

CHAPTER TWO

THE ETHNOGRAPHY

The southern African ethnographic record provides insight into issues of hunter-gatherer / farmer proximity, construction of identity, autonomy, and assimilation of hunter-gatherers by farmers. At a general level, these ethnographic studies can be used to outline various forms of interaction between hunter-gatherers and farmers, as well as how farmers perceive hunter-gatherers in terms of ambivalence and ambiguity. When testing these various forms of ethnographic interaction and identity against the archaeological record, three contexts should be studied before any interpretations of assimilation / subjugation and autonomy / independence are made (Kent 2002a). These are historical context, temporal context, and cultural context and its variability. The much-discussed “Kalahari Revisionist Debate” illustrates the importance of these contexts: participants in the debate have often proposed extreme views regarding the levels of interaction that occur when hunter-gatherers and farmers come into contact. Researchers such as Denbow (1984, 1990, 1999) and Wilmsen (1989) feel that early studies of Kalahari hunter-gatherers (Silberbauer 1965; Lee & DeVore 1976; Marshall 1976; Lee 1979; Tanaka 1980) ignored the long history of hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction in the Kalahari. According to Denbow, these “traditionalists” saw the Kalahari hunter-gatherers as “pristine” remnants of the Stone Age, when in fact, they had been assimilated and subjugated by farmers for almost 1500 years, becoming clients and serfs of their more “complex” neighbours (Denbow 1984, 1990, 1999; Denbow & Wilmsen 1986; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990). This assimilation continued to the point that Kalahari hunter-gatherers are now almost indistinguishable from their Bantu-speaking neighbours, both genetically and culturally, especially in eastern Botswana (Denbow 1984:178; 1990; 1999).

Other researchers, such as Guenther (1996), Barnard (1992), Gordon (1984), Lee (1979; 2002), Lee & DeVore (1976); Kent (1992; 2002a), and Sadr (1997; 2002) argue for more autonomous hunter-gatherers, who were not passive victims of Bantu-speaking and European farmers. Several of these researchers also argue that

hunter-gatherers were only subjugated and assimilated after the arrival of European farmers when decreasing space, resources and the presence of European farmers disrupted both hunter-gatherer and farmer ways of life (Kent 2002a; Lee 2002; Sadr 2002). They believe that many Bushmen have retained their social autonomy and cultural integrity throughout much of the last 2000 years of contact in southern Africa, due to their adaptability, resilience and flexibility (Guenther 1996). These characteristics have enabled them to own stock, switch between hunting and gathering and food production, and to work for, or trade with, farmers without losing their overall social structure and beliefs (Guenther 1986a, 1996; Vierich & Hitchcock 1996; van der Ryst 1998). Some hunter-gatherer social systems may incorporate other non-hunting and gathering economic and social resources in ways that actually maintain their hunting and gathering way of life, rather than destroying it (Bird-David 1988). Thus, not all Bushmen lost their autonomy to become an underclass of the more powerful farmers (Guenther 1996), as Denbow and Wilmsen have argued.

As Kent (1992) suggests, it therefore seems that both viewpoints may be correct, depending on the hunter-gatherers and farmers being studied, and the period during which the research took place. The testing of ethnography using archaeology (see for example Denbow 1984, 1990, 1999; Denbow & Wilmsen 1986; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990, Sadr 1997) has shown that there is more variability in Kalahari hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction (and southern African hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction in general) than was previously recognised. Examples of these varying contact situations, ranging from hostile to mutually beneficial (see Lee & Guenther 1993; van der Ryst 1998, 2003; Thorp 1998), are discussed below.

Variability in hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction

When farmers first moved into areas previously only occupied by hunter-gatherers, exploiting resources in a similar manner, contact between the two groups may have initially been welcome (Alexander 1984), even though the impact on hunter-gatherers may have been significant (Moore 1985). However, once even greater numbers of farmers settled in a region, hunting and gathering patterns would have been disrupted and hunter-gatherers more likely to resist and resent the incursion of

farmers into their areas (Alexander 1984). Alternatively, long-term, seasonal (and mutually beneficial) relationships may have been established, due to decreases in available space, mobility and resource access (Moore 1985). Common themes (such as identity construction and manipulation) underlie all interactions between hunter-gatherers and farmers, although these differ according to context (including such factors as place, time, cultural beliefs, environment and resources).

