

Keeping the Home Fires Burning: The Changed Nature of Householding in the Kofyar Homeland

Glenn Davis Stone¹

In the early 1960s, Robert Netting described households in the Kofyar homeland in Nigeria and explained their size, composition, and other characteristics as adjustments to agrarian ecology. Household changes attending movement to a frontier were analyzed in the same framework. By the 1980s, the economic rationale for homeland farming had all but disappeared, and some villages seemed on the verge of abandonment. Yet deliberate strategies for preserving homeland settlements had prevented abandonment. The demographic characteristics and household composition in the homeland now provide a window into a wholly different set of processes than what Netting described 30 years ago. Home settlement is kept viable as a facility to support ethnic identity and to attract government resources. Beneath superficial similarities are profound changes in the nature of the household and factors shaping it, reflecting the changed rationale for keeping the home fires burning.

KEY WORDS: households; agriculture; population; political ecology; settlement patterns; Nigeria.

PROLOGUE

In January 1985, I spent some time as the guest of Yongkop Daboer, the *mengwa* (headman) of the small Kofyar village of Gonkun. This was one of the villages on the Jos Plateau that Robert Netting had described in *Hill Farmers of Nigeria* (1968). My main priority in 1985 was a study of a frontier that had been pulling Kofyar people away from the Jos Plateau, but I was fascinated by what seemed to be a vestigial population clinging to a life in the homeland.

The outmigration had begun simply enough, with farmers augmenting their home farm production by establishing small bush farms on the fringes

¹Department of Anthropology, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri 63130-4899.

of the homeland. But as bush farming came to offer large harvests and opportunities for cash cropping, the fringe area turned into a real agricultural frontier, leaving the home farms in many ways superfluous.

The generation that led the way to the frontier certainly never intended to see its homeland abandoned. Many left parts of their families behind to maintain the home farm, and most planned to "retire" to the homeland when they were too old to farm. Still, the home population dropped precipitously. In 1985, Gonkun had only 12 active farms (down from the 26 recorded in 1961), including several run by aged widows living alone. Yongkop was an anomaly. He had been a cash-cropper on the frontier but had returned, with two wives and two young sons, to what had been his father's compound, to devote himself to the duties of headman of a village with more monkeys than people. His vision of Gonkun's future was oddly optimistic. He predicted that others would be moving back to Gonkun, that they would build themselves a road up to the village, and would start their own school. Far from being a dying village, it was, in Yongkop's eyes, on the verge of a renaissance.

The signs suggested otherwise. One night, Yongkop took me to a promontory overlooking the small valley containing what was left of his village. He told me that from this spot, you used to see hearth fires from all the compounds in the village, and hear conversations that drifted up. I told him I could see only one fire, pointing to a red glint. "No one lives there," he said. "Someone was just burning the Imperata grass growing over an empty compound." The fire that once would have marked a home now marked the entropy of abandonment.

It was hard to escape the feeling of walking through the death throes of the culture of hill farmers. Farmsteads tilled for over a century were taken over by grass; adobe walls dissolved in the rain after thatch roofs blew away; and few could remember which ancestor was buried beneath which stone cairn. Childbirth was rare, death was common, and more than one old man advised me to ask all my questions then and there because he did not expect to be around much longer.

"Come back in ten years," I wrote in fieldnotes compiled for a dissertation on ethnoarchaeology. "The place will be a museum of abandonment assemblages."

INTRODUCTION

Robert Netting first climbed the Jos Plateau escarpment in November of 1960. Nigeria had just achieved independence, and Netting had come to study how the sea change in national politics had affected roles of chiefs

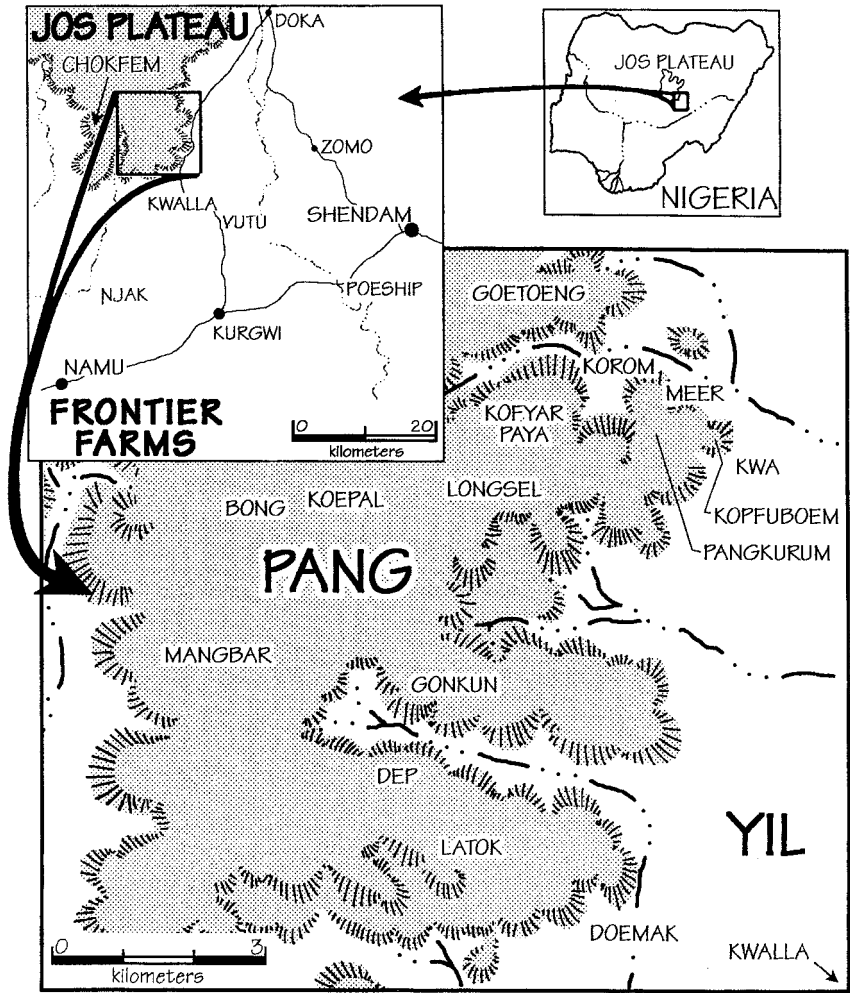


Fig. 1. The central portion of the Kofyar homeland.

among small Middle Belt groups such as the Angas, Tal and Goemai. However, his first month of fieldwork was highlighted by the rather alarming finding that the effect of independence on local politics was virtually nil. This was ecological anthropology's good fortune, for Netting turned his attention to the stunning agricultural landscape of the Kofyar, and the societal logistics of earning a living from it. Among the first issues Netting addressed was that of the Kofyar household, and why it was as it was: small, stable, nuclear, and living in a permanent compound on a farm where it

held enduring rights. Netting viewed these households through the lens of cultural adaptation, and his models linked demography, labor demands of production, and social organization.

