CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The nature of interaction between hunter-gatherers and farmers* in Africa, and especially southern Africa, has been discussed in a large number of both anthropological and archaeological books and papers through the years. Evidence for interaction, both anthropological and archaeological, has been subject to many different interpretations. A good example of this is the much-discussed "Kalahari Debate" (see Lee 1979, 2002; Parkington 1984; Denbow & Wilmsen 1986; Wilmsen 1989; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990; Hall 1990; Solway & Lee 1990; Kent 1992, 2002b; Shot 1992; Lee & Guenther 1993; Smith 1996; Sadr 1997, 2002). Each researcher has a different background, research interest, methodology, and research aims (Kent 1992). It is thus inevitable that various (and often conflicting) interpretations of hunter-gatherer interaction in southern Africa have been presented. For example, Denbow (1984; 1990) interprets a few pot sherds and fragments of iron on sites in Botswana as evidence for encapsulation of hunter-gatherers by farmer societies, whilst Sadr (1997:107) believes that this same evidence can be interpreted as hunter-gatherer autonomy:

> Do handfuls of potsherds and a few pieces of metal prove Bushman encapsulation in the extensive EIA [Early Iron Age] social and economic networks of the time? If so, the Bushmen certainly didn't get much out of it, perhaps not even a whole pot per family per century (Sadr 1997:107).

In addition to the differing anthropological and archaeological interpretations of interaction, the actual contact situations themselves vary between people, from place to place, and from time to time (Silberbauer 1965; Kent 1992, 1996; Musonda 1997), adding to the debates on interaction interpretations.

Models of interaction

The spread of farming into areas previously only occupied by hunter-gatherers would have resulted in a wide range of different culture contact situations. Various

models have been created in order to understand what processes are involved when hunter-gatherers and farmers meet and interact (Alexander 1984; Green & Perlman 1985; Moore 1985; also see Hall (1984) for a general discussion on frontiers in southern Africa), although many of these kinds of studies have not focussed specifically on the social and ideological boundaries and structures that inform and underpin interaction. For example, frontier studies address the questions concerning the causes of economic and political expansion into new areas, and the resulting effects on indigenous societies, focussing on the peripheries or edges of particular societies (Green & Perlman 1985). Boundary studies, in turn, investigate the interactions that occur at these peripheries.

Alexander (1984) proposes that there are two types of frontiers in contact situations: a "moving" frontier and a "static" frontier. Two phases occur in the moving frontier model. The first phase involves an initial movement of small groups of farmers into regions inhabited solely by hunter-gatherers, where the indigenous people may welcome contact (Alexander 1984). A denser occupation of farmers follows in the second phase, which is likely to disrupt hunting and gathering as farmers subdue the region, rather than sharing it. The indigenous hunter-gatherers are more likely to resist and resent this type of occupation (Alexander 1984). Static frontiers then develop at the end of the moving frontier and include a wide range of interaction relationships. Criticisms of this model include the fact that these distinctions impose typological constraints on interaction processes (Moore 1985), as well as the fact that the model is too focussed on periphery, and that it is too rigid (van der Ryst 1998).

Interacting with farmers would have had a number of outcomes for hunter-gatherers (Alexander 1984; Klatzow 1994; Backwell *et al.* 1996; van der Ryst 1998), changing their traditional economic, demographic and settlement patterns (Moore 1985; Hall, S. 1990). Interaction occurred at several levels, ranging from hunter-gatherers abandoning the area for less desirable regions (Alexander 1984) or occasional contact between hunter-gatherers and farmers, to more formal and extended contact (for example Lee 1976). In the case of more formal, extended contact, hunter-gatherers may either have remained autonomous or become increasingly assimilated

[*] By the term "farmers" I mean Bantu-speaking black African agropastoralists or agriculturalists.

and subordinated by farmers. Those hunter-gatherers that lost their independence came to rely on farmers economically, politically, socially and ritually (van der Ryst 1998). However, hunter-gatherers were not just passive recipients in contact situations (Moore 1985). Although the presence of farmers on the landscape did impose limitations on hunter-gatherer subsistence and mobility, they also created new social, political, religious and economic opportunities (Moore 1985: 95). The disruption of traditional hunter-gatherer mobility patterns and resource access is arguably one of the main reasons for the establishment of trade between hunter-gatherers, herders and farmers (Moore 1985; Hall, S. 1990). According to Moore (1985), the addition of only a small number of farmers into the landscape rapidly raises the cost of hunter-gatherer settlement and subsistence, as farmers and their stock exploit the resource base. Trade is one alternative to this disruption. Hunter-gatherers may also have intensified their occupation, and social and economic behaviour, in order to cope with restricted access to resources, space and landscapes. The availability of space thus plays an important role in interaction, especially in terms of proximity between different groups of people, and in terms of their perception of the landscape.