The arrival of European farmers in southern Africa appears to have increasingly disrupted hunter-gatherer and black farmer ways of life, by impacting on available space, mobility and resources. Hostile relationships between Bushmen and both black and white farmers were recorded in the Cape (Sampson 1995; Smith *et al.* 2000; Kent 2002c; Lee 2002) and the KwaZulu Natal Drakensberg (Campbell 1986, 1987; Mazel 1992), amongst other areas (Maggs 1976; Gordon 1984). As more farmers spread through the region, some hunter-gatherers remained (by choice or by force), while others retreated into more mountainous regions unsuitable for herding and agriculture (Hall, S. 1986; Loubser & Laurens 1994; Sampson 1995; Deacon & Deacon 1999; see also Woodburn 1988). These hunter-gatherers frequently raided black farming villages. There were also skirmishes in the late 1800s between white farmers and Bushmen, with Bushmen raiding livestock and white settlers taking Bushmen as servants (Loubser & Laurens 1994). During this time, young adult Bushmen, as well as children in Ghanzi, Botswana, were often taken into captivity and servitude by raiding Tswana villagers (Guenther 1986b; Lee & Guenther 1993) (also see van der Ryst 2003).

Not all interaction between hunter-gatherers and farmers was hostile. Several different trading relationships have occurred between hunter-gatherers and Bantu-speaking farmers in southern Africa during the last century or so, involving the trade of meat, honey, skins, metal, beads, ceramics and manufactured goods (Silberbauer 1965; Lee 1976; Marshall 1976; Gordon 1984; Solway & Lee 1990; Barnard 1992; Lee & Guenther 1993; Valiente-Noailles 1993) (also see Woodburn (1988) for a brief discussion on East African interaction and trade). It seems that Bushmen often tended to move from other areas specifically in order to be close to immigrant farmers (Smith & Lee 1997; Lee 2002). Rather than representing a threat to hunter-gatherers, many black farmers and their settlements acted as 'magnets' to Bushmen

groups (Maggs 1976), who were attracted by the resources that they had to offer (for archaeological examples see Mazel 1989, 2001; Hall 1990; Mitchell *et al.* 1994; Wadley 1996, 2001; van Doornum 2000). Lee's Ju/'hoansi (!Kung) informants told him that they would travel to farming settlements to trade for pots, iron and glass beads as the Bantu-speaking farmers would not come south to trade at Cho/ana (in the Sandveld of northern Namibia) (Smith & Lee 1997; Lee 2002). In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Tswana pastoralists travelled to /Xai /Xai for annual hunting and grazing expeditions. Tswana hunting parties, together with several groups of Bushmen, would gather for hunting, dancing and trading (Lee 1976). In the 1920's, hunter-gatherers became more sedentary, due to the Bantu-speakers settling with their cattle around the /Xai /Xai waterholes. Kūa hunter-gatherers in Botswana (Valiente-Noailles 1993; Bartram 1997) and the Nharo of Ghanzi (Guenther 1986a; 1986b) range between settling near villages (1-2km away) and sedentary cattle post living to mobile hunting and gathering, depending on the time of year, availability of wild food and water, and social obligations. Bushmen women and girls in Angola worked for farmers when wild foods were scarce (Bartram 1997), while G/wi men worked as trackers for Bakgalagadi hunters (Sugawara 2002).

In the case of the East African Pygmies, mutually beneficial relationships characterise most hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction in the ethnography (see for example Turnbull 1965, 1986; Harako 1976; Tanno 1976; Peterson 1978; Pedersen & Wøele 1988; Hewlett 1996, amongst others). Various groups of Pygmies have very different subsistence strategies and levels of dependence on farmers (Turnbull 1965, 1986; Bahuchet & Guillaume 1982; Bailey *et al.* 1989; Hewlett 1996). For example, Efe and Baka spend less time in the forest than Mbuti and Aka Pygmies do. They also camp closer to villages, spend more time in villages, and eat more village food than Aka and Mbuti do. However, in the rainy months, most Mbuti groups also camp near farmer villages, on the outskirts of the secondary forest (Tanno 1976). Inter-marriage does occur (Turnbull 1965), but only in one direction – Pygmy wives are taken by villager men, and the children of such unions are usually brought up as villagers.