The Kofyar also cultivated ephemeral swidden plots, called *wang*, outside of the homeland. A few years before Netting's arrival, the gradually widening perimeter of *wang* cultivation had reached Namu and the lush soils of the Benue Lowlands (Fig. 1). That area quickly became an agricultural frontier and by 1960, the Kofyar had built over a hundred compounds there. The different conditions of demography and agricultural production on the frontier, with corresponding change in households, allowed Netting to develop a dynamic model of cultural ecological change.

If Netting's first Kofyar fieldwork was nicely timed, catching independent hill villages and also the early stages of the frontier movement, his analysis was too, with his first examination of Kofyar households (Netting, 1965) appearing the same year as Ester Boserup's *Conditions of Agricultural Growth*. Whereas Julian Steward's cultural ecology had focused on foraging societies, Netting's study of Kofyar hill farmers offered one of the first, and still one of the best, analyses of the effects of agricultural change on social organization.

Netting's 1960s ethnography also caught the beginning of a profound change in Kofyar society. The startup of the Namu farms may have seemed at first like a simple extension of the old pattern of small agricultural outposts, but it was not. Several factors conspired over the next 30 years to turn the Namu bush farms into substantial, prosperous, and permanent farmsteads, and to severely drain the homeland population. By 1984, when M. P. Stone and I returned with Netting to Nigeria, the homeland population had dropped dramatically, and the elegant set of relationships among population, production, and social organization that Netting had described were irrevocably changed.

In this paper, I describe the transformation of the "Hill Farmers of Nigeria" since they became a showpiece of cultural ecology three decades ago. I show that as reasons for living in the homeland have changed, so have demography, agriculture, and household organization. Understanding the homeland households requires a different consideration of the role of agency in cultural response to changes in both ecology and political economy.

HOUSEHOLD ECOLOGY

The Kofyar homeland is divided into *pang* and *yil* (Fig. 1). *Pang* is the rugged hills at the southeast corner of the Jos Plateau, where farmsteads clustered on hilltops, forming villages separated by gorges. *Yil* is the col-

luvial plain curling around the foot of the plateau escarpment, where there were hundreds of contiguous farmsteads. In the 1960s, *yil* population densities approached 500/km² (Stone, 1996, p. 60); *pang* population densities were lower, but much of the terrain there was difficult or impossible to cultivate (Stone *et al.*, 1984). Kofyar were crowded on this difficult landscape basically for defense, the hills and escarpments of the plateau offering protection from horse-borne raiders on the plains below (Netting, 1968; Stone, 1996, p. 59).

The high ratio of population to productive resources necessitated intensive agriculture. Most food came from an annually cultivated infield (*futung*) surrounding the compound. The infield was fertilized by dung compost (*zük*) and hoed into erosion-preventing waffle ridges. Staples of millet, sorghum, maize, and cowpea, along with many minor crops, were painstakingly cultivated; oil palms were carefully tended. Further produce came from extensively terraced hillslopes.

One of Netting's first interests was in the relationship between this agricultural regime and social organization. His outlook was generally functionalist, although he did not assume that social conventions automatically sought ecological optima (the sin for which 1960s-vintage cultural ecology has been chastized ever since). Yet he was able to show that, unlike constructs such as the family or lineage, the Kofyar house hold was closely fitted to the conditions of production. This was a socially distinct group that was key to the organization of agricultural production, resource distribution, property transmission, and reproduction; it was largely co-residential (although this was beginning to change with migratory farming). As Wilk and Netting (1984) later pointed out, the overlap in these activity spheres varies greatly among societies, but among the Hill Farmers they formed a relatively tidy package.

The small-scale but relentless tasks of homeland intensive farming were manageable by a small staff; with the land base fixed and cultivation already intensified, extra workers would offer decreasing marginal returns and, indeed, might consume more than they could produce. Netting's homeland census showed a mean of only 3.4 adults per household, with a 48% rate of polygyny. Under 5% of households contained extended families. Neighbors such as the Chokfem, with lower population densities and greater reliance on outfield swidden plots, had much larger, predominantly multifamily, households (Netting, 1965, 1968, pp. 130–132). Netting's elegant model included other elements of Kofyar life, including property rights, settlement pattern, and some aspects of political organization (Netting, 1965, 1968, 1969).

Opening farms on the frontier south of Namu sharply changed the incentives linking farmwork to households. It was virtually impossible to

manage home and frontier farms simultaneously with a small staff. Moreover, since frontier farms were considerably larger and cultivation more extensive, production was limited by labor rather than by land (as in the homeland). As the labor demands of production and marginal returns to labor changed, so did household characteristics. Parents militated to keep the labor of married offspring in the household, rather than urging young couples off to form independent households as they had in the homeland. In contrast to the homeland households, frontier-farming households had a mean of 4.2 adults and a 59% rate of polygyny, and 15% consisted of extended families (Netting, 1965, p. 427).

Later analysis (Stone *et al.*, 1984) affirmed and extended Netting's model of the Kofyar household. Relatively large homeland households were shown to be maladaptive, as Netting had suggested, with lower overall and per capita crop production. Large households occurred mainly in the crowded *yil*, where land shortages hindered household fission. On the frontier, Netting's belief that households expanded to meet labor demands of production was confirmed: mean household size was found to grow steadily after frontier farms were opened, nearly doubling after 10 years.

FRONTIER AND DIASPORA

The movement to the frontier must be understood in the context of the Kofyar's history of bush farming. Kofyar probably began setting up ephemeral bush farms (*wang*) in the sparsely occupied savanna east and south of the homeland by the 1930s, the British having quelled the raiding by then; the practice was well established by the 1940s (Rowling, 1946; Stone, 1996, pp. 77–79). The first farms were at Zomo, Vutu, and Njak (Fig. 1), where they farmed the relatively poor soils on a shifting basis. Landuse cost either nothing or a token gift to a nearby chief. Travel could be a nuisance, but the plots were not farmed intensively and did not require regular trips. If the home farm was too crowded to effectively absorb the household's labor, a person or two could be dispatched to the *wang* for much of the growing season. Since plots in the thin, rocky soils within the Kofyar bush-farming radius were quickly played out and abandoned, residences were usually little more than fieldhouses.

The transience of these *wang* bush farms contrasted with the Kofyar concept of home—*koepang*—which had strong associations with permanence and attachment to place. *Koepang* carries many of the meanings of “home,” applying to the residence (in the Kofyar case, an adobe hut compound) and to the locality where the residence is. It is permanently linked

to the Jos Plateau through etymology: the root *pang* means hill, mountain, or rock. The more emotionally charged term for home is *kopnda*. *Nda* means father(s), and when a man dies or abandons a residence, that residence is called his *kop*. Although not directly translatable, *kopnda* conveys emotional content akin to “land where my fathers died” and “my home town.” It is never used for areas outside the homeland because it denotes the linkage of ancestors to specific points on the landscape.

