications it might have.

Throughout fieldwork all research equipment such as tape and video recorders, cameras and notebooks were demonstrated to the children and they were informed about the reasons for such use. Research participants were also informed about anonymity and confidentiality. Personal honesty proved to be very successful in gaining the children's consent, cooperation and participation with regard to various matters. It was eventually established and realised that our earlier relationship was gradually transformed into one of trust and friendship.

Simon (Outjie) Jacobs ■⁹

⁹ Colour-coding throughout the dissertation is intended to indicate siblings and/or *de facto karretjie* domestic unit membership.

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Simon was born in 1988¹⁰ on a farm in the district of Colesberg. He has a twin sister as well as two older brothers. His father is a shearer while both his biological and stepmother are deceased. Both were killed by his father. Until 1994 he lived and travelled with his father's *karretjie* unit. While his father was imprisoned, he resided with his paternal grandmother in her separate *karretjie* unit. It was also during this time that he started attending school. Since his grandmother's death in 1997, he has been in foster care and now lives permanently in a residential area adjacent to Colesberg.

Marie (Rokkies) Jacobs ■

Marie is Simon's twin sister. Her domestic and life history is similar to that of her brother. However, she assumed more responsibilities within the different *karretjie* units that they occupied, especially while they were living and travelling with their grandmother. Marie has also furthermore, advanced to a higher grade at school than her brother. The twins were never separated for extended periods of time during the period of intensive research.

Toek-Toek Jacobs ■

¹⁰ None of the children's dates of birth could be confirmed since they had not been registered with the Department of Home Affairs and birth certificates as such had never been issued. The dates given in this section are mere recollections provided by parents and other adults at the outspan.

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Toek-Toek was born in 1984 at the outspan next to the Seacow River Bridge in the district of Colesberg. He is an older brother of the twins, Simon and Marie. As with the twins, he too had been subjected to the loss of his mother and stepmother. As a young child he was involved in an accident with one of their donkeys and has been suffering from mental illness ever

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since. He completed a couple of months of schooling and since he left school he has been living with his father in his *karretjie* unit which is permanently situated at an informal settlement on the outskirts of Colesberg. Due to labour involvement in the district and as far away as the Free State and Western Cape Provinces, Toek-Toek's father is mostly absent from their unit both before and after he was incarcerated.

Pienkies Jacobs ■

Pienkies is the eldest brother of Simon, Marie and Toek-Toek Jacobs. He was born in the early 1980's on a farm in the district of Colesberg. After his father was imprisoned for murder, he took care of his three younger siblings. When his father was released from prison for the first conviction, Pienkies was taught the skills of shearing. He never attended school and at an early age became an independent shearer and part of the shearing team of which his father was the spokesperson. When his father was sent to prison for the second time, he 'inherited' his father's cart and donkeys. Pienkies currently works intermittently on fruit farms in the Western Cape Province.

Piet Ackerman ■

Piet was born in 1987 on a farm in the district of Colesberg. His father was a senior shearer in the shearing team that resided at the outspan at the Seacow River Bridge and his mother was mostly unemployed. During 1994, Piet's father insulted his mother and she accidentally killed him when, in her rage, she threw a stone at him. After she was imprisoned he lived and travelled with his maternal grandmother between the outspan and different farms in the district. He has completed two years of formal schooling and after his grandmother's death he moved to an informal settlement outside Colesberg. He also lived intermittently with his sister on a nearby farm. When his mother was released from prison he moved back to her at the informal settlement and is for the most part the only earning member of their unit.

Lisa Ackerman ■

Lisa was born in 1982 with the help of a midwife at the outspan at the Seacow River Bridge. She is Piet's older sister and was also present when their father died. She completed Grade 1 but soon after her mother was imprisoned she was withdrawn from school to assist at her grandmother's *karretjie* unit. Lisa became pregnant when she was thirteen and eventually 'married' the father of the baby, a farm labourer. Due to domestic violence she left him and went back to the outspan and eventually moved with other members of that

community to the informal settlement outside town.

Christine Sors ■

Christine was born in 1990 during a shearing assignment on a farm in the district of Colesberg. Her father is a shearer while her mother was one of the few women at the outspan who were temporarily employed as domestic assistants on one of the farms. She was enrolled at a farm school in the district but due to problems was withdrawn while in Grade 2. She and her family eventually also left the outspan and settled outside town where she is enrolled at a local Primary School. Both her mother and father are unemployed although her father sometimes finds part-time employment.

Hendrik Sors ■

Hendrik was born in 1993 on a farm in the district of Colesberg while his father and family were there on a shearing assignment. He is Christine's younger brother. Of all the children at the outspan he has spent the most time with his father and mother. Hendrik largely travelled with his parents' *karretjie* unit to neighbouring farms where his father was employed as a shearer. They also eventually moved to the settlement adjacent to town. Hendrik has never attended school although his mother was intending to enroll him.

Mina Sors ■

Mina was born in 1984 on a farm situated next to the Seacow River Bridge outspan, in the district of Colesberg. Her mother, and Christine and Hendrik's mother are sisters and the daughters of Piet and Lisa's father. While the spokesperson of the team was imprisoned, Mina's father assumed responsibility as unofficial spokesperson for the shearing team. Her life too entailed continual movement between farms and the outspan and eventually school and the outspan. After numerous incidents of discrimination on the part of fellow learners at school, she was withdrawn from this particular school but she was soon afterwards enrolled at another school near town. Her father was one of the first shearers to lose his donkeys and cart, and inevitably, the family's mobility and livelihood. Economic hardship sometimes forced the Karretjie men to abandon their cart and donkeys, either by virtue of selling it to take advantage of the cash it offered or by using wooden parts of the cart as fuel during winter times. While they were residing at the settlement near town, Mina, her boyfriend and another friend were incriminated in the slaughtering of a sheep on a nearby farm and were sent to the local prison for four weeks. It was only when officials realised that Mina was underaged that she was released with a warning. She was also five months pregnant and could no longer attend a local Primary School. She and her child are living in the informal settlement outside Colesberg.

Stokkies Sors ■

Stokkies was born on the same farm as his sister Mina, in the late 1980's. He and his family moved between the outspan and various farms in the vicinity on a regular basis. Whenever the shearing team was employed on a farm, Stokkies was drawn into the activities, mainly to sweep the floor of the shearing shed. He attended school for eight months before he was withdrawn by his father. He was eventually enrolled at another Primary School. Stokkies did not pass the first grade and against his parents' wishes he never went back to school. He was employed for a few weeks as a gardener at a home where his mother is a domestic worker in a nearby residential area. He also often tends to privately owned horses on a piece of land close to the settlement where he and his family live.

Sanna Sors ■

Sanna was born at the outspan in 1990 with the help of a midwife. According to her mother she gave birth to Sanna under their *karretjie* under very difficult circumstances. Since her birth, Sanna has been weak and ill. She spent most of her early childhood years in hospital. She and her mother have regularly been absent from their *karretjie* unit because they had to travel to the Free State Province for medical treatment. She lives with her parents and siblings at the settlement close to town and is enrolled at a local Primary School.

Emma (Kaffermeidjie) Arnoster ■

Emma was born on a farm in the district of Colesberg. Until 1998 she lived with her mother, her grandmother and half sister in her grandmother's *karretjie* unit at the Seacow River Bridge outspan. Emma's father died of tuberculosis when she was three years old. Since then she lived with her grandmother. Their unit was the only one without a male shearer but they preferred to travel with other kin to shearing assignments and not be left isolated at the outspan. Her mother had never been employed but since her grandmother was a pensioner their unit had the most stable income over

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the years. Emma did not complete Grade 1 and after her grandmother's death her mother sold the donkeys and cart and they moved permanently to live with family on a farm in the district. During 1999 Emma decided to leave this farm to work on another farm as a domestic assistant and as a hired hand during the onion harvest.

Grace Arnoster ■

Grace is Emma's half sister and was born at the outspan. Her father was a labourer in town and with whom her mother had a very brief relationship. He died shortly after her birth. Grace lived with her mother, half sister and Emma's grandmother at the outspan. She was also sent to school but ran away after three months. She spent most of her time at the outspan where she looked after the grandmother and assisted her mother with domestic chores. Grace was, since the age of nine, sexually abused by one of the men, a senior shearer, at the outspan. She became pregnant when she was eleven but miscarried early in the pregnancy. When the grandmother died she initially stayed at the outspan with a young couple in their unit but soon afterwards followed her mother to a neighbouring farm in the district.

Rosie Verrooi ■

Rosie was born in Colesberg in 1982 and lived for four years in the 'Black' residential area with her parents. Her father was murdered and her mother could then not take care of her. During this time a distant, elderly Karretjie relative of her mother decided to adopt her and brought her to the outspan to live with her, her son a shearer, and his wife in her *karretjie* unit. Rosie attended school and was able to acquire advanced reading and writing skills. After the domestic unit in which she lived lost their mobility because the *karretjie* owner sold the donkeys, they moved to the settlement outside town where she and her husband eventually formed their own independent unit.

1.3 Outline of the Dissertation

By introducing the key participating children in the study in Chapter 1, I endeavour to demonstrate the main theme of the dissertation. By sketching the role of factors such as high levels of spatial mobility and domestic fluidity, I indicate how the children's daily lives are regulated and disrupted, and how they are deprived of their basic rights as members of South African society, especially in terms of access to formal education and other services. The intention was thus to give an early indication of the key issues to be dealt with in this dissertation.

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework for the study and situates the present work within the context of the contemporary and relevant discourses relating to the

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issues to be interrogated. It also deals with the objectives of the study. More specifically the chapter focuses on three perspectives relating to the study. Firstly, it examines the discourse on the topic of peripatetic groups worldwide and the notion of a peripatetic Karretjie niche within South African society. Secondly, it explores the notion of domestic fluidity with an emphasis on the fact that domestic boundaries are not fixed within the Karretjie community as well as the role that different individuals play within domestic units. Thirdly, it investigates the position of childhood within the discipline of anthropology. The methodology employed in the study, with the associated difficulties, are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3 provides a historical dimension and background to the study and the people concerned. It also investigates the contemporary circumstances and particular lifestyle of the Karretjie People of the district and town of Colesberg by contextualising their position within the larger South African society. This sets the background to the rest of the study i.e. how geographical mobility and domestic flux impinge on the children's lives at home and at school.

This is followed by the next three chapters which primarily present empirical data and analysis stemming from the study. Chapter 4 provides a description of the features of the Seacow River Bridge outspan, people's access to services and facilities as well as an overview of everyday life at the outspan. It discusses the children's activities, their relationships with other children and adults, incidences of violence, their involvement with labour as well as their perceptions of their

peripatetic way of life.

By using the data described in previous Chapters, I endeavour to examine and analyse more closely the children's life histories in Chapter 5. More specifically, a description is given of each child's domestic history over time. It is followed by a discussion of the main trends pertaining to the children's movement between different domestic *karretjie* units.

Chapter 6 explores the children's attendance at school and experiences of formal education and in particular it demonstrates how an itinerant lifestyle and schooling are not easily compatible. It also appraises the educational system in South Africa and in particular farm school education. It demonstrates that the immediate environment of the *karretjie* unit remains the central place in which informal education takes place. Furthermore, it discusses parents' attitudes toward formal schooling, their expectations as well as an initiative of mobile schooling for Karretjie People.

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Chapter 7 provides an overview of the Karretjie People's changing circumstances in recent years and considers the current position of the community who used to live semi-permanently at the Seacow River Bridge outspan. It also presents a concluding summary of the findings of the study.



CHAPTER 2 THE PROBLEM IN CONTEXT: OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY, THEORETICAL CONTEXTUALISATION AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter is organised in three parts. The first part presents the general objectives to be pursued as well as the problem orientation directing the study. The second part provides a discussion of the theoretical framework for the study as well as the dissertation's main themes. The third section deals with the methodology used, and some of the methodological difficulties, rewards and challenges encountered during the study.

2.1 Objectives of the Study and Problem Orientation

The decision to focus on the Karretjie children in this study manifested in three main objectives:¹¹ Firstly, to explore the children's everyday lives. The Karretjie child's most important physical and social setting is situated in and around the immediate location of the *karretjie* domestic unit, whether such a unit is based at an outspan, in a *gang* or on a farm, or whether it is *en route*. It is here that the child spends most of her/his time.

¹¹ My interest in this particular topic was a realisation of the potential, and need, for a particular focus on the children.

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The second objective is to examine how high levels of spatial mobility and domestic flux and instability impinge on the children's lives. The reality is that it is mainly forces beyond their control (e.g. availability of work, seasonal determinants, restricted accompaniment as determined by landowners, etc.) as well as parents and/or caretakers' decision-making, that regulate these children's physical and social contexts in terms of the frequency and duration of travelling, *karretjie* unit composition and residential instability in general.

Thirdly, the study aims to allow the children themselves to narrate their everyday lives and experiences at the outspans, on farms and at school¹². To accomplish this, it was however important to describe the children's experiences by placing them within the different contexts of the adults' lifeworlds.

The first problem area to be investigated is the phenomenon of peripatetic communities worldwide and the notion of a peripatetic niche. It provides the context for the following chapter which defines and establishes the phenomenon of Karretjie People within similar heuristic parameters. In particular, it demonstrates the interconnectedness of spatial mobility and a peripatetic lifestyle.

¹² By considering the children's views and experiences, recognition is given that they are active participants in the settings they form part of and that children play a significant role in determining their destination. The subject of anthropology and childhood is discussed in 2.2.3.

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The occurrence of peripatetic communities in South Africa is an uncommon phenomenon. The Karretjie People of the Karoo represent such a community. They are dependent upon other communities for food resources because they do not own, control or have easy access to land. Sheep-shearing is the males' specialised skill which is offered to the farming community on a regular basis. This service that they render is specialised in the sense that farmers cannot perform the particular skill of shearing themselves and it is mostly looked upon as an improper labour practice for them to be involved in.

They have the option of becoming sedentary but their itinerancy enables them to exploit the limited opportunities and resources available to them. Hardly any anthropological literature exists on the subject of itinerant or peripatetic communities in South Africa, and none on itinerant children other than data on the Karretjie People and thus deserves scientific consideration.

The unpredictability of an itinerant lifestyle and the added variable of seasonality create unique circumstances and problems for children growing up in this community. This study on the lives of the Karretjie children endeavours to enhance the understanding of such a particular lifestyle and the demands associated with a peripatetic community.

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As I show in this ethnography, Karretjie communities and their accompanying lifestyle of high frequency of geographical mobility and domestic variability, are best described within the theoretical framework of a peripatetic niche. Given the origin of the Karretjie People (i.e. they are descendants of the Khoekhoen and San) it is evident that when their ancestors were progressively drawn into the agricultural economy of the Karoo region, mainly due to competition for and lack of available resources, the transformation process from being hunter-gatherers to a peripatetic lifestyle took place.

By using mostly literature within the South African context, the next problem area to be considered is the fluid nature of domestic groups and *karretjie* units. It concentrates on the notion of household and how it applies to the study. In chapters to follow it will be explained how domestic fluidity pertains to Karretjie families and their children and in particular how the boundaries of domestic and social units are blurred and flexible as part of a series of survival strategies employed by them.

Ross (1993:25) has introduced the concepts of 'moral' (group-oriented, which involves the household as such) and 'instrumental' (ego-centred, which puts a network of people in action) to explain how domestic units are formed and dissolved. She states that

“... morality ... involves the need for, and culturally-defined and sanctioned processes of, providing for others through group

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interaction and reproduction. Instrumentality ... involves concerns with maintaining oneself, with providing for oneself and one's own needs (Ross 1993:25)".

As I will demonstrate in following chapters, both these notions apply to the Karretjie People as well as their children. Decision-making takes place on both levels, i.e. a community, as a group, may decide to relocate or individual agency may be a factor in terms of geographical mobility. With regard to the children, I will show how domestic units are fused (or not) as necessitated by strategies such as kin-care, foster-care, consumption and other practical and/or forced considerations.

The challenges associated with their itinerant lifestyle together with concomitant household fluidity create a unique set of conditions and obstacles for the children growing up in this community. Data related to this are of essence to explore further avenues in terms of meaningful planning and development initiatives.

The third section of the research problem is structured around the consideration of the position of childhood within the discipline of anthropology. The study of childhood has largely been disregarded in anthropology's focus on people and their social settings. This study is a contribution to the growing local research with, and literature on children, and explores the ways in which Karretjie children construct their lives as well as external determinants influencing their lifeways.

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It has been suggested that while children should not be viewed

as inactive recipients of culture, they should also not be regarded as having independent cultural habits distinguishing them from adults (cf. Jones 1990:40).

Children form part of the adult world and therefore broader society. By admitting this, it has to be recognised that

“... children, as much as men and women, *have* culture, are *part* of culture, and are *makers* of culture” (Jones 1990:40).

Furthermore Jones (1990:40) states that

“... we do not require an anthropology of children; what is required is an anthropology which acknowledges, and accounts for, both childhood in culture and culture in childhood”.

2.2 Theoretical Contextualisation and the Themes of the Study

An intensive literature study on various subjects and related fields associated with various aspects of the research was done. Literature and other data on Sinti and Roma groups¹³, nomads and other peripatetic groups in general were analogously used in the study of Karretjie families. General anthropological theory pertaining to the concept of household worldwide, and in particular, theory and analyses relating to the notion of domestic fluidity and flux within the southern African context were examined. Literature on children and their position (as a social category) within anthropology has been widely incorporated in the study. Lastly, all publications and other printed material resulting from research amongst different Karretjie communities in the country have been consulted and incorporated in the study.

2.2.1 Anthropology and Peripatetic Communities

¹³ These itinerant sub-groups are collectively and often popularly referred to as 'Gypsies' throughout the literature.

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The human and social sciences and especially anthropology have, until relatively recently, mostly neglected to inquire into the phenomenon of peripatetic communities. Peripatetics¹⁴ are regarded as the most widely found groups of people whose lifestyle involves spatial mobility (cf. Berland & Salo 1986:1). In recent times, anthropologists worldwide have defined the notion of a particular peripatetic niche¹⁵ - a construct which emphasises

“the regular demand for specialized goods and/or services that more sedentary communities cannot, or will not support on a permanent basis” (Berland & Salo 1986:2).

Anthropological studies of itinerant communities have generally focused on hunter-gatherers and pastoralists, thus largely overlooking peripatetic groups (cf. Rao 1987:1). Anthropologists J. Berland and M. Salo, in collaboration with the Commission on Nomadic Peoples, organised the first *International Symposium on Peripatetic Societies* to coincide with the 1985 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Washington, DC. The fundamental reason for this was twofold; firstly, to define the parameters of peripatetic adaptations worldwide,

¹⁴ “Peripatetic” as a construct was developed by Berland (1986) primarily because the term is regarded, in semantic terms, as indifferent and consistent with the Sanskrit language (and its equivalent) *pāryātān*, with an emphasis on controlled and systematic spatial movement instead of mobility in a disorderly manner (cf. Berland & Salo 1986:2).

¹⁵ Salo (1986) has formulated the idea of a socioeconomic niche for peripatetic groups, emphasising their use and exploitation of social rather than natural resources.

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and secondly, to refine the concept of “nomadism” and the position of peripatetics such as tinkers, basket-makers, peddlers, traders, craftsmen, entertainers, etc. among other communities (Berland & Salo 1986:1).

According to Rao (1987:1) numerous studies have been conducted by anthropologists and other scholars on itinerant communities such as nomads, hunter-gatherers and pastoralists but the most widely dispersed of all itinerant activities, namely that of peripatetic communities have largely been ignored or dismissed as social peculiarities. Rao (1987:3) defines peripatetics as

“primarily non-food-producing/extracting, preferentially endogamous, itinerant communities subsisting mainly on the sale of goods and/or specialized services to sedentary customers”.

Therefore, customers (or clients) can be regarded as peripatetic communities’ primary resource. In other words, the human resources that they exploit are an essential requirement in order for them to earn a livelihood. Since they do not have easy access to land, they do not produce food for subsistence purposes and thus have to rely on the economic and social needs which are in demand by the society of which they form part.

Such communities all over the world are generally grouped together and labelled ‘Gypsies’ or vagrants. However, according to Rao (1987:7) not all ‘Gypsies’ are nomadic and not all non-pastoral and non-hunting-gathering nomads are ‘Gypsies’.

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So-called 'Gypsies' are however, categorised conjointly with peripatetics mainly because of their subsistence activities. Anthropologists in Europe, the United States of America and Asia have devoted considerable attention to 'Gypsies' (cf. Costarelli 1993; Gmelch 1985; Hegarty 1998; Kyuchukov 1995; Mayall 1988; McLaughlin 1980; Ní Shuinéar 1993; Okely 1975, 1983; Sutherland 1975; Sway 1988; Wang 1985) and peripatetic communities (cf. Berland 1982, 1986, 1987; Casimir 1987; Nemeth 1986; Rao & Casimir 1988; Salo 1986).

Berland and Salo (1987:1-2) maintain that

“... peripatetics have been overlooked in the mainstream social sciences by historians, sociologists and especially anthropologists specializing in the study of small-scale societies. From an ethnographic perspective the dearth of information on such groups represents a conspicuous void in the massive and often meticulously documented record explicating the structure and organization of human communities”.

Peripatetics' marginal status might be one of the reasons why academics have not sooner enquired into their role in society. Globally peripatetics live among other mobile groups and the sedentary population and are regarded by sedentary communities as having an inferior status, but as Berland and Salo (1986:2) argue,

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“this does not *de facto* place them as economically insignificant relative to urban, rural or pastoral communities”.

The subordinate position ascribed to such groups derives from their traditional occupations with an accompanying feature of poverty because of lack of material possessions (Casimir 1986:89). Peripatetics fit the category of the “professional stranger” (cf. Simmel 1950; Berland 1986:189) in the sense that they are the most widely distributed of all other spatially mobile populations and because they are regarded as not belonging to sedentary societies, yet their services and skills are essential to such societies’ functioning.

Unlike pastoral nomads and hunter-gatherers, peripatetic groups obtain their food primarily from other human groups of which they form part (or are associated with) and have no control over the natural and human resources in the settings they frequent. Members of peripatetic groups also do not necessarily tend to travel either regularly or continuously as is the case with other nomadic groups. They might lead sedentary lives for extended periods of time and still retain their peripatetic identity.

There are also similarities between these different itinerant groups: they all employ cyclical mobility as a survival strategy, albeit due to availability of

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pasture, water resources or wild foods and in the case of peripatetics - a dependency upon their customers' particular demands. As Rao (1987:4) explains (it)

“Hunter-gatherers procure various plant material and animals at specific times of the year, and many peripatetic communities obtain compensation at fixed times of the year for goods and services in seasonal demand”.

According to Rao (1987:21, 22) little empirical and substantive data about the development of peripatetic communities or what Berland (cf. Berland & Salo 1986:1) calls “ubiquitous nomads” are available but it seems as if many contemporary peripatetic groups emerged from hunter-gatherers or pastoral nomads, the process either being unexpected or gradual. The transformation from a predominantly hunter-gatherer subsistence to a peripatetic one probably took place when hunter-gatherers were driven into peripheral areas by other groups, especially when resources were low. Pastoral nomads on the other hand, turned to a peripatetic lifestyle because they lost their herds and pastures mainly because of warfare or due to gradual impoverishment (Rao 1987:21, 22).

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The most notable characteristic of peripatetic communities' activities as a group or on an individual basis is flexibility and sensitivity to factors comprising their geographical and social settings. According to Berland and Salo (1986:3)

“... they [peripatetics] are especially attuned to changes in social and economic circumstances as well as a broad spectrum of other factors that may influence patterns of human needs and desires in each region, community and even specific households they exploit”.

Another feature of peripatetics is that kinship is more often than not a formative and organising principle in their activities and decision-making. Furthermore, their livelihood and group composition are closely related to practical considerations which in turn is linked to individual skills and resources available to them (Berland & Salo 1986:3). Given this, Berland and Salo (1986:3) state that it would however, be incorrect to assume that all patterns of mobility are economically motivated. Spatial mobility may also be linked to various internal and external factors such as disputes, practical and social conditions.

While spatial mobility in varying degrees is characteristic of all human individuals, it is alleged that the higher the levels of spatial practice¹⁶ (albeit social practice in the

¹⁶ The concept of spatial practice was developed by Bourdieu (1977) and refers to the role of individual agency in acting upon and transforming structurally bounded environments. De Certeau (1986) has expanded on this concept with particular reference to space. He argues that the significance of space lies in the social construction of it by individual actors and not solely in its physical layout.

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sense of settling down or being mobile), the lower and more inferior the status of such groups or individuals as perceived by sedentary communities (cf. Misra 1986:181-182). Peripatetic groups also don't regard mobility and/or sedentism as opposing elements or conditions. Rather, relative mobility or sedentism is considered to be strategies that can be exploited as opportunities arise. In this regard Berland and Salo (1986:4) state that

“... where settling down for a time is always considered a possibility, most families continue to maintain a readiness for mobility as a viable alternative”.

2.2.2 Domestic Units and the Notion of Fluidity

While it is not my intention to explore the literature on 'household' and 'family' and its associated conceptual problems exhaustively, the following succinct discussion of the topic will illustrate the main points, particularly those pertaining to this study. The emphasis here is rather on the fluid nature, in terms of boundaries and membership, that impinge upon *karretjie* domestic units or households.

In the social sciences, 'household' or 'family' is usually considered to be a meaningful unit of analysis for the study of domesticity, processes of production and reproduction, consumption and social and economic processes (Ross 1993:29).

Hammel (in Rodman 1985:58) defines household as

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“... those who share the same physical space for the purpose of eating, sleeping and taking rest and leisure, growing up, child rearing and procreating”.

Household is also seen as an entity which does not include children who have left the domestic unit as well as kin who live in close proximity. Therefore, the above definition takes into account the domestic activities a household executes as well as ‘spatial proximity’ (Rodman 1985:58).

Similarly, Bender (1967:493) argues that ‘family’ on the one hand and ‘household’ on the other are logically distinct and empirically different. He states that

“... as to the first point, the referent of the family is kinship, while the referent of the household is propinquity or residence.

Therefore, the implication is that in many instances families do not necessarily form households and also, households are often not comprised of families.

Anthropologists like Rodman (1985:57) support this view because according to her residence should be studied as a phenomenon in its own right. She states that

“... the “house” in household should not be overlooked in the analysis of residential patterns, for it is a nexus that links the subsistence and

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code of kinship in a particular way (Rodman 1985:57)”.

Anthropologists have however, levelled criticism at the use of such units of analysis and have also pointed to conceptual problems associated with them. It seems that the most important critique centres around the matter of individual agency. In other words, ‘family’ or ‘household’ is mostly seen to focus too much on structure (i.e. individuals comprising a particular domestic unit), therefore failing to recognise that people’s actions, their labour practices and the associated individual agency, play a major part in the construction of domestic units. Spiegel et.al. (1996:7-8) state that households tend to be viewed in terms of

“... standardised domestic group ‘developmental cycles’ that assume that each household forms first as an adult couple - or small nuclear family - subsequently expanding to include that couple’s children, or additional children. Later, as the children become adults, they disperse to establish separate households”.

By implication households are therefore regarded as being stable domestic units and thus not acknowledging the existence of mobility of individuals as well as the fluid nature of domestic boundaries. Domestic units are constructed around the principle of shared income and expenditure even though the members are dispersed (*de jure* membership) or together (*de facto* membership).¹⁷ Spiegel et.al.

¹⁷ *De jure* membership pertains to people who are regarded as members of a particular domestic unit even though they are absent from such a unit for any duration of time. *De facto* membership applies to people who are regarded as members of a particular domestic unit and who are actually present on a

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(1996:10) call units in which some members are absent to generate income while others are remaining at their homes and subsisting on such earnings “stretched” households “across space”.

According to Ross (1993:35) the most important research on households in South Africa has been conducted in rural areas where the migrant labour system has been most prevalent. The work of Murray (1981) in Lesotho in this regard deserves special mention. Murray (1981:102) points out that

“... a man’s absence as a migrant labourer is a condition of his family’s survival”.

regular basis.

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This particular labour practice means that in order for a family to survive and maintain its status as a family unit, the migrant labourer has no option but to leave the physical environment of the domestic unit in order to provide towards it financially and materially.

Murray's (1981) work led to numerous other studies exploring the migrant labour system in the country and in particular the social and economic effects of male absenteeism from their rural households as well as the occurrence and consequences of return migration (cf. Spiegel 1980; Sharp 1987; Jones 1990; Ramphela 1991, to mention a few).

With reference to her research among migrant labourers in a hostel in the Western Cape, Ramphela (1991:119) states that

“... the perennial problem of the unit of study which anthropologists have to confront ... , was resolved in this case by resorting to the common denominator of space allocation in this setting - a bed”.

Although ‘household’ and ‘family’ have been used to good effect to describe and explain social and economic action and interaction, it has frequently ignored the mere fact of fluidity of domestic units and the patterns thereof, which can only be acquired through a longitudinal research strategy (cf. *Social Dynamics* Issue 1996, 22(1)). As Ross (1993:40) puts it

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“... it is personal mobility which provides our entry point into an understanding of the fluidity of domestic units, and the role of individuals in determining the shape of domestic interaction over time”.

In 1996, the journal *Social Dynamics* (22 (1)) published a compilation of articles concerned with the nature and causes of domestic fluidity in South African society. As Spiegel (1996(a):5) states

“... the articles ... all attempt to show the ways in which people understand and give meaning to their own domestic lives, demonstrating the cultural nature of the domestic experience, whether it is stable or fluid”.

It is useful to regard a *karretjie* (cart) as the focus for a domestic unit because it becomes a single space for the people who form part of a particular travelling and social unit. With the use of other material such as plastic and corrugated iron, families convert the cart into a temporary¹⁸ and functional overnight shelter presumed to be fluid. Such a shelter has no divisions and all aspects of life revolve around the *karretjie* and its immediate environment. It is the common denominator for purposes of travelling, consumption, production and reproduction, employment

¹⁸ Legally, one is allowed to reside on state-owned property up to a maximum of 48 hours.

and identity.

2.2.3 Anthropology and Childhood

In this section I endeavour to contextualise childhood studies in anthropology, and in chapters to follow, the ways in which Karretjie children construct their lives as well as external determinants influencing their lifeways.

The anthropology and/or ethnography of childhood is regarded as one of the most recent specialised sub-disciplines within anthropology. It has been argued that there are enough anthropological studies concerning children to form a tradition in the discipline as it is practised worldwide (Benthall 1992:1).¹⁹ But, according to Hirschfeld (2002:611) efforts by especially early anthropologists to describe children's lives have not succeeded in "bringing children in from the margins of anthropology" and therefore a tradition of child-focused research has not yet been well established.

¹⁹ Examples of well-known work in this regard in anthropology internationally include: Mead (1963); Whiting (1963); Hardman (1973, 1974); Schwartzmann (1978); Korbin (1981); Ennew (1986); La Fontaine (1986); LeVine (1977) James & Prout (1990(a) & (b)); Rasmussen (1993, 1994); James (1993); James, et.al. (1998); Stephens (1998). Studies within the South African context include: Reynolds (1989, 1991); Swart (1990); Jones (1990, 1993(b)); Kotzé (1992); Waldman (1993); Van der Waal (1996).

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Early monographs concerning children and the accompanying focus on the process of socialisation, including rites of passage, puberty rites, family life and play, have also contributed to the fact that children's own contribution to their development has been obscured. Childhood used to be portrayed as something in progress with the ideal of reaching an adult end-state, therefore neglecting to indicate how they shape their own lifepaths at a particular point in time.

Theoretical approaches to the study of childhood and in particular with reference to children and agency, have largely been disregarded in, amongst others, anthropology's focus on people and their social settings. Central to the work of Giddens (1989) is that every person is a "competent human agent". He states that

"... [this is because] human actors routinely and chronically constitute and reconstitute their qualities as agents in recurrent processes of social interaction (1989:283)".

This statement of course, applies as much to children as it does to adults. In anthropology, the work by James and Prout (1990) deals with the issue of children and agency and is regarded as important because it was one of the first real attempts to move away from models of socialisation and development to rather focus on children's activities in the construction of their own lives.

Anthropologists have until fairly recently, tended to examine adults, rather than

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children on an individual basis or in group context. Children, as a social category, have been regarded as impassive and muted recipients of cultural and social forces within their communities. Agency as such has mostly been overlooked and therefore children's choices and determinations as regards their lifecourse and survival strategies have traditionally not been part of anthropological enquiry. Hirschfeld (2002:611) explains the reason for this as follows

“... children are strikingly adept at acquiring adult culture and [they are] adept at creating their own cultures”.

Another reason why anthropology has marginalised children is due to the fact that children are closely associated with their mothers and therefore until recently children suffered the same exclusion as women from mainstream anthropology (cf. James & Prout 1990(a); Hirschfeld 2002). In this regard Caputo (1995:27) states that

“... children have been discussed as part of a mother-child dyad in studies of child-rearing practices, as participants in initiation ceremonies, as members of kinship structures, as part of the schooling process in studies of language acquisition, or in connection with the importance of play in their lives”.

Since the 1970's and until the mid-1990's various anthropologists and other

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theorists advocated for more research to be undertaken amongst children and youth with a strong emphasis on their lifeworld and their perceptions of it (cf. Hardman 1973; La Fontaine 1986; Burman and Reynolds 1986; Jones 1990 and 1993(a) & (b); Benthall 1992; James 1993 and Jenks 1996, to mention a few). Ariès (1973) set this idea in motion when he claimed that the concept of childhood only emerged from the fifteenth century onwards, specifically in the western world, and that prior to this period, the notion of childhood did not exist. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ideas surrounding the notion of childhood resulted in the marginalisation of children from the adult world (James 1993:72). According to James (1993:72)

“... ideas about children directly impinge upon the experience of childhood which children themselves have. However ... this relationship was rarely given critical attention before the 1970s”.

Hardman (1973:85) was one of the first anthropologists to suggest that children should be regarded as a muted group and within a particular age category in society when she posed the question “*Can there be an anthropology of children?*”. She argues that anthropology has the potential to explicate children’s accounts through the ethnographic method (James 1993:85). Hardman (1973:87)

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furthermore suggests that children could be seen as subjects to be studied on their own merit and not just as receivers of adult instruction.

For James (1993:85) this process starts with the establishment of the child as an active participating entity in the world he/she forms part of, rather than as a simple inactive outside spectator, and she sees children as playing a significant part in determining the shape and destination which their own lives take. Various scholars explain and elaborate on this subject and sentiment as follows:

Jones (1990:33) states that

“... [the] implicit rationale for marginalising children has ... been that, by virtue of their incomplete cultural state, children neither qualify as informants about culture, nor are they suitable subjects for anthropological enquiry”.

James (1993:81) explains the void in the study of childhood in general as follows

“[it] represents a broad theoretical tautness within the humanities; in other words what significance should be ascribed to the role of social structure as opposed to that of human agency?”.

According to Jenks (1996:121)

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“... a growing number of ... anthropologists have attended to the dissonance which exists between children’s own experiences of being a child and the institutional form which childhood takes. This has sharpened a theoretical focus on the plurality of childhoods, a plurality evidenced not only cross-culturally but also within cultures”.

Benthall (1992:1) states that the first anthropological study of childhood was Spencer’s (1899) *Education of the Pueblo Child: A Study in Arrested development*. He further suggests that

“... the author ... held that those societies which were culturally retarded suffered from a rigid suppression of children’s inventiveness, which they have adopted in a struggle for survival”.

In 1931 Mead’s work *Growing up in New Guinea* appeared. It is concerned with Manus children of the Admiralty Islands and gives valuable ethnographic insights into the lives of these children compared to adult life (Benthall 1992:1). Furthermore, Mead’s (1963:210) work among adolescent girls in Samoa was an important first step to recognise children as valuable informants in anthropology.

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However, according to James (1993:80) this attempt

“... was grounded within a western ideological notion of children and childhood”.

James (1993) and others like Ennew (1986) noted that a western idea of childhood often has detrimental effects on the lives and daily experiences of children of the poor. Thus, for James (1993:73) the western ideal of, for instance, schooling and formal education may not benefit children from developing countries because their labour involvement may make a significant contribution to the family income and therefore withdrawal from work into school may be destructive.

In this regard James (1993:74) maintains that

“...where children’s social status and roles are radically different from those of their western counterparts ... an appreciation and understanding of children’s own experience of the world must involve, first and most importantly, unpacking the *ideas* which shape the contextual practices and perceptions of childhood as it daily unfolds for children”.

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Benthall (1992:1) argues that the major difference between children and other (muted) groups (such as women) is that

“... children’s ‘minority’ status normally comes to an end. Hence the analogy with other such groups, though useful is limited. It follows that the ethnography of children brings out the range of potential for cultural variation, only a limited part of which is actually realized in adult societies”.

More recent studies outside southern Africa that highlight the importance of the ethnography of childhood are: *Becoming Tongan: An Ethnography of Childhood* by Morton (1996) and *Children’s Lifeworlds: Gender, Welfare and Labour in the Developing World* by Niewenhuys (1994) (both cited in Stephens 1998:530-531). In reviewing these works, Stephens (1998:531) states that these ethnographies

“... point the way toward a dynamic anthropology of children and childhood that is capable of illuminating the multiple contexts in which childhoods are situated and negotiated, as well as the everyday lifeworlds of children themselves”.

In general it seems that traditional accounts of childhood succeeded in showing how cultural knowledge was reproduced in next generations. However, in denying the active role children play in this process, emphasis was placed on childrearing

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activities, rather than on children's own perceptions and activities. James (1993:82) observes that

“... although the childhood that children experience is regarded as central to any discussion of the reproduction of cultural knowledge, how children receive and make use of that knowledge remains relatively uncharted”.

Southern African anthropology's neglect to recognise children's integration into society was subsequently addressed by various scholars within the discipline.

Growing Up in a Divided Society in 1986 under editorship of Burman and Reynolds was one of the first published works that emphasised the complexity of South African childhood. It covers different subjects relating to children such as health, family structure, education, rural and urban contexts as well as case study material.

The contribution of Reynolds towards an understanding of childhood in South Africa is also noteworthy. Her thesis *Children of Crossroads. An Ethnographic Study of Cognition among Seven-year-old Xhosa Children in an Urban Environment* (1983) was concerned with the lives and development of children in an informal settlement. Other works by Reynolds (cf. 1991) primarily focused on child labour in urban and rural settings of southern Africa. Also, Swart's (cf. 1988; 1990) work on street children in Johannesburg has gained international acclaim, particularly her insights on research methodology concerning children in an urban environment and matters

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relating to human agency.

Ramphela's (cf. 1991; 1993) thesis *The Politics of Space: Life in the Migrant Hostels of the Western Cape* discussed the social effects of migrant labour in South Africa and *A Bed Called Home. Life in the Migrant Labour Hostels of Cape Town* contributed to alternative perspectives on, and formation of domestic units in the country.

In the early 1990's Jones (1990 & 1993(a)) documented the lives of children in a migrant hostel complex in Lwandle in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. His dissertation with the title *Assaulting Childhood: An Ethnographic Study of Children Resident in a Western Cape Migrant Hostel Complex* explored children's circumstances, daily activities and formal schooling within this context. With a few recent exceptions worldwide and in southern Africa, Jones (1990:33) argues that

“... the general assumption within anthropology seems to have been that children are passive recipients of an extant adult culture, that

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their adherence to it is as yet perfunctory, and that their ideas and behaviour are merely partial and immature imitations of the culturally-complete adults who surround them”.