Efe women work in Lese villager gardens in return for cultivated food (which forms two thirds of the calories Efe Pygmies consume), while Efe men hunt for farmers

(Turnbull 1965; Fisher & Strickland 1991; Musonda 1997). Efe men also exchange meat, honey, and other forest products for food, tobacco, cannabis, metal goods and clothing from the Lese (Musonda 1997), and assist in felling trees during clearing of gardens. Although the Efe may plant their own small (supplementary) gardens, their mobile lifestyle does not allow for the maintenance of such gardens. Efe settlement patterns are also affected by their mutually beneficial relationships with the Lese as Efe tend to spend seven months of the year close to Lese villages in temporary camps situated between 1- 4 hours walk from the villages (Turnbull 1965; Pedersen & Wøele 1988; Hewlett 1996). When the Efe move deeper into the forest for hunting during the remaining five months of the year, they still remain within a day's walk of their associated Lese village, enabling them to fetch food, when necessary (Turnbull 1965; Bailey 1985). Efe bands usually affiliate with a particular Lese village, and camp close to it repeatedly (Fisher & Strickland 1991). Efe groups often consider themselves as belonging to a particular Lese villager, a relationship that is often (though not necessarily) inherited from father to son. Efe and Lese always perform certain ceremonies together, such as boys' initiation (Hewlett 1996) - this inter-group interaction is essential to both groups. However, Efe maintain some cultural and group autonomy, and continue to build houses that are culturally distinct (Hewlett 1996); only acculturated Pygmies build rectangular grass huts, in imitation of the rectangular mud and wood huts of the villagers (Kent 2002b).

Apart from being a resource of food and other trade objects, farmers also acted as a social resource for hunter-gatherers (Denbow 1984; Yellen 1984; Moore 1985; Wadley 1996). Farmers were seen as a source of information and higher authority, often mediating hunter-gatherer disputes (Wadley 1996). Moore (1985:103;107) believes that these changes in social relations came about partly because hunter-gatherer mobility (and consequently aggregation and dispersal mechanisms, and the practice of the trance dance (Wadley 1996)) was disrupted by the increasing numbers of farmer settlements and decreasing amounts of 'free space'. This disruption may also be part of the reason behind trade with farmers (Hall, S. 1990; 1994).

Intermarriage is another form of close interaction between hunter-gatherers and farmers. However, while intermarriage between hunter-gatherers and farmers does occur (Silberbauer 1965; Turnbull 1965; Maggs 1976; Prins 1996; Smith 1998;

Thorp 1998; Smith *et al.* 2000; van der Ryst 2003), most farmers (such as the Kgalagadi and Tswana) look down on hunter-gatherers, whom they see as an inferior and servile people (Guenther 1986b). For instance, though Tswana men may take a Basarwa bride, the opposite is not true - a Tswana woman would be seen to be 'marrying down' if she married a Basarwa man, while a Basarwa woman would have been seen to be 'marrying up'. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether a Basarwa man would be able to afford the bride-price of a Tswana woman. This ethnographic example (Smith 1998) offers clues to hierarchical social separation and boundaries between hunter-gatherers and farmers. It also shows the possible negative impacts to the largely egalitarian society that may have resulted from hunter-gatherer women gaining 'prestige' or power through intermarriage. Loubser and Laurens (1994) also note that although intermarriage did occur, Southern Sotho farmers in the Free State believed that the Bushmen were the 'first people', and were thus to be approached with caution – for example, Sotho children were taught never to look a Bushman straight in the eye. Nguni-speakers (such as the Xhosa) may have intermarried with the Bushmen more readily than Tswana-speakers (endogamous marriage patterns) because of their exogamous marriage patterns (see Hammond-Tooke 1998; 2002).

Other kinds of interaction in southern Africa include wage labour (generally on European farms) and the Tswana *mafisa* system, which is an example of marginalisation of hunter-gatherers by farmers (Guenther 1986a; Smith 1996, 1998). The Tswana form the ruling class in modern Botswana, owning large herds of cattle and tracts of land with boreholes, whilst Bushmen (Basarwa), work for them under the *mafisa* system. Most of these Basarwa have been hunter-gatherers within living memory, but have been forced to work as clients of the Tswana because of decreasing areas in which to hunt and forage. The *mafisa* system allows the Basarwa herdsmen to use milk, and sometimes calves, in return for labour. Basarwa work willingly as herdsmen in the hope that they can eventually build up their own herds, but the *mafisa* system often traps them into long bonded relationships that mostly benefit the farmers (Solway & Lee 1990; Smith 1998).