The spatial rootedness of this construction of “home” is evident in most aspects of Kofyar political and ritual life.² For example, the protective spirits (*moewang*) associated with ancestors lived only in streams in the homeland.³ Libations of millet beer were poured on cairns marking graves of forebears. First fruit ceremonies (*kagal*) were practiced only in the homeland, and in a way that reinforced a family’s tie to its own farm: before crops were eaten, the household head would conduct a divination (*pa*) that was specific to the particular homestead and the ancestors of its occupants.⁴ The ritual, along with information on where particular ancestors were buried around the compound, was passed down from father to the son chosen to inherit the farm.

In the 1940s, it would not have occurred to Kofyar that *kopnda*—with its solid ancestral compounds, manured fields, oil palms, and terraces, would ever be abandoned for *wang*—a ramshackle compound on the thin soils of the piedmont. When nine hill villages were forced onto vacant areas on the plains below [following a misunderstanding that resulted in a colonial officer burning part of a hill village (Netting 1987)], the exiles never stopped petitioning to be allowed to return, which was finally permitted 9 years later.

Kofyar bush farming reached Namu around 1951 and then leapfrogged to the nearly vacant savanna south of Namu’s own cultivated radius. The

²Malkki (1992) criticizes the use of botanical and arborescent metaphors for indigenous peoples by outsiders, but the Kofyar are quite partial to botanical (even arborescent) imagery themselves. Their word for a neighborhood, *toenglu*, means tree (or plant) of houses, and their word for roots (*seen*) doubles as the collective term for ancestors, as it does in English. Appadurai (1988) claims that by describing linkages and ecological adaptations of people to particular places, anthropological writing confines and “incarcerates” those people. The criticism would not seem to apply to this study, with its focus on unfettered movement of Kofyar out of their homeland and their strategies of preserving homeland settlements even as they establish lives away in the city.

³In the homeland, a small cough is used to greet the *moewang* when crossing a stream. Once while crossing a stream on the frontier, I tried to impress my Kofyar hosts with my knowledge of folklore by offering the greeting cough. When it dawned on them what I was doing, they were highly amused at my apparent belief that there were *moewang* in the streams there.

⁴*Kagal* and various other rituals are conducted at the shrine called *lu pang*, a miniature hut lacking doors. Even this name is a reminder that home is in the hills: *lu* means hut or house, and *pang* (as noted above) means rock, mountain, and home.

early pioneers were more concerned with productivity of the new farms than with the long-term threat these farms posed to the homeland. When Netting interviewed Namu farmers in 1962, he heard blanket assurances that they would never abandon their home farms. He saw economic reasons for believing them. He observed that the labor demands of frontier and homeland farms meshed nicely (1968, p. 210), with the new frontier cash crops of rice and yams fitting fairly well into the old agricultural calendar. Home and frontier farms were complementary, the one providing subsistence, long-term tree crops, and an optimal environment for small stock, and the other, land and markets for cash crops (1968, p. 210). By 1967, when Netting left Nigeria for the second time, very few Kofyar had actually abandoned their homeland farms.

Yet the old setup of *koepang* as primary home farm and *wang* as ephemeral bush plot had begun to break down. The frontier soils were rich and there was a good market for surplus. The need to be on one's farm—to protect crops from animal predators and later from human competitors—promoted prolonged residence on the frontier. The greater distance from home had the same effect. By the early 1960s, Namu town and the community of (predominantly) Kofyar farmers were in a positively-reinforcing spiral of growth, as farm surpluses attracted crop traders, Namu grew, its market expanded, clinics and other amenities appeared, and more farmers were attracted. *Wang*, which formerly meant deprivation, came to mean opportunity and convenience. It also meant prosperity. Despite national policies promoting reliance on imported foodstuffs (Andrae and Beckman 1985), earnings from crop sales on frontier farms climbed steadily, reaching a mean of ₦1160 per household by 1984 (for comparison, the going rate for agricultural wage work was ₦5/day). Cash increasingly came to be seen as a necessity for school fees, medicine, transportation, and hired labor.

As frontier farms became established, the value of the home farm as an economic base dwindled. By 1984, few Kofyar even had to rely on a homeland farm for support while starting a new frontier farm; there was almost always a friend or relative on the frontier to stay with. The palm and canarium trees that thrived in the hills, whose oil had been the Kofyar's first cash crop early in the century, began to lose their value as the market for these products was lost to cheaper imported Malaysian palm oil.

The relationship between *koepang* and *wang* was further changed as the twin forces of population pressure and market incentives led Kofyar in many areas of the frontier to intensify production. The complementary meshing of labor needs that Netting had seen (1968, p. 210) was replaced

by scheduling conflicts.⁵ The home farm, formerly a secure and necessary home base for forays into bush farming, became an economic drain, demanding resources which were of higher value on the frontier. Homeland settlements that were essential in the time before the frontier, and economically advantageous in the time of the early frontier, were now neither.

While population growth on the frontier helped develop the area and attract further population, there was a spiral of depopulation in the homeland. Farm abandonments may have improved farming conditions at first by freeing land, but they later caused agricultural problems for remaining farmers (described below). The departure of part of a household could leave remaining members unable to operate the farm; the departure of part of a village could leave the net of communal assistance so frayed that keeping on in the village was difficult. Depopulation reinforced itself. In retrospect, it is surprising that the Kofyar hills were not empty by 1985.

STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTING THE HOMELAND

The homeland still contained viable communities in 1985 largely because of deliberate strategies to counter the pull toward the frontier. There was a tacit program for perpetuating homeland settlement that was in many ways a case of cultural agency countering the ecological and economic incentives for outmigration. The program comprised five basic strategies.

Enhancing the Homeland Infrastructure

The Kofyar homeland had always suffered from inaccessibility. Entering from the north or east required fording a branch of the Shemankar near Doka or driving down to the Poeship bridge and then following a poor road up from Kurgwi; *pang* villages were then reached by footpaths winding up a 500-m escarpment. Flows of basalt were a further obstacle. Inaccessibility was a major reason for the Kofyar being here in the first place, as it offered protection from jihadists, slavers, and raiders before the twentieth century (Stone, 1996, pp. 59–60). But by the 1970s, the inaccessibility was increasingly a factor in frontier farmers simply abandoning their home farms. An increasing number of Kofyar were seeking education and careers outside of the area, especially in Jos. Those who succeeded in

⁵For discussion of the effects of population change and market incentives on Kofyar farming, see Netting *et al.* (1989, 1993). For analysis of labor scheduling and social organization of labor, see Stone *et al.* (1990). For analysis of where and why Kofyar intensified agriculture, see Stone (1996).

the city often wanted to build vacation houses in the homeland, and this provided a new impetus to make the homeland more accessible. These people were also in a better position to lobby for improvement of the roads into the homeland, and they used their influence in the early 1980s to arrange for the building of a motorable road from Kurgwi to Kwalla. Around the same time, the Kofyar themselves began to carve a road up the Goetoeng escarpment, intending, rather improbably, to reach the high hill villages of Kofyar and Bong. Most of those who worked on the road actually lived on the frontier; financial support also came from Kofyar who were living in cities.⁶

There have been building projects representing remarkable investments of time and resources, given the numbers of people served. Just as lack of new building and neglect of public monuments may be symptoms of community death (Adams, 1980), so new buildings and the maintenance of public buildings may help forestall or prevent community death. The Protestant community in Bong was at work in 1985 on an expansive high-ceilinged church to replace another large church built a few years before—an extraordinary work effort for a congregation of only 19 adults, who had to carry construction materials over an hour's hike up the plateau. By 1985, there were also over a dozen "vacation homes" built by Kofyar who lived away (used mainly for lodging during civic and ceremonial events).

