

CHAPTER III

IMAGINING NATURE AND SOCIETY

Landscapes, Places and Nature

Emu Lagoon is only one place, but it is also many places – all the different places that people make of it... They can walk around the same water, scuff the same dust and sit under the same trees, but they are not in the same place (Strang 1997:4).

Instead, then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated movements in networks of social relations and understandings (Massey 1994:154).

Landscapes

This chapter is guided by insights from landscape studies. A crucial element, drawn from these, is that landscapes are not simply topographical features. Rather, they contain these features and people's interpretations of them. They also are not limited to the surface of the land, but can include other immaterial worlds that are located below or above the surface (Bender 1993). Ultimately landscapes are created by people and enclose the 'real' and the 'imagined'.

Because landscapes are social, they are not fixed. They change as societies change. For example, acts based in ideology affect landscapes. These acts often create visible public symbols to represent the ideology (Denecke 1992).

Acknowledging this role the mental played in the construction of the landscape allows the recovery of ideologies. It also allows recognition of ideological agents whose actions can have both intended and unintended consequences, and material and nonmaterial motivations (Baker 1992). For example, the landscape is altered by material structures such as rain-control or elite sites, which are created within these ideological contexts. Mapungubwe was such a site. The move of the royal residential area onto the hilltop materialised the new ideology. This physically separated the rulers and commoners. Through this relocation, the Mapungubwe hilltop acquired new meaning.

When the Leopards Kopje people moved into the SLCA, they used their mental map, or imaginings,¹ to guide their interaction with the landscape. This would have been partly based on associations between types of places (hills, caves and pools) and their use in rain-control. These imaginings were then materialised onto the Shashe-Limpopo landscape. It was possible to create a new, and ideal ritual landscape because “the frontier as an institutional vacuum was a place where the frontiersmen could literally construct a desirable social order. They came to the frontier not with a sociological and political tabula rasa to be shaped by its forests and plains, but with a mental model of a good society. The elements of the model went well into the past...” (Kopytoff 1989:12-13). Interaction with the landscape helped to shape the physical expression of their imaginings. Through continued interaction between people and the sacred landscapes, meanings ascribed to features were reinforced and amplified, or changed.

The Leopard’s Kopje people were re-using a canvass that had previously been painted by the hunter-gatherer and other farmer communities already in the valley. This canvas “has both transparency and depth: transparency, because one can see into it; depth, because the more one looks the further one sees” (Ingold 200:56). Thus farmer and hunter-gatherer interaction with the landscape-canvas did not simply cover the landscape. Instead, people learnt to see into it, and the more they interacted with it, the more they saw.

Space and Place

Landscapes enclose both spaces and places. Spaces became places by being named, by materialising power and social relations, and by embodying social and ideological investments of groups. “Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed” (Carter et al 1993:xii). The symbolic meanings apply both to spaces constructed by people and to nature, and both are given meaning through the interaction of human agents with it. Topographic features on the landscape thus

^{1.} In using the term *imagining* I follow Roepstorff & Bubandt (2003:15). For them imagining creates a model for action, because “...the process of imagining is more than a metaphor; it is a particular form of practice. Imagining is not just the grasping or the conceptualisation of that what is ‘out there’, it also implies an attempt to render an idea real by making it the model for future action. In other words, imagining entails a model of as well as a model for reality...”.

are symbolic resources in the creation and reproduction of power structures (Tilley 1996).

Spaces also are inscribed with social relations, and a place is given its specificity by not only its history, but by being constructed out of a particular set of social relations. This specificity is constructed through interrelations (Massey 1994). Different elements, religious, social, political and cultural are inscribed on the same space, and "localities can in a sense be present in one another, both inside and outside at the same time" (Massey 1994:7). This means that different people could have had different interpretations of elements on the SLCA landscape.

Massey (1994) argues that we need to think of the spatial in the context of space-time and as formed out of social relations at all scales; this allows a view of place as an articulation of those social relations and networks at a particular moment. The identities of places, therefore, are not fixed and are multiple and contested and cannot be bounded. Places should thus be viewed as open and porous (Massey 1994). This approach facilitates the meaning of spaces and places to be viewed as interconnected and shifting.