The clientship form of labour was usually seasonal, dictated to by farmers' agricultural or herding needs. Hunter-gatherers could work for farmers as rainmakers or herdsmen and then revert to hunting and gathering again (often in

areas marginal to agricultural activities) when their services were no longer necessary (Klatzow 1994; Loubser & Laurens 1994; Backwell *et al.* 1996; Wadley 1996). Hunter-gatherers provided religious specialists and supernatural expertise to farmers (Silberbauer 1965; Peterson 1978; Kenny 1981; Hall, S. 1994), and were often rewarded with livestock and crops for rainmaking (Jolly 1986, 1991; Lewis-Williams 1986; Campbell 1987; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989:92-99; Prins 1990, 1996; Ouzman 1995; van der Ryst 1998, 2003). There is even a possibility that hunter-gatherers may have gone to Khoe settlements at Kat River to heal sick Khoe (Hall, S. 1994). Interaction between hunter-gatherers and farmers caused dramatic social changes in some parts of southern Africa, as can be seen in the Drakensberg, where it is thought that hunter-gatherers began to accumulate livestock, thereby opening the way for stratification by wealth. This could have been coupled to increased prestige for medicine men who acted as rainmakers for farmers (Dowson 1994). Such specialisation would have led to changes in hunter-gatherer societies, where previously groups had been mostly egalitarian. The possibility that many interaction relationships were between hunter-gatherer and farmer men, coupled with some Bushmen women 'marrying up' into farmer society, has interesting implications for further gender divisions and loss of egalitarianism in hunter-gatherer society. These changes to the core of hunter-gatherer social make-up may have made it easier for some individuals to manipulate their identity to become incorporated into farmer society while still retaining their hunter-gatherer identity.

Jolly (1995; 1996; 1998; 2000) discusses how Nguni and southern Sotho ritual practice and cosmology was incorporated into Bushman art as a result of the contact between the hunter-gatherers and the farmers. Jolly believes that although hunter-gatherers may have been believed to possess powers derived from their liminal status between nature and culture, they tended to adopt the culture of the farming communities by whom they are encapsulated and with whom they are intermarried. They are thus drawn into the ritual life of their agricultural neighbours (but see Lewis-Williams's (1996) comment on Jolly (1996), as well as Prins (1994); Hammond-Tooke (1997, 1998, 2002)). Lewis-Williams believes that it is highly unlikely that the Bushmen adopted the ancestor religion and cosmology of the farmers. Instead, they exploited the farmer belief system without becoming part of

the farmer descent groups, although features of Nguni divination may have been derived from the Bushmen.

Several Bushmen groups (for example the Kūa (Valiente-Noailles 1993; Vierich & Hitchcock 1996)) now include agropastoralism in their subsistence strategies, although they do still supplement this with hunting and gathering (Guenther 1996). Vierich and Hitchcock believe that such a fluctuation in subsistence strategies is due to hunter-gatherers remaining flexible, adaptable and opportunistic. This flexibility was made possible in the past by patterns of reciprocal visiting and extensive kin networks. The increasing numbers of farmers on the landscape, decreasing available space for seasonal mobility and aggregation may have meant that hunter-gatherer networks were no longer as extensive as in the past. Hunter-gatherers may thus have been forced to approach farmers to settle disputes and to obtain food and other resources previously obtained through kin-networks.

Yellen (1984) also found that hunter-gatherers were able to integrate pastoralism and agriculture into their subsistence strategies, at least in the short term, as his ethnoarchaeological work in northwestern Botswana with the Dobe !Kung illustrates. This was often accompanied by a change in settlement layout, a decrease in mobility, and an increase in personal possessions, as well as the Dobe turning increasingly to nearby farmers to settle their disputes.

However, hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction was not a one-way process (Hall, S. 1994; Hammond-Tooke 1997, 1998; Kent 2002b). Contact with both Bushmen and Khoe peoples influenced Cape Nguni languages, as well as some aspects of Nguni culture (Prins 1996; Hammond-Tooke 1997, 1998, 2002). For example, Hammond-Tooke believes it is possible that the Cape Nguni witch familiar, the *thikoloshe* (also known as the *thokolose* (Sotho) and the *tokolosie* (Afrikaans)) is a direct adaptation of /Kaggen, the /Xam Bushmen's mythological trickster figure described by Bleek and Lloyd (Bleek & Lloyd 1911 in Hammond-Tooke 1997). Furthermore, it is possible that Bushman shamanism influenced southern Bantu divination and healing practices, although the nature of the borrowing is limited (Hammond-Tooke 1998). At Kutse, Kent (2002b) studied a group of hunter-gatherers representing several central and eastern Kalahari dialects that had only recently become sedentary,