Other anthropological studies on children and youth in South Africa include work done by Waldman (1993) amongst adolescents on farms in the Western Cape. This study represents one of few conducted in the rural areas of South Africa. Jones (1993:16, 17) views this situation as follows:

“... one of the incidental consequences of anthropology’s inattention to children in the countryside has been the creation of an image of their relative domestic stability”.

Jones (1990:311) also mentions that there are millions more children in South Africa whose lives remain closed to the rest of the world. He argues that there is a need to enquire about such children: academics need to know about their patterns of mobility, their relationships with their parents and other caretakers, their encounters with education and “their everyday experiences”.

Jones (1993(b):204-205) concludes as follows in his published work on children in migrant hostels in Lwandle

“[Children] are extremely significant actors in our society. They offer

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vast and hitherto largely untapped reservoirs of fresh information, opinion, and sociological perception and they hold insights and wisdom which are worthy of acknowledgement and expression. Most importantly, the past and present deficits of childhood in South Africa cannot be countered unless they are known and publicised. If post-apartheid society is to make any significant difference to their lot, it is therefore critical that the particular realities of all this country's children be documented, understood and fully represented in the process of its definition. There remains much to be learnt about, and also from, South Africa's children".

Hirschfeld (2002:624) argues that an emphasis on children within anthropology is essential theoretically because children, as opposed to adults, are better at acquiring cultural knowledge and because this process involves learned behaviour and therefore their insights can contribute immensely to anthropology's main focus. Jones (1990:40) suggests that

"... there *is* a child's world, but it is one which is neither fully independent of, nor dependent on, the world of the adult. We need to document this world, and we need to listen to what children themselves have to say about it".

This study endeavours to contribute to, and address some of the afore-mentioned lacunae and issues by exploring the ways in which the Karretjie children's lives and

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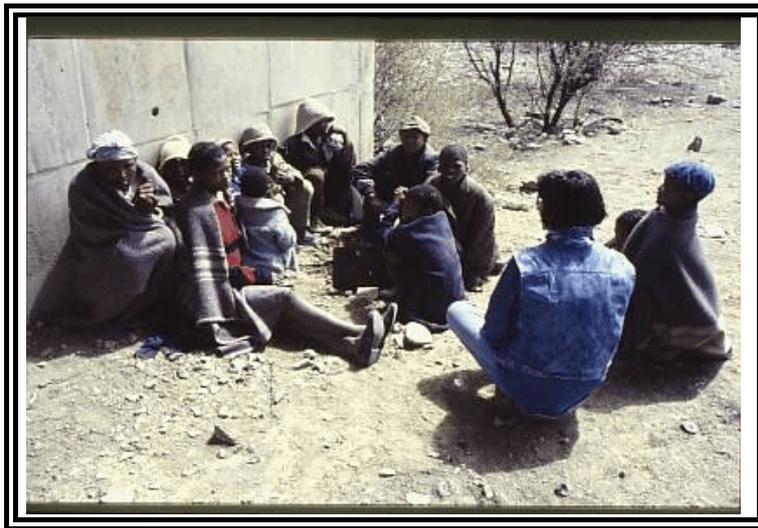
experiences are shaped by itinerancy and domestic flux in varying degrees. The children's experiences with high levels of fluidity are especially evident in changing contexts and by virtue of them being placed in domestic units other than their own. Therefore, particular aspects of their childhood such as high levels of domestic fluidity and geographical mobility, their domestic conditions as well as their encounters with formal education are examined.

2.3 Methodology

I was first introduced to the Karretjie People and their children in 1992. Intensive research was conducted from 1994 to 1998 and regular follow-up fieldwork was done whenever my work responsibilities allowed me to do so. The main advantage of my prolonged involvement with the children was to experience and uncover the domestic changes and shifting contexts transpiring over an extended period of time. A preliminary survey brought me into contact with a large number of people, both the itinerant Karretjie People and the sedentary part of the wider community.

Their spatial mobility patterns, their fluid social organisation and the overall dispersed nature of the Karretjie People were important considerations in selecting a group of children for intensive study. The survey revealed that there were five different Karretjie outspans in the area and I decided, also for practical reasons, to limit the ethnographic study to the Karoo district of Colesberg in the Northern Cape

Province.²⁰



Photograph 2.1 Fieldwork

²⁰ Preliminary surveys in other towns and districts in the Karoo, such as, Middelburg, Hanover, Noupoort, Cradock, Philipstown, De Aar, Victoria West, Loxton, Beaufort West, Carnarvon, Britstown, etc. were also undertaken.

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Much of the material for this study did not result from formalised question and answer interviews, the advantage being less evasive responses. This is especially the case with children where answers easily dry up. At first, I did not select a number of children and other individuals for intensive study, but rather relied on unstructured, informal and random information from a wide range of people within the different Karretjie communities in the area as well as other members of the broader community, i.e. farmers, teachers, social workers, townspeople in general, municipal councillors and officials, representatives of organised agriculture, representatives of the local law clinic, medical clinic personnel, the police and the clergy.

My involvement with the Karretjie children in the Colesberg district produced information for 42 Karretjie domestic *karretjie* units. Additional information was obtained from 14 families living in the Karoo district of Victoria West and on a random basis from Karretjie families in other districts as well. I have known these families well for a period of seven years and although there were periods that we did not have contact, either because I had to continue my work obligations and/or because they were travelling, it was possible to build what Okely (1983:47) calls “a composite record of hard data”.

Experience over an extended period of time, of the context in which the Karretjie children lived was another advantage of my prolonged involvement. With every visit there was something new to learn and to experience, and mutual trust, awareness,

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insight and understanding developed as the project progressed. Although it took considerable time to establish mutual confidence, my friendship with especially the Karretjie children and overall involvement with Karretjie families, were unconventional for the area in terms of interpersonal and intercommunity relations. Once a relationship of trust was established it also became possible for me to act on their behalf, either materially or in terms of an advocacy role.

Upon initially approaching the Karretjie People, I explained to them that I was a student and researcher wanting to learn more about their way of life and how their children grow up and acquired the skills they needed. I was cautious not to introduce myself at the outset as a lecturer/teacher wanting to learn how they taught their children because I was not certain what their experiences with the formal educational system entailed.

At first they were suspicious of my intentions but after several visits this approach proved to be successful as they realised that I was truly interested in them as people. Mistrust often prevailed due to a prevalent 'distance' between Karretjie People and 'White' people and friendship as such across these perceived 'categories' was largely frowned upon by the larger community. Their perceived pariah status, precarious economic position and the general perceptions held by the wider community, including suspicion, over a period of time resulted in them being cautious and distrustful of any relationship other than employee-employer.

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Using a Karoo cottage in Colesberg as my home base, I spent the days with them, at the outspans but also, when the opportunity presented itself, when they were on the move to another location or shearing assignment or when actually shearing in a farmer's shearing shed or when they had to go to town for whatever reason. It was not viable to physically live within the community on a continual basis due to practical considerations such as violent acts, my gender status and logistical issues such as the absence of housing and simply the lack of potentially shared space in their already cramped and intimate interior and also basic amenities in general. Also, given the accepted local patterns of behaviour and relations, neither the Karretjie People nor the wider community would have expected this.

As was mentioned previously, the central focus of my research was on a particular Karretjie community, at the Seacow River Bridge outspan (see Chapter 4 for a description of the outspan) because it comprised of a suitable sample of children between the age of four and seventeen years and the community had regular mobility and domestic fluidity patterns between different farms and the outspan, school and the outspan and between different *karretjie* units. This was also one of the larger, 'more stable' (in terms of composition) Karretjie communities. I did, however, not exclude families and children from other outspans and districts and in order to ensure a wider perspective, they were included in the research process.

Young children who were not initially central to the study, over a period of time also became respondents because as they got older they could articulate themselves

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and their 'world' better. At first I did nothing more than 'hang around' and observe and after months of close contact, I was able to get a general picture of the children's day-to-day activities.

General questions were prepared and observations were gathered relating to the lives of the children, according to the procedures proposed by Whiting et.al. (1953). Open-ended interviewing was done with small groups of children during which topics such as daily activities and chores, games, their views on, and experiences of their peripatetic lifestyle and eventually their sojourn at school were discussed. Kin and caretaker interviews proved to be useful because the context of the domestic *karretjie* unit and that of a particular outspan explained much about each child's circumstances, experiences and views (see Appendix A).

A consistent photographic record developed over six to seven years also proved to be a valuable source of information, particularly in terms of different aspects of travelling, *karretjie* unit structure and composition at the outspans and spatial dynamics and layout of an outspan. Photographs were also distributed amongst research participants on a regular basis.

Access to the Karretjie children, and the opportunity for long-term participant observation and the development of close associations with them were slow in developing and to a certain extent, remained complicated for the duration of the project. When a relationship had been established, the daily hardship of these

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children and the ceaseless processes of fission and fusion made my involvement with them both challenging and rewarding.

One of the major challenges of the research project was to establish myself in this context and to create a suitable affiliation with the Karretjie People, especially given their vulnerable and disadvantaged social, political, and economic position within the wider community. The intention from the outset was that fieldwork among the Karretjie children should be part of a longitudinal project. In this regard Spiegel et. al. (1996:25) articulate the significance of the issue of domestic fluidity patterns as follows

“... if we are interested in tracking patterns of domestic fluidity, research procedures must be designed around two commitments. The first is to undertake relatively long term, ‘longitudinal’ studies of a number of domestic units, rather than one-off ‘snapshots’ represented by a single interview. The second is to assemble detailed biographies ... of selected individuals within at least some of these domestic units”

It was important that I establish my bona fides, therefore ensuring continuous and firm functioning in the area for an extended period of time. Furthermore I could not afford initial rejection and/or animosity by any segment of the wider community, especially the farming community and obviously the Karretjie People themselves. Farmers for whom the Karretjie men work as shearers have absolute control over

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access to the farm for both Karretjie People and visitors. They determine the conditions of such presence on their private property, they dictate the movement of, and the interaction between people. Most of the farmers were kind and hospitable but few of them understood or acknowledged the reasons or the need to study the Karretjie People and their children and hence were suspicious.

My contact with the Karretjie People and the children was on every occasion established directly. Their position in the local power structure is such that a mediator from any other section of the community, e.g. a farmer, would have been damaging in terms of me gaining adequate access. Usually the only relations the Karretjie People have with 'White' people are structurally shaped e.g. employer-employee, shopkeeper-customer. More often than not their contact was with, for example, the police in terms of eviction from an outspan and with farmers and police for the alleged slaughtering of sheep.

Due to socioeconomic power relations, Karretjie People operate within a system of established interrelations and patterns of accepted behaviour. Like the Karretjie People, it was essential to take into account that to function effectively, it was required to a certain extent to abide by the local rules. The following excerpt describes how I as 'outside' researcher experienced certain situations:

When I and other members of the research team were allowed to observe activities in the shearing-shed it was at the behest of the

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farmer and we were cast on 'his side'. In such a situation the shearers' spontaneity and friendliness toward us were muted and surreptitious. We were served tea when the farmer's tea tray arrives, while the perspiring shearers remained doubled-up over their sheep. The influence of the context and the collective, conditioned mind-set is such that in spite of our intensive involvement with, and our acceptance by the Karretjie People, some of them still have a problem 'graduating' in terms of form of address, from *baas* (boss) or *miesies* (madam) to *meneer* (mister) or *mevrouw* (missis). Some indication of our standing in the Karretjie community was given by virtue of the shearers, sometimes within hours, reporting back to us the farmers' views as regards our activities. The Karretjie People's district-wide network ensured that they were completely informed, and hence we were privy to the farmers' financial problems, political persuasion, personal quarrels, marriage problems, labour relations and drinking habits (cf. De Jongh & Steyn 1997).

The material which was generated by the project was purposely made available locally. The Colesberg/Kemper museum houses a comprehensive annotated photographic exhibition portraying the Karretjie People and particularly the children and their activities and the research project, and publications have been widely distributed. Although the general response to this was approving, reactions from some quarters proved the opposite. Still, I was able to continue functioning quite

effectively over a period of many subsequent years.²¹

Researching peripatetics thus presents unusual challenges from a methodological point of view. The phenomenon of their perpetual mobility and also the extreme fluidity of their domestic units and the variability of the contexts in which they live and work had to be contended with.

²¹ Ambivalence in this regard is perhaps best illustrated by the reaction of the local press. Socio-political divisions were confirmed by virtue of the pro-establishment Colesberg Advertiser (1861-1997) reporting that "... although the researchers have noted the current socio-economic circumstances of these erstwhile roving hunters, now migrating labourers, they are especially interested in their origin' and 'Obviously these "children of the wind" ... do not realise that they have become a "socio-economic problem" for the farmers and the scientists" (Colesberg Advertiser. Thursday, 17 December 1992). The 'alternative paper of the people', the Toverberg Indaba stated "... (the researchers) came to notice the plight of the *karretjie mense* (Karretjie People) ... (and) decided to research this disempowered sheep-shearing community, hoping in the process to heighten others awareness and effect some change" (Toverberg Indaba. August 1993 4(14)). The Toverberg Indaba is currently no longer published and the Advertiser has become a regional paper in different format serving several Karoo towns.

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In practical terms, the problem in a project of this nature is aggravated by not only the itinerancy of the people but also by their disempowerment in the physical and social contexts in which they operate. Whether one maintains a constant presence and involvement at a particular outspan or follows or traces departing Karretjie units to new destinations, the continuity of first-hand involvement, observation and information is broken.

This also applies, for example, to enumeration. Karretjie families who return to the same outspan fairly regularly do not present a problem, but a significant number of people move into or out of the district in search of work and might only spend a single night at an outspan. It is not unusual to be visiting on a particular day at an outspan where some fourteen karretjie units are encamped, and to come back the next day to find only the ashes of their fires and the droppings of their donkeys. If not warned in advance of such a move one had to resort to tracing them by following their tracks on the dirt road (cf. De Jongh & Steyn 1997).

Waksler (1986:74) suggests that in order for social scientists to examine the role of children in everyday life is to ask questions not only about their nature but also about their political position in the world in which they live. The socio-economic and socio-political circumstances that apply to the Karretjie children's parents and other adults obviously also apply to the children, only more so, because of their status as children and as Karretjie People which means that they occupy the lowest step on the hierarchical ladder of the broader community of the district. The children can in

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fact be regarded as the most powerless, given the stigmatised perceptions of the Karretjie People in general, but particularly their parents' status and hence their own position.

One of the advantages of conducting research at an outspan was that it did not necessitate me specifically to obtain permission from authorities to be there because it is situated on neutral land. The Seacow River Bridge outspan where most of my research time was spent, is situated next to a river and a bridge, fairly sheltered and gave me some 'research privacy'. Here I could visit, socialise, play with the children, go on wood-fetching, fishing and donkey-cart excursions.

My research amongst the Karretjie children presented research demands of their own. For example, Reynolds (1991:161) commented on her research concerning child labour in Zimbabwe as follows

“... children’s worlds are not easy to record. To do so, we need to draw on the methods already elaborated in anthropology, sociology, psychology and (for their labour) agriculture, but we need to innovate beyond these in devising techniques to capture and account for children’s behaviour, attitudes, motives and contexts”.

One of the major difficulties in this project was the dearth of literature on itinerant and/or peripatetic children, their activities, basic needs and living conditions.

The Problem in Context

Substantial grassroots fieldwork needs to be done because of the insufficiency of data, including methods of study, on itinerants and geographically mobile communities in general. This was especially true regarding the Karretjie People, and observation and participation during fieldwork proved to be more valuable than any existing literature (Reiss 1975:4).

It is not the purpose here to elaborate on the problems relating to the study of children as already reflected in the existing literature (cf. Adler & Adler 1987, Fine 1988, Jones 1990, Mandell 1991, Swart 1990 and others). Research into the worlds of children reveals much about the complexity of their lives and as far as the Karretjie children are concerned all the conventional methodological issues were encountered, but the mobility of the children and their families adds another important dimension to the fieldwork. As was mentioned previously, the Karretjie community is characterised by a frequent change in their human and natural environments and the mobility of children and adults occurs on a regular and frequent basis between different outspans and farms and within different Karretjie units.

Thus, the geographical and domestic instability and fluidity characteristic of these people raised particular methodological problems in the study of the children. One of the first steps in observing the children's lives was to try to ascertain what a 'typical' day or a "day in the life of" (cf. Ramphele 1990:5) comprises of in terms of geographical setting, Karretjie unit composition, people present at a particular

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outspan and the activities in which the children participate. The study of these aspects of the children's lives was complicated by the unpredictable changes in their living patterns. Depending on the type of labour involvement and the availability of work, the Karretjie People and their children may, or have to, locate themselves outside the boundaries of a particular region, which further complicated the demarcation of the unit and area of study.

Furthermore, the Karretjie People's mobile existence made it difficult to retain continuity in terms of observation and interviewing especially because it seldom happened that parents or the *karretjie* will move to other outspans, farms or districts as an unchangeable unit, and also, though infrequently, without their children. In one instance a Karretjie family from the outspan moved (were fetched by the farmer) to a district in the Free State Province where the father worked in the garden of the farm owner and the mother performed casual work. I followed them to this particular farm and was confronted by a very suspicious farmer and his wife. I was allowed to see only the father of the family and then only for a short while under the close supervision of the farmer - the mother later told me that the children had cried when they heard I was 'visiting' but that I had not been allowed to see them.

Only a few days later when conducting research in the Colesberg district - a distance of nearly 600 kilometres, I was stunned to discover that this family had arrived, 'on foot', back at their semi-permanent outspan homebase. After a disagreement with the farmer as regards having to work on Sundays he had kicked their food from the fire and they had left the same night, once getting a lift on a truck,

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but walking much of the way, sleeping next to the road and often having to carry the smaller children. This incident does not only reflect on the extensive mobility patterns of some of the Karretjie People but also on the attitude of some of the farmers as regards them. It also again confirmed that my fieldwork strategy had to be particularly sensitive to their geographical and domestic mobility patterns.

It was also often difficult to follow the children's movements. The Karretjie People and especially the children do not live according to a fixed routine - they eat, sleep and play when and where they want to or when opportunity presents itself, which makes it difficult to keep track of their daily activities (Swart 1990:2). Domestic fluidity more often than not pertains specifically to the children, who may reside with other kin, especially grandparents or with their own Karretjie units for various reasons. Furthermore, as has been mentioned, the geographical and physical settings in which the Karretjie People live frequently change, and research continuity is a problem. Still, I endeavoured, as often as possible, to establish and maintain continuous participant observation for the duration of a trek i.e. for the complete process: the decision to move, the dismantling of the shack, the packing of the cart, the inspanning of the donkeys, the journey and the eventual settling down at the new temporary destination, albeit at an outspan or on a farm.

Obtaining information about the children's perceptions and what they do and say also presented some challenges but by accompanying them and by increasingly becoming involved in their daily activities, it was possible to progressively gain an

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understanding of their actions and thoughts (cf. Mandell 1991:165). While it is obviously impossible to pass for a child, my physical size and gender was a definite advantage and together with my unconventional 'outsider' ways eventually negated my initial perceived status as a '(wit) *miesies*', (white madam) with roughly the status of a farmer's wife.

Another advantage was that I was able to communicate effectively, Afrikaans being the virtually unilingual Karretjie People's vernacular. Although the children eventually accepted me as a sporadic part of their ongoing activities, I effectively remained an outsider in their world of hardship and unpredictability, but a world which they often also perceive as one of adventure and excitement. Their lives can furthermore never truly be experienced because of the 'adultcentric' (Fine 1988:9) nature of my understanding of their world and their vulnerability.

The use of projective techniques during fieldwork, such as the keeping of diaries and autobiographies was limited mainly because of high levels of illiteracy. The number of children attending farm schools in the district only started increasing since the advent of the research project. Virtually all the adults and most of the children are still illiterate and unfamiliar with the handling of writing materials. The illiteracy of many of the Karretjie children, together with and as a result of their underprivileged position within the broader community, rendered possible research techniques such as the writing of essays on experiences or the keeping of diaries ineffective. Life histories through oral testimony however, as told by the children and

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their parents and other caretakers proved to be useful especially to establish levels of mobility, both spatially and domestically.

My involvement with the children at two of the farm schools in the district proved to be limited in terms of interviewing during breaks and after school mainly because the Karretjie children intermingled and socially interacted with farm labourers' children who also attended these schools. Observation during class sessions, breaks and playtime did however prove to provide valuable insight into the Karretjie children's relationships with teachers and other classmates. Discrimination, especially became evident during this part of the research process. (Issues pertaining to this subject are discussed in Chapter 6.)

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The fieldwork entailed a subjectivist methodology (Adler & Adler 1987:85). As such subjective means were employed to study subjective phenomena. An important strategy in the study of the Karretjie children as with the Karretjie People in general, was continued involvement with and a commitment to them. My experience was similar to that of Waldman (1993:25) with her research participants: rendering assistance by offering transport to Karretjie People to and from town, to hospital and to farms and this in many ways provided me with the opportunity to at least put something back into a on-going relationship with them.

Even given acceptance by the Karretjie People within a context of a relationship of trust, experience in this project only served to confirm once again that true participant observation was challenging. It is possible to share, but never to truly experience their lives, especially under the conditions and within the context as outlined above. The problems of the Karretjie People never really became my problems because as a relative outsider I could withdraw at any time, and their 'issues' simply became data.



CHAPTER 3 THE KARRETJIE PEOPLE IN CONTEXT

My point of departure in the study of the lives of the Karretjie children is twofold: First, the phenomenon and existence of the Karretjie People are the result of a particular set of circumstances related to historical events and the social, economic and cultural conditions present in their given setting, and which are distinctive to that context; second, the experiences and views of the adult Karretjie People, in addition to those of the children, as well as the sedentary community inform my analyses and perceptions of the Karretjie children.

3.1 Historical Progression

Accounts of hunters, travellers and missionaries suggest that the San and later the Khoekhoen were the first occupants of the Karoo (a Khoekhoen word implying an arid area or desert) and the district of Colesberg (cf. Cumming 1850; Stow 1966; Van der Merwe 1937; Gutsche 1968). A mission station for the San was established at Toverberg (where the present town of Colesberg is situated) in 1814 mainly because of the large number of San present and due to the fact that it was the residence of Na'na'kow, leader of the San in the area between the Seacow River and Van der Walts River, i.e. approximating the present district of Colesberg.

The Karretjie People in Context

Data and oral accounts suggest that most of the Karretjie People of the Karoo district of Colesberg are descendants of these early hunter-gatherers (San) and nomadic pastoralists (Khoekhoen) (see footnote 2). Many members of the present farming community still relate tales about the San and Khoekhoen in the district, as told by their parents and grandparents.



Photograph 3.1
Karretjie People

“During

the early 1900s Bushmen were still hunted in the Oorlogspoort River area.

The Karretjie People in Context

Bushmen children were often presented as gifts by the farming community to their relatives in the Cape.

At the turn of the century, many Bushmen were still staying on a farm on the banks of the Seacow River and hunted hippopotamuses.

Bushmen changed from nomadic hunters to 'tame' Bushmen farm labourers but still retained a degree of mobility".

Work done by archaeologist, Sampson, confirms the early presence of San and Khoekhoen communities in this district dating to $\pm 2\ 645$ years ago. A survey of surface sites in the previously Zeekoe (Zeekoei/Seekoei) River Valley and excavations of rock shelters on farms such as Riversmead, Zaaiplaas and Glen Elliot in the Colesberg district reveal San presence in the area and also the nature of interaction between San and Khoekhoen communities and white farmers (cf. Sampson 1967, 1968, 1985, 1986).

It was only in the 1770's that the first white farmers arrived from the south to districts in the Karoo beyond the Sneeuberg and consequently interaction between these pioneer farmers and the San and Khoekhoen often led to periods of conflict, but mostly competition for resources. This was twofold: first, farming communities hunted game which the San regarded as their main resource and they retaliated by slaughtering the domesticated animals of the farmers and eventually they

The Karretjie People in Context

themselves became the target; second, the Khoekhoen and the farmers competed for the same grazing land for their herds.

From the 1860's onwards the local newspaper, the *Colesberg Advertiser* reported on the activities of and interaction between the San, Khoekhoen and the local farming community

“Bushmen. A number of cattle and sheep have been slaughtered of late ... because they [the Bushmen] were hungry” (20 October 1868).

“Thefts by Bushmen and other marauders are still an everyday occurrence in this district. The only effectual remedy is direct infringement of the law viz: to give any thief a charge of loopers [large-sized buckshot] wherever caught in the act, and of course we cannot advise that” (17 January 1871).

“Old and incorrigible sheep stealers drove off 14 sheep ... The culprits were lodged in gaol and will probably be comfortably fed and clothed at the public expense for some years to come” (27 March 1871).

Despite periods of conflict there were also periods of relative harmony. The establishment of the Toverberg mission station during 1814, which was based near the present Colesberg fountain, was a major contributory factor. Within five years most of the San had left the station primarily because they were accused of

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slaughtering local farmers' livestock. Eventually the lifestyle of both the San and the KhoeKhoen were turned into a more semi-sedentary one.

Many of these communities were introduced to the agrarian economy of the Karoo and were kept as so-called 'tame Bushmen' on farms where the men learned functional skills such as shearing and later fencing. Some continued their mobility, first on foot, then with the aid of pack animals and finally with donkey carts. Like their ancestors, most of the Karretjie People in the district of Colesberg have a background of having resided permanently or semi-permanently on a farm. The itinerant lifestyle that the Karretjie People retain to a greater or lesser degree, by means of a donkey cart, allows them to maximise and take advantage of shearing opportunities over an expansive region but also safeguards their independence in a declining agricultural economy.

3.2 District and Town of Colesberg: A Profile

Colesberg is situated in the eastern part of the Northern Cape Province in the Republic of South Africa, approximately halfway between Pretoria, the country's capital and Cape Town on the N1 national road. It is located 30 km from the Xhariep River (Orange River) and is regarded as the working capital of the recently designated Umsobomvu Municipality (cf. Atkinson et.al. 2003:3). The Northern Cape, with Kimberley as its capital, is geographically the largest province in the country, covering 363 389 km², or 29,7% of the total surface of the country

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(Development Bank of Southern Africa 1998:1). Although they roam virtually this whole area with their donkey carts, none of this land is owned by the Karretjie People. Furthermore, it is the province with the smallest economy in South Africa. According to the Development Bank of Southern Africa (1998:1) the

**Map 3.1 Approximate Location of the Great
Karoo**



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population of the Northern Cape numbered 0,8 million in 1994 and represented the most sparse concentration of people in the country. A survey during 1994 concluded that there are more than 51 000 poor households and some 268 000 poor people in the Northern Cape. According to the Development Bank of Southern Africa (1998:4) this implies that

“... over 38% of households and 48% of individuals in the Northern Cape live in poverty. Approximately 130 000 of these people are children”.

The Northern Cape is divided into four topographical areas, namely the central interior plain, the southern interior plain, the interior pre-Karoo surface terrain and the Orange River valley. The district of Colesberg falls within the southern interior plain and within the Bo-Karoo subregion which includes “lowlands with hills which stretch across the south-eastern section of the region” (Development Bank of Southern Africa 1998:13).

Colesberg’s neighbouring districts are Philippolis across the Orange River in the southern Free State to the north, Noupoot to the south, Venterstad to the east and Philipstown to the west. A striking feature of Colesberg is a round flat-topped hill,

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Coleskop and the town was initially named for this hill when it was called “Toverberg” (Magic Mountain) or “Torenberg” (Mountain of Wrath), since, according to Gutsche (1968:1)

“... Bushmen sheltered there ... and gave the mountain its name ... from where they obtained their material for witchcraft. It was also said that

“the mountain itself was enchanted ... visible at twenty miles distance, it never changed but always remained the same until one was close upon it”.

In 1829 the town was named “Colesberg” in honour of Sir Lowry Galbraith Cole who gave permission for the establishment of the first Christian congregation there (Gutsche 1968:54).

Colesberg falls in a semi-desert, summer-rainfall region with an average rainfall of less than 200 millimetres per annum and is situated 3000 to 4000 feet above sea-level. The summer rains begin in October but temperatures only increase during November with temperatures sometimes above 40°C recorded until February.

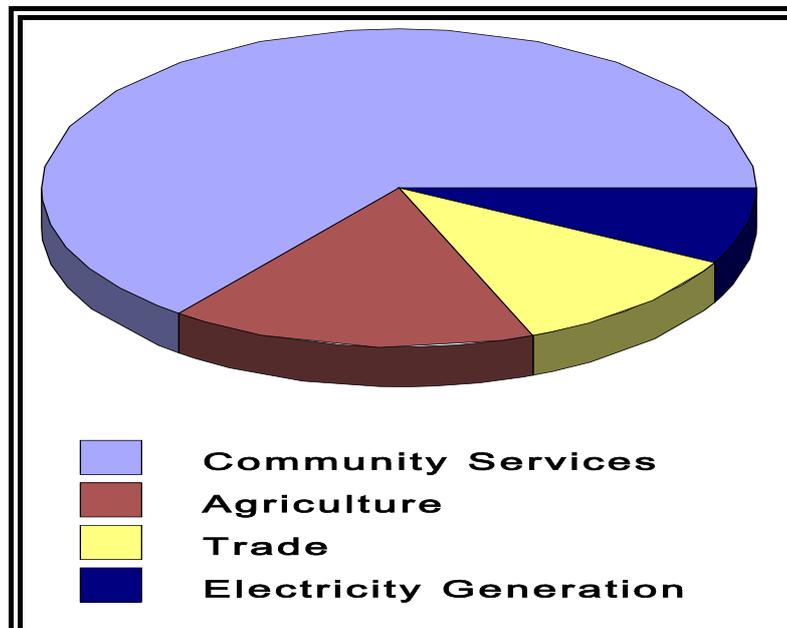
The Karretjie People in Context

Rain during the summer months is sporadic and temperatures decrease towards April and recorded as low as -16°C during winter. The winter months are thus cold and dry with extremely cold nights. Severe cold nights are caused by prevailing winds from the west (Development Bank of southern Africa 1998:14).

Topographically the region consists of vast plains with dispersed flat-topped hills. It consists mainly of Karoo scrub but also grasses. The district comprises 534 792 hectares and is seen to be a prosperous agricultural area. According to Atkinson et.al. (2003:3) the district has approximately 247 farms of which about 20% are unoccupied. Within the agricultural sector, farming activities entail mostly Merino and Dorper sheep-breeding, for wool but also for mutton. Racehorse-breeding, Angora goat farming and recently, commercialised game-farming (which has led to an increase in tourism including hunting by foreigners), are also discerned enterprises in the area. According to Atkinson et.al. (2003:3) the agricultural sector of the region has been overtaken by Community Service (mainly government services) as the principal employment generator of the region.

Diagram 3.1 Formal Economic Sector of the Karoo Region

(compiled from
Atkinson et.al.
2003:3)



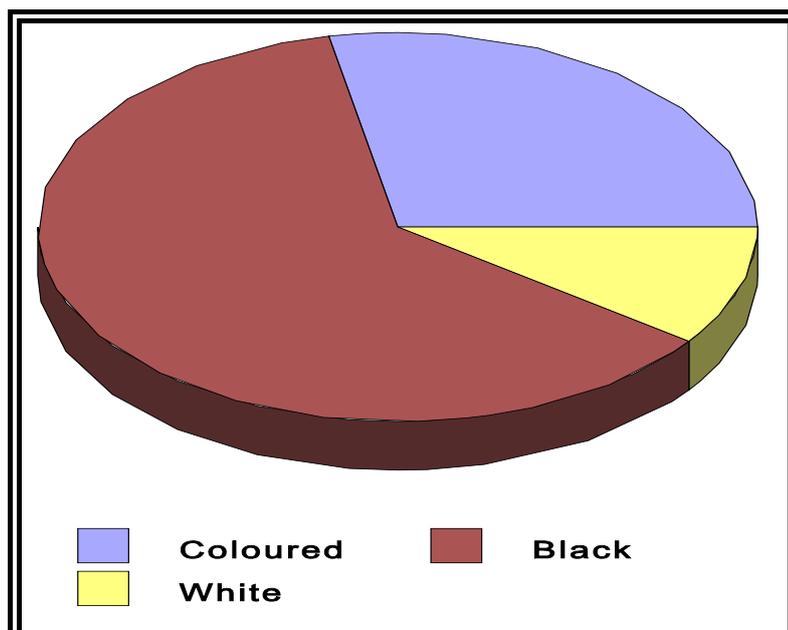
According to Atkinson et.al. (2003:4) the population of Colesberg is estimated at about 20 500. 'Coloured' people (possibly including the Karretjie People, but they are more often than not, not conspicuous (or inconspicuous) to ('invisible') or ignored by censustakers) comprise 28.3% of this number while 61.7% are 'Black' and 10.0% 'White'. It is difficult to obtain accurate census figures on a mobile population but Karoo-wide the Karretjie People number several thousands. The fact that, for years, they were not classified at all and more recently as 'Coloured', also obscures actual numbers. From 1996 to 1998 the average number of farm

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workers per farm in the Colesberg district declined from 4.5 to 3.6. Permanent farm labour decreased by 20% from 1996 to 1998 and seasonal labour declined by 2.5% during this period (Atkinson et.al. 2003: 4).

Diagram 3.2 Population Profile of Colesberg

(compiled from
Atkinson
2003:4)



The town consists of three residential areas namely Kuyasa, a former 'township' and predominantly 'Black' on the eastern side of the central business district; Lowryville, another erstwhile 'township' and mainly 'Coloured' on the north-western side of the central business district; and the predominantly 'White' residential area next to the central business region including Vaalbank, to the south of the central business area. Mostly Xhosa-and Sotho-speakers reside in Kuyasa, while

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‘Coloured’ people, including a community of Griqua live in Lowryville. The main town still consists of primarily ‘White’ English- and Afrikaans-speaking people.

The following extract ultimately explains the quintessence of the town and district of Colesberg

“[It] is a community of cleavages and oppositions: wealthy and poor; conservative and liberal; Afrikaans and English; ‘Black’ and ‘White’; ‘Black’ and ‘Coloured’; African National Congress (ANC) and Democratic Alliance (DA) (and various conservative and ultra-conservative political groupings); town and farm; old and new money; horse-breeders and sheep-farmers; and finally, the Karretjie People versus almost everybody else. In terms of insecurity, poverty and powerlessness they occupy a position below the lowest rung of the district’s socio-economic ladder and yet their plight and circumstances have not effectively placed them on the agenda of any individual, group or organisation” (cf. De Jongh & Steyn 1998(a)).

As was mentioned earlier, property in the Colesberg district is owned by over a hundred ‘White’ landowners. This state of affairs started developing when the first farmer settled in the area in the 1700s. By virtue of these settlers competing for the same resources as the hunting-gathering ancestors of the Karretjie People, a process was set in motion which over generations produced a hierarchical and

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rigidly ordered social system. The process has furthermore developed in most of the residents of the region, including the Karretjie People, a communal conditioned mindset of acceptance of the status quo. A status quo of bias and intolerance and a monopoly of resources which go beyond constitutional reformations.

3.3 Lifestyle of the Itinerant Karretjie People

The aim of this section is to provide an overview of the lifestyle of the Karretjie People of the Karoo in order to contextualise the children's position. As was mentioned earlier, the daily lives and circumstances of the Karretjie adults inform my understanding of their children's position to a large extent because the children are part of their parents' context and furthermore because adults are the principal decision-makers in terms of the direction that their children's lives take.

Certain aspects of a peripatetic lifestyle are henceforth emphasised to demonstrate issues relevant to the lives of the Karretjie People as an example of such a community in South Africa. The extensive peripatetic literature, including Roma

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and Sinti ('Gypsy'), is valuable in this regard since it represents in many instances an appropriate analytical frame for the study of the Karretjie People and their children.

3.3.1 Identity, Outspans and *Karretjie* Unit Formation and Affiliation

Although the ancestors of the Karretjie People were of the first inhabitants of the Colesberg region, they have, through a series of external interventions, gradually been denied access to the resources of the area, most significantly one of the main resources in the Karoo, land.

The Karretjie People themselves explain their origin in terms of a vague identity of being 'Bushman', or as they refer to themselves in general, "*Karretjiemense*"²² (Donkey Cart People) or the men in particular, "*Skêrbestuurders*" (Managers or Handlers of sheep-shears). Their relative seclusion in the early years, as individuals on farms and their relative isolation still today, as a community, has resulted in them at first losing much of their ancestral heritage, and now having not really adopted the practices of the surrounding communities in the area.

²² The term 'Karretjie People' represents a self-ascribed identity. Such communities were officially recognised internationally as distinctive only in 1998 in *The Encyclopedia of World Cultures and Daily Life* (cf. De Jongh & Steyn 1998(b)).

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With reference to Karretjie People singularity De Jongh (2000:1) points out that

“... according to their own perception and that of the wider community in their region, the Karretjie People *are* a people apart. Historical and socio-political forces have furthermore shaped a local system which has locked them into an asymmetrical relationship with the surrounding community”.

When not encamped on or near a farm while the adult men are occupied with shearing (some farmers do not allow the *karretjie* shelter/home and its occupants onto the farm), the Karretjie People erect their impermanent homes on outspans in the area, (i.e. pieces of land not privately owned or simply next to the road). As was mentioned previously, the families on such outspans are relatively small and together with their *karretjie* and shelter can be regarded as a unit for domestic, child-care, social and economic purposes. It furthermore provides transportation for social and economic purposes.

The notion of the *karretjie* as unit of analysis is significant in this study. The *karretjie* as a social and economic unit is generally constructed around the nuclear family, consisting of a man, his ‘wife’ and their unmarried children. Extended family groups as a *karretjie* unit also occur and usually consist of orphaned

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children, 'borrowed' children and widowed or disabled elders who are incapable of supporting and sustaining their own *karretjie* unit.

Burton et.al. (2002:334-335) distinguish between "vertically extended households" and "laterally extended households". The former refers to units which consist mainly of a married couple, children from this union and their spouses, as well as grandchildren. It may also include other family members such as an elderly person. The latter consists of siblings, their spouses and their offspring and is usually formed as a result of the death or absence, of a senior member of a vertically extended household. Laterally extended households can also be formed by means of individual agency by two or more siblings (cf. Burton et.al. 2002).

Although kinship plays an important role in the group or alliance of *karretjie* units that camps and travels together, most units are economically independent in that each attempt as far as possible to generate its own income. Still, sharing amongst different units is customary. The number of extended family *karretjie* units residing together mostly depends on the nature of the relationship between different units and the availability of economic resources. Most outspans consist of *karretjie* units that represent proximate generations based on association between parents and the units of their married children. The families are in fact, *de jure* much larger, as especially the younger males tend to obtain their own cart,

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donkeys and *karretjie* unit as soon as they start to shear independently, get married or regularly perform labour elsewhere.

Working amongst a 'Gypsy' community, Okely (1983:60) observed a similar tendency, namely that

“... the trailer unit, which usually coincides with the nuclear family, is a major unit of production and consumption. Each trailer unit ... depends on the wider cooperation of kin, affines and camp neighbours for mutual aid, temporary partnerships and protection”.

Two to fourteen such *karretjie* units may be found at a particular outspan and at a particular time. In terms of numbers and distribution the Karretjie People are for niche employers a distinct source of labour for the region. Because of their mobility and a vast area like the Karoo one has to extrapolate the Karoo-wide numbers of several thousands of Karretjie People from the more accurate statistics of particular districts. Due to the ebb and flow of their movements and the changing nature of their resource exploitation the number of Karretjie People in the Colesberg district for example, varies from about 200 to 300.