Changing spaces and places

Spaces between hunter-gatherers and farmers changed through time. In the first phases of interaction (see Alexander 1984; Moore 1985), the amount of available space for both hunter-gatherers and farmers was quite high, but with increasing numbers of sedentary farmers in an area, there would have been a decrease in available 'free' space. Hunter-gatherers may have specifically chosen to be proximate to farmers. For example, in the Shashe-Limpopo, it appears that hunter-gatherers selected sites for specific outcomes (van Doornum 2000): the selection of the shelter at Little Muck, for instance, was motivated by a need to be close to farmers (at Leokwe Hill) at specific times (Hall & Smith 2000). If hunter-gatherers had not wished to partake in some form of interaction, they would have moved away. This choice has implications for issues of identity and how hunter-gatherers saw themselves in relation to farmers and *vice versa,* and how this conception changed through time. Mutually beneficial interaction, independence, or assimilation of hunter-gatherers by farmers was informed and influenced by the social identities and

constructions underlying interaction, and may be reflected in the material culture found in the different sites.

Alternatively – an option not often considered in interaction studies - farmers might have chosen to be proximate to hunter-gatherers, for various reasons. For example, Mitchell (2004) suggests that the possibility of hunter-gatherer marriage partners, labour and knowledge may have attracted some early pioneer farmers (Moore 1985) to an area, although in other regions (such as the Limpopo), farmers settled wherever conditions were suitable for them socially and economically.

Decreases in available space would have led to hunter-gatherer space being taken over, and later their 'places' as well. According to Parkington and Mills (1991:355), a place is a " 'space given meaning' by people". This is echoed by several other researchers: spaces become places by being inhabited, and through human activity (Thomas 1996); by being named and through having meaning for / being given meaning by the people using that space (Carter *et al.* 1993). According to Massey (1994), places have no boundaries; instead they form part of a network of social relations and meaning. Thus the meaning of a place may change because it develops in the relationship between people and things (Thomas 1996). Over the last 2000 years in southern Africa, perceptions of space and place have also changed through time, as the interaction relationships between hunter-gatherers and farmers changed. When farmers entered and settled in a region, the landscape of hunter-gatherer spaces and places changed into a landscape of hunter-gatherer *and* farmer spaces and places. Some of the hunter-gatherer places may have been taken over by farmers in order to harness the power of the first people. In doing so, the 'meaning' or 'identity' of the place would have been altered, changing it as a 'place' (see Parkington 1980: 73). One region ideally suited to examining such changes in hunter-gatherer space, place and identity due to interaction with farmers, is the Shashe-Limpopo region.

The Shashe-Limpopo region of Limpopo Province

According to Mitchell (2004:7), one of the factors lacking in studies of interaction thus far has been an acknowledgement of the differences in farming groups and how they structure their interaction with hunter-gatherers. Such differences would have had implications for the hunter-gatherers involved, in terms of where they fitted into the farmers' worldview and social scale. A study of hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction in the Shashe-Limpopo would therefore be of importance in redressing this lack, as several different groups of farmers settled in the region over time. These successive groups, which became increasingly socially and politically stratified once they had settled in the region, included Zhizo and Leopard's Kopje farmers (which includes both the K2 and Mapungubwe periods) (Huffman 1996, 2000; Meyer 2000). In addition, while the hunter-gatherer sequence is relatively unknown, the complex Iron Age farmer sequence of the region has been well-documented (see Chapter 3) (Hanisch 1980, 1981a & b; Huffman 1996, 2000; Meyer 2000). This provides a unique background and opportunity to study changes in hunter-gatherer society and their interaction with farmers, through time. The issue of proximity, space and place is important in the Shashe-Limpopo region, because of the increasing numbers of farmers settling here through time. The Iron Age sequence thus provides the critical and essential other half of the hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction being studied.