Because the meanings of spaces are not inherent, they are invoked through the practices of social actors and are subject to revision (Moore 1986). People, however, read space aided by a mental map. The contours of this map are drawn from historical, socio-political and cultural information. Clear examples are the layout of Iron Age homesteads following the Central Cattle Pattern, which is the product of a specific worldview (Huffman 1982) and the subsequent changes in settlement layout with the development of the Zimbabwe culture (Huffman 1986, 2000). At historic rain-control sites different areas are demarcated. Structures include features, such as rain-kraals (cf. Schapera 1971). This layout had meaning to the actors and spectators, and was drawn from their imaginings of a rain-control place (cf. Anderson 1991, Roepstorff and Bubandt 2003). It is also important to recognise that there is a difference between conceptual space and physical space (Ardener 1989). The spatial layout of a rain-control site is the result of the interplay between these two categories. This interplay involves change over time.

The organisation of space can be seen as a communication system or symbolic code (cf. Moore 1986; Massey 1994), and was used not only to practise rain-control, but also communicate associated ideas and ideologies. The manifestation, however, was complex, as spatial layout and the use of space are shaped by symbolic dimensions, and are never straightforward and simple (Hodder 1987). Rain-control rituals obviously form part of broader religious beliefs, and would reinforce those beliefs. Religious beliefs in turn form part of the ideologies of a society. These would be projected onto the landscape and create new conceptual spaces. The allocation of meaning to spaces takes place at both a micro and macro scale (Morley and Robins 1993). On a micro scale people give meaning to topographical features: for example, Xhosa and Zulu rain-controllers associate pools with the rain snake (Hunter 1936; Thelejane 1963). On a macro scale people associate topographic features with other people as //kabbo did when he explained his home landscape to Dr. Bleek (Deacon 1986). It is through this materialisation process that rain-control formed an important part of the Mapungubwe sacred landscape.

Nature and environment

Sharing landscapes is not necessarily based on the same understanding of nature and environment², as these are social constructs (cf. Hoopes 1996; Roepstorff and Bubandt 2003; Strang 1997). This means that a person or community's relationship to nature and the environment is dependent on their location, their worldview, economic modes and socio-spatial organisation (cf. Strang 1997).

Nature and the environment are different places (Ingold 2000). 'Nature' is 'out there', where "the world can exist as nature only for a being that does not belong there, and that can look upon it...from such a safe distance that it is easy to connive in the illusion that it is unaffected by his presence" (Ingold 2000:20). On the other hand "environment is the world as it exists and takes on meaning in relation to [a person], and in that sense it came into existence and undergoes

² I do not wish to engage in the constructivist – primordialist debate. Nor do I want to explore the nature-culture (cf. Levi-Strauss 1966) debates by feminist writers Rosaldo (1974) and Ortner (1974) and more recently by Descola & Pálsson (1996) and Milton (1997). Rather I focus on how human beings imagine their surroundings. Consequently, I follow Ingold's (2000) division between nature and environment.

development within [that person] and around [that person]" Ingold 2000:20). The difference between what is environment and what is nature is thus a difference of perspective and experience.

By acknowledging that environment is a construct, I do not deny that there are independent physical features such as forests and mountains, but what these mean are interpreted by people guided by their experiences. "Knowledge of the world is gained by moving about in it, exploring it, attending to it, ever alert to the signs by which it is revealed" (Ingold 2000:55). This means "nature is simultaneously real and really imagined" (Roepstorff and Bubandt 2003:9).

Landscapes and People

The next part of this chapter is deeply influenced by the theoretical framework and methodology of Strang's 1997 study of interaction dynamics between Australian Aboriginal people and white pastoralists. She explored the different views of the environment in these two communities. This was achieved through using insights gained from landscape studies. For her, landscape "[b]y providing a common idiom ... shows how different values are located in the land according to social, cultural, historical and ecological factors" (Strang 1997:5). Culturally specific processes inform people's readings and representation of the landscape. These are embedded in symbolic meaning and value (Strang 1997).

For Strang (1997) human environmental interaction is influenced by three key factors. These are "universal processes of cognition and fundamental human imperatives; responses to ecological pressures and potentialities; and the beliefs and values that are instituted within a specifically cultural context and inculcated through cultural forms" (Strang 1997:6). Through recognizing that people's relationship with the environment is constructed, and differs from one person and group to the rest, I access different views of Leopard's Kopje farmers and hunter-gatherers about nature and environment.

