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ENCAPSULATION OR NOT? THE JU/'HOANSI EXAMPLE

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Introduction

In prehistoric archaeology there is a general assumption (although not universal) that we can separate out different social or ethnic groupings on the basis of material culture residues. This, in many ways, runs counter to post-modern thinking that all societies are inextricably enmeshed, and just part of a one-world system (after Wolf 1982). This idea inevitably rejects the old anthropological concept of 'culture' as a relativist exercise, with no possibility of cultural autonomy. While it is obviously true that there is no such thing as an 'isolated' culture today, and that culture is not static, with internal development always taking place, there is the tendency to use the global network of the present as a model of the past, and to give possibly greater power to individual will as agents of resistance. "Cultural survival thus depends on the preservation, and even enhancement, of the capacities of individuals for creativity and spontaneity in emotion, thought, and action. It depends, that is, on individuals' developing the capacities for self-evaluation and self-correction" (Moody-Adams 1997:83). Within a world where individual rights are given precedence over collective needs this concept no doubt has great validity. But the social 'conscience' and pressures to conform to these are very great, particularly in small-scale societies that prehistorians usually have to deal with. The pressure that was brought to bear on Nisa (Shostak 1981) to take a husband against her will, shows how difficult resistance is, even in a society which gives a great deal of lee-way to children, for the individual to 'fight the system'.

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Only if we can recognise cultural entities will we be able to use material culture as indicators of encapsulation (being surrounded) or domination (being subjugated). However, even if such indicators can be recognised, modern ethnography has shown that interpretation of stylistic variables across ethnic boundaries to be fraught with problems due to environmental and social complexities, and seldom clear-cut.

In his discussion of material culture and ethnic boundaries, Hodder (1981:31) noted a general condition. With competition boundaries hardened, resulting in a need for clear stylistic/cultural signals. When boundaries were more fluid, there was an ease of crossing without changing ethnic markers, and symbols could become mixed. Later (ibid:85) Hodder goes on to qualify this by suggesting that “because of the ideological and symbolic components of material items, artifacts are *actively* manipulated in social strategies” it is difficult to “analyse the maintenance of material differences between ethnic groups solely in terms of the degree of interaction between groups”. His study was between groups of pastoralists in Kenya, and between pastoralists and Dorobo hunters who were probably derived from pastoralist society, and who seem to be able to move in and out of pastoralism when necessary (Galaty 1993:186). The Dorobo are what Bollig (1987) would call ‘peripatetic minorities’, and appear to have a similar mode of production to the pastoralists.

In the case of two quite separate modes of production, such as between the egalitarian hunter-gatherers and pastoralists/agropastoralists of Southern Africa, it is possible that Hodder’s continuation of his qualification (ibid:85) that it may “still be possible...to set up ‘reflective’ links between material culture and human behaviour” where the complications of competition, such as between elders and young men, are not an issue, would allow us to interpret material culture in behavioural terms.

A general condition might be posited: when there is a degree of perceived equality on both sides of the cultural boundary there is less chance of encapsulation and dominance. This would be possible when the groups on each side of the boundary are not in competition for resources, or have equal power over resources. With resource scarcity, one group may try to dominate the other.

Another condition might be: as material culture flows in one direction, and eventually eclipses what existed before, this might be considered as an indication of encapsulation. Although people can adopt new cultural material without any sense of domination being imposed, we would have to look at what was being exchanged across the cultural boundary, and how dominant exotic material might become through time.

Hunters & Herders of the Cape

At the Cape, pottery and domestic sheep were introduced some 2000 years ago. An aboriginal hunting economy continued to exist before and after these commodities are seen in the archaeological record. Thus two separate archaeological signatures are evident in the landscape: one hunter, the other herder (Smith et al 1991). There was an

obvious relationship between the two economic groups, with pottery and a few sheep appearing in the hunter site of Witklip. However, ostrich eggshell bead sizes do not overlap between the two groups: the hunter's remain small (less than 5mm), while the herder's are consistently large (greater than 5mm) from their first appearance at Kasteelberg 1860 BP. There is no evidence for a massive dislocation of hunter social organisation or economy in this formative period.

After 800 BP Kasteelberg was no longer occupied, and herder sites of the later period have yet to be identified. One interpretation of this is that cattle herds may have grown to such an extent that the camps of the herders would have to have been moved more constantly to maintain the health of these bulk grazers. From the top levels at Die Krans, dated to 700 BP and Witklip, dated to 500-300 BP, although the bulk of the ostrich eggshell beads still remain small, a few larger beads appear in the collections, and from Voelylei, a small rock shelter on the eastern margins of the coastal forelands, dated to c. 400 BP, almost all the beads were large. One is tempted to see this new development as an important shift in relations between hunters and herders, with the former being brought more fully into the economic and social ambit of the latter.