There was optimistic talk in 1985 about introducing various amenities. For instance, wells, which were easily dug in the deep soils of the frontier, were impossible to dig in the bedrock of the homeland. As Kofyar became accustomed to wells, having to excavate in streambeds for dry-season water increasingly came to be seen as a major annoyance [see *Expedition* 33(1), cover photo]. In 1985, there was talk a campaign to have boreholes dug in the homeland.

Maintenance of Home Farms

In 1961, homeland farms had been principal residences, and frontier farms were outposts. By 1985, the relationship was reversed; most frontier farmers with home farms kept them as secondary operations or outposts. For some, it was only a *piéd à terre*, providing lodging during social events and festivities; for others, the home farm was a going concern, with pooling of labor and other resources between home and frontier. In some cases, a wife lived permanently on the home farm; in others, wives rotated yearly

⁶The road to Goetoeng was opened with some fanfare in January 1985, and the first car up was the chauffeured Pugeot of Lazarus Dakyen, a respected barrister in Jos who has since been appointed to the high courts in Lafia and Jos. Reared on a farmstead in Goetoeng, Dakyen had collected household censuses for Netting in 1966, earning enough to keep himself in school.

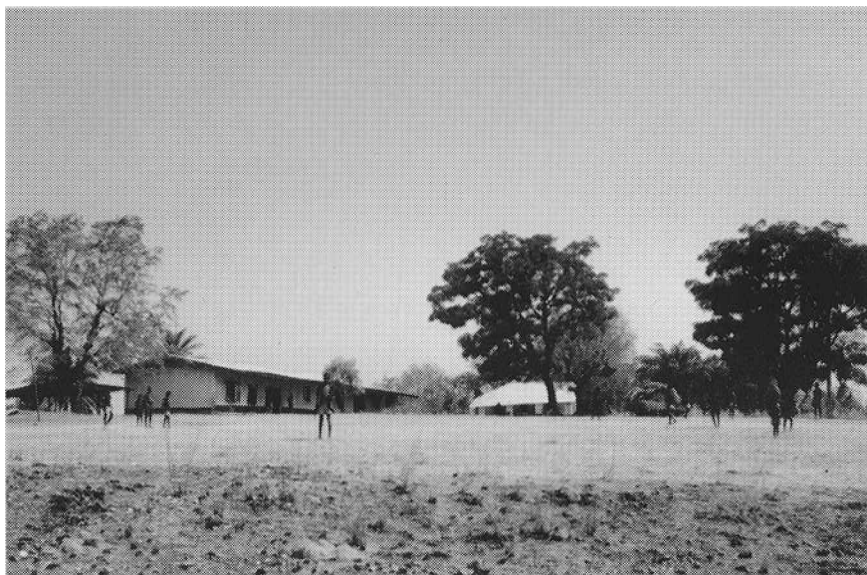


Fig. 2. Primary school in the hill village of Kofyar-Paya, 1985.

between homeland and frontier. The male head-of-household typically spent most of his time on the frontier, coming “home” a few times during the farming season. I use the term *houseful* for the group of individuals who reside primarily on a single farm for the year (cf. Laslett, 1972).

Public Events

A full calendar of public events also contributed to the preservation of homeland communities. These events include the traditional *maap* and *pa* funeral rituals; new-fashioned rallies known in Nigeria as “launchings,” usually for inaugurating civic programs; and ad hoc ceremonies commemorating installations of chiefs or other passages. These events attracted crowds in the hundreds or sometimes thousands from the frontier and the city, and they were part of the rationale for successful urban Kofyars maintaining vacation houses in the homeland.

Schools

Probably the most important strategy was the use of schools to preserve homeland settlements. Schools originally built to serve a local population came to be maintained largely to attract and keep a population. Ten

primary schools were built in Kofyarland by the British in the 1940s and 1950s, including in the hill villages of Latok and Kofyar (Fig. 2). Five more were built in the 1960s, including two in the hills. In the mid 1970s, the military government began a program of school building in the middle belt and northern Nigeria (Kirk-Greene and Rimmer, 1981, p. 115). Kofyar leaders militated for primary schools to be built in the homeland, and their case was strengthened by the tax rolls; many household heads kept paying their taxes through home communities despite spending little time there. Five more schools were built in the Kofyar homeland.

These schools were vital to the preservation of *pang* villages, where it was hard to attract and maintain population. Whereas *yil* villages had church missions, mosques, daily and weekly markets, and small businesses, there were no markets or mosques in the hills and, as of 1985, only one church.⁷ But the hills did have schools, and the hill people knew these were settlement anchors.

The presence of schoolchildren ensures an adult population to care for them, and the children in turn help feed the adults by working in the fields. The time demands of primary school are light: school meets only during the morning, with vacations occurring during part of the summer, or whenever the teacher has not been paid, or when the school roof blows off. Even when school is in session, the curriculum sometimes consists of farmwork. Wednesday was "work day" at the Doemak primary school, and students reporting to school were put to work on a farm. The teacher would arrange for the class to be hired out to a local farmer, and the proceeds went for school supplies and a graduation party fund.

Sending children to homeland schools was considered a civic obligation, even for families living entirely on the frontier; a child could always be sent to live with a relative or other home villager. The primary school in Latok, where the population was small and scattered, had struggled to survive, and when the chief of Latok placed his children in frontier schools, he was forced by irate Latokians to move them back to the hills.

There is irony in the Kofyar's strategic use of schools to anchor homeland settlement. As late as mid-century, many hill farmers resisted sending their children to schools because they were afraid they would learn skills that would pull them away from the farm (Findlay, 1945, p. 141; for an analysis of the effects of education on off-farm migration and class formation in Yorubaland, see Berry, 1985).

⁷A small dispensary was built in Bong by the civilian government, but the attendant left in 1984, taking the medicine with him, after his salary stopped coming.