Hunter-Gatherers

This discussion draws on insights from general San ethnography and historical records. This is possible, because Lewis-Williams (1984) has shown remarkable continuity in San ideology through time and space.

Archaeologists have constructed models of LSA society based on the archaeological record, recent ethnography and historical accounts. These models suggest that LSA hunter-gatherer communities consisted mostly of small bands of related people who shared a camp. The dominant social relationship in bands, and thus camps, was kinship. Camps were shifted in relation to resource availability, and band membership fluctuated (Lee 1976; Wadley 1989). In fact “[g]roup size, activities and settlement patterns change constantly to accommodate variations in both the physical and social environment” (Van der Ryst 1998: 3).

The San also viewed the land as part of their identity (Barnard 1988; Van der Ryst 1998). This created a fluid relationship with nature and the environment. Home was where their camp was. This location was relational to water sources ‘owned’ by the group (Lee 1976). As camps regularly moved, home, rather than being just one site, was a collection of places. In this way topographic features were given meaning, and classified, through interaction.

This is illustrated in the Bleek and Lloyd accounts (Bleek 1933a, 1933b; Deacon 1986, 1988). The /Xam environment was not defined by just one place; rather it was many places. Deacon (1986:140) describes a sketch map produced by Bleek during his interviews with //kabbo. On this map

[e]ach location, which is invariably next to a spring or intermittent river, has the /Xam name and, in some cases, the European name, as well as the name of a person or people who lived there. Between some of the places are estimates of the time taken to get from one point to another. Written in large letters across two areas are “Flat Bushmen” and “Hardast River Bushmen” signifying the territories of these groups (Deacon 1986:140).

Essentially Bleek had sketched //kabbo’s imagining of his home landscape. The edges of /kabbo’s area were not nature, but other territories. These territories were not unfamiliar as //kabbo knew and could name the people of these places. Between the territories were spaces, for example the hunting-grounds, that could be dangerous and unpredictable (Lewis-Williams 1996), but they were part of the environment. Beyond these territories, in unexplored areas, lay the unknown and unnamed. In this world the camp was associated with “safety, dependability and co-operation” (ibid:124).

Classification of the landscape might have changed seasonally: environment could become nature and vice versa. During the rainy season, with more abundant food resources, bands aggregated into larger groups. Aggregation and dispersal were crucial elements of hunter-gatherer social organisation (Wiessner 1977; Lee 1979; Wadley 1987). Aggregation was critical to San society, because it was at this time that social and economic networks were strengthened (Wadley 1987, 1993; Wiessner 1977, 1982, 1990; Mitchell 1996). During the period of aggregation, social rules were followed more closely. This included rules about the gendered division of labour. The basic division was that men did most of the hunting of animals, while women gathered plant foods. These gender roles were followed during aggregation, but relaxed during periods of dispersal, when men helped women to collect plant foods (Marshall 1969; Lee 1979; Wadley 1987).

The blurring of gender boundaries during dispersal means that hunter-gatherer male and female perceptions of nature were similar for this period. In other respects men and women had different perceptions, as their focus of interaction with the environment differed. Women's knowledge of the landscape was based more on plant location, whereas men's familiarity was more focused on the potential locations of animals. As important as the residential landscape, was the ritual landscape. A key focal point in San society and social organisation was the trance dance. In historical times, ethnographers in the Kalahari recorded that trance dances were held throughout the year, and in part were a tool for resolving social conflicts. This is still the case. During the dance, shamans enter into altered states of consciousness. In these states shamans heal, as well as perform other specialist tasks (Lewis-Williams 1982, 1984).

Some specialist shamans practise rain-control. At times, they practise rain-control outside of trance. Rain-controllers painted some of their visions (Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2004a). Due to their experiences, shamans had additional landscapes. This would have contained ritual features as well as creatures. An example of such features might be the Lizard Mountains in the Northern Cape. This set of hills was used in rain-control and were also marked with rock art (Deacon 1988).