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Humphrey (1988:17) states that architecture is a cultural construction because

“...[the] structures and forms of dwellings ... have purpose and intention. They may have histories which outlast their occupants, or, in those cases where housing is continually moved, dismantled and reassembled on a new site, it is the idea of the dwelling which persists. Dwelling is [furthermore] both process and artefact”.

As was mentioned, the Karretjie People’s social and economic unit is the donkey cart (*karretjie*) which is transformed and shaped into an overnight domestic unit with additional material such as corrugated iron, plastic and hessian. However, each *karretjie* unit differs from other units in terms of style and shape. The Karretjie People themselves can ‘read’ and recognise the characteristics of a particular *karretjie* home, donkeys and donkey cart from a distance.

Next to the cart (or incorporating the cart), sheets of corrugated iron are used to construct an approximately one and a half to two metre (height) by three metre (width) structure which is completed with plastic and hessian on the upper part and sides. This structure is usually not high enough to stand upright in. The domestic unit consists of a single space with no divisions. Most units have a swivel door of corrugated iron which is left open in summer for maximum

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ventilation and closed in winter with a fire indoors. The types of material used do not form an effective shelter against extreme temperatures during winter and summer.



Photogr
aph 3.2
Assemb

ling a *karretjie* home

The assembling and dismantling of *karretjie* homes is a collective enterprise by all its members, and others of the same travelling group often assist one another with this task. The construction and breaking down of units can be achieved in more or less one to two hours.

The space within a *karretjie* unit is limited but organised in a practical manner.

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Cooking utensils are usually placed just outside in front of the shelter. Almost every family has a trunk in which their most valuable possessions such as identity documents, photographs and special clothing are kept. This is placed inside the shelter and often serves as a 'table' on which blankets and pillows are placed during daytime. At night bedding material is laid flat on the ground where the entire family, usually varying from two to six members, sleep together. However, when children are being oscillated between different domestic units, the number of individuals using the space within a *karretjie* unit is much higher. Necessary equipment and basics such as cooking utensils, blankets and clothing are, for practical reasons, kept to a minimum because of their itinerant, precarious and changeable lifestyle and hence the need for portability. Their socioeconomic position is of course, also not conducive to the accumulation of material possessions.



Photograph 3.3
Karretjie

e home

The arrangement of the different units at an outspan and the mobility patterns of various *karretjie* units are determined by a number of internal and external factors. Berland (1982:80) notes amongst the peripatetic Qalandar of Pakistan that

“... internal factors are mostly associated with interpersonal relationships. External factors primarily relate to economic and social requirements”.

To a large extent the same principle prevails amongst the Karretjie People. Since the adult men are shearers, the demand for skills is determined by the requirements of a farmer (including the size of the flock to be shorn) and the availability of resources among the sedentary population, which in turn depends on seasonal factors.

Intensive mobility corresponds with the main shearing period between March and October. The selection of *karretjie* units that move together between outspans and farms is determined by affiliation, skill, harmonious interrelationships and negotiations between different units and hence, convention as established over the years. The routes taken by Karretjie People are usually similar to the ones previously determined due to regular work for, and relationships with, farmers and often display a repetitive pattern.

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Each *karretjie* unit is clearly dependant on its donkeys, mostly two, for transport purposes. Donkeys are used to draw the cart on which all possessions, elderly people, young children, chickens and pets are carried. The donkeys graze along the roadside or while on a shearing assignment, most farmers allow the Karretjie People to graze their donkeys on the property. Donkeys are not tagged or marked in any way but generally their owners and other members of the community can readily identify them to the extent that each has a distinctive name. The Karretjie People have a close relationship with their donkeys and the names are often given due to certain characteristics or associations.

Most Karretjie People keep dogs; the reason being threefold: firstly, as pets, secondly, to protect their units and property, and thirdly, to assist in hunting hare as well as other small game for food. They are trained for these purposes and due to their pugnacious nature, are chained up, but also because of altercations with farmers, and due to alleged sheep-slaughtering. Dogs, like donkeys, are named. Like dogs, cats are also often kept as pets. Pets have the same diet as the Karretjie People, that is maize meal and water and sometimes some form of protein, only less and they find themselves at the end of the 'pecking order' in the sense of being given the leftovers, if any.

As stated previously, an outspan is a piece of neutral i.e. not privately owned land usually located between a dirt road and the fence enclosing a farmer's property. The

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term (outspan) has a historical derivation i.e. designated camps with water and grazing for use by farmers and travellers for their animals. Particularly also in the early years, when farmers trekked with their flocks in search of new pasture during times of drought. Such demarcated spaces are indicated on early maps. The various communities of Karretjie People in the Colesberg district use different outspans as a semi-permanent homebase from where they perform certain activities. These outspans are

- At the bridge that spans the Seacow River 22 kilometres west of Colesberg on the road to Philipstown. This outspan²³ has been over many years a preferred location. The individual members who frequent this outspan may fluctuate, especially during the shearing season and have varied from two to fourteen *karretjie* units. The river is an important resource because not only does it provide water for drinking, cooking, washing, and swimming for the children in summer, but it also serves to supplement their diet because it provides opportunities for fishing and it offers grazing for the donkeys and a supply of firewood along its banks. There are however no other amenities, such as water points and sanitary facilities at the outspan.

²³ As was mentioned in Chapter 2, the children from this particular outspan were the main participants in the study.

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- In the *gang* (corridor) near the Lowryville 'Coloured' residential area, west of town, between the fence and the tarred road to Philipstown and some 20 kilometres from the Seacow River Bridge outspan. This outspan became known as the Lowryville outspan but soon after preliminary visits were made to the area, the Karretjie People residing here were moved to a piece of land on the opposite side of the road, known as the *Plakkerskamp* (squatter camp). During 1995 this encampment one kilometre west of the N1 national road and opposite the 'Coloured' residential area of Lowryville, was set aside by the local municipal council for homeless and squatting families. Most of the occupants of the encampment are since 1998 increasingly Karretjie families from the Seacow River Bridge, and other outspans and even though many have lost their carts and donkeys, they still identify themselves as Karretjie People.
- Across the road from the Colesberg railway station where most of the Karretjie People had been 'standing' (*staan*) for many years. It is known as the Station outspan and is situated on a triangle formed by the Van der Walts River (*Vanderwaltsfonteinspruit*) and dirt roads which serve farms to the east of the district. The outspan is situated approximately 7 kilometres from town and is exposed to prevailing winds. Originally almost every *karretjie* unit had a cart and donkeys which enabled entire families to leave for a shearing assignment in the district. Recently most of the units have lost their mobility because they eventually had to sell their carts and donkeys in order to

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survive. On one occasion a farmer from the district was annoyed by donkeys grazing alongside the dirt road opposite the outspan and shot dead the donkeys belonging to a Karretjie family, thus instantly obliterating their livelihood. The number of *karretjie* units vary between twelve and eighteen. There are no water or toilet facilities at the outspan and the closest water point is at the station's main building which often led to conflict between station officials and the Karretjie People. The supply of firewood in the area has long since been depleted. Since March 2000 all the families at this outspan have been 'relocated' to the nearby *Plakkerskamp* west of town.

- In close proximity to the Merino Inn Motel just outside town and next to another dirt road serving farms to the west of the district, in the *gang* (corridor) between the fence and a dirt road. This outspan is also known as the Merino Inn (i.e. the Motel situated in close proximity) outspan. The number of *karretjie* units at this outspan also varies and over eight years it has expanded from three units to eighteen *karretjie* units. Accessibility to firewood and grazing for the donkeys is extremely limited at this outspan. Water is fetched from a water point at the petrol service station approximately 900 metres from the outspan. A popular branch of a fast food chain is situated at the petrol station which attracts many motorists on the national road. Many of the children at this outspan use begging as a strategy to supplement the family income. Although some of the men are still fetched by farmers in their trucks to shear for them, this Karretjie community has turned

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increasingly to the town for their source of income and they have for to all intents and purposes become squatters.

- The *Garings* outspan is situated on the eastern side of the district some forty kilometres from town. Its name is derived from a sisal or *garingboom* (*Agave americana*) plantation which provides shelter and shade during extreme weather conditions. It is situated on a triangle where three dirt roads intersect. A Karretjie community has been using this outspan regularly as a semi-permanent homebase from where they travel or are fetched to provide labour, mostly shearing. They work for neighbouring farmers in the district but also travel as far as Venterstad to the east, to shear. Like all the other outspans, it has no amenities and water has to be fetched from a windmill with a dam a few kilometres away. Up to twelve Karretjie families frequent this outspan and some of the children eventually attended a farm school in the region.

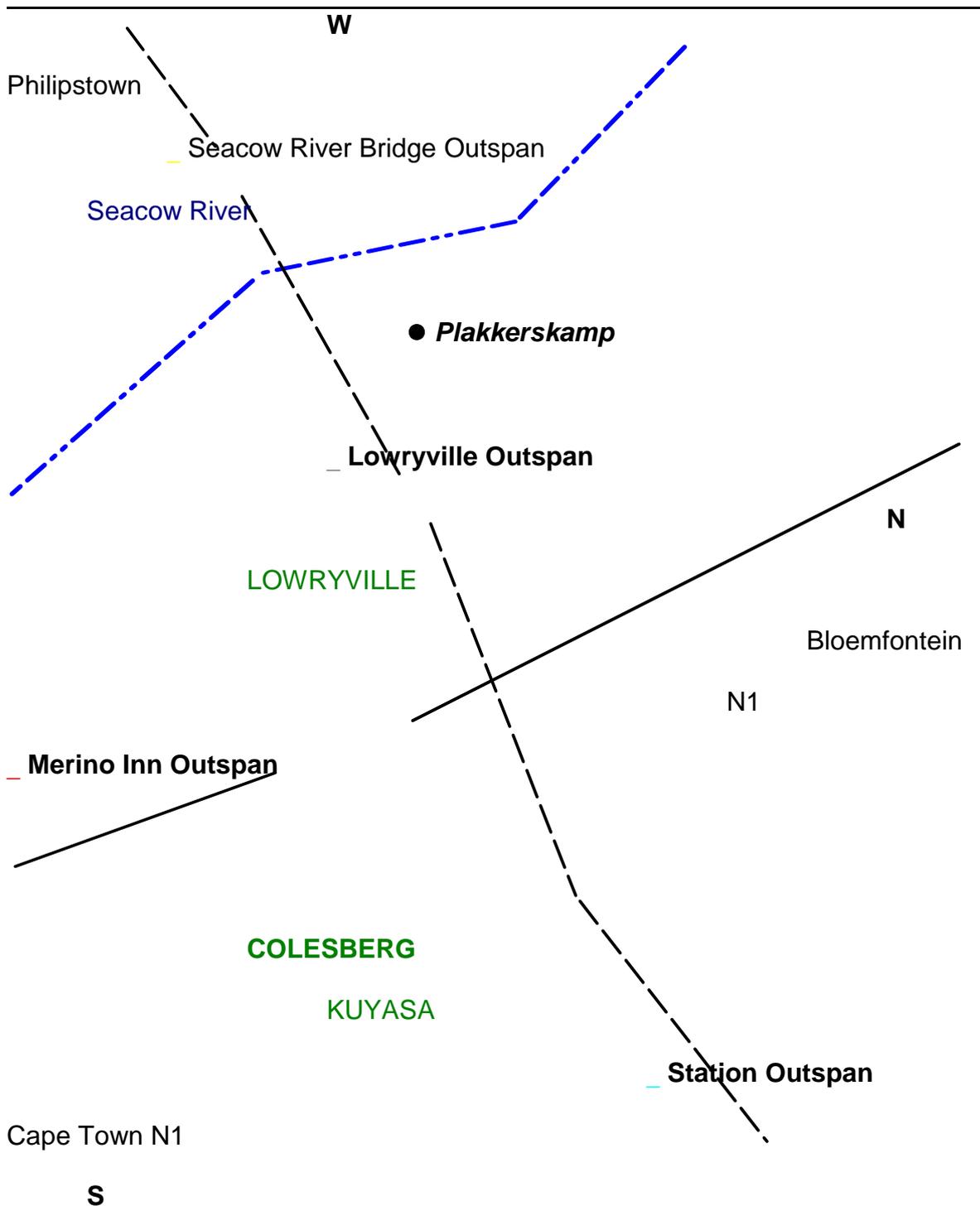
The choice of an outspan is often determined on the basis of proximity to potential resources, although other factors sometimes prevent optimal choice. Both the outside factors of the wider community i.e. in the form of law enforcement, or the internal pressures of squabbling families, may influence or even restrict access to a particular area.

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Berland (1982:84) observes that due to the “extremely fluid nature and mobility patterns” of the peripatetic Qalandar, it was impossible to conceptualise a pattern of their social structure. My experience with the Karretjie People was similar. I had to rely on their conceptualisations which include the following: to be a Karretjie person means that you have to earn a livelihood by travelling in a donkey cart and adult men having the skill of shearing. Women and children also derive their status from the men’s particular economic skill.

Although they also perform other tasks and activities such as the reparation of fences and begging, their distinctive identity is derived from the above-mentioned reality. The answer of a Karretjie child to a question “if you are a Karretjie person, what would I be?” perhaps describes it best. Her answer to this was: “I am a Karretjie (donkey cart) person and you are a motor car person”. Therefore, the common tie binding Karretjie People is their (adult males’) specialised skill as sheep-shearers, which in turn is derived from a common origin and the implied (donkey cart) and required mobility.

MAP 3.2 Approximate Location of Outspans in the District of Colesberg



_ Garings

Outspan

Steynsburg

E

3.3.2 Labour Involvement

Almost all the adult Karretjie People were at one time or another permanent or semi-permanent farm labourers who had over the years left, or been forced to leave, the farms in increasing numbers and for various reasons. Many have a history of moving frequently between employment and farms and eventually ended up leading an itinerant existence. There are various reasons why they leave their employment on farms and this places them into a number of general categories:

- The most common reason for the termination of employment was dismissal by virtue of the owner having sold the farm or died and that the new owner brings his own team of labourers to the farm. Farmers' financial problems or ironically, improved farming methods or an increase in the size of the farming unit also resulted in the reduction of the number of labourers employed. This category accounts for more than half of the reasons, more than all the others combined.

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- The second most common category of reasons given for leaving a farm involved dissatisfaction on the part of workers. Although employer-employee relationships were often good, there were many cases of workers

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leaving of their own accord because of insufficient remuneration, unreasonableness and ill-treatment on the part of the farmer.

- Workers, by their own admission, had also been dismissed for various transgressions ranging from the alleged slaughtering of sheep to excessive drinking.
- Some farm labourers were also asked by the farmer to go because their trek (possessions and dependants) had become too much and/or too many i.e. the number of donkeys and chickens, but especially the number of young children (cf. De Jongh & Steyn 1994).

As was indicated, the Karretjie People are dependent on the wider economy, in particular the agricultural economy, of the Karoo in which they (the adult men) render the essential service and labour of sheep-shearing. Internationally, terms such as “commercial nomads”, “service nomads”, “non-food producing nomads” and “economic nomads” were previously used to describe peripatetic groups such as the Karretjie People, primarily because the sale of their services constitutes their primary resource base (cf. Rao 1987:2; Nemeth 1986:135). To supplement their inadequate income, Karretjie men also do odd-jobs such as the digging of irrigation furrows and the reparation of fences on farms. While shearing on a farm the women occasionally get part-time work as domestic workers at the farmhouse or as gardeners. They also often assist in the shearing-shed with the sorting of wool.

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Children are also drawn into this kind of activity.

Berland (1986:190-191) suggests that peripatetic groups in general utilise a distinct niche within the societies of which they form part, i.e. they attend to

“... the regular demand for specialized goods and/or services that more sedentary communities cannot, or will not support on a permanent basis”

or as Nemeth (1986:136) describes it

“...entrepreneurs like service nomads may ‘intervene’ by filling gaps, and establish their so-called ‘peripatetic’s niche’ within the general economic superstructure”.

In this regard, the Karretjie men of the Colesberg district are generally recognised by employers as the best sheep-shearers. They exploit this particular niche within the agricultural economy of the region. Although they are slower (one shearer shears approximately twenty-five to thirty sheep in a working day stretching from 8h00 to 18h00) than their unionised counterparts who use electrical equipment, many farmers prefer to make use of their labour due to the following reasons:

- They are not unionised and therefore protected by a labour union and as a result they are easier to deal with.

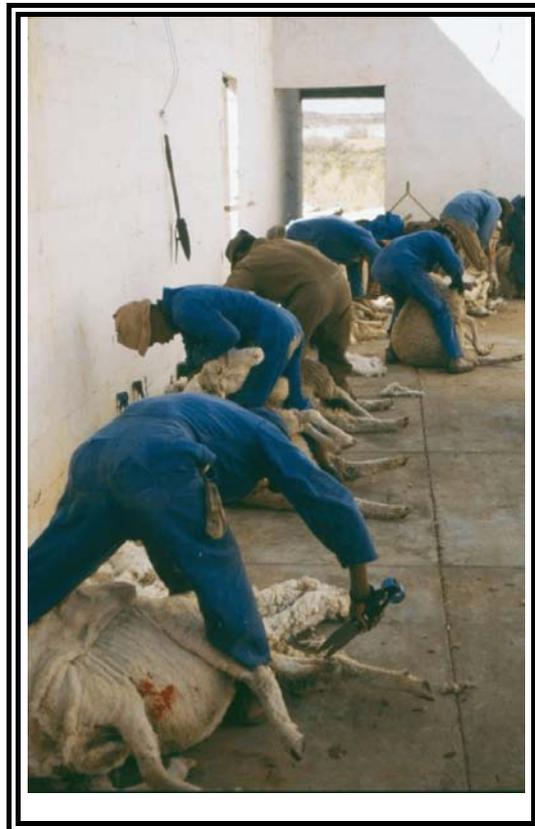
The Karretjie People in Context

- Their shearing is tidier.
- The farmers get along with them more easily because they can communicate in Afrikaans, the only language of the Karretjie People and the language which most farmers feel comfortable with, instead of in an African language, such as isiXhosa and seSotho which is mostly spoken by unionised shearers.
- Unionised shearers can easily withdraw whenever an argument develops; something that Karretjie shearers would not readily consider because of their subservient and weak bargaining position and cognisance of the paucity in alternative opportunities.
- Farmers don't want, or have to have them permanently or even semi-permanently on the property.

A farmer having in mind to shear would stop at a particular outspan and inform the informal representative of the shearing team when he intends to start with the undertaking. Farmers usually tend to continue to associate with the people at an outspan with whom they have a longstanding, or a previous working relationship. The shearers are informed about the number of sheep that needs to be sheared, how many shearers would be needed for the work as well as the duration of the

The Karretjie People in Context

assignment. The two parties then negotiate remuneration after which the shearers would either be given a pre-payment or as soon as they arrive on the farm.



Photograph 3.4 Shearing

The Karretjie People in Context

This verbal agreement confirms the arrangement between the shearers and the farmer. The price paid per sheep shorn mostly depends on individual farmers and (during the research period) prices ranged from R1.50 to R2.50 per sheep.

However, there usually is some consensus amongst farmers in a particular district. Each shearing team gets one sheep for slaughtering purposes for every 1000 sheep shorn. For the rest, families have to provide their own food and the shearers their own sheep-shears.

If the entire Karretjie family resides on the farm during a shearing assignment, provisions such as maize meal, coffee, tea, sugar, tobacco, and matches are usually bought from the farm store and are deducted from their earnings once shearing has come to an end. It frequently happens that after weeks of shearing on a particular farm and after all deductions have been made, many of the shearers receive a wage payment of less than R50,00. Women's work often pay as little as R2,00 per day and up to R10,00 per day depending on the type of labour employment. Some farmers experimented with providing temporary lodging for the shearers and their families but it is often maintained that the (sometimes stereotypical) reasons why the Karretjie People rather prefer their own *karretjie* shacks include

“They are hardened against the cold - if you put them in a proper house they get illnesses”.

The Karretjie People in Context

“You will never get them into a house - it [travelling] is ingrained in them”.

“They don’t want to feel tied down - after two or three weeks they get restless and then they want to pack their *karretjie* and trek”.

An overview of the available data on peripatetic groups suggests that two patterns of economic and political interaction arise between peripatetic groups and their clients: it is what Rao (1987:12) terms “contiguity” and “attachment”. The first applies when peripatetic groups live mainly independently of their customers but supply them with services on a regular basis. Attachment applies when peripatetics live within a particular group (i.e. a sedentary group) and often work solely for them. With reference to the Karretjie People, they live amongst the farming community of a particular district and tend to shear sheep for specific farmers on a regular basis. The clientele of a given peripatetic group, as was mentioned, usually consists of sedentary people who cannot or will not render (a) specific service(s). Remuneration by customers takes the form of cash or kind (such as old clothing, foodstuffs, etc.), either immediately or over a period of time. With regard to this notion, the Karretjie People can be regarded as co-existing with the farming community, i.e. they are contiguous to their clients (the farmers) because they tend to put a high premium on their relative freedom.

3.3.3 Spatial Mobility, Domestic Fluidity and Residential Instability

The Karretjie People in Context

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, the lives, position and circumstances of the Karretjie People of the district and town of Colesberg have not changed significantly. In most cases their situation nowadays is in fact even more insecure and tenuous. The deprivation in terms of resources has further translated into virtual lack of recourse to the infrastructure and basic services and facilities of the district, not least of which the political, educational and medical. Spatial or geographical mobility and Karretjie domestic unit fluidity are thus reactions to the need to adapt to the scarcity of resources and to optimise the precarious access to available resources.

In general, peripatetics' response to sedentary peoples' needs for particularised skills, places a high priority on individual skills and significant levels of spatial mobility. In this regard Berland (1986:191) states that

“... in turn, these specialized activities demand, as well as provide, for high degrees of structural flexibility and organizational fluidity at the group level”.

According to De Jongh (cf. 2004) the mobility patterns of the Karretjie People roughly fall within two patterns:

“In the earlier phase, they as farm labourers were settled on some or other farm which they regarded, if not as home, then at least as home

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base for varying lengths of time. In the contemporary phase, they operate from one or more temporary overnight 'home' base and spend time as individual shearers or as *karretjie* units on various farms only for the duration of a shearing assignment, or occasionally for an odd job”.

Therefore, spatial mobility occurs on different levels: on a larger scale the group as a whole will move for a specific purpose, mostly sheep-shearing, and on a smaller scale, isolated units or individuals move independently mostly on personal and social grounds, without affecting the composition of the group as a whole. The first type of locational shift refers to, what Binford (1980) calls “residential mobility” (also referred to by Ross as “intra-settlement mobility”, cf. Ross 1995:82) while the latter pertains to “logistical mobility”.

Ultimately then, Karretjie communities mainly rely on human resources and while they depend on the farming community on a regular basis in order for them to obtain food and other necessities, the seasons also demarcate their spatial mobility patterns. Most farmers tend to shear around the months of August and September, just after the winter months but it often happens that shearing takes place as early as March and as late as November. As a rule, shearing does not take place during the extreme summer months of the annual cycle. The principle of their adaptation lies in the emphasis on flexible skills and a realisation of available resources in the larger social networks (including kin) that the Karretjie People occupy.

The complexity and variety of domestic fluidity patterns in South African communities have been recognised by various anthropologists in South Africa (cf. special edition of *Social Dynamics* 1996, 22(1)). In this regard Spiegel (1996(a):5) states that

“... the flexible nature of domestic relationships remains to be thoroughly documented, and the reasons for many people having repeatedly to constitute and reconstitute their domestic arrangements have yet to be adequately explained”.

De Jongh (e.g. 1995; 2000; 2002; 2004; 2006) contributed to the understanding of, and literature on itinerancy and domestic fluidity in his long-term study of the Karretjie People and extensively discusses and by means of case studies, illustrates the interchangeable nature of spatial mobility and domestic fluidity. As was mentioned earlier, my own work entails the longitudinal study of the lives of the Karretjie children in particular and it examines the practices children employ and are exposed to, which in turn further influence their spatial mobility and domestic fluidity patterns.

Early conceptualisations of the nuclear family and household as standard to the notion of the domestic group, reinforced views of relative domestic stability. I

The Karretjie People in Context

subscribe to the idea that “domestic units as bounded households with relatively static compositions” is inadequate to consider the domestic fluidity patterns of the Karretjie children (Spiegel et.al. 1996:11). As indicated previously, the *karretjie* as a co-residential, income-sharing entity is used as unit of analysis in this study due to the complexity of flexibility and fluidity caused by fission and fusion of so-called household composition. *Karretjie* domestic units are often “stretched households”, because members who might be geographically separated from their homes for various reasons like shearing, imprisonment and schooling, still contribute towards or affect its maintenance, mainly in the form of income sharing and expenditure (cf. Spiegel et.al. 1996:12).

Relationships and residence among different *karretjie* units at a particular outspan are extremely variable because of fission and fusion among them. Their peripatetic lifestyle revolving around factors such as sheep-shearing and the availability of resources regulate the presence and absence of different members of a particular *karretjie* unit. The spatial mobility of the Karretjie People adds an atypical dimension to their domestic fluidity:

“... theirs is a singular situation because both their ‘home base’ and work place are temporary and changeable, not only in terms of locality but also in terms of social environment and available resources” (cf. De Jongh & Steyn 1998(a):81).

Therefore, the composition of the *karretjie* unit changes continually. The adult male

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shearers are the individuals who are mostly absent from the unit, especially during times when a particular farmer prefers to have only the shearers on his property. Karretjie women at outspans near town are also often absent for several hours to perform work, mostly domestic in nature. Children are also often not part of the *karretjie* unit for varying periods of time, which is due to their activities in school or work and for practical considerations such as parents' decision to assign them to another unit to lessen the strain on their own *karretjie* unit.

Chapter 5 explicates the high levels of domestic flux that the Karretjie children who participated in this study experience and are subjected to.



Photograph 3.5 Elderly Karretjie woman

3.3.4 Flexibility and Survival Strategies

Amongst peripatetic groups, the most common denominators of group actions and social activities are flexibility and an awareness of the elements comprising the socioeconomic milieus of those communities amongst which they maintain themselves. Peripatetic groups often employ various social strategies for survival (cf. Rao 1987:18-20). Mobility and fission of residential units represent such strategies, especially when situations of internal friction arise. It is important to note that not all patterns of mobility are economically determined; moving may often be

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related to avoidance of conflict and for social reasons. Amongst Karretjie communities it often occurred that a group would split, mostly temporarily, due to internal dissension.

Another strategy is the use of linguistic communication: although the language of peripatetic groups and their customers and/or the sedentary community is basically the same, peripatetics tend to use a different and unique form of language among themselves, often described as a “secret language” (Rao 1987:18-19). The Afrikaans that the Karretjie people speak can be said to have their particular ‘stamp’ on it. Once a Karretjie owner related the following:

“Ek roep een van my donkies Kaffertjie maar as ek by Kuyasa verbyry skree ek eerder Geelbek en nie Kaffertjie nie”.

“I call one of my donkeys Kaffertjie (derogatory term for a ‘Black’ person) but when I travel past Kuyasa (‘Black’ residential area) I rather call him Geelbek (derogatory for a ‘Coloured’ person) and not Kaffertjie”.

Outside observers often perceive the Karretjie People as moving around haphazardly because of an eager desire or fondness for travelling. Using kinship as a guiding principle and an adaptive mechanism however, their movements are directed by an intricate interplay of seasonal, social, economic and ideological

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factors, which result in discernible, though flexible, regularities. In other words, their use of space is a strategy and technique to ensure control over scarce resources.

Although each *karretjie* unit is partially independent, a number of units comprising of kin, form alliances and travel as a group and rely upon each other for mutual support and cooperation. Berland (1982:87) has found that domestic units (tents in the case of the peripatetic Qalandar whom he studied) within a camp continually reaffirm their alliance by means of a number of alliance strategies. In the case of the Karretjie People such strategies include economic and social assistance, food sharing, and so-called 'marriages'.

The nature of kin relations within a unit and amongst different *karretjie* units is often an indication of the reasons why certain coalitions or partnerships are formed. The tie between mothers and their children tends to be exceptionally enduring and during any given circumstance, mutual support persists. In terms of the alliance between 'husband' and 'wife', the nature and legitimacy of the relationship is defined less by legal or religious sanction than by its acknowledgement by the rest of the community and by its consummation and cohabitation and enduring content of cooperation and companionship.

The importance of kin within or beyond an outspan is realised particularly in terms of assistance during illness, financial support and companionship. Due to the difficulty in accessing natural resources and given their insecure economic base, the Karretjie People have to rely mostly on kinship as a resource.

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Poverty is obviously experienced by all the members of the family but some individuals bear more of the brunt of it than others. Privation, particularly at certain times, is experienced by women especially, and children specifically may be neglected during times when either or both parents are absent or exert themselves to gain unpredictable access to resources.

Karretjie units which travel alone, without the benefit of the supportive network of other units in a caravan on the road or as a small community at an outspan, small families in general and single-parent households, are even more vulnerable. The absence of the shearers, the timing (or lack thereof) of pregnancy and birth, and childcare arrangements, all extend resourcefulness to the limits.

The Karretjie People and their strategies for exploiting resources are not perceived as if in isolation from the larger community or social system of which they are a part and of which they are a product. Through a system which has for generations discriminated against them and disempowered them, they are dependent on the very sedentary community and its politico-economic system which, in the first instance created, and still cause to prevail, an itinerant lifestyle. Neither a new sociopolitical system in the country nor legislative changes have significantly impacted in a positive way on the lives of the Karretjie People.

3.3.5 Karretjie People and the Sedentary Community

The Karretjie People in Context

The relationship between the farmers and the Karretjie People is often seen as symbiotic in nature. If this is the case then it is a very lopsided arrangement because much of the advantage is on the farmers' side and they ultimately have greater control. They recognise the value of these workers to them as shearers, but they are not obliged to accept responsibility for them. A Karretjie shearer can be quite arbitrarily dismissed, works long hours or not at all, has no guarantee or insurance for the provision of assistance in case of unemployment, disability, old age or leave and they have extremely tenuous access to medical and educational facilities. According to Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003:18) "contested spaces" are

"... geographic locations where conflicts in the form of opposition, confrontation, subversion, and/or resistance engage actors whose social positions are defined by differential control of resources and access to power".

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Most of the members of the sedentary community in the Colesberg district view the Karretjie People in a very stereotypical way and perceive their itinerant lifestyle as a 'preferred way of living'. Berland (1986:191) describes the position of such itinerants as follows:

“When peripatetic people visit a community, they are perceived, however briefly, as ordinary elements of that particular contextual interaction. When gone, they cease to exist - cognitively filed away to remote domains of memory to be re-called only when they reappear”.

The notion of landscape²⁴ in anthropological terms reveals itself in two related ways (cf. Hirsch 1996:1). It is mostly relevant to etic and emic approaches relating to the ways in which the outsider perceives the landscape of a particular people and, on the other hand, how a particular people attach meaning to their

²⁴ While acknowledging the complexity, problematic nature and different discourses on notions such as “landscape”, “space” and “place” in anthropology, it is not the purpose of this study to engage in, and elaborate on the subject. Rodman (1992:641) argues that “... [places] ... are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions”. Recognition is given to the fact that Karretjie communities are constructing their own places and that these are “not simply settings for social action, nor are they mere reflections of society” (cf. Rodman 1992:652).

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surroundings and socially construct their landscape. The following statements by members of the sedentary part of the inhabitants of the region describe the prevailing perceptions of and attitudes towards the Karretjie People

“They want the freedom of the [itinerant] lifestyle, the independence”.

“They don’t like ordinary work, they are too lazy - they just want to shear”.

“Itinerancy is inbred in them”.

“If the northerly blows, they trek. You will never get them into a house, it is inborn in them”.

“Some of us [farmers] tried to settle them in houses that we gave them at a central place so that they could work continuously, but they don’t want that, they want to be free, they know the house still belongs to the *baas* (boss). If they have problems they want to be able to leave at any time”.

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Itinerant communities are seen as both integral and separate in relation to other adjacent communities. Although they have a peripatetic lifestyle and are widely dispersed, they fill a unique niche within other communities, in this case as sheep-shearers in the district of Colesberg and Karoo-wide. Simmel's (1950:235, 403-404) notion of the "stranger" is useful to describe a peripatetic person's place within the wider context

"... his position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself. Restriction to intermediary trade ... gives him the specific character of mobility. If mobility takes place within a closed group, it embodies the synthesis of nearness and distance which constitutes the formal position of the stranger. For, the fundamentally mobile person comes in contact, at one time or another, with every individual, but is not organically connected, through established ties of kinship, locality, and occupation, with any single one".

As has been established, the Karretjie People's primary resource base hence, lies beyond their own community, in other words, in the farming community to whom they render their specialised skill of shearing. As a group they are both integral and peripheral to the wider community and therefore they occupy and exploit a particular social and economic niche, which in turn places a high premium on their skills and

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spatial mobility.

Peripatetic communities have often been labelled as 'vagrants' which is described by officials according to certain characteristics. Firstly, the term implies an "irregular pattern of travelling, uncoordinated with any economic or seasonal factors" (Rao 1987:8). The mobility patterns of peripatetic groups are however not sporadic or disorganised but regular and often predictable i.e. cyclical. Secondly, 'vagrants' lack a place to live in i.e. a home. This characteristic is not valid because peripatetic groups do occupy domestic spheres albeit tents, carts, wagons, *karretjies*, etc. Thirdly, 'vagrants' have no particular professions. Peripatetic groups do however, have specialised occupations in spite of the fact that they put a high premium on economic adaptability (cf. Rao 1987:8).

In the case of the Karretjie People, the cart and donkeys are vital to them in their attempt to utilise the limited resources of the context within which they are forced to function. Furthermore the term 'vagrants' cannot be applied to the Karretjie People since they cover particular travelling routes on a regular basis and which is mostly connected to a seasonal demand for shearing.

The inferior status of groups such as the Karretjie People derives from their conventional occupations and their seemingly meagre possessions and also from a lack of understanding among sedentary communities about itinerant lifestyle and its combination with specialised skills and/or services, which in turn create distrust.

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Peripatetic groups therefore appear to be amongst the poorest of the poor in most countries worldwide (cf. Casimir 1986:89).



**CHAPTER 4 GROWING UP WITH SPATIAL MOBILITY
AND RESIDENTIAL INSTABILITY**

4.1 Everyday Life at the Outspan and on Farms

The study has determined that all the children who participated in the research process were born into an itinerant lifestyle. The fourteen children who are the key respondents lived at the Seacow River Bridge semi-permanent outspan, 22 kilometres from the town of Colesberg during the periods of intensive fieldwork, and with the exception of three, are currently residing at the so-called 'Squatter Camp' (*Plakkerskamp*) informal settlement on the outskirts of Colesberg.

This chapter examines the geographical or spatial movement and mobility patterns of the Karretjie children and their families. It is also concerned with the impermanent nature of residence as well as factors causing this phenomenon. It furthermore provides an account of the travelling and spatial histories, circumstances, experiences and activities of the children at both the outspan and on farms.

Spatial movement patterns oscillate between their 'home' outspan, from five to thirteen farms in the district and different schools in the region. In some cases mobility extends beyond these places. The case studies and profiles of the children

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should be read in conjunction with Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 which elaborate on the experiences of the children, both at domestic level and at school.

4.1.1 Features of the Seacow River Bridge Outspan

The Seacow River Bridge outspan is more or less triangular and elongated in shape and it is enclosed by a dirt road towards Philipstown to the west, a fence demarcating private property on the southern side and the Seacow River on the eastern side. The Karretjie People often refer to this space as the *gang* (corridor) implying a narrow piece of land between a road and private property. The nearest towns to the outspan are Colesberg, 22 kilometres to the east and to the west, the district and town of Philipstown. The narrow end of the outspan is just off the road and the widest end stretches towards the river and underneath the bridge.

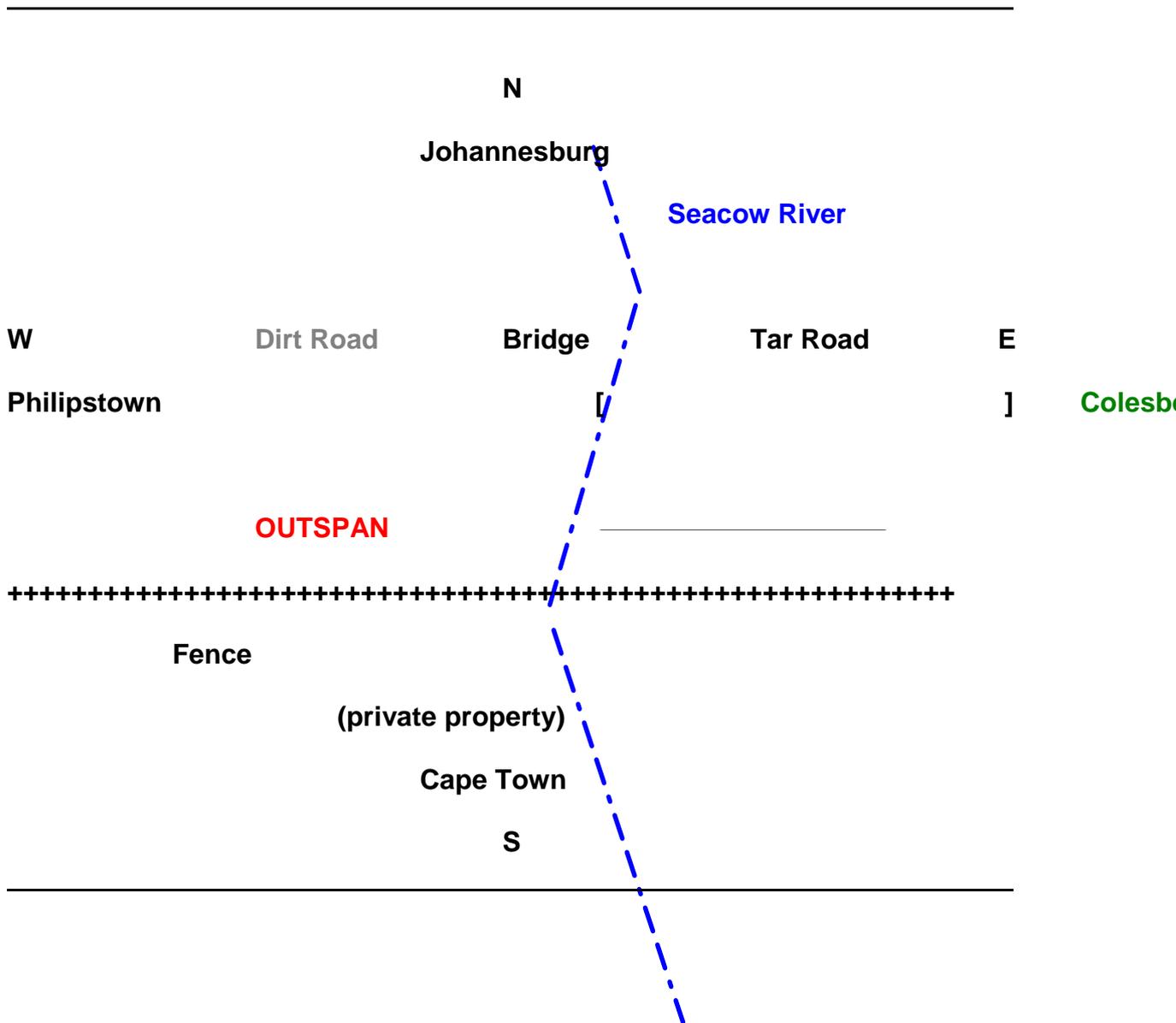
The river is an important resource not only by virtue of its water for drinking, cooking, washing, bathing and swimming, but also for the supplementary diet that fishing provides and along the banks grazing for the donkeys and a supply of firewood. Similarly, the space underneath the bridge provides shade and shelter and is a favourite spot for socialising, especially during weekends.