While we know that certain goods were already being transferred in one direction from herders to hunters, the aesthetics of bead sizes may indicate a more fundamental shift, since they maintained their size consistency for so long. We might see this as a material demonstration of Simon van der Stel's statement in 1685 about the social place of hunters: "...we find that these Sonquas are just the same as the poor in Europe, each tribe of Hottentots having some of them and employing them to bring news of the approach of a strange tribe. They steal nothing from the kraals of their employers, but regularly from other kraals...possessing nothing...except what they acquire by theft" (Waterhouse 1932:122), with the hunters occupying a place on the periphery of Khoekhoe society (Smith 1998).

The Ju/'hoansi of Namibia and Botswana

In 1989, Ed Wilmsen, in his book *Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari* forcefully synthesized the prevailing revisionist mood and demonstrated to his and many other people's satisfaction that the Bushmen of the Kalahari were a subjugated people due to a process that began almost 1500 years ago. Under Wilmsen's scrutiny all Bushmen of the Sandveld were seen to have first been influenced by expanding hegemony of a state based in the Tsodilo Hills of northern Botswana, initially at Divuyu, then later at Nqoma. This influence expanded over a hierarchy of sites where: "an elite...established at Nqoma...was able to exercise sufficient hegemony over the inhabitants of secondary sites...(and)...their subordinates, probably... as far afield as Cae Cae (/Xai /Xai), Qubi, and other sandveld communities, to judge from the presence of contemporary ceramics at these sandveld places" (Wilmsen 1989:73).

Wilmsen (ibid:74) goes on to suggest that these few pieces of pottery found on Sandveld sites were: "desirable pretestations in social relations between those dominant elite centres and their rural sources of supply, where local people would prize them as symbols

of higher status”, and local chiefs would be given pots to encourage them to send local surplus or commoditized products, such as ivory, rhino horn, ostrich feathers or ostrich eggshells, etc. back to the political centre, that would, in turn, have been part of the Indian Ocean trade at this time. In other words, Wilmsen sees the hunters of the Sandveld as having been encapsulated members of a much wider system of control and redistribution.

This picture of ‘encapsulation’ was at odds with the paradigm of evolutionary adaptation of hunters that inspired much of the first Hunter-Gatherer Conference published in 1968 as *Man the Hunter* by Lee & Devore. In this paradigm hunters were viewed almost in isolation, and indeed, it was the degree of isolation that initially encouraged the Marshall family to travel to southern Africa after the Second World War to find people untouched by the ravages of so-called ‘civilisation’, from which came the influential work by Lorna Marshall (1976), and the series of films by John Marshall, beginning with *The Hunters*, now known to generations of anthropology students.

However, by 1989, when Wilmsen published his book, the dominance of the theme *Man the Hunter* had already been softened by the recognised importance of women’s contribution to the economy as *Woman the Gatherer*, and, in the proceedings of the third hunter-gatherer conference published in 1982 by Leacock & Lee, which showed how hunters interacted socially and politically with their neighbours. In addition, part of Richard Lee’s 1965 Ph.D.thesis and his 1979 book, *The !Kung San*, discuss the relationship with herders, and the fact that some Bushmen worked for them as herdsmen. Thus the isolationist paradigm was already a thing of the past when *Land Filled with Flies* appeared, and so ensued considerable debate in the literature, with the one-world revisionist view on one side ranged against a picture of independent, but not isolated hunters on the other (see Barnard 1992 for a bibliography of the debate).

Just how much did the outside world affect the lives of the Ju/’hoansi Bushmen of the Sandveld who had been successively studied by the Marshalls, Lee and others of the Harvard Kalahari Research Group? This was the underlying question behind a joint University of Cape Town/University of Toronto project in Northern Namibia (Smith & Lee 1997). This project was designed as an ethnohistorical study to elicit historical information from respected Bushman elders, whom no one had thought to ask while the debate was at its height, accompanied by archaeological excavation to give time depth to this information.

The site of Cho/ana in the Kaudom Reserve was chosen as our base, since there were good surface indications of long term use going back to the Later Stone Age., and information from our Ju/’hoan colleagues that this had been an important *hxaro*, or internal exchange, place in the past. Two of our Ju/’hoan colleagues had actually lived there prior to gazetting of the Kaudom as a nature reserve in the 1960s. The information given to us by Kunta, N!ai, N!ani and Dam, our four elders, during many hours of interview, showed that far from being dominated by black people, none came into the area before the late 19th century when dispossessed Herero, first fleeing the rinderpest epidemic, and later the German genocidal war of 1904-5, entered as refugees from the

west. From the north, the main entry of black people (Mbukushu farmers) from the Kavango River was mostly triggered by the war between SWAPO and SADF in the 1960s.

Our Ju/'hoan friends described how they would go to the Kavango River to trade with the gobas (black people). It took them eight days from Cho/ana to cover the 110km, visiting their relatives along the way. At the river they would stay with other Ju/'hoansi who seem to have had an almost permanent base there, and trade their ostrich eggshell beads and skins with the Mbukushu for pottery, glass beads and metal. These commodities were then taken back to Cho/ana for *hxaro* redistribution.