These additional landscapes were possible because the San world was not only composed of visible topographic features like Lizard Mountain. Rather, the visible intersected with the invisible. According to Lewis-Williams (1996), the /Xam cosmos was structured into horizontal and vertical axes that interdigitate. On the horizontal axis is the everyday world. The vertical one was associated with supernatural things. Shamans traversed this axis. The realm below was associated with the dead, and the realm above with spirits, shamans and the Mantis. The extremes of the vertical axis were mediated by water, as water mediated between the waterhole and hunting-ground. The intersection of the two axes means that for the /Xam some topographical features, like waterholes, could represent different landscapes.

Hunter-gatherer social and ritual landscapes guided their encounters with farmers. The southern African San have a long history of interaction with farming communities, dating back to at least 1500 years (cf. Wadley 1996). This interaction and its impact have been extensively discussed in the Kalahari Revisionist debate (cf. Schrire 1984; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990; Solway & Lee 1990; Sadr 1997). Key components of this interaction included ritual and economical activities. Hunter-gatherers have worked as hunters, herders and ritual specialists for farming communities (cf. Jolly 1986, 1992; Dowson 1998; Van der Ryst 1998; Blundell 2004). This interaction probably influenced hunter-gatherer perceptions of the environment, and they might have combined their knowledge with that acquired from farmers. Hunter-gatherer practices and beliefs also could have influenced farmers.

Historical and ethnographic accounts (Van der Ryst 1998) of farmer hunter-gatherer interaction show that hunter-gatherer women are more likely to marry farmer men, than vice versa. This creates another level of mobility for hunter-gatherer women. They not only can move between camps, but between modes of production. The process of inter-community marriage might have resulted in the more intensive transfer of landscape concepts than could be acquired through other interaction or observation.

Farmers

It is likely that, due to their reliance on fertile soil and good grazing, farming communities had a different perception of nature and environment from hunter-gatherers.

Traditionally Eastern Bantu homesteads included several houses clustered around a central cattle kraal (Kuper 1980). The homesteads are the core of people's worlds (environment). The opposite is the bush (nature), which is potentially dangerous (Packard 1981; Ingold 2000).

In southern Africa marriage is patri-local (the wife moves to her husband's homestead). Because of patrilocal marriage patterns, women are more mobile, and often reside away from their birth families. This marriage pattern means that a homestead consists of the male household head, his wives, married sons and unmarried children. The number of wives, and accordingly the size of the homestead, is dependant on the status of the male head. Usually the homestead of a chief was larger than those of other people (Hammond-Tooke 1993).

Chiefdoms seem to have occurred through most of the period (Evers and Hammond-Tooke 1986). Political hierarchies at times manifest in changes in aggregation. There have been various levels of settlement aggregation in farming communities (cf. Hall and Maggs 1979; Hall 1984; Pistorius 1992; Hall 1998; Booyens 2000, 2003).

Irrespective of the status and size of their households, early farming chiefdoms were largely self-sufficient generalists (Whitelaw 1997), and each neighbourhood probably made their own bowls, cooking pots, containers, spoons, tools, clothes and jewellery. Labour was allocated according to gender, age and status. Men worked with stone and wood, as well as domestic stock. While older more senior men owned the stock, young boys herded and looked after the animals. On the other hand women worked with material derived from the earth, such as clay pots and house plaster. Women were also responsible for planting and tending agricultural crops as well as cooking. These age and status defined gender roles resulted in different experiences of the village and bush. These encounters

probably contributed to different perceptions of nature and environment for men and women and people of different ages.

There are some exceptions to these small-scale gendered roles. Late K2, Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe were class-based states with craft specialists. The changes in the economic system, as well as new class-based roles, removed some people from direct contact with the fields and grazing areas and created a new set of perceptions of where nature was. These new perceptions meant that there was no longer a uniform view of the landscape and nature within the SLCA: it now fissured along class lines. Class position now defined a person's worldview.

Regardless of class, ancestors are the mediators between farming communities and the spiritual world. Ancestors, however, are not the same everywhere. Who can become ancestors relates to the structure of communities, domestic, kinship and descent relations and institutions (Fortes 1965; Hammond-Tooke 1985). Obviously, the ancestors feature in rain-control rites, but they are not the sole mediators. The spirits of the land also play an important role. The complexity of rain-control ethnography is discussed in Chapter V. I emphasize one point here. Rain-controllers often cure droughts away from normal residential places and so some aspects belong in the bush.