As yet, hunter-gatherer studies in the South African portion of the Shashe-Limpopo region are still preliminary (but see work done in related regions in Botswana and Zimbabwe by Robinson (1964), Cooke & Simons (1969) and Walker (1994)), and focus mainly on providing a database from which to work. These studies also pose possible scenarios for hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction through time. This project will not only provide further data on the Shashe-Limpopo region, but will provide an opportunity to test whether a widespread pattern of interaction existed, and how this changed through time, or whether unique situations have been represented in previous studies (Hall & Smith 2000; van Doornum 2000). Thus the two inter-related aims of the project will be to identify hunter-gatherer identities and sequences of interaction in relation to farmer sequences of increasing complexity, and to assess the changing hunter-gatherer conceptualisation of 'space' and 'place'.

The first aim - to identify and describe hunter-gatherer sequences of interaction in relation to the farmer sequence – is achieved by building upon Hall and Smith's (2000) work (see Chapter 3) on changing perceptions of identity through time, from the pre-contact period to the Middle Iron Age.

The second aim is to investigate hunter-gatherer conceptualisation of 'space' and 'place' by studying hunter-gatherer sites assumed to be in face-to-face contact with farmers and those that are not. On the basis of this, I draw some conclusions about the related issues of hunter-gatherer identity, and changes to that identity through time. This second issue involves a comparison of archaeological data obtained from sites such as Balerno Shelter 3 and Little Muck Shelter, with data from similar rock shelters on the farms of Pont Drift (Tshisiku Shelter), near the Limpopo River, and Balerno (Balerno Shelter 2 and Balerno Main Shelter). This will enable an assessment of the changing concept of 'place' (and the implied changes in hunter-gatherer identity) outlined for Little Muck Shelter by Hall and Smith (2000), and an assessment of whether such changes were specific to the site of Little Muck Shelter, because of its close proximity to the farmer settlement of Leokwe Hill. My own work (van Doornum 2000), investigating the relationship between the proximity of hunter-gatherer sites to farmer settlements (ranging from 'close-in' to 'far-out' sites) and the effect that this distance had on interaction and the density of its archaeological correlates, also formed an important base from which to work.

Thesis contents

Various ethnographic examples of hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction are discussed in Chapter 2, highlighting the variability in such interaction. Several case studies are discussed in order to investigate issues of hunter-gatherer identity and self-image, including farmer perception of hunter-gatherers, and *vice versa*, in order to gain an understanding of the identities and social constructions underlying interaction.

Chapter 3 discusses archaeological examples of hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction, focussing on various scales of interaction, ranging from regional to direct or 'face-to-face', taking into consideration the issues of identity and social structures underlying

interaction discussed in Chapter 2. Previous archaeological studies of the Later Stone Age and Iron Age in the Shashe-Limpopo region are also discussed.

The three shelters chosen for study in this project – Tshisiku Shelter, Balerno Main Shelter, and Balerno Shelter 2, are described in Chapter 4. The geology, topography, climate and environmental background are briefly commented on, while the excavations, stratigraphy and chronology of each site are discussed in detail.

The major finds recovered from the three excavations described in Chapter 4 include microlithic stone tool assemblages, faunal material, worked bone tools, shell, beads of various kinds, colouring material, pottery, and metal artefacts. Several of the artefact categories have an Iron Age origin, for example glass beads, pottery, and various metal objects. The analysis of these assemblages is divided into two sections: analysis of the lithic assemblages (Chapter 5), and the analysis of the non-lithic assemblages (bone, shell, beads, colouring material, worked bone, worked wood and metal) (Chapter 6). The assemblages from each shelter are discussed separately, according to artefact category, and then compared in order to establish what regional patterns of artefact distribution occur through time and space. Various tables and graphs illustrating patterns in the data are included in the Appendices.

In Chapter 7, I discuss the findings of Chapters 5 and 6, and compare and contrast this data with data from other shelters in southern Africa. The hunter-gatherer sequence of the last 2000 years is contrasted with the pre-contact period in an attempt to understand how hunter-gatherer identity and perceptions of space and place changed through time. Changes in the hunter-gatherer occupation and interaction sequence over time in the region are also discussed, with reference to the ethnographic and archaeological background discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Identities and social construction underlying interaction in the Shashe-Limpopo are also examined.

Chapter 8 concludes, by postulating a sequence of hunter-gatherer occupation for the Shashe-Limpopo region, and by highlighting the findings of the research that can be tested by further work in the region.

The Appendices contain the graphs and tables referred to in Chapters 5 and 6. Brief discussions of some relevant stone tool classification terminology and raw materials are also included.