Retirement

Those who returned from frontier farms to live full-time in the homeland were said to be “retired.” Reasons for retirement varied. It was the older generation that was most vocal about commitment to the hills, but it was they who founded the frontier communities which threatened to empty the hills. Therefore, some retired to set an example. Others were simply doing what had been planned all along; the term *wang* referred to a transitory farm away from home, and to some retirees, that was just what the Namu frontier had been—even if their stay had stretched to 25 years.

Some much-discussed retirements involved supernatural factors. A case in point was Dajong, an early frontier farmer from the hill village of Kofyar-Paya. Dajong’s home compound was believed to be the *kop* (former residence) of Dafyar, the hero of the Kofyar origin myth. (Dafyar and his sister were the sole survivors of a primordial volcanic eruption, and all Kofyar are their descendants. The name *Kofyar* probably derives from this compound, which would have been called *Kop-fyar* as the masculine prefix *Da* is dropped in compound words.) Dajong’s compound was extraordinary, with a secret brewing hut, a spirit house (*lu moewong*), a hut containing ritual paraphernalia for controlling the rains, and an especially important hut with a fire that had always to be kept burning. There was widespread distress when Dajong moved to the frontier and left the farm in care of a shiftless younger brother who neglected the sacred fire. After a string of bad luck on the frontier, Kofyar-Paya villagers convinced Dajong that *moe-wong* spirits would torment him until he returned to tend the farm and the sacred fire—which he eventually did.

Others returned to the homeland for medical retirement. Aged and ailing, some preferred treatment by traditional magico-medical practitioners (*wumulak*). There were *wumulak* on the frontier as well, but their treatment was seen to be more effective in the homeland. The homeland was also the preferred place to die, and the proper final resting place of household heads.

These strategies for perpetuating homeland settlement helped prevent outright abandonment of many homeland communities. The pattern Netting saw in 1961, reflecting a time when crowded hill settlements were a matter not of choice but of survival, had by 1985 been replaced by a pattern in which depleted communities persevered mostly because of people’s desire to offset the incentives to leave. The logic of Netting’s model flowed from demography to production to household organization, and I will follow the same course to highlight the changes.

HOMELAND DEMOGRAPHY

The many abandoned farmsteads in the Kofyar homeland in 1985 left no doubt that there had been substantial depopulation, but measuring the change is not easy. The task is complicated by the many Kofyar who divide their time between homeland and frontier. To estimate homeland population in 1985, I have calculated *weighted housefuls* for each farm; this measure reflects the portion of each person's time spent at the homeland farm.⁸

Table I compares residential population in the 12 homeland villages for which 1961 and 1985 censuses are available. These are *pang* villages except for Meer and Korom. The table shows an overall dropoff of 56% in weighted homeland population between 1961 and 1985 (weighted houseful sizes are discussed below).

Adults in the 1985 homeland population mostly fall into three categories. Stay-at-Homes were individuals who never joined the migratory stream south. Some had *wang* farms around Kwalla or Doemak, but never moved to the Namu frontier. This was an aging population, including several unitary households relying on help from neighbors. Outpost farmers were members of multifarm households living on the homeland farm. Retirees were those adults who had withdrawn from frontier farming. Table II breaks down the 1985 homeland households according to whether the head was a Stay-at-Home, an Outpost farmer, or a Retiree (I do not have information allowing classification of all adults in the homeland).

These categories do not apply to children, most of whom are in the homeland for schooling. Figure 3 shows the marked difference between the homeland and frontier in schooling; note that 85% of homeland children aged 7–16 were in school in 1985, as compared to 23% of the frontier children in that age range. Of the frontier-farming households with one or more schoolchildren in our census, 68% had sent at least one child to school in the homeland. The demographic anchoring effect of schools is dramatic: three of the four villages with the slightest drops in population were villages with primary schools (Table I).

⁸The 1984–85 household census recorded where each individual spent time, using a six-step scale of ALL, ALL BUT VISITS, MOSTLY, HALFTIME, MOSTLY AWAY, ONLY VISITS. For example, a farm with one full-time resident, one halftime resident and one "ONLY VISITS" would have a weighted houseful of $(1.0) + (0.5) + (0.167) = 1.67$. Netting's earlier homeland censuses did not record how members of bi-farm households divided their time, but he did collect this information in a small frontier census in 1961. The mean size of the frontier farm houseful, weighted for part-year residence, was 3.2 persons (Stone, 1996, p. 102). To approximate the homeland weighted housefuls in 1961, I subtracted 3.2 from those households with bush farms.

TABLE I. Houseful and Village Sizes in the Kofyar Homeland, 1961 vs. 1985^a

Village	1961			1985			Population change
	<i>n</i> of farms	Avg. weighted houseful	Total weighted population	<i>n</i> of farms	Avg. weighted houseful	Total weighted population	
All	385	4.0	1536	179	3.8	684	-56%
Koepal ^b	17	4.2	72	0	0	0	-100%
Dep	35	3.5	124	3	3.0	9	-93%
Korom	14	5.2	72	5	2.9	15	-80%
Pangkurum	28	4.6	130	13	2.8	36	-72%
Mangbar	48	3.3	158	19	2.6	49	-69%
Meer	32	3.8	121	14	2.9	40	-67%
Gonkun	26	3.7	96	12	2.9	35	-63%
Kopfuboom	16	3.6	58	5	4.8	24	-58%
Kofyar-Paya ^c	47	5.7	266	28	4.3	120	-55%
Longsel	28	3.9	110	13	5.0	66	-41%
Latok ^c	35	2.7	93	19	3.4	65	-31%
Bong ^c	59	4.0	236	48	4.7	225	-5%

^aHousefuls are weighted for residence time; each individual is pro-rated by the amount of the year spent in the homeland. Table is sorted by percent change in population. Latok was not censused in 1961, so data from the 1966 census are used.

^bTwo farms still being cultivated but the owners had moved to Bong village.

^cSchool present in village.

The result of the changed conditions of residence was a very different demographic makeup from the homeland of 1961.⁹ The 1985 homeland had the strongly bimodal age distribution shown in Fig. 4, with the majority of all Kofyar adolescents and those over 70, but less than 20% of those under 5 or between 20–40. There was patterning in gender distribution as well: males comprised 60% of those aged 10–19 in the homeland as compared to 45% of the overall population. This reflects the greater role men are expected to play in the preservation of the homeland communities, for although Kofyar women in general have substantial access to land and labor resources (M. P. Stone, 1988; M. P. Stone *et al.*, 1995), settlement decisions are mostly made by men.

⁹Of the 8796 persons recorded in our 1984–85 census, 86% made their principal residence in homeland or frontier farms. The present analysis excludes the others, who are working or schooling out of the area, or living in Namu town. Namu-dwelling Kofyar are distinctive in terms of economic orientation (many make their living outside of agriculture), religion (many are Muslim, and some have adopted Hausa ethnicity), household organization (men have fewer wives, women have more children, and families are much less likely to be extended), and household size (the mean size is 6.7, as compared to 6.3 for frontier farmers and 4.0 in the homeland).