although they had interacted and traded with Bantu-speaking Bakgalagadi for some 1000-2000 years. Instead of the hunter-gatherers adopting the Bantu culture, the Bakgalagadi had adopted much of the hunter-gatherer culture. Simon Hall (1994:47) also says that hunter-gatherer rituals have been incorporated into farmer belief systems because hunter-gatherers are recognised as having been ‘first people’ or original inhabitants of the land, close to nature and able to control it. This liminal status between the human and natural world gives them healing powers as well.

An example of the ‘power of the first people’ is discussed by Cashdan (1986a): she describes two groups of Kalahari Basarwa living near the Botletli River, Botswana. They differed in social organisation, subsistence and reaction to contact with herders and farmers. The floodplain Basarwa are wealthy cattle-owners, while the savanna Basarwa are poor, with few or no cattle. She investigates why the two groups responded so differently to the same group of Bantu-speakers. Kalanga farmers lived near the river and claimed political control over the region, but the Basarwa were considered to be the “traditional inhabitants and owners of the area” (Cashdan 1986a: 304). The Bateti / riverine Basarwa differed from the savannah Bushmen in two important ways. First, they had headmen with the power to allocate land. Second, they had valuable land to allocate. They were able to use their control over the floodplain to acquire Kalanga cattle and become wealthy. The dispersed political organisation of the savannah group, together with their lack of access to the scarce and valuable flood plain made them powerless in the face of Bantu-competition. Various new groups to the area would ask the Bateti for permission to settle on the floodplains, indicating the power that they had over the region by virtue of having been there “first” (Cashdan 1986a; 1986b). The Kalanga were granted insufficient land for their needs (i.e. the Basarwa had the power to refuse them all the land they wanted), and had to buy extra grain from the Bateti. On the other hand, interaction in the savannah region was minimal, until farmland became scarce, but the savannah Basarwa were asked for permission to hunt (a request which was never denied). Although the savannah Basarwa did not have the political power to refuse the Bantu-speakers permission to hunt in their territory, they were felt to have a “magical” kind of power over nature. The Bantu-speaking farmers believed that if the Basarwa did not grant permission, and they hunted anyway, they would not be successful in the hunt.

This example brings us to further discussions of issues of identity, and how farmers perceived hunter-gatherers in terms of ambivalence and ambiguity (and *vice versa*).

Ethnographic images of the ‘Other’

The way in which hunter-gatherers and farmers interact (the ‘mechanics’ or ‘functional’ aspects of interaction) is based on underlying social structures, including the construction of identities in order to define and validate interaction choices. Furthermore, “(i)dentify always involves the construction of boundaries” (Hammond-Tooke 2000:421). The creation of cultural boundaries not only defines, but also maintains, interaction relationships, especially those occurring on a close or ‘face-to-face’ level. The identities of a group are created both by its members and also by the people with whom they interact. Ethnic group members need to have an ‘other’ with whom they can contrast themselves. Thus, ethnicity and identity are based on how people feel about themselves and how other groups perceive them (Jones 2000; Kent 2002a). These perceptions are not necessarily the same (Kent 2002a). Negative and stereotypical perspectives of ‘others’, focussing on the real and perceived differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’, are a common means of maintaining cultural boundaries (Kent 2002a).

Farmer constructions of hunter-gatherer identities

An example of how farmers construct an identity for hunter-gatherers can be found in East Africa, where the Dorobo participate in mutually beneficial economic activities with neighbouring farmers and herders (Kenny 1981; Woodburn 1988; Smith 1998; also see Bahuchet & Guillaume (1982) for a similar example between Aka hunter-gatherers and farmers). Dorobo is a term (not used by the people themselves) denoting various groups of hunter-gatherer groups, from northern Uganda to northern Tanzania, who retain their ‘social marginality’ as people of the bush. Farmers and herders view the Dorobo as having low status, and see them as being amoral, wild creatures whose ancestors are thought to have been present at the birth of the present world order and who played important parts in the act of creation itself.