The physical space at the outspan allows for a single row of *karretjie* homes towards the southern side of the road and a few homes on the other side, varying from eight to fourteen homes. The families frequenting the outspan are all related to one

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another in some or other way but mostly through of an elderly matriarch, Mieta Ackerman. The people living there include her sons, daughters and their spouses, grandchildren and great grandchildren. The adult men at this particular outspan comprise a shearing team.

Diagram 4.1 Spatial Layout of the Seacow River Bridge Outspan



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Photograph 4.1 Seacow River Bridge outspan

Like other outspans throughout the Great Karoo, this one has no electricity, water point or other amenities. People make use of the nearby bush along the river banks as their toilet and often they simply squat a few meters from their homes. The river provides water for cooking, drinking, fishing, washing and swimming and is regarded as a major resource for the people living here and for their donkeys and pets. The location of the outspan (i.e. in close proximity to farms) offers the benefit of incidental labour opportunities as well as occasional 'gifts' in the form of remains of hunted game and seasonal crops by farmers.

Since the outspan is situated next to the road to both Colesberg and Philipstown, shearers are easily accessible to passing farmers who intend to shear and want to negotiate an agreement with the men. Despite this and other benefits that the

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outspan offers, this outspan and others in the district, represent the worst type of living space in the area. Waste and refuse are dumped in or next to a ditch caused by erosion a couple of meters from the *karretjie* homes and is only 'cleansed' once the rains come down.

The Seacow River Bridge outspan has over the years developed into a semi-permanent location for this community of Karretjie People although they are in actual fact legally not allowed to occupy the site in excess of 48 hours.

Photograph 4.2 Seacow River Bridge outspan when Karretjie families are on a shearing assignment



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Diagram 4.2

Genealogy - Seacow River Bridge Outspan

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4.1.2 *Karretjie* Domestic Units

The *karretjie* constitutes the domestic unit and space for the people living there. It usually consists of the nuclear family in the *de jure* sense but *de facto*, often includes a grandparent and children from other *karretjie* units in order to take advantage of available resources. As the study has shown, the *karretjie* is regarded as a domestic unit since the donkey cart more often than not forms part of the dwelling which consists of plastic, *sinke* (corrugated iron) and wire and it is here that the family sleeps, prepares food, eats, washes and socialises. The *karretjie* sometimes serves as a storage place for possessions which do not easily fit within the shack such as plastic containers and other utensils. Dogs are always tied up and usually lie underneath the *karretjie* during extreme temperatures and for shelter.

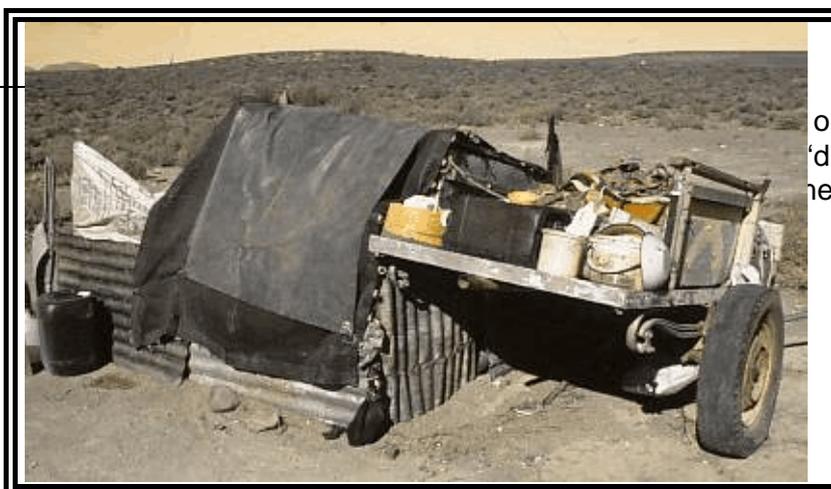
By their own admission and description the *karretjie* is home to the children and adults - their shifting haven - regardless of its eight or ten or more different locations in the course of an annual cycle. "Home" represents this changing and often unpredictable context which shapes them as children - who need and long to play, to emulate their elders, to have shelter and feel secure, to be loved and to have the right to be carefree.

The space within the home is very limited and although families occupying a typical *karretjie* home tend to be relatively small, a single space with no divisions results in overcrowding. The shacks are not furnished with beds or other furniture, except

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sometimes for a rudimentary table on the outside on which cooking utensils are arranged and some small, low self-made wooden benches. Almost every family does however, own a small tin trunk (*trommel*) in which personal belongings such as identity documents²⁵, children's school progress cards and photographs are kept. The sleeping space is on the ground with a plastic shield underneath and blankets on which they lie and cover themselves. The space immediately to the front of the shack is regarded and used as an important and integral living space for purposes such as socialising, food consumption, mending of clothing and fixing donkey harnesses.

Photograph 4.3 *Karretjie* domestic unit



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Food is prepared outside the shack on an open fire and people usually eat sitting or standing around. Meals are not eaten at regular times and they usually have two meals a day. Utensils such as spoons and plates are often shared between the members of a particular unit. Every family prepares its own food but often it is also shared between different units. A meal primarily consists of mealie (corn) porridge and water and very seldom a piece of meat that they acquire in some or other way as well as coffee and sugar. This is the situation when times are good; At other times, or 'in-between-shearing' times, the *krummelpap* (crumbly porridge) becomes *slappap* (soft porridge) and eventually *dunpap* (watery porridge). When the river is running the adult men usually go fishing for a variety of fish. When shearing on a farm, supplies are bought from the farm store.

When farmers approve of the whole family residing on their property for the duration of a shearing task, some of the older children are often incorporated into labour activities. Although this practice is constitutionally illegal for children under the age of sixteen, it is regarded as beneficial by both adults and children because of the financial contribution, though minimal, to individual units. One boy explains as follows:²⁶

²⁶ The children's views were recorded in Afrikaans, their only language. Much of its essence and power, however, are lost in translation.

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“Dis ‘n beterder lewe hier op die plaas. My pa kan kos, twak en vuurhoutjies by die stoor koop. Ek werk in die skuur saam met die manne - ek vee die los stukkies wol op. Die baas gee my R5.00 vir die dag se werk en dié gee ek vir my ma”. (Piet)

“It is better to live here on the farm. My father can buy food, tobacco and matches at the farm store. I work in the shearing shed alongside the shearers, sweeping discarded pieces of wool from the floor. The boss (farmer) gives me R5.00 for a day’s work which I give to my mother”. (Piet)

People seldom gather indoors except when it is too cold to function outside. Material goods are kept to a minimum because, besides the fact that they are very poor, it is also impractical for people depending on mobility for their survival to pack a single cart with too many possessions. Many children express their concern about their families’ impoverished circumstances since they realise what other accommodation alternatives, such as living in houses on the farms where their fathers shear and boarding at school, entail.

When there is a demand for sheep-shearing an adult male earns on average between R30.00 and R40.00 per day. When all expenses have been subtracted for

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incidental purchases at the farm store, the shearers take very little money home for basic necessities. One child describes her and her siblings' situation as follows

“Ons het dan nie ander plek om te staan nie; dis hoekom ons hier in die gang bly. As onse pa nie skeer nie het ons baie min kos. Ons gaan lê baie maal saans dun. Kyk hoe verniel is my klere. My pa werk hard maar die geldjies is te min”. (Mina)

“We have no other place to stay; that is why we have to live here next to the road. If our father is not shearing we have very little food in the house. We often go to sleep at night with empty stomachs. Look how torn my clothes are. My father works hard but the money is not enough”. (Mina)

During the day there is plenty of activity at the outspan. When the men are not away on a shearing assignment they gather underneath the bridge to sharpen their shears, chat, and particularly on weekends, drink. Women are busy cooking, washing and feeding babies or sometimes they are drinking with the men. Children are playing around, minding younger children and collecting water and firewood. Especially during weekends, arguing and even fighting, often the result of alcohol abuse, is common at the outspan.

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Photog

raph 4.4

Children fetching water

Like their children, parents are mostly extremely dissatisfied with their circumstances. Although they place a high premium on their relative freedom that is offered by the flexibility of mobility, they regard the conditions at the outspan and a mobile life in general as detrimental to their children's future. A mother expresses her discontent as follows:

“Dis ‘n baie harde lewe hierdie. Dis moeilik om kinders so langs die pad groot te kry. Baie maal is daar nie werk nie en dan huil die kinders van die hongerte totdat hulle aan die slaap raak. Dit sal beterder wees as ons ‘n vaste werkie kan kry want dan kan ons ook in ordentlike huise bly. Hierdie

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rond getrekkery is nie iets wat ons meer maklik doen nie". (Tiekie - mother of Mina, Stokkies and Sanna)

"It is a very hard life. It is difficult to raise children on the road. Often we don't have work and then the children cry of hunger until they fall asleep. It will be better if we can find permanent employment because then we can also have proper houses. This thing of travelling is getting more difficult". (Tiekie - mother of Mina, Stokkies and Sanna)

4.1.3 Access to Services and Facilities

The nature and changeability of the Karretjie People's physical setting often restrict the children's access to, amongst others, proper health-care facilities and formal education. A lack of proper facilities such as clean water and toilet amenities constitute unhealthy conditions for the people living at the outspan as their health is closely related to their environmental context. Overbearing extremes of temperature during winter and summer are characteristic of this part of the country and during the former season children suffer from severe colds and at such times often have to do without proper medical treatment.

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The adults normally seek medical treatment only in absolute emergencies, for example in the case of complex childbirth, chronic illnesses and serious accidents. The cyclical reappearance of illness among children is directly related to the living conditions mentioned above. High infant mortality rates, low birth weight delivery, poor diet, undernutrition and diarrhoea are significant factors that determine the quality of these people's state of health (Costarelli 1993).

Although a mobile medical unit reaches some of the people on the outspan and farms, the Karretjie People still tend to use plants such as *dawidjie* or *dawidjiewortel* (*Cissampelos capensis*) and *kankerbos* (*Sutherlandia frutescens*) from the natural environment for the treatment of common ailments such as fever and influenza (cf. Van Wyk & Gericke 2003). The mobile clinic consists of two motorised units, has a regular visiting schedule and each comprises of a medical team of two. The units cover 15 routes (reaching other outspans and farms) in the district which they complete within six weeks. The activities of the medical clinic are mostly directed to preventive, in particular family planning, and curative tasks (cf. Buch 1984).

Medicine provided is fairly inexpensive and children under six and pregnant women receive free medical treatment. The efficacy of this service is however, complicated by the mobility of the Karretjie People themselves.

Previously education, or the lack thereof, for the children of the Karretjie People was dictated by their circumstances and their livelihood. As formal education is a fairly recent and still limited development for these communities, the process through

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which the children are prepared for full participation in their community is still an essential function of the *karretjie* unit²⁷. Many children do not attend school or drop out of school at an early stage because geographical mobility and sustained formal education are often not compatible and practical.

4.1.4 The Children's Activities at the Outspan and on Farms

The children grow up in an environment of considerable freedom and independence. They are not limited to any particular area in and around the *karretjie* unit and play, eat and sleep when and where they want to, as long as especially the smaller children stay within hailing distance. A typical day at an outspan starts when breakfast is prepared and which normally consists of maizemeal porridge and milk if available or otherwise water. Playing with agetates, caretaking of younger children and performing household chores take up most of the children's day.

Late afternoon activities centre around the preparation of supper which is basically the same as the breakfast meal. The children are also involved in the trekking activities; they assist in fetching the donkeys and inspanning them,

²⁷ This topic is discussed in Chapter 6.

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packing or unpacking the cart and minding younger siblings. Children also swim in the river and play along the banks of the river or close to the dirt road.

Informal learning at the outspans is part of everyday life and the children learn by observing and imitating their parents', other adults' and siblings' activities. The donkey cart unit effects important child-rearing and child-care functions and may be regarded as an important agent in terms of socialisation. The moving experience to an outspan or farm in itself is educational. When children travel with their parents, they often cover vast distances and frequently encounter new regions and sets of people. This happens *inter alia* because not all the individuals at an outspan will necessarily move together.

The children spent most of their time in the surrounding area of the *karretjie* unit's current location and this provides different but also limited alternatives regarding play. A lack of commercially produced toys has as consequence that they explore and play with available objects such as stones, bottles, sticks and all sorts of scrap at an outspan or on a farm while their fathers are shearing.

They play in mixed-sex and mixed-age groups and their games usually reflect the preoccupations of their community and are often connected with travelling and

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Photograph 4.5 *Stokpoppe*

other related issues (cf. Okely 1983:163). It is only when the older children, especially girls get more involved in child-caretaking that play becomes gender specific. The girls make *stokpoppe* which are dolls made of a wooden stick around which the body is constructed with old pieces of fabric. Plaited pieces of fabric are

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used to put together the arms and legs. The boys play with *steenkarre* which are basically stones with a good grip that they 'drive' on a self-made infrastructure of 'roads'.



Photog

raph 4.6 Boys imitating travelling

Both boys and girls make toys with clay from the river to create carts, donkeys and people, with the help of their parents, older children and other adults. Whenever they have access to wire, the creation of *draadkarre* (cars made with wire) is very popular amongst the boys. They attach all sorts of debris such as tins, plastic,

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rubber and fabric to the cars to give them a unique finished look. The children spend many hours constructing these types of toys and are always on the lookout for discarded scrap for this purpose. Toys often don't last long and are

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Photograph 4.7 Clay toys



simply
discarded
when no
longer
required and
often they are
left behind at
the outspan

when the families move on to perform labour on a farm. A number of make-believe games are developed using these toys, and real-life activities e.g. farming and domestic activities are often simulated.

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Swimming in the shallow part of the river is another popular pastime for the children. Boys and girls swim together with the older children looking out for the younger ones. Boys often go along the banks of the river to set their snares for rabbit and other small animals. Every boy at the outspan owns a *kettie* (catapult)

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which is used to go on hunting trips for birds. They do this in groups and use pebbles to shoot birds which they often bring back home, gather around a fire to roast them with all the other children.



Photograph 4.8
Swimming in the river

Older girls play house during which they draw a floor plan of a house with different rooms in the sand. Every room contains a couple of big stones which serve as chairs and here they socialise and imitate behaviour such as drinking tea, which most probably they encountered during their stay on farms and perhaps aspire to. Another favoured game amongst girls is skipping. Two girls hold a rope on either side and swing it during which time a third girl has to jump in and start skipping. The moment the rope touches her, she falls out and another girl gets a turn.

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Photogr

aph 4.9 Playing 'house'

Hide-and-seek is another popular game amongst both girls and boys and the bushes alongside the banks of the river offer plenty of opportunities to play this game. Boys also 'inspan' each other with donkey harnesses and imitate trekking around. Other games and activities include playing with old and discarded tyres and tubes (usually from their fathers' donkey carts) and tugging a rope in which two "teams" participate.

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4.1.5 Child-adult Relationships and Child-child Relationships

The separation of children from parents, often their fathers, and siblings is conventional, but children have recourse in a network of kin and friends, often peers, at the outspan, which extends beyond parents and siblings. Mutual aid regarding child-rearing and child-care is common in this community; one in which the adult peer group as well as teenage children usually accept responsibility for assistance in caring for and training younger children (cf. Steyn 2001). Child-family networks and child-community support are important organising principles among them. Ní Shuinéar (1993:19) observed the following during a UNICEF workshop concerning 'Gypsy' children

“The [Gypsy] child lives in a community which supports and reinforces his (sic) sense of belonging. He expresses his moods, his needs, his wants directly, and receives an immediate and attentive response. Both on a physical and emotional level, the child's needs are looked after not just by his immediate family, but the community as a whole. This creates an intense emotional bonding and identification with the group”.

As members of an itinerant group, this principle applies to the children at the outspan in the sense that the sharing of responsibility with regard to the care of children occurs among a larger kin group than just the parents and siblings

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frequenting the outspan. Separation between children and parents may happen on a regular basis and for long periods of time mainly due to labour involvement, criminal activity and illness, and the most obvious strength and recourse that the children have under these circumstances is their multifaceted relationships with an extended network of kin including the children's grandmother, who is always concerned about the welfare and care of her grandchildren, siblings, and even non-kin (see Diagram 4.3). The children's grandmother would often tell of family life at the outspan

“Al die kinders hier is my eie kleinkinders en agterkleinkinders. Ek sorg vir hulle al is ek sieklik. As hulle iets nodig het, vra hulle net. Sommer vir enigeen hier. Ons almal help mekaar maar so”. (Mieta)

“All the children here are my own grandchildren and great grandchildren. I look after them although I am crippled. They just ask if they need anything. Anybody here. We all help each other like this”.
(Mieta)

The children's social interactions occur primarily at the outspan, mostly with parents and peers, but also on farms and at school where other adults and children are present. Depending on labour involvement and absent parents, adults

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Photogr

aph 4.10 Mother and child

focus a great deal of their attention on children. Mothers are the primary caretakers of infants and the extended breastfeeding time of two to three years necessitates mothers to take infants and very young children with them everywhere they go and not to leave them with siblings or peers at an outspan. The relationship between mother and child is close and there is a tendency for children to take the mother's surname if the parents are not legally married, which is the case at the outspan. Court (1985:47) describes the relationship between children and parents amongst Irish Tinkers as follows

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“The love parents and children shared, besides being the love of person for person and the love of progenitor and young, was love of the Tinkers’ primary societal unit, the family. Parents were its only founders and lawgivers, children were its only future; it had no other apparatus”.

All the children at the outspan spend much of their leisure time with their parents, such as chatting, fishing, sharpening shears, washing and cleaning. They furthermore hold their parents in high regard and defend them unreservedly.

Once during a visit at the outspan I recorded the following conversation between Simon and his cousins, Piet, Stokkies, Christine and Hendrik. Piet was commenting that Simon’s father was drinking too much

“Jou pa is ‘n dronkgat. Hy wil almal moer as hy drink. Kyk hoe het hy vir Robert gekoggel en toe Robert sê hy moet sy bek hou, toe wil jou pa baklei”.

“Your father is a drunkard. He wants to hit everyone when he is drinking. Look how he mocked Robert and when Robert told him to shut up, your father wanted to fight.

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When Christine commented in a similar manner, Simon started swearing at them and told them

“Jou pa is ook ‘n dronkgat. My pa kan vir my skoene koop net wanneer hy wil en jou pa (Christine) koop nie eers vir jou panties nie. Dis hoekom jy kaalgat rondloop”.

“Your father is also a drunkard. My father can buy me shoes at anytime and your father (Christine) does not even buy you underwear. That’s why you walk around naked”.

Parental caretaking and peer caretaking, often siblings, are both prominent and sometimes related features of the socialisation process of the children (Draper 1988). Weisner & Gallimore (1977:169) view caretaking as follows

“... [it] refers to activities ranging from complete and independent full-time care of a child by an older child to the performance of specific tasks for another child under the supervision of adults or other children; it includes verbal or other explicit training and direction of the child’s behavior, as well as simply “keeping an eye out” for younger siblings”.

Parents at the outspan may delegate care of younger to older children but remain

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accessible to their children of all ages, whenever they are not involved in labour or other practices. Children seek help or resources from the different individuals that frequent a particular setting. The composition and size of the residential and *karretjie* unit as well as daily activities like parents' economic involvement and older children attending school are important factors in the availability of individuals in the caretaking of younger children (Weisner & Gallimore 1977).

Workload and the type of work, in this case mostly shearing, and women being occupied with domestic chores such as collecting wood or water, are closely related to the need for peer caretaking. Peer caretaking may be quite informal and is sometimes associated with other tasks and therefore does not necessarily influence or interrupt the children's usual daily activities and routines. According to Liégeois (1998:66) children as educators

“... play an important mediating role, since they find themselves linked simultaneously with the parental generation and with children of the same age, and are able to pass on to younger siblings both this ‘vertical’ experience, received from parents and grandparents, and the ‘horizontal’ experience of persons in their same age group who undergo similar experiences at the same time”.

Duties include offering help and comforting younger children as well as the preparation of food. Multiple caretaking by non-parental caretakers such as adult

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kin, especially the grandmother and aunts, non-kin adults and particularly children, play an important role in the children's lives (cf. Weisner & Gallimore 1977).

Observation over time and space reveals a basic pattern of child-caretaking at the outspan. Each child's primary and secondary caretakers are summarised in the following diagram.

Diagram 4.3 The Children's Primary and Secondary Caretakers

Child	Primary Caretakers	Secondary Caretakers
Pienkies	Koot (father), Katryn (mother -deceased), Flora	Mieta (paternal grandmother), Isak (paternal uncle), Robert (paternal cousin)
Toek-Toek	Koot (father), Katryn (mother -deceased), Flora	Mieta (paternal grandmother), Isak (paternal uncle), Pienkies (brother)
Simon & Marie	Koot (father), Katryn (mother -deceased), Flora (stepmother-deceased), Mieta (paternal grandmother), Anna (foster parent)	Pienkies (brother), Toek-Toek (brother), Mina (paternal cousin), Vygie (maternal aunt)

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Mina	Isak (father), Tiekie (mother)	Mieta (paternal great grandmother), Emma (paternal grandmother), Hendrik (spouse of grandmother), Robert (maternal uncle)
Stokkies	Isak (father), Tiekie (mother)	Mieta (paternal great grandmother), Emma (paternal grandmother), Hendrik (spouse of grandmother), Robert (maternal uncle), Mina (sister)
Sanna	Isak (father), Tiekie (mother)	Mieta (paternal great grandmother), Emma (paternal grandmother), Hendrik (spouse of grandmother), Robert (maternal uncle), Mina (sister), Stokkies (brother), Lisa (paternal cousin), Grace (paternal cousin), Emma (paternal cousin)
Christine	Freek (father), Sanna (mother)	Mieta (maternal relative), Toek-Toek (paternal cousin), Mina (maternal cousin), Tiekie (maternal aunt)

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Hendrik	Freek (father), Sanna (mother)	Mieta (maternal relative), Toek-Toek (paternal cousin), Mina (maternal cousin), Tiekie (maternal aunt), Christine (sister), Lisa (maternal relative)
Lisa	Hendrik (father), Emma (mother), Mieta (maternal grandmother), Baba (maternal relative)	Koeliemeid (maternal relative), Robert (maternal uncle)
Piet	Hendrik (father), Emma (mother), Mieta (maternal grandmother)	Koeliemeid (maternal relative), Robert (maternal uncle), Baba (maternal relative), Lisa (sister), Tokkie (sister's boyfriend)
Grace	Koeliemeid (mother), Mieta (paternal grandmother), Frans (paternal uncle)	Emma (paternal aunt), Mina (paternal cousin)
Emma	Koeliemeid (mother), Mieta (paternal grandmother), Frans (paternal uncle)	Emma (paternal aunt), Mina (paternal cousin), Monica (maternal relative)
Rosie	Meitjies (adoptive mother)	Manie (maternal uncle), Monica (spouse of maternal uncle),

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		Doortjie (maternal relative)
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4.1.6 Violence at the Outspan

The major factor that contributes to violent acts at the outspan is alcohol use and abuse. Severe drinking usually starts on a Friday, albeit at the outspan or while the families are encamped on a farm. Drinking usually continues throughout the weekend and only really stops when especially the shearers know that they have a shearing assignment or another commitment the next day. Drinking also occurs

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during idle weekdays depending on the availability of money and someone to get to town to purchase either ingredients for a home brew or liquor from an outlet.

Verbal abuse is quite common at the outspan and swearing between different individuals forms part of many conflict situations. Physical abuse also occurs. Injuries and even deaths occur as a result of stabbing with sheep-shears or knives.

Case 4.1 Witness to Violence and Murder

- (1) One Saturday evening the Jacobs children's parents were arguing when their father in a fit of anger took his shears and stabbed their mother in the groin, piercing an artery and she died as a result of arterial haemorrhaging. Their four children were present at the time of their mother's death and witnessed how their father was taken away to town in a police vehicle. Since the magistrate understood the family's difficult circumstances, their father was eventually released from prison and became 'remarried' soon afterwards.²⁸

²⁸ The research team was instrumental in the magistrate's judgement decision in the Arnoster case. I was consulted in advance as regards the particular lifestyle and circumstances of the family and was invited to attend the court proceedings.

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- (2) After visiting and drinking at a nearby farm one weekend the Jacobs children's father and stepmother started arguing while on their way back to the outspan. He hit her several times with his walking stick until she fell down. He then stopped and after a while fell asleep next to her and next to the dirt road near a small dam. The next morning when he woke up he realised for the first time that she had been dead for several hours. He tried to cover her body with grass and pieces of wood and made his way back to the outspan. When he arrived at the outspan everyone, especially his mother, were enquiring about his wife. He said that she stayed behind on the farm and that he did not know when she would be returning to the outspan. Two days later a farm labourer found her body and soon afterwards the police arrived at the outspan to take the children's father to the local prison. This time the children's father was not released from prison.

Disputes and physical assault often lead to the temporary break-up or abandonment of a *karretjie* unit. Conflict for example, often arises between Pienkies and his father. On several occasions while Pienkies was still residing with his father in his domestic unit, physical struggles between them resulted in Pienkies moving out and staying with his cousin Robert, at the outspan. Soon after another such an incident his father was convicted for murdering his second wife and Pienkies 'inherited' his

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father's cart and donkeys and as a result became independent. On several occasions the Ackerman children's mother left their unit because of abuse by their father. She usually went to live at an encampment near town where she had relatives. Their mother eventually killed their father by accident. Lisa remembered the night her father died as follows

“Die grootmense het baie gedrink. My ma en pa het begin baklei en my ma het hom dood gegooi met 'n steen. Toe het iemand vir ... (aangrensende boer) gaan roep sodat die polisie kan kom. Hulle het my ma eers later kom haal. Hoe sou ons bly as my ma nie hier is nie? Ek is plaas toe want dit is beter daar”.

“The adults drank a lot. My mother and father started fighting and my mother killed him with a stone. Then someone went to tell ... (neighbouring farmer) to call the police. They only fetched my mother after a while. How would we stay here if my mother was not here? I went to the farm because it is better there”.

Conflict also arises when the people at the outspan are suspected of slaughtering sheep in the area. The following incident was ultimately one of the primary reasons why the community at the outspan split.

The father of Mina, Stokkies and Sanna had slaughtered a sheep belonging to a neighbouring farmer one night. The following day the

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farmer enquired about the missing animal at the outspan. Everyone present at the outspan at the time denied that these children's father was guilty. The next day the farmer returned with the police. At that time one of the senior residents (from the Verrooi family) and a distant relative at the outspan, revealed that the children's father did in fact slaughter a sheep. Afterwards no one really wanted to reveal more about the incident but apparently physical and verbal abuse occurred between the two families. The Sors family (Mina, Stokkies and Sanna's family) was one of the first to leave the Seacow River Bridge outspan permanently.

All the children admitted that they have witnessed violence at the outspan and on farms at some or other time, although not of the same degree. As described previously, six children from the outspan were present when one parent was killed by another. Pienkies, Toek-Toek and the twins had to go through the same ordeal a second time when their father also killed their stepmother.

The children are almost never excluded from any adult activities at the outspan. They often imitate the behaviour of their parents and other adults. They would for instance, pretend that each has a knife and that they are stabbing each other. Many lose their temper easily and especially boys physically fight each other. A mother sees the situation as follows

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“Die kinders is gewoon aan baklei. Hulle word maar so groot. Miskien is dit nie ‘n snaaksigheid vir hulle nie. Ek raas met hulle as hulle mekaar slaan. Dis veral ... wat so bakleierig raak met die ander kinders en sweer”. (Sanna - mother of Christine and Hendrik)

“The children are used to fighting. That is how they grow up. Perhaps it is not something unusual to them. I reprimand them when they hit each other. It is especially ... who fights with the other children and swears”. (Sanna - mother of Christine and Hendrik)

The circumstances and lifestyle associated with the Karretjie People precipitate a lifestyle of violence. Most members of the community admit it and they often regard proper housing, more money and better living conditions in general as means to lessen the prevalence of violence.

4.1.7 The Children’s Labour Practices

The older children at the outspan do not only play an active role with regard to child-care, they are also a valuable source of labour. Girls seem to be more involved in activities surrounding the immediate *karretjie* unit with chores such as sweeping, washing clothes, preparing food and feeding pets and chickens. Boys look after the donkeys, fetch water and firewood and sometimes assist with chores such as washing clothing. The children themselves however do not regard their domestic

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responsibilities as being gender specific²⁹.

Berland (1982:123-124) has found among the peripatetic Qalandar of Pakistan that

“... from a very early age the child recognizes that the tasks he is assigned represent an important contribution to his own and his family’s survival”.

²⁹ This information was obtained by recording the children’s activities, their geographical setting and the people present on an hourly basis.

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This also applies to the Karretjie children and they soon learn that they play an integral and important part in their family's survival. Depending on the number of members of a particular *karretjie* unit, very young children often get involved in domestic responsibilities. For instance, in the unit of the partly disabled grandmother, the twins who were still residing with their father in his separate unit during that time, were regularly incorporated into assisting with duties concerning their grandmother's unit. When the shearers are away on a shearing assignment, the mothers of the children would also frequently 'borrow' children, especially boys, from other units to assist with collecting firewood and water in particular.

Children are also the ones who help to prepare the weekend brew. When asked what the basic ingredients and method of preparation for the beverage were, the adults could (or would) name only a few of the ingredients while all the older children knew the exact ingredients and amounts. The process of preparation usually starts on Thursdays and it is often the children's responsibility to see that the containers stay full for the duration of the weekend.

From an early age boys accompany their fathers to the shearing shed and are progressively taught by their fathers. When they are skilled (or strong) enough and older, they start shearing independently and as a result, often form an independent *karretjie* unit. During her study amongst a group of 'Gypsies', Okely (1983:162) observed that

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“... the learning context for travelling children is most often on the basis of one adult per child; a parent or relative. Learning is by direct example and practice in circumstances similar to those they will experience as adults”.

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Case 4.2 Becoming a Shearer

While his father was serving a prison sentence in the town of Hanover for killing his mother, Pienkies lived with his grandmother in her *karretjie* unit. She would often send him to a neighbouring farm with her donkey cart to buy food and matches from the farm store. He was also responsible for looking after his three younger siblings. During that time he never left his grandmother's unit and accompanied her when the adult men were shearing.

Soon after his father's release from prison, Pienkies was reunited with him and his (Pienkies') siblings, and all lived together with their stepmother in their father's original *karretjie* unit. During this time Pienkies' father taught him the skill of shearing. With the permission of some farmers Pienkies was allowed to learn to shear alongside his father in the shearing shed. Pienkies never attended school. At the age of fifteen and as a strong youngster he became an independent shearer and part of the shearing team who semi-permanently lived at the Seacow River Bridge outspan.

When his father was sent to prison a second time for the death of the children's stepmother, Pienkies 'inherited' his father's *karretjie* unit and donkeys. He was the only member of the unit although the twins

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and Toek-Toek would often eat with him at his unit. Pienkies was regarded as one of the best shearers of the team and with his income he was able to provide in his siblings' needs while their father was still in prison. He often supplemented his grandmother's contribution towards especially clothing for Simon, Marie and Toek-Toek. After his father was released from prison, Pienkies was allowed to keep the cart and donkeys for his own purposes.

Children younger than 14 years are not recruited into activities such as shearing because the type of labour can be done most efficiently by adults and by its nature children cannot easily be incorporated. Amongst others, a certain amount of physical strength is required to handle and control a sheep during shearing. Pienkies' response to his involvement in labour is as follows

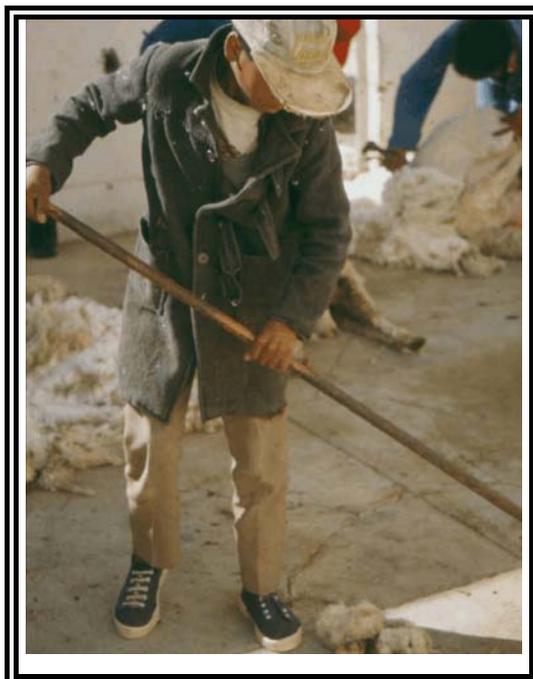
“Ek skeer nog nie so vinnig soos my pa nie; net so fyftien skaap ‘n dag. Dis harde werk en jou rug raak moeg van al die krom staan maar ek kry darem geld in met die skeerdery. Ek wil nie skool loop nie en my pa het gesê dis beter dat ek ook skeer”.

“I don't shear as fast as my father; just about fifteen sheep a day. It is hard work and your back gets tired of all the bending but at least I earn money with shearing. I don't want to go to school and my father told me it is better that I do shearing”.

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An example of some of the other activities in which the children are involved is onion picking on one of the neighbouring farms. According to Okely (1983:164) this kind of labour involvement is often

“... condemned by the larger society as exploitation ... certainly children are an important part of the labour force”.



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Photograph 4.11 Sweeping the shearing shed

The reality is that the children's earnings make an extremely valuable contribution to the family and *karretjie* unit income. The type of labour they perform such as sweeping the shearing shed and picking and cleaning onions did not necessarily keep them, for instance, out of school, because for these children school attendance only became an option at a later stage and then attendance was not continuous or necessarily of long duration. Lisa and Piet's mother responded to this as follows

“Die kinders wil nie skool loop nie en hulle kan ook nie net so hier sit nie. Hulle gaan saam as ons uie pluk of ander loswerkies doen. Baiemaal wil hulle help met die werkies en dan kry hulle so vyf of tien randjies vir die dag”. (Emma)

“The children don't want to go to school and they can't just sit here. They go along when we go onion picking or when we are doing other odd-jobs. Often they want to assist with the work and then they get five or ten rand for the day”. (Emma)

Amongst the Karretjie People of the district of Colesberg, begging is another economic activity in which young children are incorporated, therefore contributing to the *karretjie* unit's economic resources. This activity mostly occurs at the outspans

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close to town where especially motorists passing through give the children money or food. At the Seacow River Bridge outspan however this did not occur, although nowadays some of these children who have moved with their families to the informal settlement adjacent to town, do beg to supplement the income of their domestic units. The particular setting of an outspan usually plays a role in children engaged in begging.

4.2 Spatial Mobility and the Children's Geographical Settings

As was established, the Karretjie People are a community characterised by frequent changes in natural and human environments, one in which the mobility of people, both children and adults, takes place on a regular basis. Thus the socialisation process of the Karretjie children can be explained in terms of the different settings and sets of people comprising their everyday lives. Whiting (1980) suggests that

“... the mother's and father's greatest effect is in the assignment of the child to settings that have important socializing influences”.

The changes in the children's geographical and social settings are often the result of their parents' economic practices and social activities. Parents influence their children directly by educating them concerning certain aspects, such as domestic

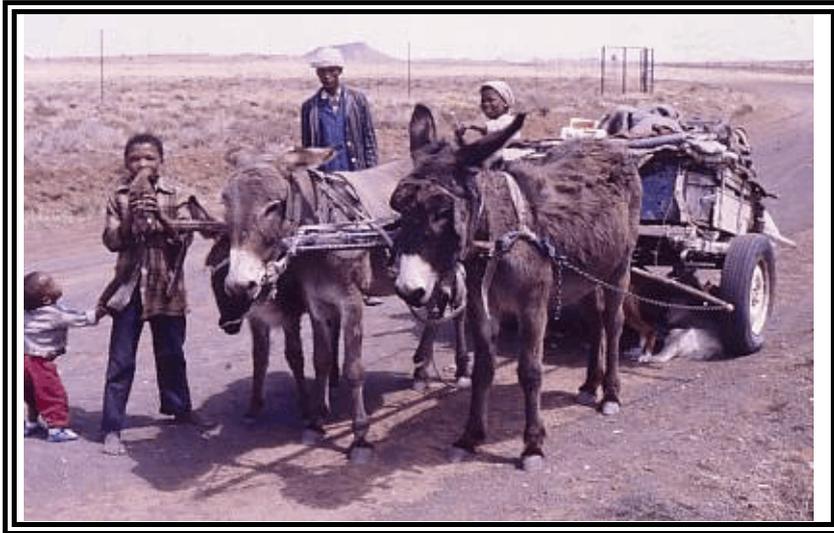
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chores, but also by the choices (often strained) they make as regards the different environments in which the children spend their time.

Their insecure economic circumstances necessitate that parents assign their children to changeable, adaptable and flexible settings and networks of people, normally, but not exclusively kin. The most important characteristic of their physical and social settings is the continuous shift between geographical areas and domestic units, which in turn involve different outspans and different individuals that occupy particular settings at certain times. Household composition, type of labour involvement of parents that regulate the routine of family life and the spatial arrangement of different *karretjie* domestic units, play a major role in the children's childhood years (cf. Whiting & Edwards 1988).

Spatial mobility occurs on different levels: on a larger scale the group as a whole would move for a specific reason, mostly labour-related, and on a smaller scale, isolated units move independently mostly on personal and social grounds without affecting the composition of the group as a whole. Frequent and regular movement of individuals, including children, occur primarily between outspans and farms. All the children have been exposed to extended periods of separation from especially their fathers, mainly because the farmers increasingly prefer to have only the shearers on their property for the duration of a shearing assignment. The following case provides an overview on the subject of changing localities.

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Photograph 4.12 *En route*

Case 4.3 Shifting Places

For most of their lives the twins, Simon and Marie lived semi-permanently at the outspan next to the Seacow River Bridge. Their family and friends call them by their *klein naampies* (nicknames), Outjie and Rökkies. Their father and mother were not legally married or *ge-êg* as they refer to a 'proper' marriage, and for this reason the children were given the last name of the mother. They, together with their parents and two brothers, used to travel on a regular basis to various farms in the district of Colesberg where their father sheared sheep for a living (see Diagram 4.4). Their father was the unofficial spokesperson at the outspan for the men who comprised

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a shearing team. When a farmer's preference was to not have the whole family and *karretjie* unit on his property for the duration of a shearing assignment, the twins would stay behind with their mother in their domestic unit at the outspan. Alternatively, they camped next to the road close to the farm or even in close proximity of the shearing shed.

Whenever an opportunity presented itself, their father would accept work as far as 600 kilometers away from home. In one instance, the twins, their siblings and parents travelled to a farm in the north-eastern part of the Free State Province and lived there for almost a month. After they were severely mistreated they returned partly on foot to the outspan.

In 1991 the children's father accidentally killed their mother at the outspan during one of their regular weekend drinking bouts. After their circumstances were taken into consideration, his prison sentence was suspended. In February 1994 their father was sentenced to six years imprisonment of which two years were suspended because he killed the twins' stepmother. Outjie and Rökkies' grandmother decided in their interest that they together with one of their brothers and the other school-aged children at the outspan, should attend school. They were taken by a neighbouring farmer's daughter to a farm school some 60

Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

kilometers from their home outspan and because of her involvement as a teacher. They were allowed to go home twice a term for weekends and during the holiday season. They were eventually withdrawn from school because of extreme unhappiness and returned to the outspan to live with their grandmother.