Table II. Categories of Household Heads Resident in the Homeland, 1985

	n	Stay-at home (%)	Home outpost (%)	Retiree (%)
Yil	154	49.4	46.1	4.5
Pang	223	64.1	21.1	14.8
Total	377	58.1	31.3	10.6

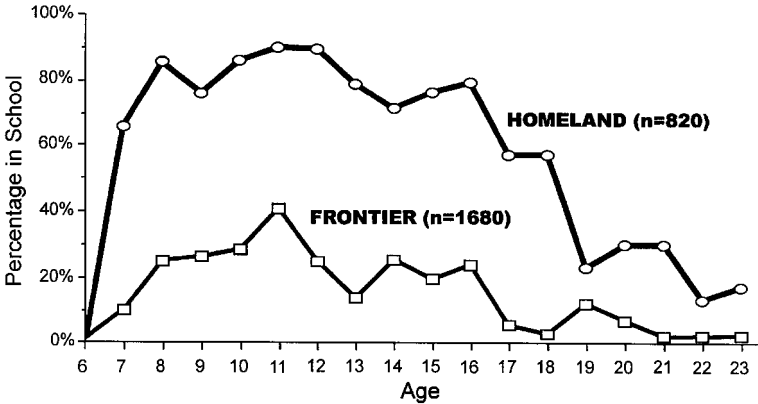


Fig. 3. Percentages of individuals attending school in 1984–85.

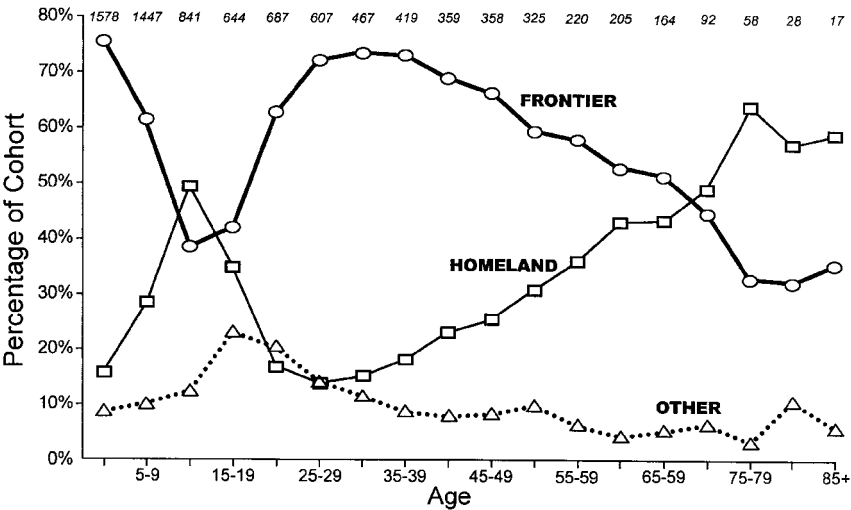


Fig. 4. Percentage of each age cohort residing in homeland and frontier in 1984–85. Numbers across the top give the number of individuals censused in each cohort.

Table III. Kofyar Homeland, Households Agriculture Compared in 1961 and 1984-85

	1961	1984-85	Change (%)
Estimated population density	150/km ²	50/km ²	-67
Households in sample	396	412	
Agricultural intensity	High	Moderate	
Goat + sheep ($\bar{x}$)	10.1	8.9	-11
Household size weighted for agricultural production ($\bar{x}$) ^a	3.3	2.4	-27
Per capita production ($\bar{x}$)			
Grain (bundles)	8.2	10.0	+ 22
Legumes (basins)	2.2	2.7	+ 22
Yams (tubers)	0	85	N/A
Rice (bags)	0	0.7	N/A
Household characteristics			
Actual household size ($\bar{x}$)	4.3	3.3	-23
Stability of membership	Generally stable	Yearly changes	
Husbands + wives per household ($\bar{x}$)	2.4	1.3	-46
Sons + daughters per household ($\bar{x}$)	1.2	1.3	+ 8
Misc. distant kin per household ($\bar{x}$)	0.4	0.8	+ 100
Top membership categories	Wives, heads	Other children	

^aChildren under 14 are counted as .33, adults over 65 as .67, and others as 1.0. This weighting reflects potential for farm production, rather than the earlier weighting which measured resident population.

TRANSFORMATION OF HOMELAND AGRICULTURE

If intensive hill farming was an unavoidable, labor-expensive adaptation to crowded conditions, depopulation should have allowed agricultural extensification. We did not measure agricultural labor in the homeland as we did on the frontier (Stone *et al.*, 1990), but there were various indications that agricultural intensity had declined. Several older adults told me that people had to work less hard in the fields since the depopulation, although they complained about the reduced numbers of neighbors to assist in the work.

Table III shows that per capita production in the homeland increased between 1961 and 1984, despite the low numbers of adults of peak productive ages and the fact that 1984 was a drought year.¹⁰

¹⁰This table does not separate 1984 home farms into *yil* and *pang* because most social and economic differences between these areas are quite minor. In the 1960s, the *yil* households had significantly lower per capita production and were larger because land shortages impeded household fissioning (Stone *et al.*, 1984). With depopulation, these differences have mostly vanished. A contrast that has emerged is in market production. In the 1960s, the only homeland crop marketed in appreciable quantities was palm oil; by 1985, the cash crops of rice and yams were being grown in modest amounts, almost exclusively on the *yil*.



Fig. 5. Abandoned and partly deteriorated homeland compound, 1985. Its courtyard has been hoed and planted in peanuts and sorghum.

The increase is attributable to increased land per person, especially from the freeing of infields (*futung*) as farms were abandoned (Fig. 5). *Futung* were level plots in good locations, picked clean of rocks, and with residual nutrients from years of composting. Farmers could cultivate these instead of the more distant outfield (*goon*) plots, which were often on terraces. Saving the labor of terrace maintenance was key; the work of terrace agriculture was both hard and hazardous, and terrace farming was labor-intensive even though the plots were cultivated on a shifting basis (see Stocking, 1996, p. 338). As land was freed up in and around hill villages, the spectacularly terraced hillsides fell into disrepair (Fig. 6). In sum, agriculture became slightly more extensive, more concentrated on relatively productive areas, and probably more efficient in its return on labor inputs (although data are unavailable).

This did not mean that the trappings of intensive agriculture had disappeared. Most homeland farmers still fertilized their annually-cropped infields with *zük* compost, and goat/sheep ownership was only down slightly from 1961 levels (Table III). One reason this intensive practice continued was that its principal labor cost was the feeding of penned animals during the rainy season; this was a child's task, and children were resident in sub-



Fig. 6. Terraced hillside very near the hillside depicted in Netting's *Hill Farmers of Nigeria* (1968, Plate IIIA), but by 1985 the untended terraces were washing down the hill.

stantial numbers for schooling.¹¹ Thus, the Kofyar use of schools to anchor home communities exerted an effect on production strategies.