An understanding of what it means to be human, according to the farmers and herders in general, is negatively expressed through the Dorobo. Farming and herding are indicators of being human, and since Dorobo neither farm nor herd, their humanity is questionable in the eyes of the farmers and herders. Furthermore, the social rules and relationships necessary in a farming or herding society are unnecessary among the more mobile and fluid hunter-gatherers; they are thus seen to be outside social constraint - they live in the forest, and unlike the rest of humanity who must submit to convention, the Dorobo give the illusion of being able to escape into a marginal area, where they are believed to be in contact with supernatural beings, and consequently have power. In other words, farmers and herders believe the Dorobo are:

...like animals, yet they have power over nature; they live in the realm of witches and wild spirits, but also live in the presence of God; they are buffoonish, profligate, amoral fools, but also the possessors of secret knowledge and mediators with powers beyond our world (Kenny 1981:478).

Farmer stories and myths reveal further mostly negative attitudes towards hunter-gatherers such as the Dorobo (see Kenny 1981: 484-486). According to farmers, although God may mean for the Dorobo to have good things in life (for example, cattle), they are unable to retain them because of innate flaws in their nature. In contrast, the farmers believe that they themselves are able to retain cattle because of their greater self-restraint and respect. Farmers also believe that the Dorobo are responsible for the separation of people from God, and for the introduction of work, death and poverty (which Kenny states is a role traditionally reserved for women). The Dorobo are transformers in social contexts: they act as circumcisors for the Maasai, Baraguyu and Nandi. They turn boys into men, taking onto themselves the blood-pollution of their act. According to Kenny (1981), the farmers believe the Dorobo are ideally suited for such roles because they are intermediate between humans and animals; they have power to transform and powers similar to those of sorcery, and they are vulgar, uncivilised, amoral and emotionally unstable. Finally, there is a similarity between supposed attributes of the Dorobo as 'outsiders' and certain categories of 'insider'. In general, farmer and herder societies have a sexual division of labour based on a combination of biology and subsistence practice. In

the minds of farmer men, the Dorobo are allied with the images associated with women – “lack of proper control, a proclivity for suspect mystical practices, and so forth” (Kenny 1981:489). Dorobo men do not own cattle, and farmer men may thus see them as being similar to women in that respect as well. Little has been said about the role of farmer women and Dorobo women in interaction.

In southern African farmer creation myths and religious practices, the power of hunter-gatherers and their ‘places’ is also of great importance. According to Ouzman (1995), both engravings and a link to the Bushmen / hunter-gatherers were important factors in determining where Tswana rainmaking sites would be located. The Tswana consider hunter-gatherer engraving sites such as Thaba Sione in the central interior (Ouzman 1995), and Matsieng in Botswana (Walker 1997), as places of power, and use these places for rainmaking rituals. Matsieng is believed to be a creation site from which animals, the first people (Bushmen) and the Tswana forebear, Matsieng, emerged. In the central interior, Bushmen and Tswana-speaking farmers also have similar rainmaking beliefs and practices.

Bushman identity and self-image

Guenther (1986a; 1986b) discusses Bushman identity and self-image, looking at issues such as the effects of contact on Bushman belief, language, and social institutions and organisation, as well as Bushman economy and demography. Most Bushmen, especially the Nharo, have adopted some form of sedentism, food production, wage labour and village existence. Contact with the Europeans and Bantu-speakers led to ecological, economical, social and ideological changes to Nharo culture, and accompanying these changes an increasing situation of deprivation and distress – a state referred to as *sheta* by the Nharo (Guenther 1986b). The Nharo and other Bushmen groups often refer to themselves as the “mouthless people” or the “dumb” people (meaning “stupid” people), and also the “superfluous” or “inconsequential” people (Guenther 1986a; 1986b). This self-depreciation is also evident in certain creation myths where Bushmen divinities prefer other ethnic groups to the Bushmen (Biesle 1976; Guenther 1986b: 232-233). In their creation myths, Bushmen were created in an inferior state as compared to black and white people. It is not only the Nharo that feel this way - some of the Nyae-Nyae

Bushmen saw themselves as inferior to the Ovamba miners, feeling “shy, naked and inferior in the presence of these big black men with their goods” (Marshall 1976:7). Guenther (1986a) believes that this sense of inferiority is probably a psychological reaction to their position of marginality, poverty and powerlessness. However, the trance dance remains an important part of Nharo Bushmen social life, reminding the Bushmen of their old values and beliefs, and reinforcing these (Guenther 1986a). The trance dance also distinguishes Bushmen from non-Bushmen, negating their poor self-image, and allowing them a measure of ethnic identity and positive self-image. During the dance all “foreign” objects, such as European pipes and metal are hidden away, as they “cause” nausea in the dancers.