People and the SLCA Landscape

Settlement histories and residential distribution in the SLCA created a set of dichotomies. As discussed in Chapter II, field surveys found that Leopard's Kopje farming settlements were concentrated in the valley, Leokwe sites were in the valley and on the edge of the valley and plateau, while hunter-gatherer sites dotted the plateau.

These groups probably had different perceptions of centre and periphery. The centre for the Leopard's Kopje farming communities was the capital and river valley homesteads. This would have placed the plateau out of society, and in the bush (nature). The Leokwe centre was in the valley and on the plateau/ valley boundary, and the hunter-gatherer hub would have been located on the plateau (Figs. II1, II2, and II3). This is not to deny that on a macro socio-political level

some Leokwe people might have perceived the K2 capital as the centre, but on a smaller group scale their homesteads would have been their pivot. The relationship between people and places, however, is deeper than just occupation of spaces. “At its most intense, the boundaries between person and place, or between the self and the landscape, dissolve altogether” (Ingold 2000:56). This suggests that symbolically hunter-gatherers could have become the plateau and Leopard’s Kopje farmers the valley.

Pre-existing social hierarchies and roles would have guided interaction. In farming communities men are the public figures, and they would have dominated interaction with other communities. These gender divisions are not as strong in hunter-gatherer communities, and interactions with other groups probably were more skills based.

THE SLCA AS A FRONTIER

The clouds on the map, like African societies over the centuries, would move, reform, disappear, break-up into pieces; the pieces would reassemble and new distinct areas would form; and the channels between them would expand, contract and shift. As new polities and societies emerge, other polities and societies would shrink and disappear and their populations would redistribute themselves among the new groupings (Kopytoff 1989:12).

There have been two different types of encounters in the SLCA from AD 900 onwards. The first was between hunter-gatherers and Zhizo farmers and later, K2 farmers. The second type of encounter was between Zhizo farmers and K2 farmers. The political changes resulting from the entrance of Leopards Kopje people into the Shashe-Limpopo were not unique, and similar processes have occurred all over Africa (cf. Kopytoff 1989). Neither was the continued presence of hunter-gatherers and some Leokwe people remarkable, both became ‘First People’. To understand these points I turn to a consideration of Kopytoff’s Frontier model.

‘First People’ in Africa hold a special place. They are often regarded in a symbolic sense as the ‘owners’ of the land (cf. Cashdan 1986a&b; Pikirayi 2001), The importance of First People at times manifests in a form of recognition in which they were “tamed structurally” (Kopytoff 1989:55). This has involved

keeping people on the margin: physically (for example, groups of blacksmiths in the Sudanic belt live as 'outcasts' and as separate 'ethnic' groups) or socially (for example, the Pygmy groups in Central Africa) while incorporating them into the ritual order (Kopytoff 1989). Another form of neutralisation is the incorporation of the ritual heads from the previous political order, such as in the Ekie state in southern Zaire (Fairley 1989). For the latecomers a ritual role removed the 'First People' from competition for political resources.

A similar example of ritual incorporation but political exclusion is found in the ritual roles allocated to the Luvhimbi rulers of the Mbedzi by the Singo conquerors in South Africa. The Singo did not exterminate the Luvhimbi, as they feared this would stop the rain. Instead, the Luvimbi became the organisers of Singo rites, but lost political power. The Singo allocated ritual roles to other pre-Singo groups as well (Loubser 1991). This is similar to the ritual roles Calabrese (2005) believes were allocated to the Leokwe.

This ritual role and respect shown to the First People is also manifest in the Venda respect shown to caves, hills, pools and places with rock art. These are seen as *midzimu* places, associated with ancient spirits (not family ancestor spirits). Gifts are left at these places and they are visited to treat misfortunes, such as female infertility (Loubser and Dowson 1987). Similarly, in historic times in the Waterberg the *masele*, were regional rain controllers. The *masele* (foreigners or groups of mixed farmer and hunter-gatherer origins) were living in the area before the arrival of the Northern Transvaal Ndebele. The *masele* continued to use shelters marked with rock art as places to ask for rain (Van der Ryst 1998).