Depopulation also posed new obstacles to farm production, especially the resurgence of wild animals that devoured crops. Patas monkeys could devastate a millet field, and some farmers in depopulated areas had stopped even trying to grow this crop despite its importance as a source of both food and beer. The animal problem forced homeland Kofyars to adopt some extensive agricultural tactics which Netting never would have seen in the 1960s homeland. Walking through the largely depopulated village of Koepal in 1984, we heard an eerie wailing that we finally traced to a young girl, sitting high in a palm tree. She had been sent up the tree to sing all afternoon, acting as an audio scarecrow to warn off the monkeys. Anthropomorphic scarecrows were also used throughout the homeland.

The features of production which had shaped homeland households two decades earlier had changed. The tight land supply had been replaced

¹¹Chemical fertilizers were theoretically available at government-subsidized rates during the 1980s, and one might have expected a supply of subsidized fertilizer to have supplanted the labor-intensive goat herds. The problem was that the supply was not dependable; the local government's allotment of 3600 bags in 1983 (an election year) dropped to 1200 in 1984, and many Kofyar found themselves unable to get fertilizer even at scalpers' prices. The goat herds stayed.

by a lightly populated landscape with choice land for the asking, where the complaints were about the lack of neighbors for work parties. Farm production was limited by labor rather than land. But unlike the situation on the frontier decades before, where labor shortages had prompted strong seasonal (and later permanent) migration, the 1985 homeland had few signs of Kofyar coming home to farm. Nor were households any longer accommodating to optimize farm production; unlike the earlier homeland and frontier households that had faced strong incentives to adjust size and composition to the quantity and quality of productive labor demands, many households were in the homeland in 1985 largely as place-holders. Not surprisingly, the makeup of these groups was quite different.

HOMELAND HOUSEHOLD ORGANIZATION

Thirty-one percent of the homeland farms in our census were "home only" households without frontier farms; the rest were homeland outposts of frontier-farming households. These households had superficial similarities to the households recorded by Netting in 1961; for instance, although sizes are

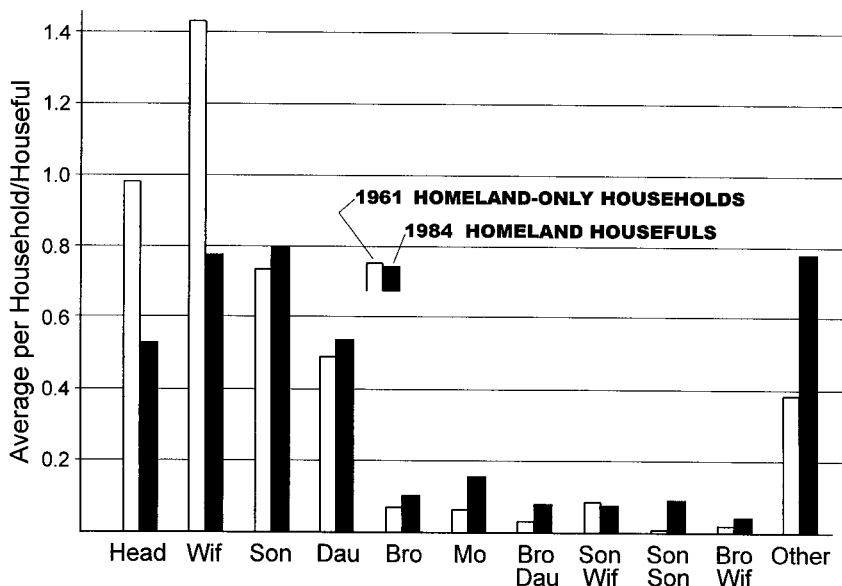


Fig. 7. Household composition for coresidential groups in the Kofyar homeland, 1961 and 1985 compared.



Fig. 8. A homeland houseful in 1985, comprising an 80-year-old woman and three children, working together on their farm.

hard to compare directly because of the changes in mobility, the weighted houseful sizes had only changed from 4.0 to 3.8 (Table I). Yet there had been striking changes in household composition. My analysis divides all individuals into the 11 categories shown in Fig. 7; each category is a relationship to the household head. The 1961 homeland households were made up more of male heads-of-household and wives than anything else; these two relations together comprised 56% of the average household. A full 94% of the households contained a resident conjugal pair. But by 1985, heads and wives made up 39% of the average houseful, and only 36% of all housefuls had a conjugal pair resident. An even sharper contrast was in the numbers of "other" relations—a category including fathers' wives, granddaughters, wives' kin, and other distant kin or nonkin. This category, which made up 8% of the average 1961 household, made up 20% in 1985—more than any other category except for sons. Almost half of the homeland housefuls had no resident adult male household head. A common household configuration consisted of an aged man or woman living with a few primary schoolchildren, sometimes removed by three generations (Fig. 8). The changes between the 1961 household and the 1985 houseful are summarized in Table I.

Figures 7 and 8 and Table III depict housefuls whose composition was much more varied and whose members were less closely related, with less integration into a family structure. Membership was also more ephemeral; children usually left for the frontier after their schooling, and wives often rotated between home and frontier farms. These characteristics of homeland housefuls were not adjustments to demands of agricultural production in the homeland. Indeed, the utility of the labor of most homeland residents would have been higher if they were not in the homeland at all, but working on the frontier (see Nyerges, 1992). The presence, size, and composition of homeland housefuls were primarily byproducts of deliberate Kofyar strategies for preserving homeland villages.

Twenty years after Netting (1965) described them, Kofyar homeland households still averaged around four people living in adobe compounds scattered throughout the hills of the Jos Plateau and the adjacent plains. There the similarity ended, as the numbers of households, their agricultural regime, their economic relationship to the frontier, their reasons for being there, the stability of their membership, and their composition all reflected the economic and cultural changes wrought by the diaspora.

DISCUSSION

The drainage of population from the Kofyar hills brought change not only in agricultural production and in households but also in the relationship *between* production and households. The households Netting examined in 1961 were shaped by an intensive farming regime necessitated by high population density in the homeland; the crowding resulted from dangers in the savanna below. After the diaspora, a remnant hill population persisted, not because of threats to the south but in spite of opportunities to the south. Understanding the changed relationship between production and household hinges on the issue of why this homeland population persisted.

Kofyar living in the homeland tended to see their nurturance of homeland settlements as a product of the spatial rootedness and territorial commitment I described above. They took pride in having maintained their homeland communities while several neighboring groups, such as the Chok-fem, had abandoned theirs. In fact, such a predisposition would have been promoted by their cultural-ecological past. As Netting (1993) pointed out, it was adaptive for the intensive hill farmers to become highly invested in their land, and it fit the cross-cultural characteristics of smallholder agriculture. It is expectable that the distinctive smallholder institutions of enduring property rights, stable settlement, and high investment in land had

become embedded in ideology and ramified in culture long before there was any question of leaving *kopnda* behind. Deeply linked to ritual and other aspects of culture, these would be much higher priorities than notions of proper household form. [Chokfem, in contrast, had been an area of shifting cultivation (Netting, 1965)]. Thus, an ethos that had formed when the landscape was crowded may partly explain why *kopnda* could hold onto its sparse population, bucking trends in the agricultural calendar, land availability, and market opportunities.