Not all Bushmen had / have such negative self-images, however. Kent’s (2002b) work in the Kalahari shows that autonomous hunter-gatherers looked down on herders and farmers, just as they looked down on the hunter-gatherers. Thus farmer views of hunter-gatherers as marginal, childlike, unreliable, ignorant, poor, uncivilised and incapable (Marshall 1976; Barnard 1992), are not shared by many of the hunter-gatherers themselves (Kent 2002a). According to Kent, at Kutse, when you ask a Basarwa what they think of a Kgalagadi, they are as unflattering about the Bantu-speakers as the farmers are about them (Kent 2002a). Ironically, while considering the Basarwa “backwards”, inferior, and generally ignorant, Bantu-speakers still come to Kutse to consult Basarwa healers, as their healing techniques are considered to be very powerful, and sometimes better, than those of Bantu-speaking healers (Kent 2002a).

Sugawara (2002), in turn, describes how G/wi and G//ana Bushmen in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (also see Silberbauer 1996) emphasise the differences between themselves and the Bakgalagadi. They believe that the Bakgalagadi possess mysterious powers, and that they behave strangely. For example, the Bushmen say that the Bakgalagadi are cold towards their children, and that they are happy to sell a child to earn money, or that they are happy to kill a brother using magical medicine.

The Ju/’hoansi (!Kung) saw themselves as autonomous actors in the past (and present) rather than as victims, even though they were under the control of the Tawana chiefdom and British colonial authority (Lee 2002). For instance, Lee’s

Ju/'hoansi informant, Kumsa, had a rather dismissive view of the Tswana overlords, because, unlike Europeans, the Tswanas claimed a chiefly status but gave nothing to the Bushmen: wealth and giving away were seen as the marks of a chief, not the exercising of power.

Although Bushmen in the Eastern Cape and Natal may have intermarried and been assimilated into Bantu-speaking society, Prins (1994) states that their roles were not always passive. In fact, some individuals were able to adapt to the new culture and manipulate various aspects of it, integrating and re-interpreting Nguni beliefs and practices to suit their own new social identities. The assimilation of new ideas in Bushman society is not problematic as their religious beliefs generally have a fluid character, and they can assimilate new ideas without changing their beliefs as a whole. One such example is Lindiso, the last known Bushman rock artist in Transkei (who was also a rainmaker). Lindiso became accepted into Nguni society by partially transforming his identity and ideology. After settling in a Mpondomise homestead, he continued to paint and to visit other Bushmen, and was even allowed to marry into the Mpondomise, becoming an active and acceptable member of the society (Prins 1994:182). This is probably because the Mpondomise perceived Lindiso as more acceptable than other mountain Bushmen, as he had assumed a new identity and ethnicity, midway between traditional hunter-gatherer and Nguni culture (Prins 1994:182). He was in a place of power because of his difference and because he was a rainmaker.

Sugawara (2002) discusses another example of Bushman social adaptability: an old G/wi man living at Xade. The old man was seen as a liminal person on the boundary between G/wi and Bantu cultures due to his storytelling ability and his symbolic power (he was a diviner as well as a healer and purifier of pollution). He profited from this liminality, often being paid in goats for his services. The old man considered himself to be a member of both cultures, either a Bakgalagadi farmer or a G/wi hunter-gatherer, depending on the occasion, and was accepted as such by both groups.

Such manipulation of identity in interaction relationships by individual hunter-gatherers rather than groups of hunter-gatherers, may be an indication of how much

some egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies may have changed through time. This manipulation of identity may have made it easier for individuals or small groups to become incorporated / assimilated into farmer groups while retaining their own beliefs. Others, lacking power, prestige or skills required by farmers, or unable or unwilling to manipulate their identity, may have become incorporated and subjugated by farmer societies.

It is apparent that, just as there are many forms of interaction between hunter-gatherers and farmers, there are also many varied viewpoints and reactions to this interaction. Having discussed these various examples of ethnographic contact situations and constructions of identities, the question then arises: how does one recognise interaction, and autonomy versus assimilation, in the archaeological record? What are the implications of changing material densities in hunter-gatherer sites and the proximity between hunter-gatherers and farmers with regard to where, when and how interaction took place?