This San rock art centred ritual is not surprising. In historic southern Africa, the role of hunter-gathers as ritual specialists such as healers and rain-controllers is well documented (Jolly 1986, 1992; Dowson 1998; Prins 1990; Hammond-Tooke 1998, 1999; Blundell 2004; Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2004a). This power held by the San shamans has also been transferred onto their art. Rock art is often touched to access its power (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004b). In the Maclear district of the Eastern Cape, rock art is still flaked, scratched and rubbed by

contemporary traditional healers, who use the paint and paintings in ritual (D. Pearce pers. comm. 2005).

Southern African ethnography records a range in responses to newcomers. In the Kalahari the hunter-gatherer response to farmers ranged from continued economic independence to close interaction and even integration. According to Sadr (2005), independence is discernible in the continued absence of farmer material culture from some southern Botswana hunter-gatherer sites in spite of the proximity of farmer settlements. Wilmsen and Denbow (1990) track this range of interactions between Botswana hunter-gatherer and farming communities. They emphasise the role of trade in this interaction, with the San exchanging hunting products for farmer crops and animal produce. In more recent times, with the disappearance of the pre-colonial trade economies and networks, cattle herding has become a central node of interaction in Botswana.

San interaction with Eastern Cape farming communities changed social relationships in hunter-gatherer communities. Specialist shamans controlled rain for the farming communities, and in the process became more wealthy and powerful. The interaction gave rise to a new rock art tradition in which San shamans are depicted as much larger than ordinary members of the community (Dowson 1998). Kinahan (1999) recorded similar changes in Namibian rock art. This response is one of many, and Blundell's Nomansland project clearly illustrate "how varied and complex the socio-historical processes were..." (Blundell 2004:175). The possibility of similar variations and complexities in the SLCA is suggested in this thesis.

Interaction, however, not only changes individuals, eventually communities are also affected. Interaction between Eastern Cape hunter-gatherer and farming communities impacted on both, who then selectively appropriated elements that fitted into their own cognitive systems and needs. One of the most obvious has been Nguni diviners adopting the trance dance from the San (Hammond-Tooke 1998, 2002). This borrowing was selective, and "was basically occasioned by a female reaction to extreme patriarchy" (Hammond-Tooke 1998:13) and it is "possible ... that the ecstatic experiences of neighbouring San groups were

adopted as an appropriate, and dramatic expression of the deep-seated frustrations of Nguni women..."(ibid:14).

The Cape Nguni also appropriated San divinatory animals. This involved the Cape Nguni adopting "a particular conception of wild animals, an important element in San healing" (Hammond-Tooke 1999:130) and selectively modifying it. This adoption was appropriate in spite of the very different cognitive systems of the two groups, as the divinatory animals fitted into the Cape Nguni framework. The divinatory animals were incorporated as a specific manifestation of the ancestors in addition to the more traditional manifestations. This allowed diviners to incorporate 'nature' as well as 'culture' and thus transcend the descent-based limitations of their ancestors. "Wild animals would seem to be most appropriate symbols to stand for such 'generic' (i.e., non-descent group) shades. Their location outside society allowed all 'ancestors' to be thought of as, in a sense, universal, and thus accessible to all diviners" (Hammond-Tooke 1999:130).

Clearly, responses differed as the newcomers and the first peoples negotiated their relationship guided by their historical and cultural backgrounds, but also by current needs. Archaeologists in the SLCA have viewed this negotiated process between hunter-gatherers and Leopard's Kopje farmers in diverse ways. Van Doornum (2000, 2005) points out that the changes in hunter-gatherer signatures changed through time and are not uniform throughout the valley. This indicates a range of responses, which varied from abandonment of the valley (as proposed by Hall & Smith 2000) to continued close co-operation with farmers.

One of the areas of co-operation was ritual, and according to Hall & Smith (2000) Leopards Kopje farming communities used the "ambiguous power" of the hunter-gatherers for their own social needs. This included appropriating ritual places and possibly practices.

As in the Eastern Cape, ritual interaction between farmers and hunter-gatherers in the SLCA probably resulted in changes in both communities. The changes in the hunter-gatherer communities varied, as some chose to be more involved than others. Similarly, alterations in the farmer world varied. Transformations, however, not only resulted from interaction between the two groups. Much larger dynamics were at work. Ideological processes related to state formation and centralisation resulted in fundamental transformations in both communities.