While their father was in prison he sent a message to his elderly mother to send the twins to a primary school in the 'Coloured' part of town, only a short distance from where he was imprisoned. They were to stay with a relative of their mother in the nearby informal settlement. They visited their grandmother and brothers during weekends.

Towards the end of 1997 the twins (now nine years of age) were put temporarily in the foster care of a social worker in the 'Coloured' neighbourhood, Lowryville (Extension 4) next to the N1 national road. In this small neighbourhood they soon became friends with other children but seldom went back to the outspan to see their grandmother and siblings. The social worker used to take them once a week to visit their father in prison. After their grandmother's death the children's visits to their other relatives at the outspan became even more infrequent.

Their father was released from prison towards the end of 1998 and

Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

now lives in an informal encampment adjacent to town. The twins remain in the care of the social worker but get to see their father regularly. They both are currently enrolled at the previously exclusively white Colesberg Primary School (having 'graduated' from the 'Coloured' primary school in Lowryville). Although only three kilometers apart, no special arrangements are made for them to keep in touch with their two brothers, who now live at the encampment opposite the informal settlement and they now only occasionally see each other.

4.3 The Children's Perceptions and Views of Mobility, Life at the Outspan, on Farms and in *Karretjie* Homes

Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003:13) use the phrase "inscribed spaces" to illustrate the relationship between people and the environments they occupy and especially the ways in which they transform space into place and attach meaning to such

Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

entities. The children's perceptions of travelling and the locales they frequent include the following

“My pa-hulle skeer maar so vir die witmense. As hulle klaar geskeer is dan staan ons maar weer hier by die brug. Dit is nie altyd lekker nie. Vandag is jy hier, môre is jy daar. Veral as dit baie koud is, is dit nie goed om hier oor te staan nie. As my pa miskien ‘n vaste werk kan kry, dan sal ons nie so hoef rond te trek met ons karretjies nie. Die boere mishandel ons ook nie altyd mooi nie”. (Stokkies)

“My father and them (other shearers) do shearing for the white people.

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Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

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standing here. If maybe my father can get a permanent job, we will not have to travel with our carts. The farmers do not always abuse (sic) us nicely". (Stokkies)

"Ons het dan nie blyplek nie, dis hoekom ons hierso staan. As my pa nie skeer nie, dan sit ons maar so. Partymaal het ons nie kos nie. Dit

Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

kan baie koud raak hier. Kyk hoe stukkend is ons klere dan. As my pa uit die werk is, het ons nie geld vir kos of klere nie". (Lisa)

"We have no place to stay, that is why we are standing here (at the bridge). When my father is not shearing, then we stay put. Sometimes we don't have food. It can get very cold here. Look how torn our clothes are. When my father is not working, we don't have money for food or clothing". (Lisa)

Both these children are aware of the difficulties associated with a mobile way of life and how it is affecting their families. Many of the other children share their views but see a different, more positive side of their circumstances

"Trek is plesierig vir my. Dis lekker om hier onder die brug te bly. Ons swem en as die manne gaan visvang, gaan ons saam. Die ouma kyk mooi na ons. Sy koop vir ons skoene as sy geld kry. Dis net partymaal in die naweek in dat die mense hier bakleierig raak". (Grace)

"For me travelling is fun and pleasant. It is nice to live here under the bridge. We swim and when the men go fishing, we accompany them. The grandmother is looking well after us. She buys us shoes when she gets money. It is just sometimes over weekends that the people here get quarrelsome". (Grace)

Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

Grace lives with her mother and sister in her grandmother's *karretjie* unit. She notably has a more positive outlook on their situation at the outspan because her grandmother gets a monthly old-age pension and in the first instance, supports the members of her own domestic unit. What is left of her income is distributed amongst other kin at the outspan.

While the men are shearing, most families experience their situation differently. They often see it as a better life mainly because they have easier access to food resources and often medical attention. When the whole family accompanies the shearers to a farm, the children encounter a new, but also familiar set of people living there. Many of the children agree on the better situation and circumstances on farms but often they had mixed feelings about the different tasks ascribed to them and the interpersonal relationships with farm children. Toek-Toek describes it as follows

“As my pa-hulle gaan skeer moet ons van vooraf ons sinke opslaan en die donkies veld toe vat. Dis harde werk om die hele kar af te pak. Partymaal moet ons baie ver loop vir water en brandgoedjies”.

“When my father and them go shearing we have to reassemble our homes all over again and take the donkeys to graze. It is hard work

Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

to unpack the whole cart. Sometimes we have to walk very far to get water and firewood”.

Mina conveys the setting and set of people on farms as follows

“Die plaaskinders sê ons is Boesmans. Hulle lag vir ons. Ons speel ook partymaal saam met hulle; hulle leer ons sing in Bantoetaal. Veral Outjie (Simon) raak baie taaikoppig met daai kinders. Hulle slaan hom die ander dag dat sy bek bloei”.

“The farm children say we are Bushmen. They laugh at us. Sometimes we play together; they teach us to sing African songs. Especially Outjie (Simon) gets very stubborn with those children. The other day they beat him up until his mouth was bleeding”.

In general the people at the outspan are concerned and unhappy about their living conditions. The most common complaints are poverty and the fact that as many as six (and sometimes even more) people have to share a very small space. Extreme temperatures during winter and summer make it even more difficult. Although they agree amongst themselves that the river is a huge resource in terms of water supply, fishing and recreation, many are concerned about the general state of hygiene at the outspan since there are no amenities.

“Dis baie vuil hier. Dit stink ook. Ons vee elke dag voor die huis maar

Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

hier is altyd brommers en as die wind opstaan is alles weer toe van die stof. Die lêplek is ook baie min. Ons slaap teen mekaar want daar is nie plek vir almal nie. As dit warm is, slaap ons sommer buite onder die brug". (Rosie)

"It is very dirty here. It also smells. Every day we sweep in front of the house but we always have blowflies and when the wind comes up, everything is covered with dust. Sleeping space is also very limited. We sleep right next to each other because there is not enough space for everyone. When its warm, we just sleep outside under the bridge".
(Rosie)

Stokkies' remarks are similar

"Ons het dan nie eers plek vir ons potte en goed nie. Dit staan hier buite. Ons loop baie ver om hout te maak. Jy kan ook nie eers regop staan in die huis nie. Dis baie koud in die winter en ons het nie genoeg komberse nie".

"We don't even have space for our pots and stuff. Everything is kept outside. We have to walk very far to get firewood. You also cannot even stand upright in the house. It is very cold in winter and we don't have enough blankets".

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It is perhaps the words of Toek-Toek that sums up the violent and brutal nature of such an existence, albeit at the outspan or on farms where people are ultimately left to fend for themselves and early on have to learn to take certain harsh actions because more often than not, they have no other choice.

“Danger (ons hond) het verlede week siek geword. Hy wou nie eet nie en het bloed gekots. Toe sê my pa ek moet hom vat na die rivier toe. Ek het ‘n groot klip gevat en sy kop ingeslaan want ons het gesien hy sal nie lewe nie”.

“Danger (our dog) became ill last week. He would not eat and vomited blood. Then my father told me I must take him to the river. I took a big stone and smashed his head because we realised he was not going to live”.

Children, especially older boys and girls are incorporated into the activities surrounding mobility and which are often regarded as adventurous.

“As ons verstand kry, dan help ons met die trekkery. Ek help my ma ons goed aangee en maak die hoenders bymekaar. My ma en die ouma ry bo-op die kar en ons hardloop langsaan om te kyk dat die honde bybly. As ons op die plaas aankom, help ek om die sinke af te laai en die kar af te pak. Dan maak my ma die donkies los en help die

Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

ouma van die kar a". (Emma)

"When we are old enough we assist with the travelling. I help my mother by passing her our stuff and collecting the chickens. My mother and grandmother ride on top of the cart en we run alongside to see that the dogs keep up. When we arrive on the farm, we help to unpack the corrugated iron and the cart. My mother then unties the donkeys and helps the grandmother off the cart". (Emma)

Stokkies' views and duties are similar

"As ons moet oppak en trek dan loop haal ek die donkies. My pa span hulle in. Dis lekker as ons trek. As my pa met die donkies stapkar ry, speel ons so hier langs die kar. Maar as die son begin laag sit, dan ry ons drafkar en dan hardloop ons langs die kar. As ons moeg word klim ons ook op die kar".

"When we have to pack and move on, I go and fetch the donkeys. My father inspans them. I like it when we travel. When my father rides the donkeys on *stapkar* (slowly), we play alongside the cart. But when the sun starts to set, we ride *drafkar* (faster) and then we run alongside the cart. When we get tired we also get onto the cart".

Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

Although many of the children regard moving as an exciting experience the case of the twins Simon and Marie and their brother Toek-Toek reveals another perspective on the disruptive nature of moving.

Case 4.4 Constraints of Travelling

As was mentioned previously, the children together with their father Koot and stepmother Flora, were once fetched by a farmer to a district in the Free State Province where their father worked in the garden of the farm owner and their stepmother performed casual work. Because of maltreatment by the farmer, they decided to leave the farm and on foot, returned back to the outspan some 600 kilometers away. They walked most of the way and spent three nights next to the road but eventually were picked up by a truck *en route* to Colesberg.

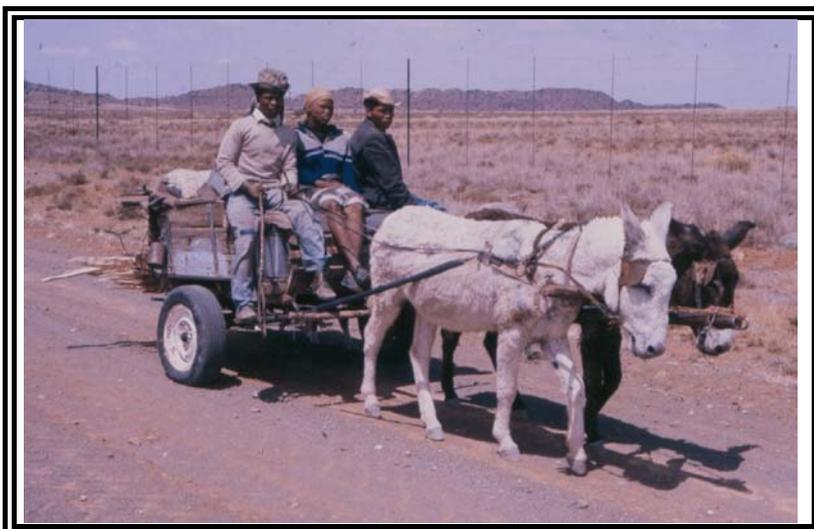
Toek-Toek describes this experience as follows

“Hy (die boer) wou hê my pa moet op die Sondag werk maar my pa het gesê hy kan nie. Toe skop hy ons pap op die vuur om. My pa het toe gesê ons moet teruggaan brug toe want ons sal nie hier regkom nie. Ons het baie ver geloop; ons voete het stukkend gewees. My pa het vir Outjie (Simon) en Rokkies (Marie) gedra want hulle het gehuil van moegheid”.

Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

“He (the farmer) wanted my father to work on the Sunday but my father told him he cannot do that. Then he kicked our porridge from the fire. My father then said we have to go back to the bridge because this will not work out. We had to walk very far; our feet were damaged. My father had to carry Outjie (Simon) and Rökkies (Marie) because they cried of exhaustion”.

The key principles of the Karretjie People’s social organisation are temporary territorial localisation and a wide-ranging social network maintained by patterns of visiting and knowledge of widely diversified genealogies and this defines a framework with a necessarily high level of mobility (cf. De Jongh & Steyn 1998(a)). Ultimately, this implies that the children are exposed to high degrees of residential instability and an extremely variable existence in general.

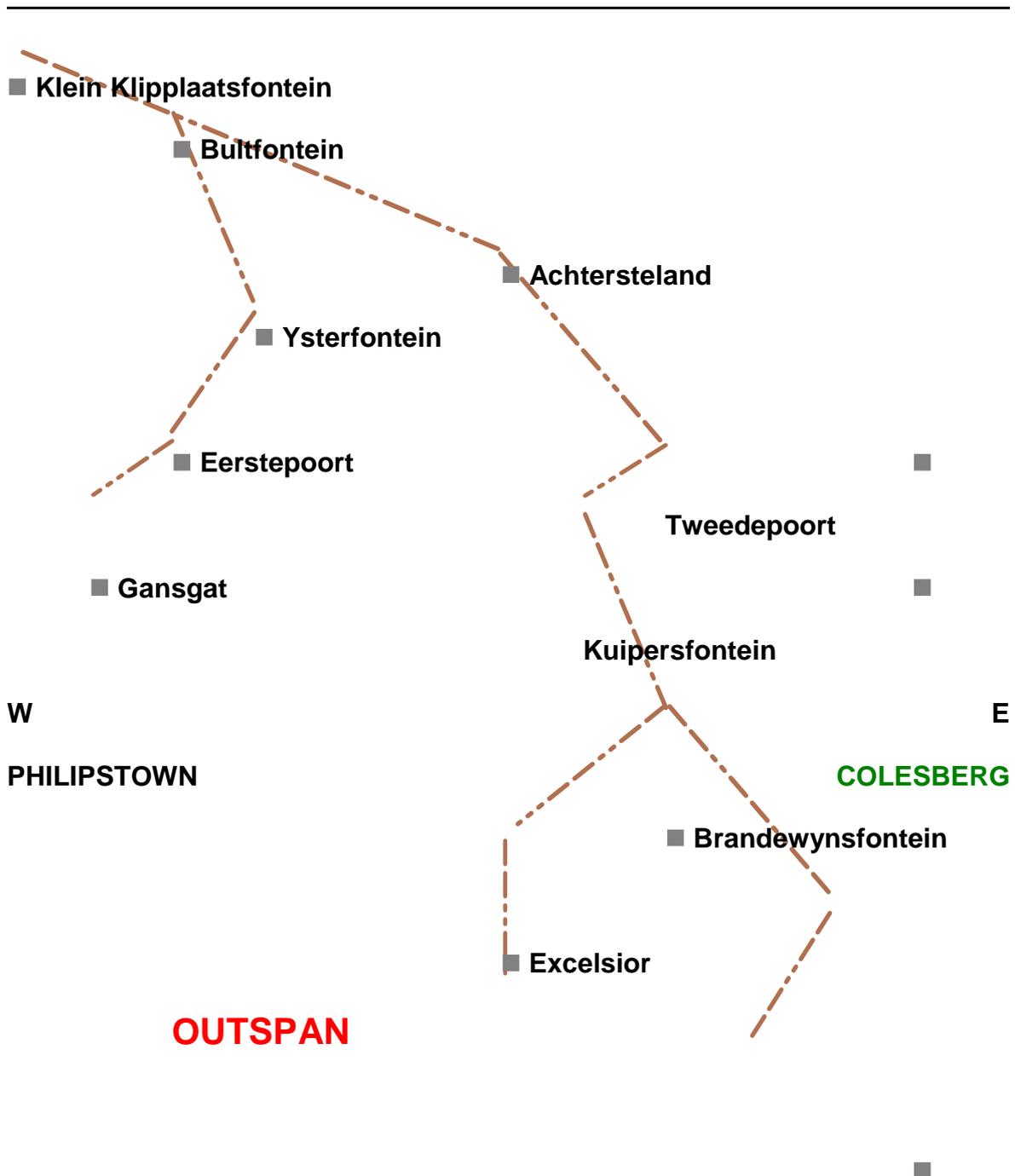


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Spatial Mobility and Residential Instability

Karretjie

Diagram 4.4 The Outspan Where the Children Have Lived Semi-permanently and the Farms Where They Have Lived Temporarily





**CHAPTER 5 DOMESTIC FLUIDITY, UNSTABLE UNITS
AND THE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL SETTINGS**

5.1 The Children's Domestic Histories

The previous chapter provided an overview of the lives of the Karretjie families, with a focus on residential dynamics, at the Seacow River Bridge outspan and on farms in the district of Colesberg. This section presents some of my observations and the accounts of the children and their experiences and circumstances related to domestic fluidity and flux. It deals with the children's domestic histories as well as residential arrangements and provides an explanation of the reasons for their dynamic nature³⁰.

³⁰ Siblings' domestic composition and change are presented separately because, even though much is obviously similar, they also each have different and individual lifepaths that they travelled.

Domestic Fluidity

The concept and phenomenon of domestic fluidity³¹ have in recent years gained momentum in anthropological literature (cf. Spiegel et.al. 1996:7). Spiegel et.al.'s (1996) research amongst urban households in Greater Cape Town has indicated that individuals as well as households or domestic units were mobile on a continuous basis and for various reasons. The conceptualisation of households as relatively stable domestic units consisting of a nuclear family with day-to-day “patterns of co-residence, commensality and income-pooling” is challenged by the authors and they suggest that the formation and composition of domestic units in contemporary South Africa are more complex than previously assumed (cf. Spiegel et.al. 1996:7-9).

According to Spiegel et.al. (1996:12-13) the concept of household has been defined

“... as a group within which income and expenditure flows are concentrated, even if the members of that group are resident in widely dispersed parts ...”.

They use the conceptualisation of “stretched households” with the assumption that household members cannot be co-resident or commensal for the duration of their lives but that despite physical distance and hence separation between them, members of a particular household still commit and contribute towards the continuation and maintenance of the household (cf. Spiegel et.al. 1996:12). In the

³¹ The notions of ‘domestic fluidity’ and ‘household’ have been discussed and elaborated on in section 3.3.3 of the dissertation.

Domestic Fluidity

case of Karretjie communities, a peripatetic lifestyle revolving around factors such as seasonality, sheep-shearing opportunities, availability of resources as well as the location of an outspan and particular shearing assignment, regulate the presence or absence of members of a domestic unit.

Domestic Fluidity

Ross (1995:73) argues that children who live separately and independently from their siblings and parents present a significant complication for an understanding of households or domestic units. Furthermore, she shows a need to investigate the movement patterns of individuals and their social networks in this regard because domestic units cannot simply be regarded as stable reproductive or generative in nature (Ross 1995:73). Van der Waal (1996:31) argues that the “making” and “unmaking” of domestic units is a common phenomenon but that in many instances high levels of residential instability and domestic flux are set in motion early on during childhood and continue throughout the lifespan.

Ross (1995:72-73) points out that there is limited literature available examining the mobility patterns of especially children, albeit with their parents or other kin or independently and in particular, how domestic units are formed in the first instance and then change over a period of time. The work of anthropologists, Reynolds (1983) amongst children in Crossroads adjacent to Cape Town, Van der Waal (1996) in Limpopo Province and that of Jones (1990) in hostels in the Western Cape has contributed significantly in this regard. They have indicated that children in these rural and urban settings have been separated from their parents for extended periods of time and that they were not only subjected to frequent movement between different households, but also geographically and residentially.

In terms of the Karretjie children’s reality, the composition and size of *karretjie* domestic units are transformed on a regular basis as a result of economic and social

Domestic Fluidity

activities as well as due to practical considerations. Apart from school attendance³², incidences of death, physical assault and criminal activity also frequently lead to the temporary break-up or abandonment of units, resulting in children being removed from one or both parents and siblings, ultimately resulting in domestic fragmentation. Furthermore, depending on the availability of especially food resources, parents or caretakers may decide to send some of their children off to kin on nearby farms or other outspans in the area where they would be incorporated into homes in which resources are more readily available.

According to Parke (1978:35)

“... the home environment remains a principal setting in which the child’s early social and cognitive development takes place. The early social and physical environment that the home provides for the child has a marked impact on (his) later social and cognitive development”.

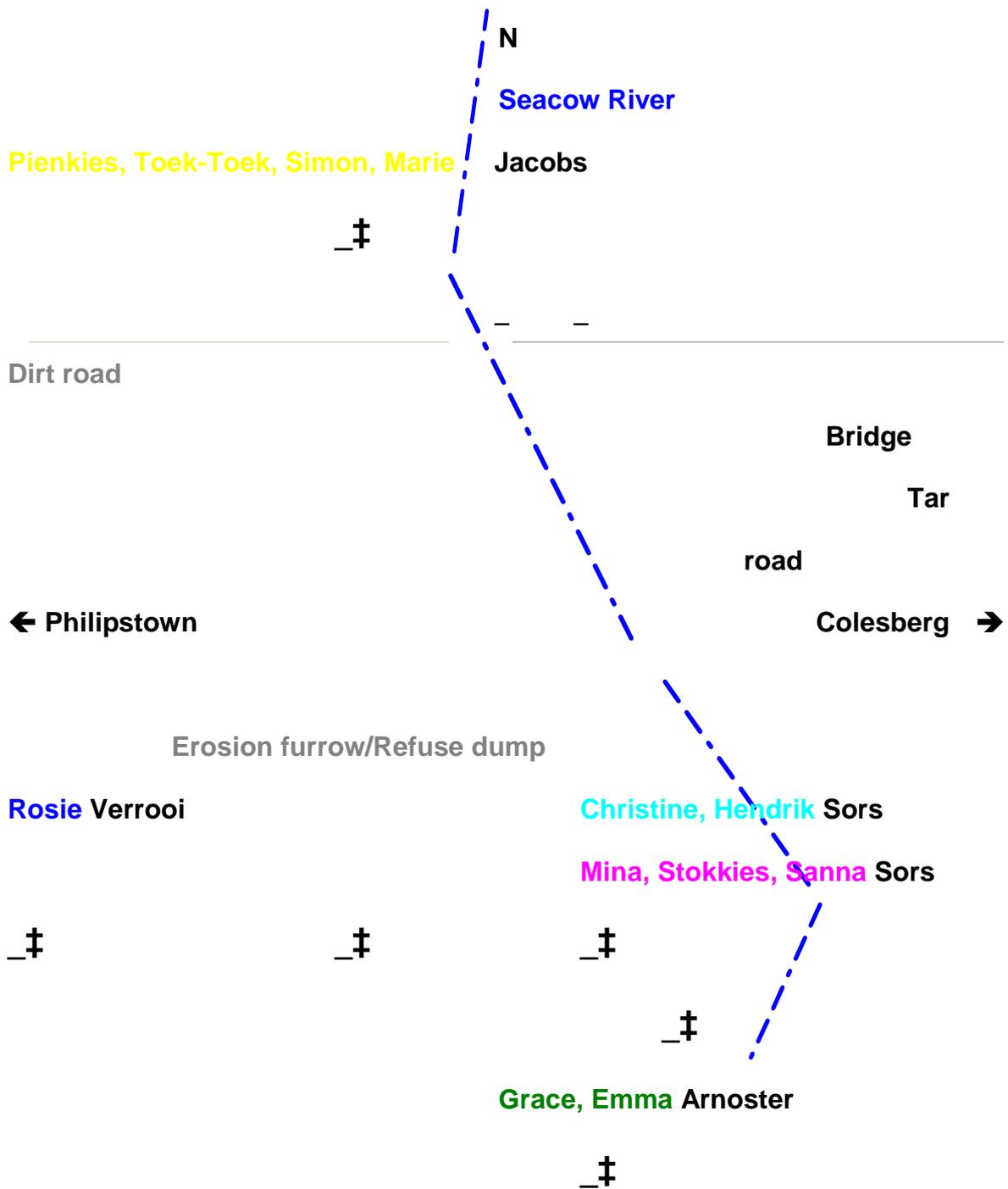
³² The children’s separation from people at the outspan for extended periods of time due to school attendance as well as their experiences at a farm school in the district are discussed in Chapter 6.

Domestic Fluidity

The *karretjie* home and family are important factors in the Karretjie child's physical and cognitive formation. 'Home' is what the children perceive to be, and call, their rudimentary overnight shelter which they share with all the members of a *karretjie* unit. 'Home' is also what they call the perpetual relocating space and place which they share with a constantly changing complement of kin - variability depending on various factors. The social setting that applies to the children changes frequently as a result of their own and their parents' mobility patterns but also patterns of domestic fluidity.

The study has pointed out that a *karretjie* unit may comprise of individuals beyond the nuclear family and the composition of household membership varies as a direct result of particular economic and social activities of its members. In most cases, *karretjie* domestic units which extend beyond the nuclear family are what Burton et.al. (2002) call, "vertically extended households" because it typically consists of a married couple, their children (including spouses) and/or grandchildren. Diagram 4.1 and Diagram 5.1 provide an approximate graphic representation of this Karretjie community's use of space at the outspan, resources available to them, lack of basic amenities as well as the social network that exists between members of the community.

Diagram 5.1 Spatial Distribution of Each Child's *Karretjie* Unit at the Seacow River Bridge Outspan During the Initial Stages of the Research

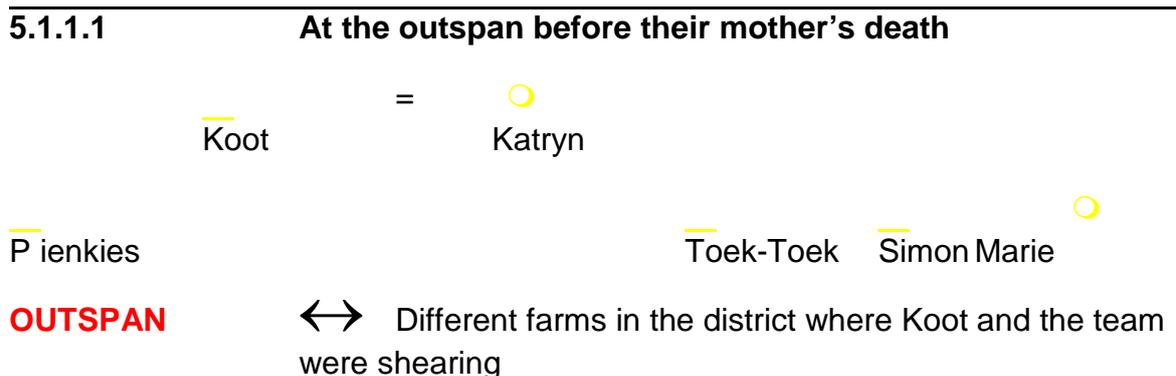


 *karretjie* shelter
donkey cart

Case 5.1.1 Simon and Marie’s *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

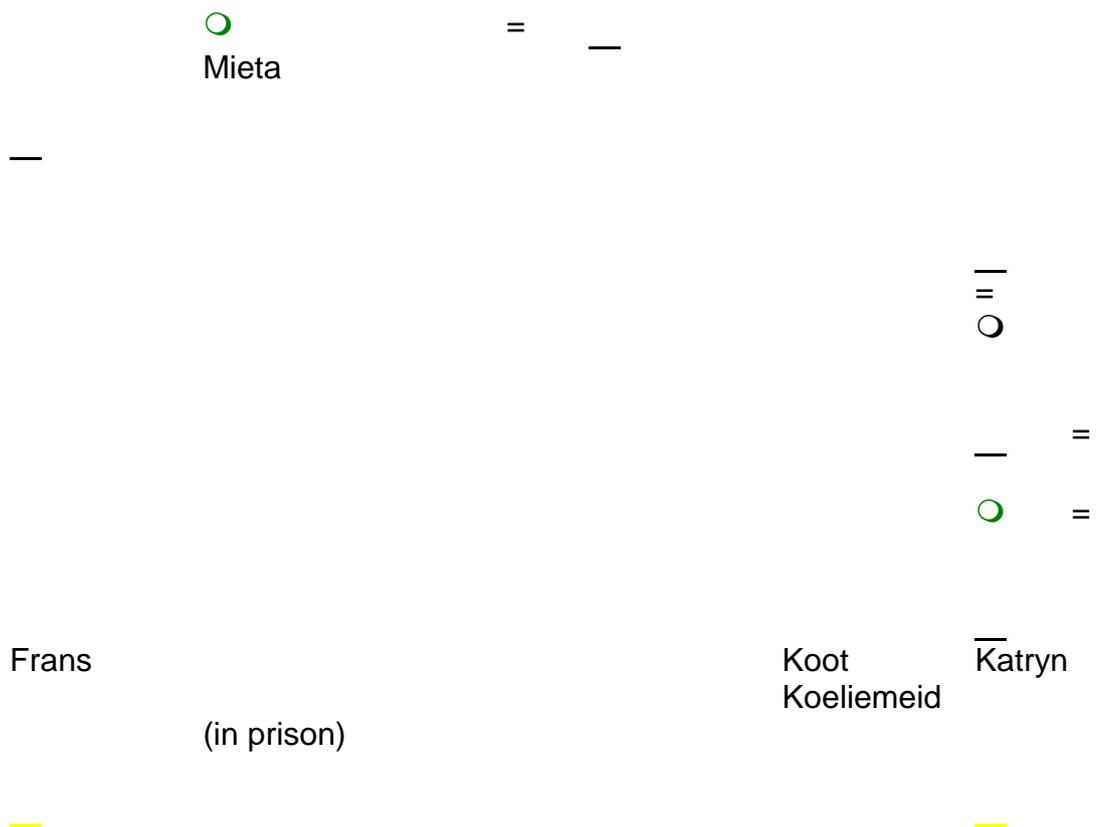
Simon and Marie are twins. They were born in 1988 on the farm Brandewynsfontein in the district of Colesberg in the Northern Cape Province. They have two brothers, Pienkies and Toek-Toek. Their father was one of the senior shearers living semi-permanently at the Seacow River Bridge outspan. They and their brothers shared a domestic unit with their parents and whenever the whole family was allowed to accompany their father to a shearing assignment on a farm, they remained a unit for purposes of travelling, living and subsistence.

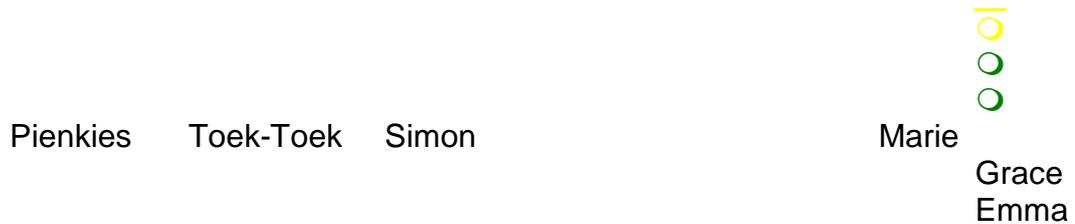
Diagram 5.1.1.1 to Diagram 5.1.1.6 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating Simon and Marie’s *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics



While their father was in prison for their mother’s death, Simon and Marie along with their siblings stayed behind at the outspan with their elderly and partly disabled grandmother, Mieta Ackerman (Koot’s mother) in her *karretjie* unit, which she shared with a daughter-in-law and her two children. Taking into consideration the circumstances of the Arnoster family, their father received a suspended sentence. He returned to the outspan and committed himself to responsibility for his four children.

5.1.1.2 At the outspan after their mother’s death





(Note: For some time the Jacobs and Ackerman siblings' residence overlapped.)

OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing, including Eerstespoort where Frans lived

With the death of his stepmother, Flora, Toek-Toek accompanied his father to town for the latter to stand trial. After his father was sentenced to six years imprisonment in 1994, Toek-Toek went to live in his grandmother, Mieta Ackerman's *karretjie* unit. Since he is four years older than the twins, he took much of the responsibility for them, such as cooking their food and washing their clothes even though slightly retarded after his head injury. Although their grandmother was in a position to provide financially for the members of her unit as well as for others at the outspan, she was partly disabled due to an accident previously while she was travelling with her donkey cart.

5.1.1.3 At the outspan with their father and stepmother



— Pienkies — — Toek-Toek Simon Marie

OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing
↔ Tweeling in the Free State Province

While Koot was awaiting trial and eventually sentenced and sent to the local prison the twins once again were left in the care of their grandmother. A neighbouring farmer's daughter is a teacher at one of the farm schools in the district and because of her involvement the farmer volunteered to take the children to town on Monday mornings from where his daughter would take them to school on the eastern side of the district. The twins remained at Vlugfontein Primary School for two years after which their grandmother withdrew them because of their severe unhappiness. For almost a year Simon and Marie remained at the outspan and travelled with their grandmother's cart when the men together with their families were on their way to a shearing assignment.

5.1.1.4 At the outspan with their grandmother after their father was sent to prison for a second time

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Mieta = — — — — —
— — — — — ○ =

Domestic Fluidity



(Note: The Jacobs and Ackerman siblings' residence sometimes overlapped.)

OUTSPAN

↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing, including Eerstespoort where Frans lived

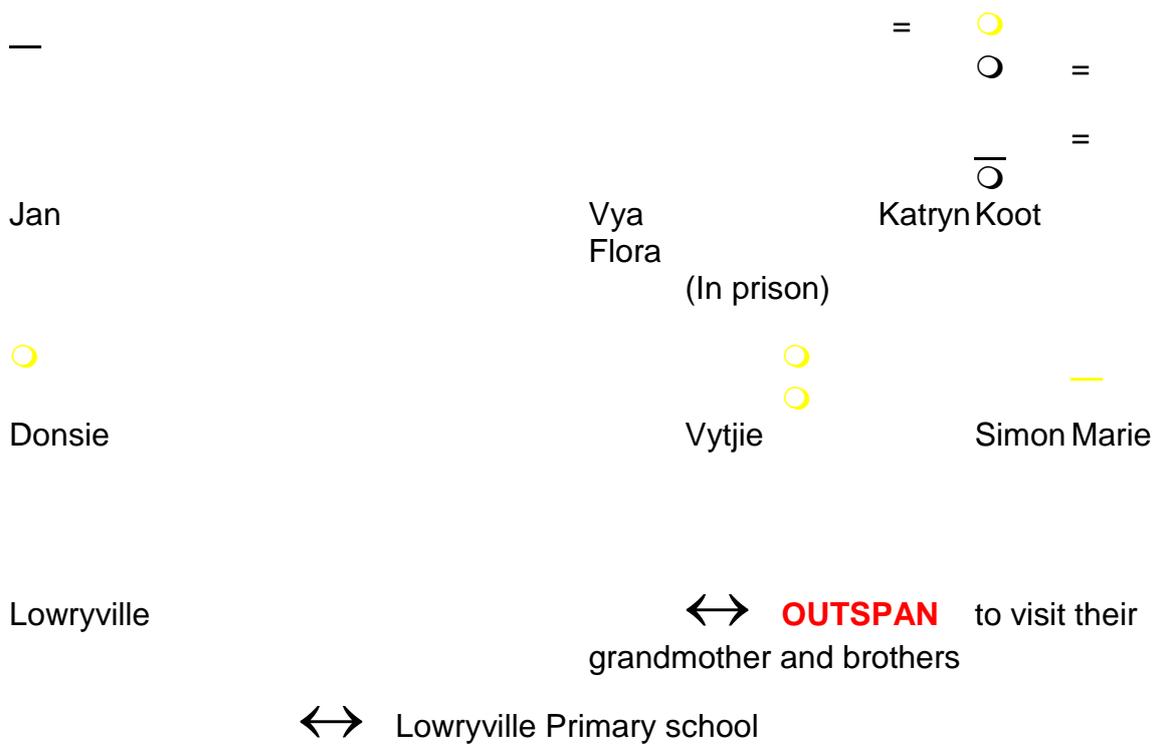
↔ Vlugfontein school in the district

The following year Koot informed his mother via his eldest son Pienkies that the twins should go back to school but this time to Lowryville Primary School in the predominantly 'Coloured' neighbourhood of Colesberg. The twins stayed with one of their

Domestic Fluidity

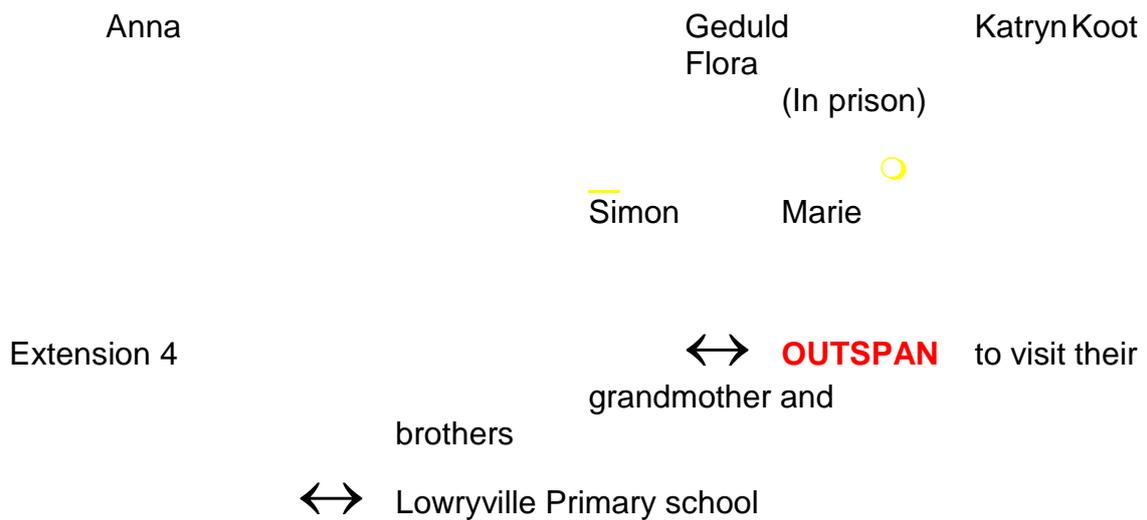
mother's cousins in Lowryville in order for them to be close to school and to him while he was serving time in prison.

5.1.1.5 At Lowryville with a maternal relative while their father was in prison



During 1997 the twins were put in the foster care of a social worker and are currently living in a new residential area next to the N1 national road in a two-bedroom house. She receives R240.00 per month for each child in her care. They were eventually withdrawn from the Lowryville Primary school and now attend the Colesberg Primary school in town.

5.1.1.6 With their foster family at Extension 4, residential area next to the N1 national road



Case 5.1.2 Toek-Toek's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Toek-Toek was born in 1984 at the outspan next to the Seacow River Bridge. He has three siblings, the twins, Simon and Marie, and an elder brother, Pienkies. He is the child of Koot Arnoster and Katryn Jacobs. While his mother was still alive he and his siblings lived in their parents' domestic unit. Whenever a shearing opportunity arose, the family would travel along with their father to a farm for the duration of such an assignment. Otherwise, the children would stay behind at the outspan with their mother.

Diagram 5.1.2.1 to Diagram 5.1.2.5 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating Toek-Toek's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

5.1.2.1 At the outspan before his mother's death



OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where Koot and the team were shearing

Toek-Toek and his two younger siblings lived in their grandmother's domestic unit while his father was imprisoned for the death of his

Domestic Fluidity

mother. During this time Toek-Toek was often sent away by his grandmother to a nearby farm, Eerstepoort, to temporarily live with his uncle, Frans, a farm labourer on the farm. Toek-Toek usually went back to the outspan during weekends to assist with domestic chores such as collecting firewood and looking after the twins. He was often also responsible for preparing the weekend brew for the people at the outspan. Mostly for this reason, his grandmother would send for him.

5.1.2.2 At the outspan after his mother's death



Domestic Fluidity

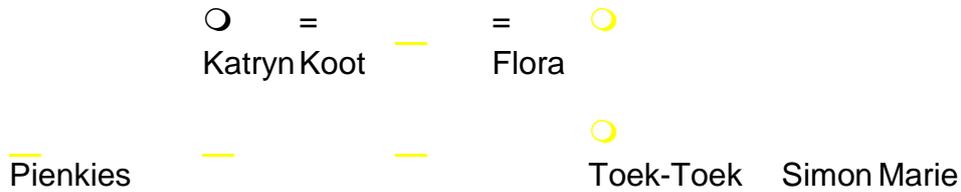


(Note: For some time the Jacobs and Ackerman siblings' residence overlapped.)

OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing, including Eerstespoort where Frans lived

Soon after his release from prison, his father remarried and returned to the outspan to resume his duties as shearer. Toek-Toek and his siblings then lived in and travelled with the domestic unit of his father and stepmother.

5.1.2.3 At the outspan with his father and stepmother



OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing

With the death of his stepmother, Flora, he accompanied his father to town for the latter to stand trial. After his father was sentenced to six years imprisonment, Toek-Toek went to live in his grandmother, Mieta Ackerman's *karretjie* unit. Since he is four years older than the twins, he took much of the responsibility for them, such as cooking their food and washing their clothes. Although their grandmother was in a position to provide financially for the members of her unit as well as for others at the outspan, she was partly disabled due to an accident previously while she was travelling with her donkey cart. He was also admitted to the farm school in the district which the twins attended but dropped out after a while because he was regarded as retarded. His grandmother also argued that her health was deteriorating fast and that she needed Toek-Toek to assist with packing and unpacking the donkey cart whenever the group would travel to a farm to engage in a shearing assignment. Toek-Toek never learnt to shear.

↔ Vlugfontein school in the district

After his grandmother's death, Toek-Toek moved to the so-called squatter camp near town. After his father was released from prison, they erected a new shack and are still staying together at the informal settlement. His father is often picked up by a farmer's truck for shearing or other work throughout the district and country and during these times Toek-Toek takes care of their two dogs and their home. The social worker who looks after the twins, attempted to enroll Toek-Toek at the neighbouring Lowryville school but he was not accepted because of his age. He spends most of his time at home and often complains that he is not feeling well and cannot find a job due to a previously sustained injury to his head.

5.1.2.5 At the informal settlement adjacent to Colesberg and after his father was released from prison

Koot = ○
Katryn

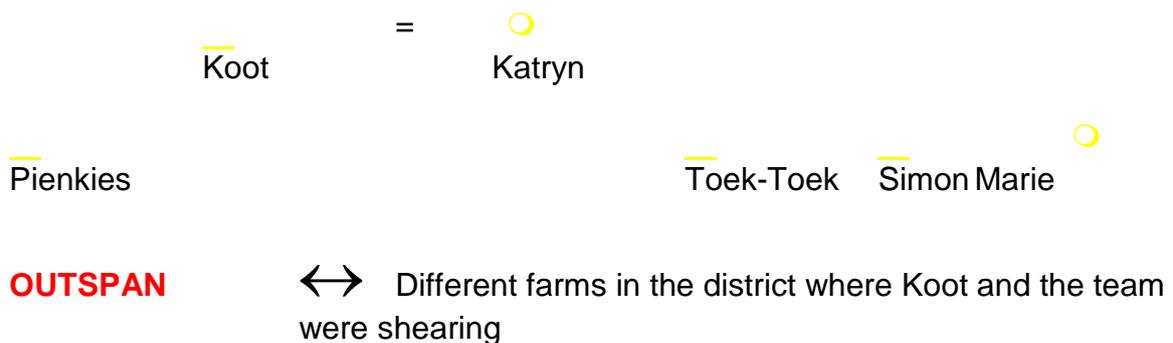
Toek-Toek

Case 5.1.3 Pienkies' *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Pienkies is the eldest child of Koot Arnoster and Katryn Jacobs. He was born in the early 1980's on the farm Sunnydale in the district of Colesberg. While his father was a shearer and part of the shearing team residing at the Seacow River Bridge outspan, he lived and travelled with his parents and siblings in their *karretjie* domestic unit.

Diagram 5.1.3.1 to Diagram 5.1.3.4 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating Pienkies' *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

5.1.3.1 At the outspan before his mother's death

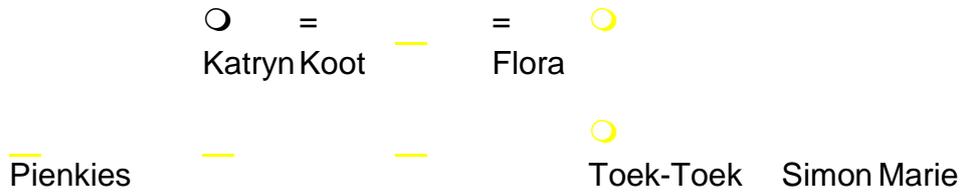


While his father was in prison in the Karoo town Hanover for killing his mother, Pienkies also lived with his grandmother. Because he was the eldest of the Jacobs children, he was responsible for looking after his three younger siblings. During that time he never left his grandmother's unit and accompanied her when the men were shearing.

Domestic Fluidity

Soon after his father's release from prison, Pienkies was reunited with him and his siblings, and they all lived together with their stepmother in their father's original *karretjie* unit. During this time Pienkies' father taught him the skill of shearing. With the permission of some farmers Pienkies was allowed to learn to shear alongside his father in the shearing shed. Pienkies never attended school and became an independent shearer.

5.1.3.3 At the outspan with his father and stepmother



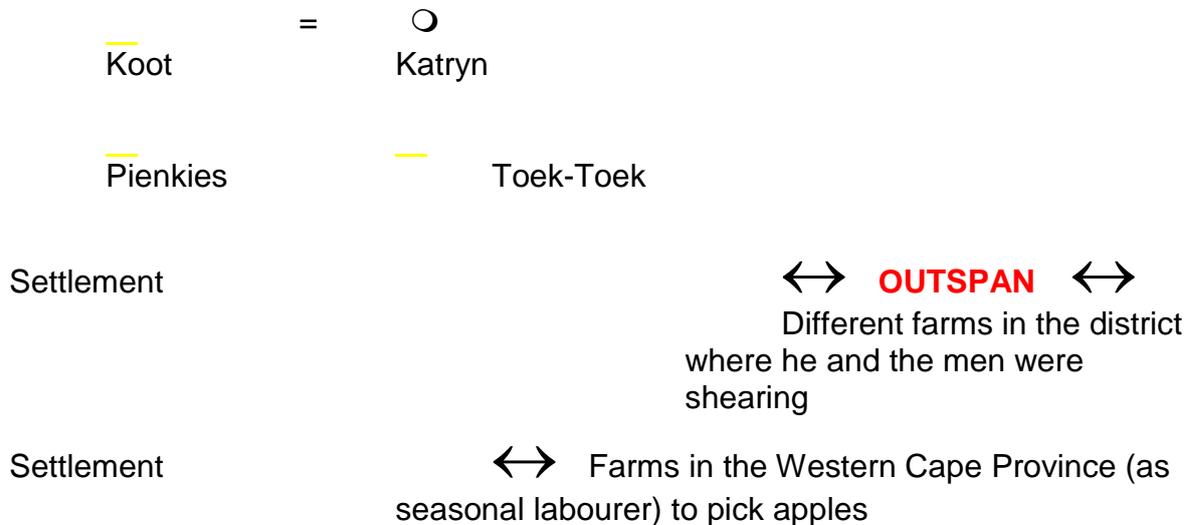
OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing

After his stepmother's death, Pienkies inherited his father's donkeys and cart and formed an separate domestic unit. However, during 1998, Pienkies together with the other people at the outspan found themselves in a position where for most of the time they did not have work at all. He sold the cart and donkeys and when his grandmother died he moved to the informal settlement outside town. He once again was incorporated into his father's domestic unit from where he would still be picked up by farmers in the district to shear. During 1999 a farmer from the Western Cape Province stopped at the squatter camp looking for labourers to pick apples on his farm. Pienkies was willing to go and has not been back at the squatter camp and his family ever since.

5.1.3.4 At the outspan when he became an independent shearer

Domestic Fluidity

and at the informal settlement adjacent to Colesberg after he lost his mobility

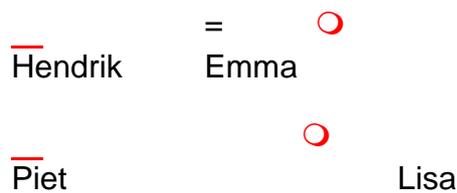


Case 5.1.4 Piet's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Piet was born in 1987 with the help of a midwife on the farm Achtersteland in the district of Colesberg while his father was away on a shearing assignment. He is the son of Emma Ackerman, daughter of Mieta Ackerman and her second husband, Hendrik Sors. The Seacow River Bridge outspan has always been their semi-permanent home base. He and his older sister were part of their parents' domestic unit. His father was also one of the senior shearers of the team at the outspan and whenever it was possible, Piet would travel with and live in his parents' *karretjie* unit.

**Diagram 5.1.4.1 to Diagram 5.1.4.4 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating
Piet's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit
Composition and Dynamics**

5.1.4.1 At the outspan before his father's death



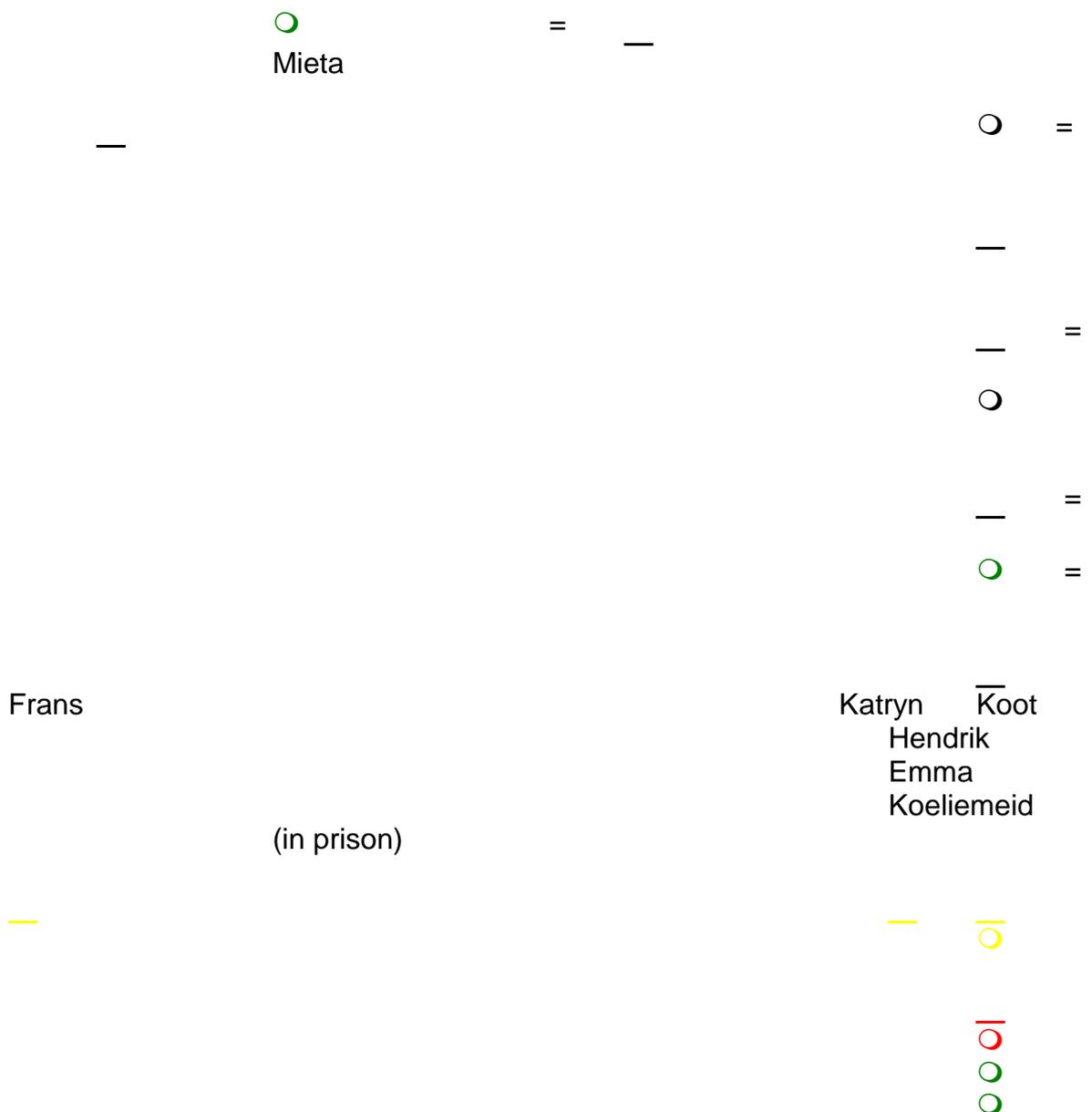
OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where his father and the team were shearing

 ↔ Vlugfontein school in the district

During a violent argument, his mother killed his father with a brick at the outspan. She was sent to prison but was released after a couple of weeks and brought back to the outspan to spend time with her children while awaiting trial. In her absence it was Piet's grandmother who primarily took care of him. Emma's *karretjie* home was abandoned during this period as her children were staying with their grandmother. As was the case with her other grandchildren, his grandmother decided that Piet should attend one of the farm schools in the district of Colesberg. Piet, like his cousins failed the first grade. After one year of schooling his mother took him out of school because she needed his help at the outspan. He had to tend to the donkeys, collect firewood

and fetch water and assist his father during the periods when no shearing was taking place. Due to her circumstances as a single parent, his mother was acquitted and returned to the outspan.

5.1.4.2 At the outspan with his grandmother while his mother was awaiting trial in Colesberg



Domestic Fluidity

Pi

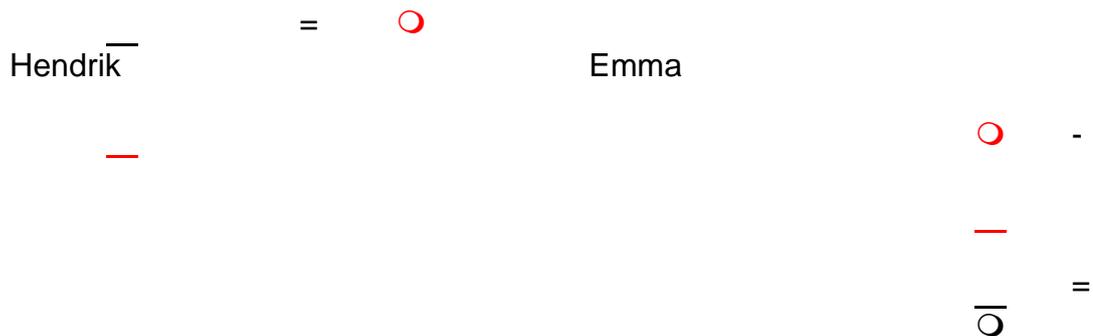
Toek Si
Ma
Piet
Lisa
Grace
Emma

(Note: For some time the Jacobs and Ackerman siblings' residence overlapped.)

OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing, including Eerstespoort where Frans lived

Piet's sister, Lisa got married to Tokkie, a farm labourer in the vicinity and left the outspan to stay with him. It became increasingly difficult for Emma to support herself and Piet due to the fact that the only earning member of their *karretjie* unit was no longer there to provide for them. Emma decided that Piet should rather stay with his sister on a nearby farm where she would be able to take care of his basic needs. Emma herself lived off the charity of her fellow residents at the outspan.

5.1.4.3 On a farm with his sister and her husband while his mother could not provide for him



Case 5.1.5 Lisa's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Lisa was born in 1982 with the help of a midwife at the outspan. She is Piet's older sister and the daughter of Emma Ackerman and Hendrik Sors and lived in their domestic unit. At the outspan Lisa spent most of her time taking care of her brother and younger cousins. She would also assist with dismantling their home and packing their donkey cart when the team was called upon for a shearing assignment. Together with her brother and cousins, Lisa was sent to the farm school on the eastern side of town. She too was extremely unhappy there and after one year of attendance, her grandmother withdrew her from school because she failed Grade 1 and she was needed at the outspan to assist her grandmother.

**Diagram 5.1.5.1 to Diagram 5.1.5.4 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating
Lisa's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit
Composition and Dynamics**

5.1.5.1 At the outspan before her father's death



OUTSPAN

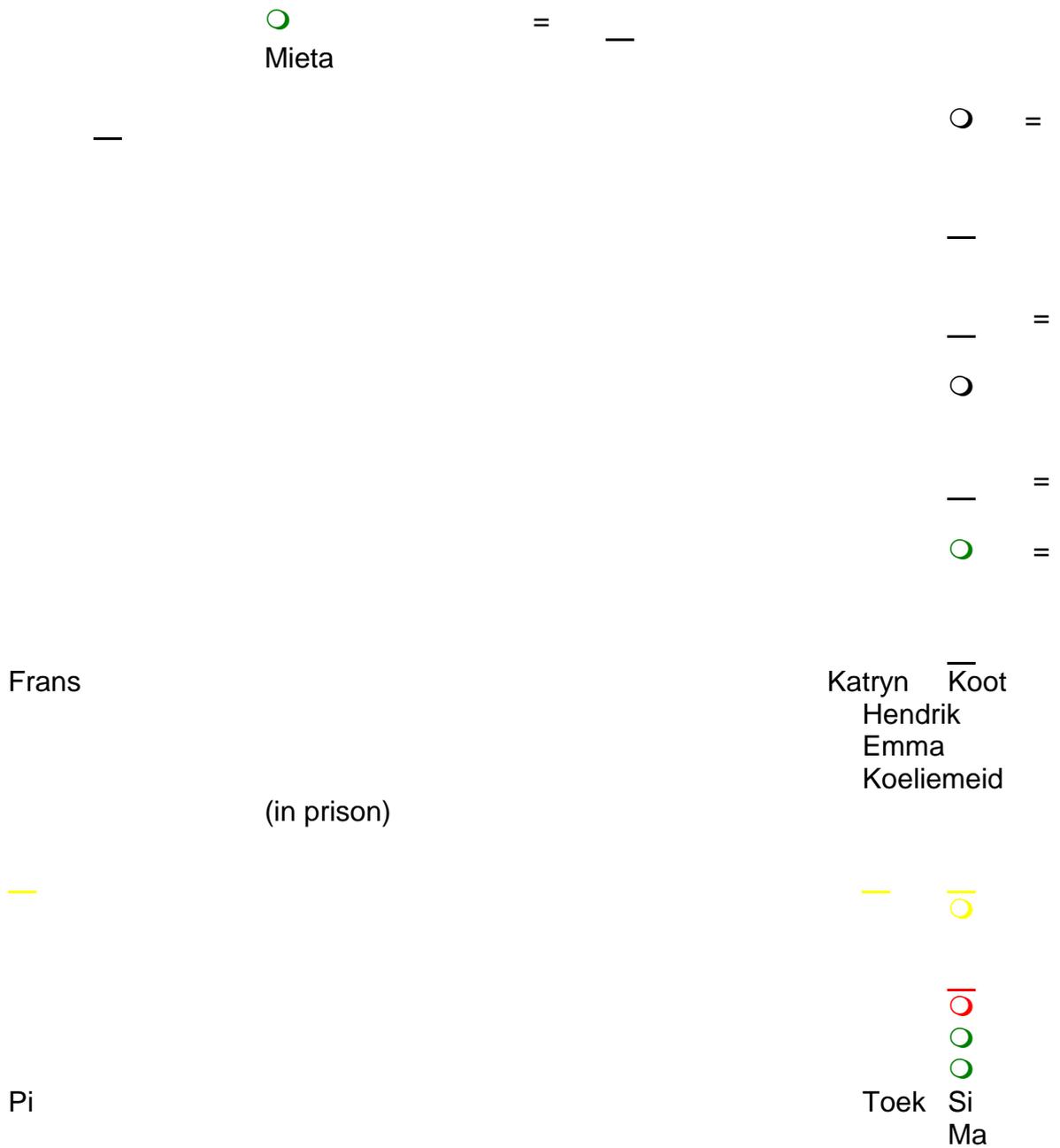
↔ Different farms in the district where her father and the team were shearing

↔ Vlugfontein school in the district

While her mother was awaiting trial in town for the death of her father, Lisa resided and travelled with her grandmother's *karretjie* unit. During times that old Mieta Ackerman could not support all of her grandchildren, Lisa was sent to Kopersfontein, a neighbouring

farm, to stay with a cousin of her mother. It was here that she met Tokkie, a farm labourer.

5.1.5.2 At the outspan with her grandmother while her mother was awaiting trial in Colesberg



Domestic Fluidity

Piet
Lisa
Grace
Emma

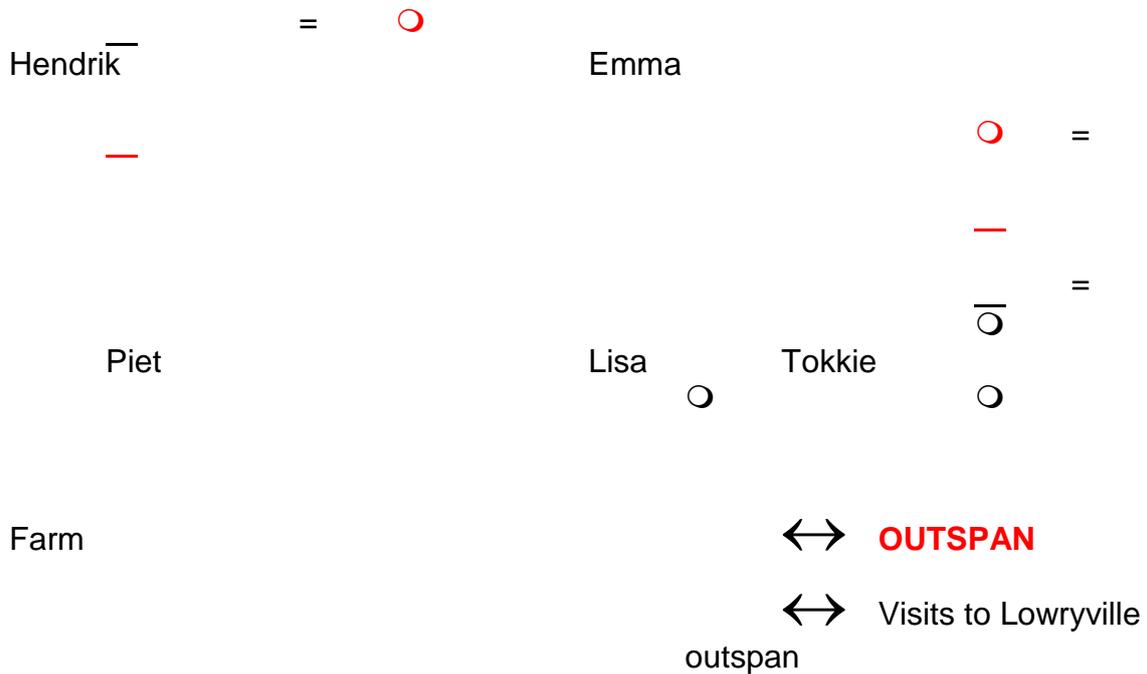
(Note: For some time the Jacobs and Ackerman siblings' residence overlapped.)

OUTSPAN

↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing, including Eerstepoort where Frans lived

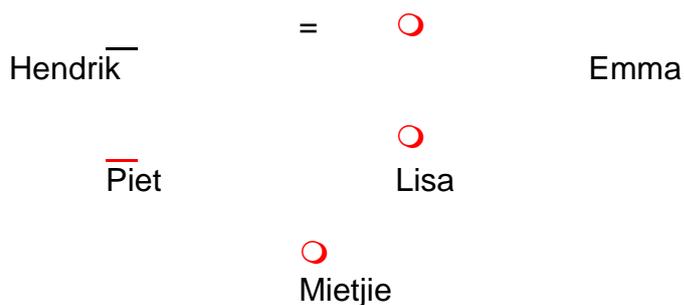
When she was thirteen Lisa expected her and Tokkie's baby. Lisa's brother Piet also stayed with them on the farm especially during times that Emma could not provide for him. Lisa and her baby only returned to her family at the outspan when Tokkie physically assaulted her.

5.1.5.3 On a farm with her boyfriend while her mother was in prison



At the beginning of 1999 Lisa left Tokkie and now lives at the informal settlement near town with her mother and brother and baby.

5.1.5.4 At the informal settlement near Colesberg



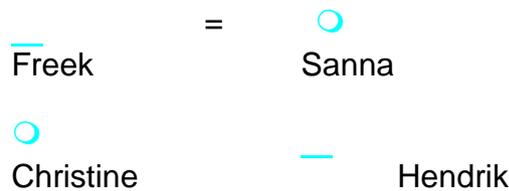
Domestic Fluidity

Case 5.1.6 Christine's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Christine is the child of Sanna Sors and Freek Geduld. Since 1990 they have been living at the Seacow River Bridge outspan with kin in their own *karretjie* unit. Christine was born during a shearing assignment on a nearby farm, Achtersteland in 1990 (her parents could not confirm the year of birth) and has one brother, Hendrik. Her father Freek, was one of the members of the shearing team residing at the outspan. Sanna Sors is the daughter of Hendrik Sors and was one of only a few women at the outspan who was an earning member of their *karretjie* unit. She was either assisting in the shearing shed with the sorting of wool or doing domestic work at a neighbouring farm. Christine, together with the other children at the outspan, was also withdrawn from the farm school during 1996.

**Diagram 5.1.6.1 to Diagram 5.1.6.2 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating
Christine's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit
Composition and Dynamics**

5.1.6.1 At the outspan with her mother and father



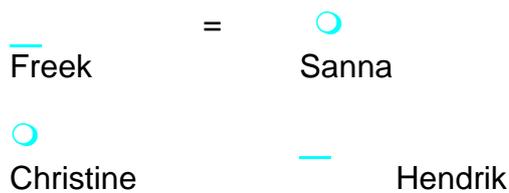
OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where her father and the team were shearing

 ↔ Vlugfontein school in the district

Her parents were of the first families to leave the outspan permanently. Initially Christine and her family settled semi-permanently at the encampment (the so-called squatter camp) near town but dismantled their unit within a few months to reside at a temporary encampment on the opposite side of the road with some other *Karretjie* families. Her mother, Sanna, was employed as a domestic worker. Her father, Freek, is regularly fetched by a farmer to assist on that particular farm; doing chores mostly associated with shearing. He has recently been away to another province on such an

assignment. Christine has been enrolled at the adjacent 'Coloured' Lowryville Primary School since 1998 and seems to be progressing well.

5.1.6.2 At the informal settlement adjacent to Colesberg



Settlement ↔ A farm in the district where her father was working
↔ Lowryville Primary School

Case 5.1.7 Hendrik's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

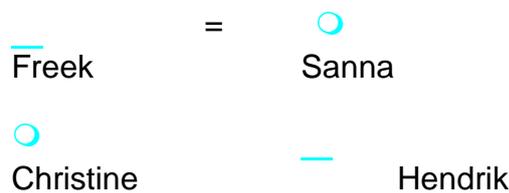
Hendrik was born in 1993 on the farm Klein Klipplaatsfontein while his father was there on a shearing assignment. He is the youngest child of Sanna Sors and Freek Geduld. Of all the children at the outspan he has spent the most time with his father and mother. The times when he was separated from his father was due to farmers in the district who preferred to have only the male shearers without their families, donkeys and carts on their property for the duration of a shearing

Domestic Fluidity

assignment. Although his parents are not legally married and are subjected to the same level of poverty as most of the other units at the outspan, they were never in a situation where Hendrik had to be sent away to live with other kin.

Diagram 5.1.7.1 to Diagram 5.1.7.2 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating Hendrik's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

5.1.7.1 At the outspan with his mother and father

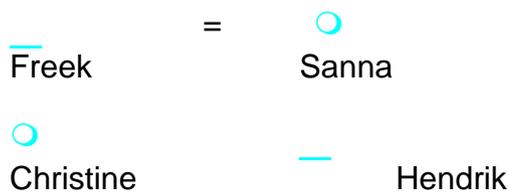


OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where his father and the team were shearing

His family was one of the first to leave the Seacow River Bridge outspan for the informal settlement close to town. Hendrik is also not attending school although his mother intends to enroll him at the

Lowryville Primary School. As is clear from the diagrams, Hendrik's domestic circumstances have been relatively stable.

5.1.7.2 At the informal settlement adjacent to Colesberg



Settlement ↔ A farm in the district where his father was working
↔ Lowryville Primary School

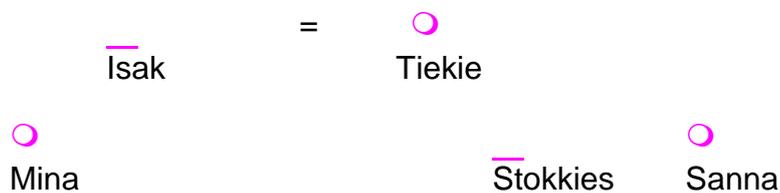
Case 5.1.8 Mina's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Mina was born in 1984 on the farm Excelsior which borders the outspan at the Seacow River Bridge and where she spent most of her life in her parents domestic unit. Her parents are Isak Arnoster and Tiekie Sors. Isak is one of Mieta Ackerman's grandsons as well as one of the senior members of the shearing team residing at the outspan (see Diagram 4.2). During the time that Koot Arnoster was sent to prison, Isak assumed responsibility as the unofficial spokesperson for the shearing team. Mina and her younger brother Stokkies were enrolled, with the other children, at a farm school in the district. When they first arrived at the school they found their new environment

exciting but after a couple of weeks they both ran away mainly because of discrimination against them at school by farm labourers' children. Mina never returned to the school.

**Diagram 5.1.8.1 to Diagram 5.1.8.2 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating
Mina's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit
Composition and Dynamics**

5.1.8.1 At the outspan with her mother and father



OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where her father and the team were shearing

 ↔ Vlugfontein school in the district

After their grandmother Mieta's death they, together with the families at the outspan, moved to the squatter camp adjacent to town. Isak's was the first of the families to lose their donkeys and cart. Initially Mina was enrolled at the Lowryville Primary School but was taken out of school after the first term. Mina, her boyfriend and another friend were incriminated in the illegal slaughtering of a sheep on a nearby farm and were sent to the local prison for four weeks. It was only when officials

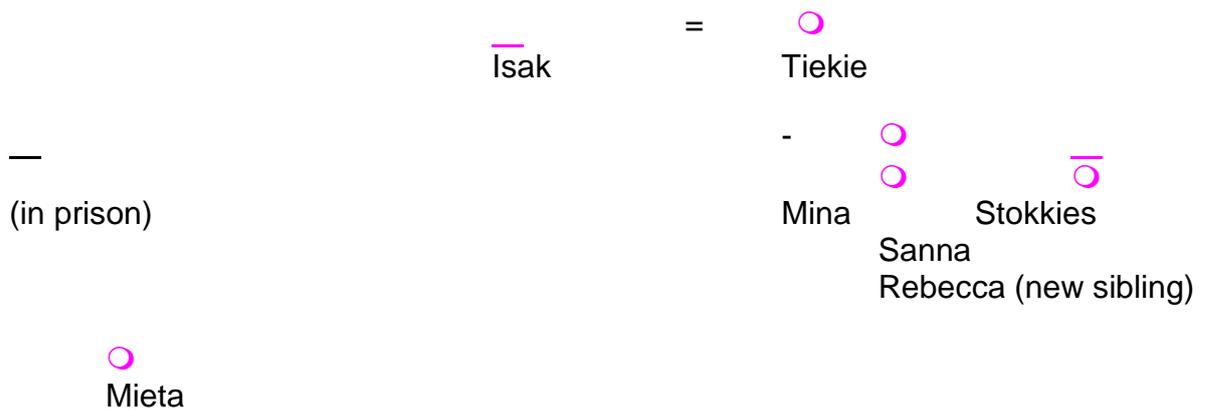
Domestic Fluidity

realised that Mina is underaged that she was released with a warning.

She was also five months pregnant and could no longer attend school.

She is also unemployed.

5.1.8.2 At the informal settlement adjacent to Colesberg



Case 5.1.9 Stokkies' *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Stokkies was born on the same farm as his sister Mina in 1988 . He lived with his mother Tiekie Sors, his father Isak Arnoster and two sisters Mina and Sanna in their domestic unit. Due to the fact that Stokkies' father was one of the senior members of the shearing team, he was often absent from the outspan because a particular farmer would prefer to have only the men working and residing on his farm. During other times Stokkies and the rest of their unit would accompany

Domestic Fluidity

his father on such an assignment. Otherwise, like most of the other children, they moved between the outspan and eight different farms in the vicinity on a regular basis. Whenever the shearing team was shearing at a farm, Stokkies was drawn into the activities, mainly to sweep the floor of the shearing shed. Together with the other children at the outspan, Stokkies was enrolled at the farm school in the district. He too was extremely unhappy and was often involved in fighting with other children attending the school. After eight months he was withdrawn from the school by his parents mainly because he on the one hand was complaining about the poor treatment he received at the school and on the other hand, his teachers complained about him assaulting the farm labourer's children.

**Diagram 5.1.9.1 to Diagram 5.1.9.2 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating
Stokkies' *Karretjie* Domestic Unit
Composition and Dynamics**

5.1.9.1 At the outspan with his mother and father

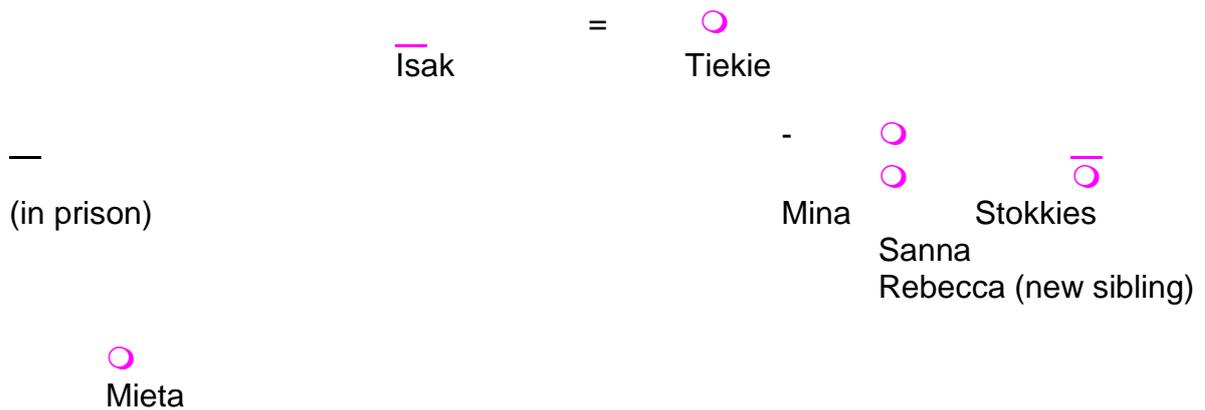


OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where his father and the team were shearing

 ↔ Vlugfontein school in the district

After his grandmother's death, he accompanied his parents to the squatter camp near town. Once again he was enrolled at the Lowryville Primary School. Stokkies did not pass the first grade and against his parents' wishes he never went back to school. He was employed for a few weeks as a gardener at a home where his mother, Tiekie is a domestic worker in the Lowryville residential area. He also often tends to privately owned horses on a piece of land across from the camp where he lives. His father still works actively as a shearer or any other work he can find.

5.1.9.2 At the informal settlement adjacent to Colesberg



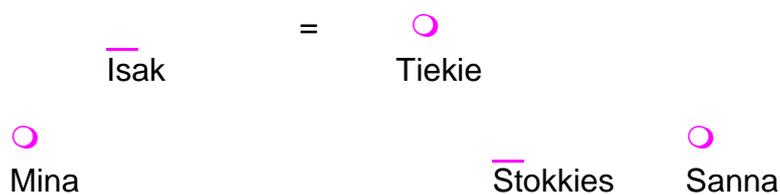
Case 5.1.10 Sanna's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Sanna was born on the outspan in 1990 with the help of a midwife. According to her mother Tiekie Sors and father Isak Arnoster, Tiekie gave birth to Sanna under their *karretjie* under very difficult circumstances. Since her birth, Sanna has been weak and ill. She spent most of her early childhood years in hospital. Her mother accompanied her on a regular basis by train 200 kilometres away to Bloemfontein to receive treatment for a chronic problem with one of her legs. During these times Sanna's brother Stokkies and sister Mina, were left in the care of their father. Whenever their father was

away on a shearing assignment Tiekie would arrange that Sanna's visits to Bloemfontein be postponed in order for her to be with her children.

Diagram 5.1.10.1 to Diagram 5.1.10.2 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating Sanna's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

5.1.10.1 At the outspan with her mother and father



OUTSPAN

↔ Different farms in the district where her father and the team were shearing

↔ Hospital in Bloemfontein

Sanna moved to the informal settlement adjacent to town with her parents when her father lost his mobility due to selling his donkeys and cart. Since 1999 Sanna has been enrolled at the adjacent Lowryville Primary School and is progressing well.

5.1.10.2 At the informal settlement adjacent to Colesberg

Domestic Fluidity



Case 5.1.11 Emma’s *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Emma was born on the farm Sunnydale in the district of Colesberg in 1984. She is also known by her other relatives and friends as ‘*Kaffermeidjie*’ because of her darker complexion. Until 1998 she lived with her mother Koeliemeid, her grandmother Mieta Ackerman and her half sister Grace in her grandmother’s *karretjie* unit at the Seacow River Bridge outspan. Emma’s father is one of Mieta’s sons who died of tuberculosis when Emma was three years old. Since then they have been living with their grandmother. Whenever the men were

offered a shearing opportunity, the *karretjie* unit of Mieta and the other members who were living there would move with all the other units. Their unit was the only one without a male shearer but they preferred to be with kin and not be left isolated at the outspan. Her mother has never been employed but since her grandmother is a pensioner their unit had the most stable income over the years. Like the other children Emma had a history of living temporarily at different farms in the area. She also attended the farm school on the eastern side of the district with the other school-aged children at the outspan. Her grandmother paid for all the children's attendance. Emma failed the first grade and was enrolled for the second time when her grandmother withdrew her from school to rather assist her at the outspan.

**Diagram 5.1.11.1 to Diagram 5.1.11.3 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating
Emma's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit
Composition and Dynamics**

5.1.11.1 At the outspan with her grandmother and mother



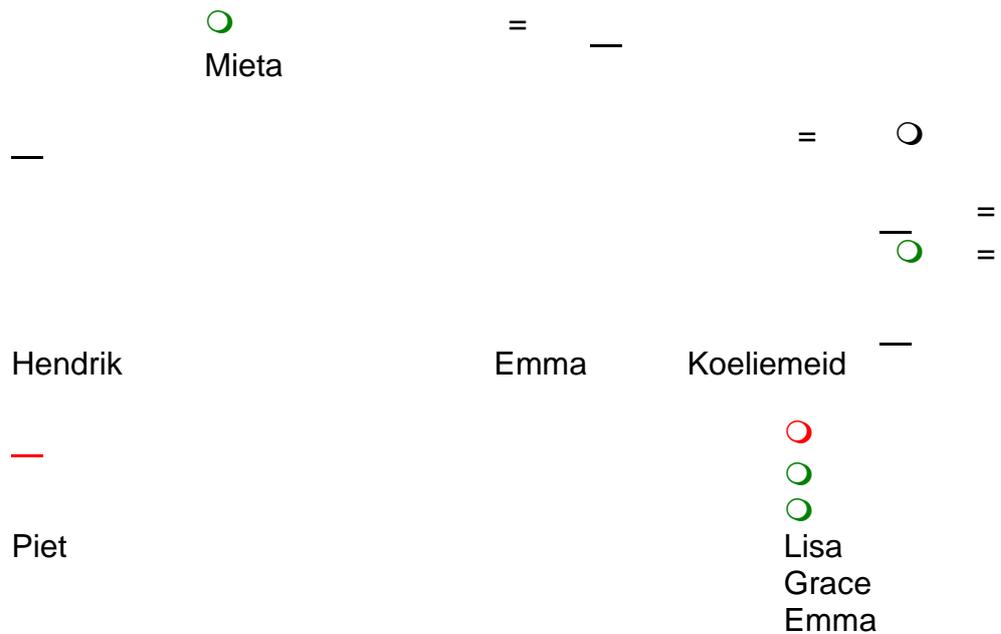
(Note: For some time the Jacobs and Ackerman siblings' residence overlapped.)

OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing

 ↔ Vlugfontein farm in the district

5.1.11.2 At the outspan with her grandmother and mother

Domestic Fluidity



(Note: For some time the Jacobs and Ackerman siblings' residence overlapped.)

OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing

 ↔ Vlugfontein farm in the district

After her grandmother's death, their *karretjie* unit almost immediately disintegrated as a result of no income. Her mother sold the donkeys and cart and moved with Emma to the farm Eerstespoort close to the outspan, where they live in informal housing which the owner of the property made available to them. Towards the end of 1999, Emma however decided to leave her mother and now stays at the farm Excelsior where she works as a domestic or assists in the onion fields.

5.1.11.3 After her grandmother's death with her mother





Case 5.1.12 Grace's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Grace is Emma's half sister and was born in the 1980's on the outspan.

Her father is a labourer in town with whom her mother had

Domestic Fluidity

a very short relationship before the death of Emma's father. Grace lived with her mother, half sister and grandmother at the outspan. She was also sent to school but ran away after three months. Like her cousin, Toek-Toek, she spent most of her time at the outspan looking after their grandmother and helping her mother with domestic chores. Grace was since the age of nine sexually molested by one of the men at the outspan. She became pregnant when she was eleven but lost the baby early in the pregnancy. She only once mentioned to me the name of the adult shearer who harassed her and got her pregnant and admitted that it was one of the reasons why activities at the outspan became increasingly violent especially during weekends when everyone had been drinking. Her mother knew about these incidents and used to get involved in physically fighting with this person. Grace used to travel between the outspan and different farms in the area with her grandmother's cart.

**Diagram 5.1.12.1 to Diagram 5.1.12.3 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating
Grace's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit
Composition and Dynamics**

5.1.12.1 At the outspan with her grandmother and mother



(Note: For some time the Jacobs and Ackerman siblings' residence overlapped.)

OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing

↔ Vlugfontein farm in the district

5.1.12.2 At the outspan with her grandmother and mother

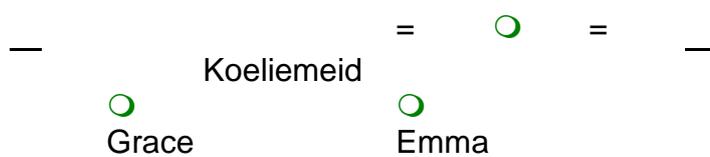


(Note: For some time the Jacobs and Ackerman siblings' residence overlapped.)

OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing
 ↔ Vlugfontein farm in the district

When her grandmother died she initially stayed at the outspan with a young couple in their unit but soon afterwards followed her mother to the farm Eerstepoort where they now live permanently.

5.1.12.3 On a farm in the district of Colesberg with her mother



Farm

↔ Visits to Lowryville outspan

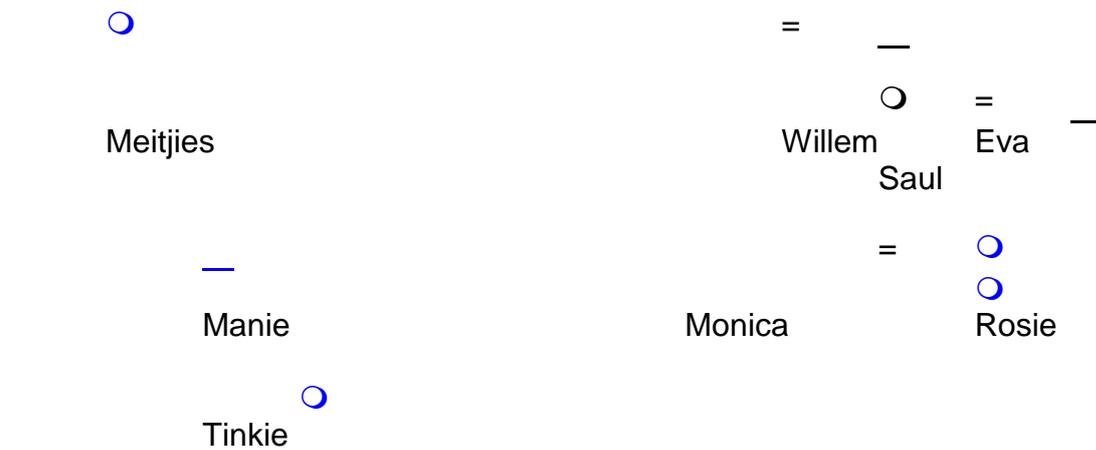
Case 5.1.13 Rosie's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit Composition and Dynamics

Of all the children at the Seacow River Bridge outspan, Rosie was the only adopted one. She was born in Colesberg in 1982 and lived for four years in the Kuyasa black residential area with her parents. Her father was murdered and her mother could not take care of her any longer. During this time Meitjies Verrooi, a distant relative³³ of Rosie's mother decided to adopt her and brought her to the outspan to live with her, her son Manie and later Manie's wife Monica in her *karretjie* unit. Manie was also part of the shearing team and whenever a shearing opportunity arose, the whole unit would accompany him to the farm. During the early years, Rosie still attended the Lowryville Primary School in town and completed Standard 1 or Grade 3. According to Meitjies, Rosie was withdrawn from school because it became increasingly difficult to make arrangements when they had to pack up and travel without her residing with them on a permanent basis. With the exception of two other children residing at the outspan, Rosie is the only one with reading and writing skills.

³³ The nature of this relationship could not be established and is therefore, not indicated on the diagram.

Diagram 5.1.13.1 to Diagram 5.1.13.2 Genealogical Diagrams Indicating
Rosie's *Karretjie* Domestic Unit
Composition and Dynamics

5.1.13.1 At the outspan with her adoptive mother



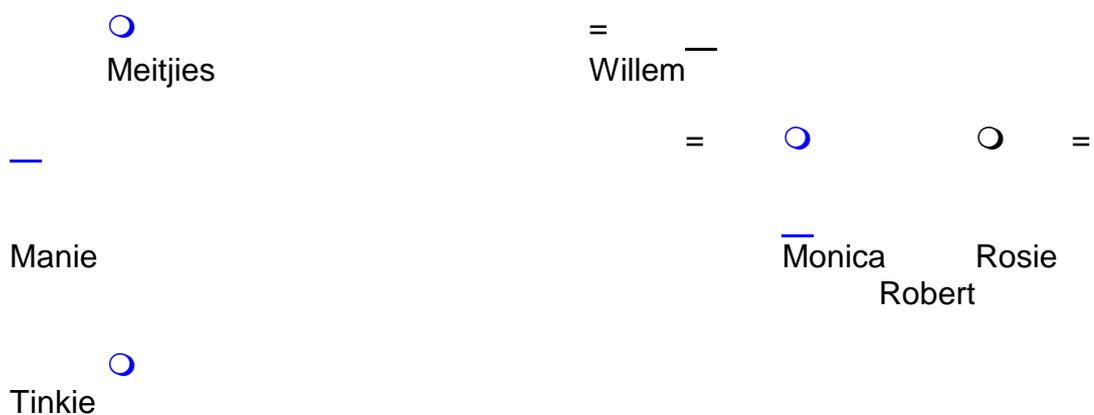
OUTSPAN ↔ Different farms in the district where the men were shearing

↔ Vlugfontein farm in the district

Domestic Fluidity

During 1997 Meitjies and Manie sold their cart and donkeys and moved with Rosie, to the informal settlement outside Colesberg. It was during this time that Rosie and Robert, one of Emma's sons from her first 'marriage' started a relationship. Robert was also one of the shearers at the outspan but in the process had to sell his donkeys. He still has his cart. They soon erected their own shack at the encampment but after a couple of months decided to move back to the outspan at the bridge mainly because of violent acts. Robert does odd-jobs at nearby farms and Rosie often accompanies him during the day. They found it difficult to live at the outspan and are currently back at the informal settlement where she and her husband share a domestic unit with Meitjies, Manie, Monica and their baby.

5.1.13.2 At the informal settlement adjacent to Colesberg after she got married



5.2 Discussion

It is evident that for most of the Karretjie children, their childhood years entail times of great flux and fragmentation, a perpetual process of shifting localities and changing relationships with others and where factors such as poverty, domestic disruption and personal uncertainty are the reality of their lives. As reflected in the genealogical diagrams for each child, they were subjected to continuous domestic change and instability during the research period, and the shifts in kinship and caretaking relationships that such movements caused, are apparent. I will now indicate the domestic fluidity patterns of the children in terms of certain criteria and trends.

- **Movement between outspans, farms and schools**

This tendency has been discussed throughout the dissertation and especially in Chapter 4 and although it ultimately relates to geographical or residential change rather than domestic variability, it involved social adaptation to a new physical and human environment, comprising unfamiliar people and often different kin. Whenever the members of a shearer's *karretjie* unit were permitted by the farmer to accompany and stay with him while on a shearing assignment, the children encountered and developed new social bonds with the people living on a

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particular farm. This entailed new bonds with especially, settled farm labourers' children as potential playmates.

Moving between their temporary semi-permanent homebase outspan and farms in the district did not necessarily imply that the Karretjie group as a whole would shift location. In such instances it meant that children had to leave behind important care-giving individuals. Mieta Ackerman's *karretjie* unit has never consisted of a shearer, hence, travelling (or not) with the rest of the group was sometimes decided upon in terms of other practical requirements such as illness and conflict. Although her *karretjie* unit usually did accompany the others, there were times that the children did not have the benefit of having their grandmother close-by for emotional and financial support and this often resulted in insecurity amongst the children.

Another factor contributing significantly to the children's residential instability and domestic disruption was their movement between the outspan and school. Chapter 6 deals with the children's experiences of schooling and reveals that the separation of children from their parents, siblings and other kin at an outspan was often experienced as traumatic and detrimental to the children's well-being. They were fetched from the outspan at the beginning of each school term and as a result

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only saw their parents during school holidays. The children also found it difficult to form meaningful relationships with farm labourer children who attended the same school.

The entire Seacow River Bridge Karretjie community eventually moved to a settlement adjacent to town known as the *Plakkerskamp* (squatter camp). The first part of the conclusion of the dissertation deals with the Karretjie families sedentary lives and conditions at the new encampment. Many domestic units have lost their mobility because they had to sell their carts and donkeys for financial reasons and could no longer maintain a peripatetic lifestyle due to changing farming practices in the region. Their new settlement mostly comprised residents from other outspans in the district of Colesberg but also squatting families in general. Again here, children had to form new relationships with people resident at the encampment.

· Movement between different *karretjie* units as a result of violence and death of a primary caretaker

The case of the Jacobs siblings reveals that high levels of domestic instability were brought about by the stabbing death of their biological mother, followed by the death of their stepmother. They were instantaneously orphaned in both instances because their father was held responsible for these violent incidences and was sent to prison in a neighbouring town. With the absence of their primary caretaker in both events and their father's subsequent imprisonment (and despite their elder brother's

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caretaking for a while), the children had to eventually abandon their parents' *karretjie* unit. Until he was released from prison after their mother's death and after he went to prison for a second time for the death of their stepmother, the children joined their grandmother's domestic *karretjie* unit which already consisted of five resident members and now totalling nine members.

Similar circumstances prevailed in the Ackerman children's case. The composition of their domestic unit was relatively stable until their father's death. He was killed by their mother during an argument and since he was one of the senior shearers at the outspan their *karretjie* unit's financial base was eliminated with immediate effect by this incident. Soon afterwards they also lost their donkeys and hence their mobility due to the absence of its main earning member. While their mother was awaiting trial the children were incorporated into their grandmother's domestic unit and their time spent there overlapped for a certain period of time with the Jacobs children's stay; its membership effectively numbering eleven residents.

· **Movement into foster care**

Foster care revealed itself on different levels. The aforementioned trend showed that some of the children were placed in the care of their paternal (in the case of the Jacobs siblings) and maternal grandmother (in the case of the Ackerman siblings) for varying periods of time. After spending considerable time in their grandmother's domestic unit, the Jacobs twins were eventually put into foster care with a distant relative. This happened mainly as a result of their grandmother's death and the resultant abandonment of her *karretjie* unit, their father's labour involvement after he was released from prison as well as his eagerness to send them to Colesberg Secondary school in town. Ultimately the reason for placing them in foster care was their father's and other kin's inability to provide adequately for them.

· **Movement as a result of individual agency**

Individual agency also contributed to the domestic mobility of children and mostly when they had reached adolescence. The cases of Lisa Ackerman and Rosie Verrooi revealed that once they had entered into a relationship with a partner, they decided to leave their respective domestic units. Rosie decided to leave her adoptive mother's *karretjie* unit when she became involved with one of the shearers at the outspan. They erected their own domestic unit at the outspan and travelled as an independent unit to shearing assignments. Even after they lost their cart and donkeys and the other families relocated to the encampment adjacent to town, the

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couple decided remain at the outspan. Due to financial constraints and in need of kin support they were the last residents at the Seacow River Bridge outspan who moved to the squatter camp. They stayed here for a period of time in their own domestic unit but eventually again joined her (Rosie's) adoptive mother's unit comprising four resident members.

During the time that Lisa Ackerman's mother was imprisoned she stayed with her grandmother in her *karretjie* unit. Because she was one of the older children at the outspan, her grandmother sent her off to a maternal relative on a neighbouring farm for extended periods of time to alleviate the pressure on her domestic unit's resources. Eventually she entered into a relationship with one of the labourers on a farm where the shearing team used to travel, stay and work. They had a baby soon afterwards. Lisa decided to permanently leave her grandmother's unit and was taken into her partner's home. After her grandmother's death and her mother's release from prison, she ended the relationship which turned abusive and, with her child, moved back to her mother's domestic unit at the encampment³⁴.

³⁴ Chapter 6 reveals other incidences of individual agency when some children decided to leave school.

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The case material presented in this chapter has illustrated that although some of the children at the outspan had relatively stable domestic circumstances (i.e. the Sors and Arnoster siblings), other cases demonstrated extensive movement of children between different *karretjie* and other domestic units. Relative domestic stability can mostly be ascribed to the prolonged presence of, and responsibility taken by both parents in terms of caretaking and nurturing of their children.



CHAPTER 6 CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

Article 10 of the Bill of Rights stemming from South Africa's constitution maintains that "everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected". In a speech a former Minister of Education (Asmal 2000) referred to this article and remarked that

"... the prison of illiteracy is an immediate affront to this right, because language is a vital compass for intellectual navigation, for meaningful movement, within a constitutional order. The State issues its instructions -- and confers its benefits -- in written regulations, statutes and correspondence. Illiteracy, placing citizens outside this world of law, forcing citizens to depend upon third party translators, is almost a form of serfdom".

The Karretjie People and their children were during the initial stages of the research, and are still today, only to a slighter extent, to all intents and purposes illiterate, neither adults nor children ever having had the benefit of schooling or even access to a school. This is due to their history and distinctive lifestyle but also because, to outsiders, including policy-makers, they are an invisible phenomenon.

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Various constraints related to the children's accessibility to formal education can be identified, amongst others, their impoverished and underprivileged circumstances; factors related to their itinerant way of life including mobility patterns, children's support to their families and basic costs associated with schooling; and school related factors such as a curriculum which is sometimes perceived to be not reconcilable to their lifestyle.

6.1 A Brief Outline of Education in South Africa

Since democratisation in the country, national government has restructured the previous 19 education departments into one national and nine provincial education departments. The educational sector currently consists of approximately 12.3 million learners in 28 000 schools with 380 000 educators (Hofmeyr 2001:1). The system comprises almost 390 special needs schools and 1 000 private schools and ranges from grade one to six (primary level) and grade seven to twelve (secondary level) (Garson 2004:1).

According to Garson (2004:1) the last three grades (i.e. 10, 11 and 12) are not compulsory. Illiteracy rates are approximately 30% of persons older than 15 and it is estimated that from 6 to 8 million adults in the country are functionally

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illiterate. One of the main reasons for this backlog is the “liberation now, education later” stance during the apartheid years which created a culture of non-learning in the country (Garson 2004:3).

According to the Development Bank of Southern Africa (1998:45)

“... an education expands the range of options which a person may choose, thus creating opportunities for a fulfilling life. Education and training satisfy the basic need for knowledge and skills. Education also provides a means of meeting basic needs provided that adequate employment opportunities exist, and helps sustain and accelerate overall development”.

In a speech to parliament in a similar vein, the minister provided statistics which, in broad terms, give some idea of the extent of the problem: in South Africa 3.5 million adults over the age of 16 have never attended school; another 2.5 million adults have had some schooling but were ill-taught or lack practice and so have lost their prior ability to read or write. In other words, there are six million South Africans who are excluded from the written word, from the whole universe of creativity and humanity that books hold; and also, logically, from the ordinary, everyday empowerment that the written language gives albeit in jobs, travel, and even constitutionally (cf. Asmal 2000).

Disturbing as such figures and their implications are, they do not include reference to

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children, or to the discrepant *de jure* and *de facto* roles that language plays in certain regions in South Africa today. In general terms they also, obviously, do not reveal the particular dire circumstances of specific communities, nor are they sensitive to the context of some of the truly poorest of the poor South Africans in the central rural areas of the country - the reality of this country's different "geographies of poverty" (cf. De Jongh 2002).

Legislative and educational changes in the decade since the democratic election in 1994 have, furthermore, had an insignificant impact on the children's lives because the Karretjie People lack the necessary mechanisms and resources to secure their educational rights. The reason is twofold: firstly, an itinerant lifestyle and its associated challenges and secondly, the farm school educational system.

6.2 Itinerancy and Schooling

Various factors have affected and impeded the Karretjie children's attendance, albeit regular or sporadic, at school as well as their education in general. These include the consequences of an itinerant lifestyle - high levels of geographical mobility, domestic fluidity and separation from parents and other caregivers.

Case 6.1 Irreconcilability of an Itinerant Lifestyle (and its indirect determinants) and Formal Education

The twins, Simon and Marie started attending school, situated on a farm, together. They were both admitted at an older age than was expected of other children their age. The children's mother and stepmother are deceased. Their father was responsible in each case and was imprisoned after their stepmother's death. Prior to these fateful events, they mostly travelled with their father's *karretjie* unit wherever he was employed as a shearer. Whenever they could not join their father's unit, they stayed behind at the outspan with other relatives. Like most of the other children, the children did not attend school because there were no educational facilities within close range. A joint initiative from teachers, farmers and their grandmother eventually resulted in them attending a farm school about 60 kilometres from their home outspan. They started school as boarders while their father was imprisoned. Many times they were anguished by their negative experiences at school. Due to financial constraints their quarterly school-fees could no longer be paid by their grandmother and they ceased to attend school altogether. When their grandmother died they stayed with relatives at an informal settlement near town and were sent to the 'Coloured' Primary school in close proximity to where they were settled. They were eventually withdrawn from this school due to

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insufficient progress. Detrimental effects associated with their domestic circumstances³⁵, eventually led to the twins being put in foster care close to town. They once again started attending school at the previously 'white' primary school in town. One of the twins has made significant progress and advanced to subsequent grades.

³⁵ The twins' domestic position and circumstances were elaborated on in case study 4.3 and case study 5.1.1

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Numerous factors hindered the twins' attendance at school. Firstly, their father's occupation as a sheep-shearer, often took the family to different and varied locations, which in turn necessitated a flexible lifestyle associated with itinerancy. The proximity of schools within most of these settings were extremely limited. In addition, incessant travelling and residential instability interfered with the children's regular attendance of school. Secondly, poverty levels and violent acts associated with their particular lifestyle as well as unpredictable income, made it very difficult for the twins to attend school consistently. In the third instance, this led to extreme domestic flux for the children because they had to be shifted between different households in order to accommodate changing circumstances. Lastly, the children's separation from parents for extended periods of time with accompanied discrimination at school, resulted in emotional distress which also interfered with their formal education.

As was mentioned earlier, the educational system in South Africa is still prejudiced to a large extent, mainly because of a historical system of inequity and exclusion of certain communities from mainstream services. Education for previously disadvantaged groups, including the Karretjie People, should therefore be, and is, one of national government's main priorities. The Karretjie case, however, requires particular awareness and sensitivity.

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Certain barriers prevent the Karretjie children from accessing their basic right to education and its associated benefits. A peripatetic lifestyle has become increasingly more hazardous for some of these communities. Poverty-induced surrendering of cart and donkeys, for example, and the resultant loss of mobility and the concomitant increase in underemployment result in them being pushed to the fringes of towns and ultimately force them to become part of the squatter problem in South Africa.

Amongst the Karretjie children, schooling of children rarely continues to secondary level, often because of the economic needs of the nuclear or extended family.

Case 6.2 Children as Earning Members of *Karretjie* Units

Piet attended a farm school in the district for two years. He was one of the children at the school who received the lowest marks in his grade. His father is deceased and his mother is unemployed (see case 5.1.4). Other members of Piet's *karretjie* unit include his older sister, who is also unemployed, and her daughter. He explained his frequent absenteeism and eventually withdrawal from school as follows

“Ons het nie genoeg geld vir kos vir ons almal nie. Eers my ouma en toe my ma het besluit ek kan nie meer skool loop nie want ek moet werk soek”.

“We do not have enough money to buy food for everyone. My

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grandmother and eventually my mother decided that I should leave school in order to get employment”.

Piet got part-time work tending to horses at nearby horse stables. Soon after he procured this employment he permanently withdrew from school. The stables are walking distance from their home outspan and Piet starts early in the morning and returns home when he has finished his chores. His duties include curry-combing some of the horses, feeding them and walking with them. Thus, Piet is the only member of his family's *karretjie* unit who generates a regular income (see case 5.1.4). Piet's mother explained that she could no longer afford the four-quarterly school fees, although she would have liked Piet to continue at school.

Piet's case applies to many of the *Karretjie* children. Often, poverty leaves parents no option but to withdraw their children from school. Like many of the other children, Piet would have been withdrawn from school anyway, because his mother could not continue to pay his school-fees.

Although most of the children's parents are illiterate and unemployed for large parts of the annual cycle, they acknowledge the importance of their children acquiring the basic skills of reading and writing. As people who have spent their childhood years and most of their adult lives subject to segregated governance, parents view their

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children as a new generation who should have, at least theoretically, better future prospects.

Many of the children were only introduced to formal education, provided mainly by farm schools in rural areas, in the early 1990s. Furthermore, most have only brief encounters with schooling and with a few exceptions, never learn the skills of reading and writing. Although all South African schools have been theoretically accessible to every child since the advent of democracy, the Karretjie children still have little opportunity to attend schools other than secluded farm schools on a sporadic basis.

In itinerant communities specialised training (such as shearing), informal instruction and other socialisation processes are integral parts of the child's day-to-day activities. While primary education for sedentary communities takes place in the classroom, peripatetic children's education occurs within the household and general community. Itinerant children are integral to the entire social system of which they form part and are evaluated in terms of their individual experience and skills and not in a general category of 'children' (cf. Okely 1975).

According to Okely (1975:77) who studied 'Gypsy' communities in Europe, the nuclear family plays a vital role in the socialisation of the child. She suggests that itinerant children learn by direct participation in various community activities. Children spend most of the day with a parent or substitute parent such as a

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grandmother, and at times take care of other siblings. She observes that

“... children are socialised into adult life and values by long hours of observing and listening to adults’ conversations and exchanges. Inside the trailer they (are) expected to sit quietly, giving priority to the adults. Very few subjects or situations (are) concealed from the young. Parental quarrels, neighbours’ disputes and scandals, financial hardship, arrests, death and violence (are) freely discussed or enacted before them. Children (are) generally entrusted with secrets and given early responsibilities. Used as messengers between families they report back on private discussions” (Okely 1975:77).

Similarly, Liégeois (1998:65) states that the general education of the ‘Gypsy’ child takes place within a collective system. According to him the child’s entire life revolves around the family which represents the basic unit for purposes of social, economic and educational activities. Liégeois (1998:65) maintains that

“[He] lives communally, alongside three or four generations, and his socialisation takes place within this context which assures cohesion, coherence, continuity and security. Generations are neither separated nor opposed; children and adults work together, live together, suffer together”.

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Worldwide, itinerant groups are often illiterate and much emphasis is placed on the oral significance in the acquisition of culture in such communities. Coming from illiterate homes, itinerant children, including Karretjie children do not have access to books and other learning material, or parental help with homework. They are not exposed to a 'culture' or home environment of learning. Parents are also pragmatic in this sense. Their children generally remain uneducated until they decide that it is an essential skill they need to acquire. Until such time they tend to keep their children home in order to assist the family in various ways. Children's help, including minding younger children, fetching water and firewood, etc. is a crucial contribution to the unit and community.

Furthermore, school as a sedentary institution with fixed timetables, an emphasis on group rather than individual activities, including discipline, and subservience to a single authority often contradicts an itinerant lifestyle with an emphasis on flexibility and shared caring and authority. Despite negativity surrounding itinerant children's school attendance in general, parents are mostly in favour of sending their children to school to acquire the skills associated with formal education.

6.3 Farm School Education

Verwoerdian³⁶ apartheid policies were instrumental in establishing farm schools for

³⁶ Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd was South Africa's prime minister from 1958 to 1966 and is often called 'the architect of apartheid'. He became minister of Bantu Affairs in 1950 and introduced the Bantu Education system for blacks in

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black people in the country. There are some 4,600 farm schools in South Africa with enrolments of around 600,000 learners. This is more or less 17 percent of all schools, which implies that one in every five schools in the country is a farm school. Many of the children attending these schools walk long distances to be there and, again in the words of the same, previously cited minister

“... when these children arrive at school it is likely that they will enter a building that is in poor repair. They will probably not have access to clean water to quench their thirst. They will probably find it hard to concentrate on account of poor nutrition. They will have little protection from the weather. They will not be tired from carrying books because they do not have any. The teacher will be struggling to teach children of different grades in one class and without proper learning materials”.

(Asmal, 2000:4)

It is also true, however, on the one hand, that children from the Karretjie context (and their parents) never even had, and often still do not have, access to such imperfect schools. On the other hand, the farm schools in the Karoo district I have been working in do not necessarily conform to the picture painted above. Many of the farm schools in these areas are not only situated on land made available by farmers but have buildings constructed and learning materials available, either due to funds initially advanced by the farmer or procured from provincial authorities through the

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intercession of the landowner or her/his spouse and/or by means of various and continuous fund-raising projects.

In most cases such schools are staffed by dedicated and experienced teachers; and many of the children from farms in the area and from further afield are transported to the school, accommodated, and provided with regular wholesome meals. The 'Verwoerdian ideal' (i.e. apartheid strategy) was said to have been 'a school on every farm' and the rationale 'to stabilise the labour force on farms; maintain the presence of women and children on farms as part of the labour force; and prevent migration from farms to the cities and towns'. But 'the current system with high drop out rates, the critically limited provision at secondary level and the lack of resources to implement an appropriate curriculum has outlived its usefulness even for those parties who had benefited from it in the past' (Education White Paper – 2, 1996:35-36; Asmal, 2000:3).

On the contrary, increasing demand for such schooling, steady growth in enrolment, a better pass-rate than many town and urban equivalents and national recognition and accolades for some of these schools' performance, put a lie to these allegations. Almost without exception the driving force behind such successful enterprises is a single individual (or just a few) who is vocation-driven. The schools are situated on private land but are assisted by subsidies and salaries from official sources, but these are mostly inadequate.

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Graaff and Gordon (1992:208) state that

“... of all black children in South Africa who have been subjected to the notorious Bantu Education system, rural children are simultaneously the most disadvantaged and the most ignored”.

The establishment of farm schools for black children in the country is often seen as a result of severe conflict between farmers and their labour force. Initially, white farmers and black communities living on white-owned land had a sort of patron-client relationship whereby labourers, as sharecroppers, were allowed to farm on the land in exchange for a proportional annual harvest. According to Graaff & Gordon (1992:211-213) the discovery of mineral resources such as gold and diamonds in the 19th century made it increasingly difficult for farmers to acquire an adequate source of labour because it meant that labour requirements now had to be divided between labour on the mines and labour on the farms. In order to overcome conflicting interests of both farmers and mining groups, the then government tried to force labourers off the farms by means of the Masters and Servants Act and pass laws, to become remunerated workers on the mines (Graaff & Gordon 1992:212-213).

The education of black children in rural areas became the responsibility of the state after the Bantu Education Act was introduced in 1953 (Gaganakis and Crewe, 1987: 1). Previously, black children were mostly educated by either missionaries or under the auspices of farmers. The apartheid government of the time encouraged farm

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school education by providing subsidies and equipment to farmers to continue their educational endeavours. In this regard Graaff & Gordon (1992:209) state that the purpose was to take away the responsibility of education from religious institutions and rather make it that of farmers - a situation they consider "unique in the world". Other than this, farmers were prepared to contribute in this way because they wanted at least to have a semi-literate labour force (De V Graaff et al., 1990; Gaganakis and Crewe, 1987; Waldman, 1993).

Two of the major problems associated with the farm school system are that they are situated on private land and the farmer manages the school (so he, as a private individual, decides whether to open a school on his property, or to close it down). Furthermore, although the Department of Education and Training (DET) stipulated in its act of 1979 that "... any person who wishes to provide education for a black person, except at a State or community school, shall apply for registration of a school" (Gaganakis and Crewe, 1987: 4), the matter of school fees was determined by the farmer as school manager.

Since 1994, with a new dispensation in the country, the Department of Education has done little in terms of implementing new incentives as regards farm schools. These schools are still under the control of the farm owner, they provide schooling from grade 1 up to grade 7, and secondary education is mostly not provided. Therefore, because farm schools are part and parcel of the farm context, the socio-political circumstances associated with them, still need to be addressed.

6.4 The Children's Attendance and Experiences of School

The government has already demonstrated its commitment to education through the new constitution by recognising basic education as a fundamental human right. It has furthermore recognised the 'inheritance of inequality' of the previous South African dispensation. Thus it is acknowledged that the distribution of resources for education provision must address the fact that almost half of South African families live in poverty, mainly in rural areas. In so doing the new structure of the school system must ensure an equitable, efficient qualitatively sound and financially sustainable system for all its learners (Education White Paper – 2, 1996: 6). The instruments the government hence intend to employ are designed for, and directed at schools and learners as part of the existing, and known, structure. These instruments are not, however, calibrated to discern potential learners who have never been in the ambit of a school system conceived in a sedentist paradigm, as is the case at hand, the Karretjie children.

National policy guidelines now make provision for new or reformed principles of organisation, governance, capacity building, financing and implementation in or of education, but in every instance exclusively directed at the formal school system. And even where initiatives are directed at actual schools, the premises are sometimes uninformed or preconceived. Farm schools, for example, are now regarded as belonging to one of only two categories of schools, i.e. public schools.

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This category also includes community schools, state schools and state-aided schools (including church schools, mine schools and others) and comprise over 98 percent of the country's primary and secondary schools and 99 percent of school enrolments. The other category, independent schools, comprise all current private and independent schools and account for not quite two percent of primary and secondary schools, and about 1.2 percent of enrolments (Education White Paper – 2, 1996: 8).

The rationale for the public schools category is to ensure that the new organisation breaks with the past and lays a foundation on which a democratically-governed and equitable system of high quality can be built and while the funding will be public, and the property owned by the state, it will represent a partnership between provincial education departments and local communities.

The Northern Cape Province has almost 200 farm schools. The Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for education for this province at the time, has pledged

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since democratisation that rural education is her top priority and that she would attempt to ensure that children attend the nine years of compulsory education (The Teacher 1999:2).

As mentioned earlier, some Karretjie children started, for the first time, to attend some of these schools in the 1990s. The initiative primarily came from farmers or their wives or teachers who run these schools and fetch the children at their own cost from their semi-permanent settings, albeit on outspans or other farms. They provide board and lodging for the children and return them to their 'homes' on weekends or school vacations. At the time of doing this fieldwork the state contributed R98.00 per term (four months of the year) per learner to the schools where most of the data had been gathered (Steyn, 2001). It was clearly in the interest of the farmers and teachers to bolster the numbers of children attending their schools also in terms of the viability and status of such schools.

Although fees in schools, other than private schools, do not legally have to be paid, the level and effects of poverty these people have to endure still make formal education a difficult goal to fulfil. Many Karretjie parents and children also realise that even with school education, the probability of procuring employment with a steady income is remote, especially given the high unemployment rate in the

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country generally. They are quite aware of the fact, having grown up in an environment with few employment opportunities, that even with an education, their life chances might not be improved.

The schools which do provide education for the children are often confronted with a shortage of space and lack of human resources, frequently resulting in combined class teaching. This severely affects the quality of teaching mainly because the individual needs of children are not monitored. Coming from functionally illiterate contexts, the children often require specialised attention in bridging the gap from home environment to school setting.

Teachers also find themselves in difficult circumstances: in addition to the lack of space in classrooms and inadequate equipment to perform their task, they often do not have the background or training for dealing with children who are even more deprived than the farm children they already teach. Teachers therefore have to be innovative and have to make certain adaptations in order to satisfy the children's needs and to ensure that they persevere in their work. In most cases Karretjie children have to repeat their grades and their eventual success primarily depends on the commitment of teachers who provide them with personal and special attention and remedial teaching.

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All schools in the country, whether in urban or rural areas, are supposed to follow the same curriculum (Gaganakis and Crewe, 1987: 19). Given that most Karretjie People function in a particular rural context throughout their lives, the kind of education the children receive is mostly not designed with *their* immediate environment, needs or interests in mind. Although 'Education For All' is a relatively recent development for many groups in the country, the educational framework that applies to the Karretjie children in particular, lacks in flexibility mainly because it was not planned to take cognisance of the context and conditions they find themselves in.

Even though relatively small numbers of Karretjie children initially started to attend school, many of them then dropped out, having mostly completed only two grades, and so leaving school before they attained permanent literacy and numeracy levels. Often children have no option but to leave school due to seasonal parental labour, increased poverty, the fact that children's earnings are needed to supplement family incomes and the discriminatory effects of a continuation of prejudices in many subtle and unsubtle ways against them (cf. Carlson et.al. 1995:103). They also have virtually no access to educational support mechanisms and structures such as libraries and learning centres (and at home) when they leave school and therefore their rudimentary skills in reading and writing deteriorate rapidly.

An important reason for the high drop out rates is thus the perpetuation of discrimination against, and powerlessness of, the children and their parents. Within the school setting, the children's interactions with other children, i.e. those of farm

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labourers, often result in conflict. Children also find themselves in a position of defending their parents and their particular lifestyle on a regular basis. One child recalls his experiences at school

“Dit was winter toe ek vir die eerste keer begin skoolloop het. My pa het my twee komberse gekoop. En nuwe skoene. Na een dag het een van die kinders my komberse afgevat en gesê ek kan maar op die vloer loop slaap. Hulle het ook pouses my pap geëet of uitgesmyt”.

(Stokkies)

“It was winter when I first went to school. My father bought me two blankets to take with me. He also bought me a new pair of shoes. After the first day one of the farm children took my blankets and told me that I must sleep on the floor. Also during mealtimes they took my porridge and ate it or threw it out”. (Stokkies)

Even though the children of farm labourers who attend farm schools also come from impoverished backgrounds with low levels of literacy, the gap between them and Karretjie children is still of much concern, especially to teachers. Abuse is often verbal and by way of physical harassment, and in more subtle ways in the form of low and negative expectations about the children’s abilities to learn. The children, often very painfully, are aware that they are regarded as different and inferior in some or other way.

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The itinerant way of life of many of these communities poses an immense challenge for the national educational system. Although schooling is legally compulsory until Grade 9 (*The Teacher*, 6 January 2000), it seems impossible to reconcile a shifting lifestyle and the consequences of rural poverty with an inflexible schooling system. Many families nowadays opt for a more sedentary lifestyle for various reasons, but even this lifestyle change offers little incentive for children to attend school. As was mentioned before, the reality is that, due to unemployment and the persistent financial constraints in a domestic unit, children are often left no option but to leave school and contribute to the income of their parents' unit.

According to Liégeois (1998:65)

“... the (Gypsy) child's education is collective. He lives communally, alongside three or four generations, and his socialisation takes place within this context which assures cohesion, coherence, continuity and security. Generations are neither separated nor opposed; children and adults work together, live together, suffer together”.

Although the Karretjie family retains considerable responsibility for the education of children, the introduction of formal education for Karretjie children, provided by especially farm schools, has consigned part of this responsibility to these schools, and with far-reaching consequences, particularly of a practical nature. The effects of poor living and material conditions are suffered by the children, impeding their

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educational development and opportunities.

Formal education remains a limited development for the Karretjie children and obstacles to progress are due to the special demands of “traveller education” (Reiss 1975). Education is often seen by the larger community as a means of eliminating illiteracy, familiarising Karretjie children with broader societal values, and eventually enabling them to get jobs and better themselves financially. However, despite efforts to integrate Karretjie children into the farm school system, this does not seem to be successful. Coming from non-literate homes, Karretjie children do not have access to books or parental help with schoolwork or the advantage of a 'learning environment'. The skills that the Karretjie child does develop, which include minding younger siblings, participation in the economic life of the Karretjie unit and adaptation to changing circumstances and environments, are seen as of little positive value at school.

In essence, the Karretjie children's socio-economic environment influences their schooling in several ways. Poverty, powerlessness and insecurity are characteristic of their lives and have a marked impact on their schooling. Karretjie parents have a total lack of involvement in the surroundings or the schools that their children attend. Furthermore, poor health and malnutrition are related to poor academic performance.

As was referred to before, attendance at school also exposes the children to broader

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community prejudice, abuse and assault by other children. Formal education has furthermore, already started to create friction between different Karretjie generations. Additional practical problems such as school transport and school fees have the effect of deterring children and parents from being more positively inclined to schooling.

As was mentioned earlier, until the early 1990's almost all the Karretjie People were illiterate having never had the benefit of schooling or even access to a school. Since then the children have started attending farm schools in the area. The farmers or farmers' wives who run these schools, fetch the children at the outspans, provide board and lodging for them by means of government subsidy and return them to their Karretjie homes on Friday afternoons or, depending on the particular school, only for school holidays. The farm school system which is under the joint control of white property-owners and the state, which provide a subsidy per semester per learner, is neither designed nor geared for a nomadic people with characteristic patterns of late starting, irregularity of attendance, seasonal parental labour involvement and premature withdrawal to participate in family activities.

The Karretjie children from the Seacow River Bridge outspan started attending a farm school in the district in January 1995. The school started out with 17 children in 1987 but currently number more than 170 learners from 25 farms in the district. Approximately 120 children including the Karretjie children, resided in an dilapidated shed situated on the farm. A boarding fee of R75.00 per term was subsidised by the

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state and children were allowed to go home once during each term. Due to limited funding by the state, teaching materials and educational equipment were extremely rudimentary. Learners were in mixed classes because of staff shortages and often children had to share desks and other apparatus.

A neighbouring (to the outspan) farmer's daughter is one of the teachers at this school and as a result of her initiative, the farmer took them on Monday morning to town from where she transported them to the school on the other side of the district. This school is situated 64 kilometres from the outspan, had 138 learners during the time of fieldwork, 5 teachers and offered only primary schooling. The class I attended regularly³⁷ constituted a combined Sub A and B (Grade 1 and 2) class consisting of 43 learners of which 6 Karretjie children from the Seacow River Bridge outspan. Their ages range between 7 and 13 years and the policy is that anyone under the age of 18 years is allowed to enrol.