A more practical side to this explanation involves the ongoing use of the homeland communities in constructing an ethnic identity and capitalizing on that identity as a political and economic resource.¹² For the homeland is more than a symbolically-loaded piece of real estate; it serves as a facility for reaffirming (or inventing, as in the case of “launchings”) traditions, for celebrating and publicizing accomplishments, establishing and renewing political and economic connections. The threat posed by the diaspora to ethnic identity was recognized from the outset, as evidenced by the colonial officer who wrote in 1945 that “Together with this shifting of population from north to south can be seen signs of disintegration of the tribes concerned, and the time can be foreseen when the Yergum, Montol, and Dimmuk [Doemak] tribes will cease to exist as political entities” (JosProF, file 2097a, 1949). It was precisely this danger that the Kofyar recognized and countered.

More practical yet are incentives for maintaining the homeland to attract political and economic investment by the state. The dispersal of their population between 1960 and 1985 threatened to leave the Kofyar without any sizeable contiguous area under their control. This is critical because the Nigerian government controls enormous wealth, and when resources are directed to the populace, it is generally not to sets of people but to local administrations—states and local government areas (LGAs). This dynamic strongly favors political subdivision. Creation of new political divisions provides local elites opportunities to carve out spheres of accumulation (Nnoli, 1978, p. 161); it also tends to win the political support of the recipients of the new political subdivisions. For example, “[t]he sup-

¹²Kofyar ethnic categories are defined in terms of the geography of the homeland. The Kofyar tongue has no word for tribe or ethnic group; one inquires about social affiliation with *Ga gurum pene?*—literally, “Where are your people from?” The answer is always a homeland location, but its specificity varies; one’s people may be from a neighborhood, village, chiefdom, or colonial “tribal area” (see Stone, 1996, p. 63–69). “Kofyar” is rarely used in self-identification. On “Kofyar” as an anthropological construct, see Netting (1968, pp. 36–43); on Kofyar “tribes” as colonial constructs, see Stone (1996, pp. 63–71). For comparable examples from Africa see Evans-Pritchard (1940, p. 136) and Linares (1983, p. 130). On the “segmentary” nature of African ethnicity, see Uchendu (1995, p. 131).

port for ex-President Ibrahim Babangida in his eight year rule reached its climax following the creation of nine new states in August 1991. For that singular action he received a chieftaincy title in Igboland and the expression of approval to extend his title to 2000 AD" (Akinyele, 1996, p. 88). Indeed, subdivision is thought to benefit both local and national economies; "[t]he popular belief is that development radiates from administrative headquarters and that the more such centers exist, the faster the rate of national development" (Akinyele, 1996, p. 88).

Political districting is usually closely tied to ethnic identity, contributing to the 'ethnicizing' of Nigerian society (Joseph, 1987, p. 49). In the Kofyar case, designation of states was not relevant but designation of LGAs and districts within them was. Pan LGA was established in 1980 by politicians of the Nigerian Second Republic (1979–1984). Pan gave the Kofyar their own political district, finally separated from Shendam LGA which had always been dominated by the neighboring Goemai.¹³

The regime had plans for further districting within the LGA, even including the Latok hills—where there were only a few hundred adults living—for its own district within Pan LGA. Especially in swing areas such as the Middle Belt, politicians curried favor by bestowing administrative infrastructure that supported ethnicity and garnered federal funding. Another round of subdivision was underway by the short-lived Third Republic of 1994, before it was annulled by the military junta. The rewards of this system provide incentives to keep populations resident and communities viable; indeed, levels of state funding are directly tied to local population (Wunsch and Olowu, 1996/97, p. 77).

The Kofyar homeland communities of 1985 showed parallels with the Yoruba home communities that Berry described as serving primarily as channels to economic resources of the state. Households there "functioned not as homogeneous or unitary agencies of resource allocation but rather as nodal points in a diaspora, as places where individuals came to participate in the operation of a farm or other rural enterprise or to draw on the resources of their kinsmen" (Berry, 1985, p. 70).

The differences between the Kofyar homeland in 1960 and 1985 run deep, and their effects on the nature of the homeland household are real. Thus my analysis does not contradict Netting's model of early Kofyar households, a model that has been elaborated but not contradicted by later

¹³This was also an ethnic resource. The name *Pan* is Kofyar for clan, and during the early 1980s, "Pan" became a form of self-identification, especially for those who had left the farming area for careers in cities such as Jos and Lafia. Even after the military government folded Pan back into Shendam LGA in 1984, many Kofyar used Pan as an ethnic label.

scholarship (Stone *et al.*, 1984). The households of the 1980s homeland, with their piecemeal and ephemeral composition, odd bimodal age distribution, and clustering around school villages, were less an adaptation to conditions of population and farm production than they were a by-product of deliberate strategies for preserving that homeland as an ethnic and political-economic resource. Those strategies are best understood from a causal catchment broadened to include factors that were largely immaterial to the Kofyar householders Netting first saw when he hiked up the plateau escarpment as a graduate student. It is the change that is the real story here, a change from which we can best learn by embracing the parallax of two different perspectives.

EPILOGUE: THE HOME FIRES BURNING

After noting to myself that I should return to the homeland in 10 years, it was, rather oddly, exactly 10 years later that I returned with Netting on what would be his last trip. We found the *yil* villages thriving, with evidence everywhere of continued efforts to keep it that way. The grade schools still had students, traditional compounds were still occupied, new vacation homes had been built, and the public calendar was crowded with *maap* and *pa* funeral rituals, launchings, and other events. The summer of 1994 saw an enormous gathering in Lardang to commemorate the elevation of a Kofyar to administrative head of the Plateau State government.

There were also signs of success at attracting resources of the state. Infrastructure improvements included a borehole, with a pump providing year-round water. The trend towards increasingly localized administrations had continued (Wunsch and Olowu, 1996/97, p. 69), and the headquarters for a new Local Government Area had been built in Kwalla, accessible by a newly paved road.

My forecast for the abandonment of hill villages, where I thought I had seen a cultural twilight, was wrong. The quixotic road to Bong had never been finished, but none of the major *pang* villages was totally abandoned. Although I did not get to see him, I was told that Yongkop and his family were doing well, still awaiting Gonkun's renaissance.

In Kofyar-Paya, where I had expected Dajong's descendants to have left his legendary compound and let the sacred fire die out, the compound was still inhabited and the fire still tended—by Dajong himself, still alive and no longer tormented by the spirits of *kopnda*.

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