A typical school day starts at 8h00 and continues until 14h00. However, depending on transport arrangements, some learners only arrive after school has already started. Besides tutoring and written exercises, the day also includes readings from the Bible and prayers. Interruption and disturbance occurred regularly and children often left the classroom. Children were taught basic arithmetic and the alphabet as well as limited writing, mostly copying the letters of the alphabet. I have not

³⁷ This class was attended because the Karretjie children involved in the school were enrolled in Sub A (Grade 1) and many had to repeat the year. Some have progressed beyond Grade 1 to Sub B (grade 2).

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encountered any independent reading by the children from this class. Only from Standard 1 (Grade 3) onwards did children engage in subjects such as English, Afrikaans, Mathematics, Geography, History and Science.

Two rooms provided separate accommodation for the girls and boys who are housed at the school. Breakfast was served at 10h00 during the school break in the morning and consisted of porridge, bread with peanut butter and coffee. At 13h00 in the afternoon lunch was served by a farm labourer's wife. One of the teachers at the school was always present to supervise activities. There were not enough plates for the porridge and milk and children often shared. Boys received more food than girls i.e. one cup of porridge and one cup of milk while girls got three

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quarters of each. Supper was the same as lunch, but sometimes included protein provided by the farm owner.

Diagram 6.1 Daily School Routine³⁸

7h00 to 8h00	Arrival at school
8h00 to 8h30	Scripture and prayer
8h30 to 10h00	Subject teaching
10h00 to 11h00	Breakfast and play
11h00 to 13h00	Subject teaching and story reading
13h00 to 14h00	Lunch and free time
14h00 to 16h00	Homework

A new school has since been erected on this farm with financial aid from the Independent Development Trust (IDT). It has five classrooms and five teaching members of staff. The teachers are also involved as facilitators in an adult literacy and training project for the Karretjie People as well as farm labourers in the district.

³⁸ Adopted from the school's timetable.



Photograph 6.1 Farm school

All the Karretjie children were withdrawn from the school during January 1997. All of them failed the first grade. Many parents withdraw their children from school because “every now and then they have to pay for something”. The perception is that school is not necessarily a bad thing but that you never know what to expect and for that reason the system is failing them.

Due to an adult education program³⁹, the adults at some of the outspans had started to receive tuition which included a literacy curriculum, practical and skills training as well as guidelines and procedures for health-care, child-care, parental responsibility

³⁹ Data generated during fieldwork provided the groundwork for the planning and design of a project, *Initiating Sustainable Development: Primary Health Care and Education for the Karretjie People* in 1995. Apart from my involvement, eight facilitators from the community were selected to participate in the project.

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and hygiene. Some of the children that dropped out of the farm schools for practical reasons and often because other children discriminate against them, also participated in this education program where they were provided with a similar holistic educational orientation but with greater emphasis on basic skills and literacy.

6.5 Parental and Teachers' Attitudes Towards Formal Education

As regards socialisation, and in particular informal instruction processes, Karretjie parents are extremely supportive of their children. Most of the parents, despite the previously mentioned negative experiences of their children, are anxious for them to attend school and want education for them, especially the skills of reading and writing so that they can get a *sit* job (sitting down - clerical work) instead of a *staan* job (standing up - shearing). It is evident that education creates a gap between the new generation and the older, but parents often say that they want their children to settle down and have proper housing and facilities.

Most parents expressed the same sentiments with regard to formal education. One mother conveyed the following feelings:

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“Ek wil hê my kinders moet gelerendheid kry. Hulle moet kan leer lees en skryf sodat hulle ook eendag ‘n ordentlike werk kan bekom. Ek het nooit my gelerendheid gekry nie daarom moet hulle van kleins af skool loop. Kyk hoe sukkel ons want niemand kry werk nie”. (Tiekie)

“I want my children to have an education. They should learn how to read and write in order to get good employment. I never got an education en therefore they should attend school early on. We suffer because nobody gets work”. (Tiekie)

Some parents however, admit that the schooling of their children might and does interfere with their mobile way of life and that the children who do attend school are changed by the experience and often become critical of certain aspects of the itinerant way of life and even of their own parents' behaviour. Parents also claim that children are expected to support their families, either financially, practically or socially, and therefore schooling interferes with their particular lifestyle.

Many parents are not really knowledgeable about their children in the farm school. This is often the result of a communication breakdown between authorities and parents. Often mothers claimed that they did not know in which standard their children were because they had not been told and that they did not know what their children did at school because they had never enquired.

According to teachers at the farm school Karretjie children often displayed

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undesirable behaviour and attitudes, such as demanding attention, hyperactivity, aggressiveness, poor concentration and underachievement, often being untidy and uncared for, having feelings of insecurity and being troublesome in class and on the playground.

Teachers at the school expressed many other difficulties related to the teaching of Karretjie children. Late start of attendance was one of the main concerns and together with lack of continuity, teaching staff viewed progress as an almost impossible task. They also reported on the likelihood of premature withdrawal of children by their parents and the difficulty in getting children to attend school at all.

One teacher explained it as follows

“As ons nie self seker maak dat Karretjie kinders tot by die skool kom nie, dan kan jy vergeet dat hulle hoegenaamd skool toe kom. Hulle ouers het nie daardie dissipline om hulle kinders gereeld skool toe te stuur nie. Baie van hulle beseft nie die verantwoordelikheid wat daarmee gepaard gaan nie”.

“If we don't see to it that Karretjie children get to the school, they will not attend school at all. Their parents do not have the discipline to send their children to school on a regular basis. Many parents do not realise the responsibility attached to formal education”.

Deficiency in education and literacy in the children's home background also

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presented major obstacles to teachers and many reported on low concentration spans and low academic prospects. Problems of adaptation to the school and classroom environment which result from their itinerant lifestyle and from belonging to a stigmatised community also contributed to problematic learning. Karretjie children were also perceived as insecure and having troubled relationships with other school children i.e. farm labourers' children, and teachers. These 'problems' singled the Karretjie children out as 'different' from other school-going children.

Case 6.3 Discrimination at School

Toek-Toek was enrolled at the farm school at Vlugfontein for R7,00 a term which his grandmother paid. Although most of the children had problems adapting to the school context, Toek-Toek was often treated by the other children as mentally retarded. When he was a child he fell from his father's donkey and suffered head injuries. He had difficulty concentrating in the class and was often the victim of harassment by other children. Teachers often complained that he disturbed the normal functioning of classes and even suggested that he was retarded and should rather attend a special needs school. He was a boarder at the school and related how other children defecated on his blankets which his father bought with hard-earned money. Toek-Toek twice ran away during the night from the school and eventually his grandmother decided that he should return to the outspan

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permanently. Amongst others, she could no longer stand the way he had been treated.

The development of trust seemed to be another major barrier to progress. A teacher at one of the farm schools responded by saying

“... wanneer ‘n Karretjie kind vir die eerste keer skool toe kom is die plek vir hom baie vreemd van die gehuggie en die lewe langs die pad waaraan hy gewoon is. Voordat jy kan begin om so ‘n kind te leer moet jy eers sy selfvertroue wen”.

“... when a Karretjie child first comes to school the place seems very strange to him after life in a shack and on the road. Before you can think of teaching such a child, the child's confidence must be gained”.

During a European Conference held at Carcassonne in France which dealt with the education of ‘Gypsy’ and other itinerant children the following principles

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were suggested (cf. The Proceedings of a Conference Organised by the *Centre for Gypsy Research* at the Université René Descartes, Paris, 1993:149)

“We must create a school system adapted to our children’s needs and establish strategies to obtain a high level of instruction ... by means of the production of specific learning materials, less rigid daily and yearly timetables, the establishment of a new assessment system appropriate to the child’s intellectual development ... school should be a place where the child can reinforce his culture, his identity and the characteristics of his own group”.

The ways in which trust can be built include meeting the Karretjie child in his/her own environment, at the outspan and the family's Karretjie unit and allowing him/her to experience the school building and grounds before school attendance starts. The literacy and skills programme (known as SALT, i.e. skills and literacy training) mentioned earlier, proved to be very useful in this regard. Most of the Karretjie participants in the project seemed comfortable and eager to learn and participate in educational activities at the outspan. Non-formal educational intervention might be more effective than attempts to integrate the Karretjie children into a formal educational system which for the reasons stated, cannot meet their needs.

6.6 Mobile Education for Karretjie Communities

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Karretjie children and their families do encounter the proximity of schools during their travels. However, a couple of days and/or weeks near a town or farm with schooling facilities, hardly comprises sufficient access to formal education. With a view to progressive empowerment and upliftment, a comprehensive education programme was initiated in the district of Colesberg some years ago in an endeavour to facilitate a sustainable process for the provision of holistic education and development for the Karretjie People. By bringing basic skills to, and developing a positive value system within this community, a significant contribution was envisaged to enable particularly the adults to compete socio-economically in a more equitable manner and to improve their quality of life.

The programme included a literacy curriculum, practical and skills training as well as guidelines and procedures for health care, childcare, parental responsibility and hygiene. Portable educational facilities or “schools on wheels” (cf. Reiss 1975:120) were taken to the Karretjie People at the various outspans, but given the mobility and fluidity patterns of individuals and *karretjie* units, especially the absence of the adult males as shearers, it soon became clear that careful planning and constant innovation and adaptation of the instructional process was essential.



Photograph 6.2 Adult education

The project was implemented in two stages:

- communication, orientation and sensitisation, and

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- intensive instruction and tuition.

Given the fact that introduction and implementation of the programme had to be gradual, systematic and coordinated in order to be meaningful and also lasting and not disruptive, it was envisaged that the first stage should run for at least

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three months and the second stage for twelve to fifteen months. This latter stage was furthermore designed to set in motion a self-sustaining process.

The stage of *communication, orientation and sensitisation* was directed at the Karretjie community at large but also at farmers and key individuals and officials from the ranks of organised agriculture, the local government, political groupings, the clergy and health care. This stage served to explain the project's nature and aims and to gain the support and co-operation of all pivotal individuals and organisations. The need and strategy for introducing basic educational and health care values was explained, discussed and negotiated with all involved. This stage further served as a planning, orientation and training period for the teachers and facilitators to be employed in the project. The community facilitators had been strategically identified from their ranks and likewise had to undergo training.

The stage of *intensive instruction and tuition* embraced exclusively the Karretjie community and was designed to accommodate both adults and children. The programme for the adults (mainly females because of the frequent absence of the males who spend long hours in the shearing shed or doing other farm work), as was mentioned earlier, was designed to provide basic literacy and numeracy as well as fundamental, sustainable and transferable guidelines and procedures for child-care, parental responsibility, family planning, health care, dietetics and

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hygiene. The children from ages seven to sixteen received a similarly holistic educational orientation but with more specific emphasis on basic literacy and skills.

Given the itinerancy of the community, the initiatives and processes of the outreach programme had a dual focus. On the one hand, activities were concentrated at those outspans frequented on a regular basis by the largest number of Karretjie families. On the other hand, the more suitable facilities of a centrally located farm school were used in order to accommodate larger and combined groups for the purpose of discussions, interaction and tuition. In the case of the outspans, collapsible and portable basic equipment, in addition to the usual teaching aids, were taken to the people and in the case of the farm school, the participants were ferried to the central facility.

As the programme has now run its course a formal evaluation was done, and a number of practical and ethical issues emerged, many of which should serve as guidelines for future endeavours. Of equal importance, the circumstances of the Karretjie People have been subjected to continual change, particularly as regards the variables and external factors which impinge upon them.

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- A development initiative such as this entails a huge ethical responsibility - education for example will result in an irreversible change in lifestyle for the Karretjie People.
- Should a considerable budget be readily available one may be tempted to 'throw enough money at it hoping the problem will go away'.
- Although the adults are generally positively inclined as regards education for their children, the advent of such education has already produced friction between the newly-created 'different worlds' of the older and younger generation.
- Some members of the farming community perceive these initiatives as unimaginable because those 'Bushmen' are 'uneducable' or if you do give them some education you will 'spoil' them and the net result will be that the farmers will 'lose' their shearers.
- Unemployment, in the district and the country, is such that the additional skills will create expectations that could lead to frustration.

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- The preconditioned mind set of the wider community is such that they find it difficult to contemplate accommodating the 'new' Karretjie People in 'their' world.
- An itinerant community such as the Karretjie People occupies a particularly sensitive and vulnerable socio-economic niche and by virtue of their position of almost complete dependency run the risk of losing what little they have.

In more practical terms:

- A possible consideration to take 'the Karretjie People to the facilities', instead of the facilities to the outspans, could have far-reaching implications (thus far, mainly for logistical reasons, the facilitators have provided the teaching and instruction at the outspans, but it is impossible to provide infrastructure of the same standard 'on the run' as it were, as is possible at a fixed place).
 - given the fluidity of the *karretjie* unit, and especially the fact of the regular absence of the adult males as shearers, the further absence of adults for tuition and instructional purposes would need to be carefully planned.
 - even if the *karretjie* moves as a unit to the educational facility the regular shearing cycle has to be kept in mind, particularly as outspans are selected for strategic reasons in order to take maximum advantage

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of shearing opportunities.

- in all cases the supervision and care of the children, in the absence of some of the adults, remains a priority.

- The movements of the *karretjie* units are not always predictable and a schedule with regular tuition sessions is ill-suited for their pattern of activities.

- The suitability, also in practical terms, of the instructional strategy and content, is unpredictable and uncertain as there is no similar precedent. The facilitators and teachers had to improvise on a weekly basis and much benefit shall eventually be gained from their individual experiences and insights.

- Even if the *karretjie* moves as a unit to the educational facility the regular shearing cycle has to be kept in mind, particularly as outspans are selected for strategic reasons in order to take maximum advantage of shearing

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opportunities. In all cases supervision and care of the small children, in the absence of some of the adults, remains a priority (cf. De Jongh & Steyn 1998(a)).

The Karretjie example suggests that only through case- and context-specific data which stem from participatory research, can the required sensitivity and understanding of problems of rural poverty and educational needs be developed. Sound macro policies can only be designed by development organisations and different sectors and levels of government if such recent and 'dense data' of not only the 'different geographies of poverty' but also of pockets of 'invisible educationless people' such as have been depicted here, are utilised in order to ensure that those who initiate programmes are aware of not only the extent and nature of the problem, but also who the people really are, exactly where and how they live (cf. De Jongh & Steyn 1998(a); 2006).



CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Contemporary Developments

Despite the fact that they regard the philosophy and lifestyle of an itinerant as one of their core values, a significant number of Karretjie People sooner or later reach a stage when they contemplate an alternative lifestyle. Most of them have a history of at least temporary sedentism as labourers living on farms. Although circumstances more often than not, necessitated them to make such changes, the development and exploitation of a peripatetic niche in the agricultural economy was by and large their own doing. They are however realistic about the difficulties associated with an itinerant lifestyle and when the opportunity presents itself they usually seriously contemplate such a possibility.

In recent years an itinerant lifestyle has become increasingly more difficult for Karretjie communities. During the initial stages of fieldwork some sections of the local population discouraged research involvement with the Karretjie People because they were perceived to be a “dying race” or a “dying breed”. Given their dire circumstances and abject poverty, the opposite was actually true. Although some of them were ‘disappearing’ in the sense of becoming squatters around the town of Colesberg (and other Karoo towns), their numbers in general were increasing and their circumstances deteriorated even more.

Since 1999 a number of Karretjie families in the Colesberg district have settled near

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town in response to various factors, both internal and external to their lives. Although factors inherent in their lifestyle have had a major influence on the decision-making of the Karretjie People, economic and social factors beyond their control generally forced them to give up their itinerant and flexible lifestyle for a more sedentary lifestyle with its own associated problems.

An encampment one kilometre west of the N1 national road and opposite the 'Coloured' township of Lowryville, was set aside by the local municipal council for squatting families. This so-called *Plakkerskamp* (squatter camp) was not planned or intended in the first instance to assist Karretjie People; it was to provide some accommodation for families in need and who had begun squatting in the area at any rate and some of whom had a short history of itinerancy. The area was fenced off and very limited in terms of the amount of open space. Some 39 families resided at this encampment. On the opposite side of the road to the 'squatter camp' another encampment developed where 17 families settled on a piece of vacant land in close proximity to the Lowryville residential area. They have since been relocated to the *Plakkerskamp*.

Living conditions in this encampment are extremely poor, primarily due to the lack of basic amenities. It has a single water point, no electricity, refuse collection and suitable toilet facilities. Water is often obtained from nearby houses in Lowryville and service stations in town. Many of the occupants of the encampment are the Karretjie families and their children from the Seacow River Bridge outspan and even though

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many have lost their carts and donkeys, they still identify themselves as Karretjie People. Having lost their mobility, many families considered this site their permanent home.

There had been strong opposition from the neighbouring residents of Lowryville to the occupation of this area mainly because of fear of negative influences on the neighbourhood due to excessive drinking, begging and criminal acts. The Karretjie adults have a long history of heavy drinking especially over weekends, and most of their meagre income goes towards the buying of alcoholic beverages, especially due to the convenience (as opposed to living at the outspan) of having liquor sales outlets nearby. The frequent and heavy drinking is often, by their own admission, a response to, and connected with boredom and insecurity i.e. a form of escapism from the harsh realities of their lives.

A major impetus in the Karretjie families leaving the Seacow River Bridge outspan was due to changes at a nearby, extensive and predominantly sheep-farming unit⁴⁰. Most of the property, including the livestock, was sold and converted into a game-farming unit requiring less labourers and with different skills. While the Karretjie men are generally recognised as the best shearers in the district, this event effectively put the shearers at the outspan out of work for a significant part of the year because this farm (and eventually some other farms) was one of their major, regular

⁴⁰ Other farmers in the district also, eventually, converted to less labour-intensive farming.

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shearing assignment destinations.

Initially the adult men were called on to assist with the game-fencing of the property but soon afterwards their services were no longer required. Another change that affected the Karretjie People's position was amongst others, in the agricultural economy of the area; a gradual change from wool (Merino) to a more meat-oriented (Dorper) farming industry occurred (as a result of farmers' response to market forces).

Residence at the Seacow River Bridge outspan offered many opportunities in this regard because the above-mentioned farmer (and other local farmers in a similar position) was one of the most affluent in the Karoo and owned between 20 000 and 25 000 sheep. He made use exclusively of the shearing team at the Seacow River Bridge outspan. For almost eight months of the year, during the shearing season, they hence had an income to support their families. The farming community in general, recognises the value of these men as shearers, but they were, and still are not prepared or obliged to accept any responsibility for them or their families.

The attitude of the settled, but especially farming community, towards Karretjie People has furthermore mostly been one of suspicion and distrust, and petty theft amongst others, often brought the two groups in conflict. Although the Seacow River Bridge outspan was situated on neutral land, it was adjacent to the property of a farmer who had always been reluctant to 'permit' the Karretjie People to reside at the

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outspan. Numerous attempts were in the past made by him and police officials to evict them, and they often also tried by means of false information, to persuade them to leave the outspan for good. Over a period of time this kind of intimidation and antipathy (triggered by amongst others, a sheep-stealing incident) and the resultant deteriorating relationships, inevitably led to them leaving the outspan.

The death of the old matriarch of the community at this outspan, Mieta Ackerman, was another contributing factor finally forcing the various families to leave. The families that were originally resident at the outspan were all related to her in some or other way (see genealogical diagrams, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Mieta Ackerman was born in 1910 and would often recount memories of her childhood with her itinerant parents and siblings. She was during the initial stages of this study already receiving a monthly old-age grant. The amount was increased from R280.00 to R380.00 per month over the years and had to be collected in person at the magistrate's office in town on the 15th of every month. This income provided an indirect but significant and regular contribution to the communal income of the residents at the outspan. She used to exercise considerable authority over her children and especially grandchildren and provided for six of the children's quarterly tuition, school clothing, shoes and blankets.

The individuals comprising Mieta Ackerman's *karretjie* unit dispersed shortly after her death and funeral (see genealogical diagrams, Chapter 5). Her daughter-in-law and two granddaughters sold the donkeys and cart and moved permanently to a

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neighbouring farm. After a few months all the other families left the outspan and moved to the encampment outside town. Some of her grandchildren who attended one of the farm schools in the district were, as a direct consequence of her death, withdrawn from school mainly because the attendance fee could no longer be afforded by other members of their kin network.

The change from an itinerant to a more sedentary lifestyle was also the result of internal, rational decision-making on the part of this Karretjie community (although also, naturally, influenced by the reality of their circumstances). Many families indicated that the closer proximity to facilities such as shops , schools, the medical clinic and hospital in the case of an emergency, offered more security and better opportunities. There were also indications that housing would be provided in the future. The *karretjie* units, with one exception, have lost their mobility because they had to sell their carts and donkeys for mere survival purposes or some simply fell into complete disrepair.

At the encampment, the men remain almost constantly available whenever a shearing opportunity or any other employment opportunity arise. The farming community of the district, and some even as far as the Free State and Western Cape Provinces, often need the services of especially the men and older boys. Frequently without prior notice, they are fetched by truck at the encampment and spend as long as five months away from their families. As was mentioned earlier, increasingly many farmers preferred to have only the men on their property to avoid perceived

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problems. More often than not however, the result was not that the Karretjie men experienced a significant improvement in employment opportunities.

Only two adult Karretjie women were employed as domestic workers in the adjacent Lowryville residential area. They worked five days a week and earned from R150.00 to R180.00 per month. The task of childcaring increasingly became the responsibility of older siblings and often fathers, when they were not engaged in labour practices. Of the fourteen children previously from the outspan, nine were enrolled at either a farm school or the Lowryville Primary School. Eventually only four children remained in school. Ultimately, adaptation to their new environment has left many Karretjie People with a sense of isolation and loneliness. Family members spend less time together than in the past and the sense of 'community' is gradually fading.

7.2 Summary of the Findings

All the Karretjie children who participated in the study were born into an itinerant way of living. The introduction of the key participating children in the study has delineated the main objective, namely to examine and document the itinerant and unstable lives of the Karretjie children of the district of Colesberg of South Africa's Great Karoo region. A historical perspective as well as an investigation of the particular lifestyle of the Karretjie People contextualised their position within the larger South African domain. This has set the backdrop to the rest of the study i.e. to determine how factors such as high levels of geographical mobility and domestic flux

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impacted on the children's lives, albeit at their *karretjie* homes, on farms or at school.

The presentation of empirical data focused on a description of outspans, and in particular the Seacow River Bridge outspan, access to facilities as well as an overview of everyday life and activities of the children. Furthermore, a discussion of the children's relationships across generations, their labour involvement as well as their experiences of, and endurance of violent and criminal acts, have been pursued. Information contained in these sections of the dissertation has been used to examine and analyse the children's domestic histories by giving a description of each child's domestic circumstances. Lastly, the children's attendance and experiences of formal schooling were considered, and in particular the incompatibility of formal education and a peripatetic lifestyle has been highlighted. Apart from an overview of formal education in South Africa, and in particular the ways in which it pertains to farm schools, parental attitudes and a mobile schooling initiative have been discussed.

I have adopted the methodological strategy of intensive open-ended interviewing and as wide a spectrum of research participants as possible were included. For various reasons, the children living semi-permanently at the Seacow River Bridge outspan became the principal (but not exclusive) participants in the study. Individual as well as group interviews and discussions formed part of the methodological strategy. Participant observation was done wherever possible but confirmed, especially as regards the Karretjie adults and their children, that true participant

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observation seemed impossible. But, it was possible to develop sensitivity for their dire circumstances, to sympathise and empathise with them, because progressively my life was profoundly touched by theirs. Observation as such was used to good effect to record the children's activities, especially at outspans, during travelling, on farms and at schools.

As members of South African society, the children are deprived of some of their fundamental rights (see Appendix C) such as access to formal education and other primary services. Itinerancy and domestic flux are central themes in the lives of the children and were therefore (accompanied by the topic of childhood) used to formulate a theoretical framework in order to analyse data obtained during fieldwork. The study also considered the position of childhood within the subject of anthropology. It expanded on local research with, and literature on children. It explored the ways in which Karretjie children construct their lives as well as how forces beyond their control influenced their lifeways. Lastly, the dissertation endeavoured to give a 'voice' to Karretjie children Karoo-wide.

The above-mentioned objectives manifested themselves in three problem areas to be examined in the dissertation. The first area was the interconnectedness between spatial mobility and a peripatetic, itinerant lifestyle. The study has demonstrated that the unpredictable nature of an itinerant lifestyle accompanied by seasonal variability, created singular circumstances and challenges for the children growing up within these communities.

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The study has established that high levels of spatial mobility and domestic fluidity, could best be described within the theoretical ambit of a peripatetic niche. Because they are landless and do not have easy access to land, the Karretjie People's primary resource base lies in the clientele beyond their own community to whom they render their specialised service. Therefore, Karretjie families are dependent on communities other than their own for food resources.

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Sheep-shearing is the adult Karretjie males' specialised workmanship and this skill they offer to the sedentary farming community whenever required. This specific service is unique in the sense that farmers are unable and/or will not perform this specialised task. As a group of specialists they can be regarded as both integral and peripheral to the wider community and therefore they occupy and exploit a particular economic and social niche. This in turn, necessitates high levels of spatial mobility and domestic flexibility.

Economic survival can be regarded as one of the main reasons for the Karretjie families' continuous spatial mobility. For them the donkey cart unit is their shifting home. At outspans or other locations near a farm where the men are shearing, the donkey cart becomes part of a temporary overnight home constructed with corrugated iron, wood, hessian and plastic. This modest shelter is the haven and focus of domestic activities for a Karretjie family usually comprising the shearer-father, mother and their children and sometimes a grandparent or grandchild or a sibling of one of the parents. The families are *de jure* much larger as the children tend to leave the *karretjie* unit, boys as soon as they can shear and obtain their own cart and donkeys, and girls often through marriage or whenever a child can fend for her/himself by earning a living independently.

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The term *karretjie* was used throughout the dissertation because, not only does it reflect the importance of the mobility it provides but it is also the focus of a family's domestic activities. The donkey cart unit is not only a mobile home, it is also the place where the family prepares meals, eats and sleeps together. Therefore, it functions as a system of production and consumption, though never independent or totally self-supporting, due to the precarious position of Karretjie families within the wider community. The members of a karretjie unit cooperate in their endeavour to eke out a living, especially in terms of subsistence and the raising of children. Two or more *karretjies* at the same outspan not only collaborate in that the men are shearing together as a team, but also assist each other by means of the sharing of food or with childcare.

The next area of investigation was an explanation of the fluid nature of domestic units and groups, and in particular how it affects the children. The study has confirmed that the occurrence of domestic fluidity is rife amongst Karretjie families and communities, and is often employed as part of a series of survival strategies to alleviate the strains of everyday life. Domestic boundaries are fused as necessitated by factors such as kin-care, foster-care, consumption and other considerations, albeit practical or forced.

Although each Karretjie family unit functions relatively independently in generating disposable income, providing for its members and in decision-making, each unit is also dependent on kin beyond its own nuclear or extended family. Karretjie neighbours at an outspan as well as a wider network of kin affines are relied upon for

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assistance and cooperation on a reciprocal basis.

The findings have revealed that the relationship between mother and/or grandmother and children is the most enduring and has a strong emotional content. The material and symbolic role of the maternal figure as the preparer and server of food is of considerable importance in the community where the regular availability of nourishment is not guaranteed. A mother and her adult children continue a pattern of visiting even when they do not frequent the same outspan. Should the mother be widowed, or the children's father be absent for whatever reason, she lives and travels with one or more of her children's units or retains her own *karretjie* unit and with their help, move and set up camp together with them (see the case of Mieta Ackerman throughout the dissertation). The key sample of participating children's grandmother exercised considerable authority over them. The old age grant that she was entitled to provided a significant and regular contribution to the communal income at the outspan and hence enhanced others' circumstances substantially.

Most of the children held their fathers in high regard and some of the boys especially, were fiercely loyal to them, but in general and compared to the mothers, the role of fathers was more adjustable. Adult men were away, often for considerable periods of time, on shearing assignments or other labour practices. When they returned to their respective outspans, it was often with little accumulated income and the event was more often than not, marked by excessive drinking. Some income was generated by casual work performed by women and children, but the father as shearer and proprietor-operator of the donkey cart remained the definitive member of the *karretjie*

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unit and which often resulted in a high dependency ratio of producer/shearer to consumers/*karretjie* unit members.

The presence and absence of different members of a *karretjie* unit at a particular outspan were regulated by seasonality, a peripatetic lifestyle around sheep-shearing activities, fluctuating resource availability, social activities and the type and location of an outspan and a shearing assignment. The study has indicated that perpetual spatial mobility adds an unusual dimension to the Karretjie children's domestic fluidity patterns. Their situation is distinct because both their home base and workplace were temporary and unstable, not only in terms of locality but also in terms of social environment and available resources.

The composition of the *karretjie* unit continually changed because individual members were absent regularly and for varying periods of time either in an attempt to exploit work opportunities or to alleviate the burden of a *karretjie* unit when its resources were stretched during certain times of the year. In addition to exploiting a wide range of available opportunities, the stress on a *karretjie* unit was often lessened by farming out children to kin who found themselves in a more favourable position.

Empirical data suggested that the composition of the *karretjie* unit was most predictably and regularly affected by the absence of the shearers. This especially applied when the shearers were involved in employment on a farm remotely away from their 'home' outspan and often when families were not permitted to accompany

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and stay with the shearer. If it happened that a *karretjie* unit was located in close proximity to a shearing assignment, the teenage children and women were drawn into shearing activities. Even more significant and disruptive than the absence of one or more parent(s) from a *karretjie* unit or an outspan, were the arrangements that were made (or not) to accommodate the children that were left behind.

Babies and small children were regularly placed with a maternal or paternal grandmother or their siblings, older children and even non-kin. This applied to the younger children as well, but they were also left to their own devices at the outspan and therefore in the communal care of any adult(s) or child(ren) that were available. Age mates played an important role in these situations and strong social ties developed as a result of their implicit interdependence. *Karretjie* children soon

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learned that emotional, social and physical recourse could be found with various individuals other than their parents. They ultimately grew up predisposed to a life of domestic and residential instability.

The advent of schooling set in motion a process which effected far-reaching changes within Karretjie communities. The decision of parents to allow their children to attend school resulted in a short-circuiting of their socialisation process. They were previously prepared for full participation in their community and its activities through informal education at outspans and this was part of everyday life. In this the *karretjie* unit had an essential function, but in general children learned by observing and imitating their parents', siblings' and others' activities.

The children who attended school found themselves in a different world to that of their peers and siblings who stayed behind at the outspans in the sense that they were exposed to a totally different life. They were separated from siblings, treated as individuals and their parents had no say in the classroom. Due to the illegal status of some outspans, people residing there were under constant threat of eviction and for that reason they were hesitant to send their children away to school for the duration of even a week.

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Most parents however, were keen for their children to acquire formal education especially the skills of reading and writing in order to procure some employment. Many parents did however indicate their concern that the schooling of their children interfered with their mobile way of life and hence flexibility in decision-making. School children were also perceived as changed by the experience mainly because they became critical of certain aspects of the itinerant way of life and its associated challenges.

With the introduction of an adult learning and skills programme, a certain level of a culture of learning was established amongst the adults and children who participated in its weekly activities. While the skills and literacy of individuals were improved, the fluidity, variability and mobility of the instructional groups hampered coordinated progress and required regular innovations and adjustments. Still, the programme proved to be more durable and effective than might have been expected given the nature of the circumstances and a lack of precedents.

The empowerment of the Karretjie People has been theoretically enhanced since the country's first democratic elections in 1994. Most adults acquired official identity documents, child births were registered and easier access to disability, old age and child grants has been established. Nowadays, many Karretjie People are aware that South Africa's constitution can act on their behalf but the inclination of the wider community, the local system as it were, still presents an impediment. Although often regarded in a romantic and almost sentimental light and occasionally also as adventurous by outside observers, the life and circumstances of the Karretjie

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children and their families can still only be described as deplorable.



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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - CHILDREN, PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS⁴¹

Schedule Number

Date and Time

Personal Information

Gender

Female

Male

Name

Outspan

Seacow River Bridge

Lowryville

Squatter Camp

Station

Garings

Merino Inn

Other

⁴¹ This schedule represents a combined interview schedule. Separate schedules were used for different categories e.g. children, parents, teachers. All interviews were conducted in Afrikaans and questions were formulated in such a way that research participants understood what kind of information was required.

How long have you been residing at this outspan?

Marital status

Ge-êg	Unmarried
Living together	Divorced
Widow	Widower

Place of Birth

Age

Language

Afrikaans	Other
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Religious Affiliation

Qualification(s)

None	Primary (Grade)
Secondary (grade)	Other

Current employment

Remuneration and/or benefits

If unemployed, how is money being generated?

Do you have any relatives at any of the other outspans in the district?

Genealogy (composition of domestic *karretjie* units)

Birth and Related Matters

Where were children born and why there in particular?

Are other children present during birth and if so, why?

Who assists during childbirth?

Are babies breastfed? If so, why and how often?

Do women breastfeed babies other than their own? If so, why?

When is breastfeeding terminated and which solid foodstuffs are given to children?

At what age are children expected to behave independently?

How are twins perceived by the community?

Whose responsibility is it to name children?

Do children use their mother's or father's surname? Explain.

Give each child's name and explain the origin of each name (as well as nicknames).

Parent-Child Relationship

Which characteristics of children are regarded as positive and negative?

How do parents provide for their children? Financially, emotionally, physically, etc?

Who are responsible for children when parents are absent? Explain.

What possessions do children have?

Do children have pets? Explain.

Health Care

What kind of diseases do children get?

What kind of medication (including natural remedies) are used for treatment in case of illness?

Are any preventative measures taken? Explain.

Education - Formal and Informal

Do children receive formal education? If so, where and comment on regularity?

Summary for each child

Name	Grade	Subjects

What does the daily school routine involve?

Are children accommodated on the school premises during the week/weekends/holidays? Explain.

How do children get to and from school? Comment on regularity.

What are the difficulties associated with formal education?

How do parents' mobility and work arrangements affect regular attendance?

Are children perceived as 'different' within the school context? Explain.

What does a child's weekend routine involve?

Who assists children with homework when they are not attending school?

Do children receive informal education/training? If so, where and how?

Who is responsible for informal teaching of children? Explain.

What are children expected to learn while participating in household chores and formal work?

What are children expected to learn during observation of activities?

What do parents think children should be taught and why?

What are a mother's duties as regards informal training of children?

What are a father's duties as regards informal training of children?

Are other adults involved in informal training of children? Explain.

Play and Other Recreational Activities

Who are children's playmates?

What games do girls participate in?

What games do boys participate in?

What games do both girls and boys participate in?

Are certain games restricted to certain settings and times? Explain.

How do children acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to participate in games?

What do boys and girls use from their immediate environment as toys?

What materials are used to make toys?

Which adult activities are mimicked by children during play?

Are certain adults imitated by children during play? Explain.

Daily Routine

Describe the typical daily routine of children?

Who supervises children's activities?

What household chores do children get involved in?

At what time of day do children have meals and what does their diet consist of?

Karretjie Domestic Unit

Describe the layout of the domestic unit.

Indicate each member of the unit's sleeping arrangement.

Describe the cooking section of the unit.

What materials are used for fuel?

How is water accessed for household purposes?

How is grazing for the donkeys accessed?

Mobility

Name	Location

Does a life of perpetual itinerancy influence the children's lives? Explain.

What are children's perceptions of their families' itinerant way of life?

What roles do children play with regard to trekking activities?

Are children allowed to travel on top of the cart? Explain.

Name all the outspans and/or farms which you frequented over the past year and indicate in each instance reasons for leaving.

Outspan	Farm	Duration	Reason(s) for leaving

General

What are parents' perceptions of and expectations for their children's future?

What are children's expectations for their future?



APPENDIX B

PEOPLE AT DIFFERENT OUTSPANS IN THE DISTRICT OF COLESBERG WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY

Station Outspan

Lena Plaatjies, Katryn Plaatjies, Moos Ackerman, Abraham Plaatjies, Lya Plaatjies, Dina Plaatjies, Ragel Ackerman, Mietjie Ackerman, Freek Jacobs, Maria Karelse, Evie Karelse, Dawid v Rooy, Koenas v Rooy, Sara v Rooi, Lukas Plaatjies, Booy Plaatjies, Siena Plaatjies, Dirk Pieterse, Piet Ackerman, Griet Plaatjies, Lukas Ackerman, Jakob Pietersen, Roos Pietersen, Stefaans Ackerman, Els Plaatjies, Fieland Swarts, Sara Plaatjies, Dina Plaatjies, Doortjie Plaatjies, Martiens Witbooi, Rosette Plaatjies, Fieland Plaatjies, Delia Plaatjies, Krisjan Arnoster, Miekie Jacobs, Klaas Ackerman, Tina Witbooi, Kammies v Rooy, Hans Oerson, Siena Louw, Slinger Louw, Toen Klein, Roos Olifant, Rooihans Steenbok, Lukas Alyn, Jannetjies Thomas, Willem Anderjas, Lena Baartman

Garings Outspan

Dirk Hermanus, Witjan Hermanus, Klippies Williams, Dawid Steenbok, Klaas Steenbok, Hans Steenbok, Plaatjie Januarie, Els Pietersen, Jors Abrahams, Witjan Afrika, Baba Booyesen, Jan Booyesen

Merino Inn Outspan

Sophie Swarts, Salmon Swarts, Sarah Geduld, Toeks Geduld, Rökkies Geduld, Griet Geduld

Seacow River Bridge Outspan

Katryn Jacobs, Flora Swarts, Koot Arnoster, Pienkies Jacobs, Toek-Toek Jacobs, Outjie Jacobs, Rokkies Jacobs, Meitjies Verrooi, Manie Verrooi, Monica Rotman, Rosie Verrooi, Booy Jacobs, Sarah Geduld, Manie Jacobs, Moos Louw, Hendrik Arnoster, Emma Ackerman, Piet Ackerman, Lisa Ackerman, Isak Arnoster, Tiekie Sors, Stokkies Sors, Mina Sors, Sanna Sors, Mieta Ackerman, Koeliemeid Arnoster, Grace Arnoster, Kaffermeidjie (Emma) Arnoster, Robert Arnoster, Hendrik Geduld, Christine Geduld, Sanna Geduld



APPENDIX C

CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

AS ADOPTED BY THE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY ON 8 MAY 1996

Children

- 28 (1) Every child has the right -
- a. to a name and nationality from birth;
 - b. to family care, parental care, or appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment;
 - c. to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services, and social services;
 - d. to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation;
 - e. to be protected from exploitative labour practices;
 - f. not to be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that -
 - i are inappropriate for a person of that child's age; or
 - ii place at risk the child's well-being, education, physical or mental health, or spiritual, moral, or social development;
 - g. not to be detained except as a measure of last resort, in which case, the child may be detained only for the shortest appropriate period of time, and has the right to be -
 - i kept separately from detained persons over the age of 18 years; and

- ii treated in a manner, and kept in conditions, that take account of the child's age;
- h. to have a legal practitioner assigned to the child by the state, and at state expense, in civil proceedings affecting the child, if substantial injustice would otherwise result; and
- l. not to be used directly in armed conflict, and to be protected in times of armed conflict.

(2) A child's best interest is of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.

(3) In this section a "child" means a person under the age of 18 years.
(<http://www.polity.org.za>)