When asked how they referred to the black person, Oremy, they traded with at the Kavango River, one said: *Mi k'au* (master), the other: *Mi zhu* (my person). While the former sounds like dominance by the black, together the two responses more realistically suggest respect. Nonetheless, those Ju/'hoansi living almost permanently along the river were seen by the blacks as their servants, and it is probable that these Ju/'hoansi accepted their subordinate position. The Ju/'hoansi living in the Sandveld away from the river had no such feeling of being dominated, nor did black society influence their social or political situation, beyond being the source of desired commodities for *hxaro*.

What was the archaeological manifestation of this contact? Over the two seasons 1995 and 1997 we opened up 20 square metres of the site at Cho/ana. We have been able to recognise two separate periods of contact on the basis of ceramics. The upper phase has produced Mbukushu decorated pottery, glass beads and small pieces of metal that support the picture of trade given to us by our Ju/'hoan colleagues. However, these are only in small quantities. Of the 133 sherds recovered in our second season, 100 (75%) came from the upper levels (i.e. 20 sherds/cubic metre), along with 15 glass beads and a few fragments of tin. This contrasts markedly with the richness of the stone industry throughout the sequence (i.e. before and after the appearance of ceramics) with 45,000 pieces of stone being recovered (1.3% formally retouched).

The lower part of the sequence only produced 33 sherds, but this still indicates that contact with the producers was similar to that from the upper levels. In this case the decoration is of Divuyu-type, from the Tsodilo Hills in northern Botswana, and dated to c.1400 BP. This is similar to the age of Divuyu given by Denbow & Wilmsen (1986).

Conclusions

The picture of interaction between the Ju/'hoansi of the Sandveld and food producers in the historic period is one of occasional contact specifically to obtain desired goods. The Bushmen would go to the source, as there were no trading opportunities otherwise, since black people only recently moved away from the Kavango River. The few exotic pieces recovered in the excavation at Cho/ana mirrors that from the excavations by Yellen & Brooks (1989) at /Xai /Xai on the Botswana side of the border. They found little change in the stone tool industry through time, even after ceramics appeared.

This paucity of exotic material may be used as an indicator that there was no dominance, or massive impact upon the lives of the Bushman by outside influences, and *hxaro* exchange was in many ways driving the need for these commodities. If this scenario in the historic period (and the archaeological response to this) is valid, we might suggest that the even more limited number of pieces in the earlier time period indicate a similar degree of influence by the outside world, and the Bushmen equally had to travel to source to obtain the goods.

Thus the ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence appear to coincide, and support a picture that, rather than being encapsulated by agropastoralists, the Ju/'hoansi were left very much to their own devices, and, if they needed goods from outside the Sandveld, they had to make a special effort to obtain them. This contrasts with Wilmsen's interpretation of ceramics on stone tool users sites, that pottery was being given to the hunters: "as symbols of higher status" (Wilmsen 1989:74). There is no question that the Bushmen saw ceramics as important, but for their own redistributive social needs. One of our informants at the village of /Gam, 250km south of the Kavango River, showed us a Mbukushu decorated sherd from a pot carried down from /Gautsha by his aunt, and given to him 50 years ago. He had buried the pot before he was forcefully taken away by 'boers' as a labourer, and subsequently recovered it once he escaped. This pot fragment was still regarded as an important part of his family's history.

While domination by outsiders no doubt occurred among a number of Bushmen groups who were in close proximity, and ultimately surrounded by black agropastoralists in Botswana, even there, evidence exists of resistance to being dominated (Guenther 1993/1994; 1997). In some cases, this resistance took the form of social and political reorganisation under a strong leader who managed to keep the predatory Tswana at bay, at least until white farmers moved into the area. In some ways this parallels similar resistance to boer encroachment in the Sneeuwberg of the Cape in the 18th century. These Bushmen forced white farmers to retreat at the end of the Dutch period (Penn 1996). Only with a pacification project devised by the first British governor, McCarthy, did the Bushmen become 'bought off', allowing white settlers to insinuate themselves, and ultimately take over the traditional waterholes of the Bushmen. Once traditional territories were compromised it was only a matter of time before the Bushmen became second-class citizens working for almost nothing for the farmers. Little resistance is evident in other parts of the Karoo, where dissolution of Bushmen society similarly took place as a result of white settler expansion (Neville 1996; Sampson 1995).

In general terms, it would appear that when the Bushmen had 'space' to retreat to, and were not surrounded by more dominant food-producers, they continued to live relatively untouched lives, or could put up considerable resistance. They could choose to go to trade or work as herdsmen, and leave when they wished. When they chose to live in close proximity to food producers, such as along the Kavango River, then they were accepting a position of lower status (Smith 1998).

The two examples offered here of contact between the aboriginal hunters of southern Africa and encroaching food producers suggests that material culture can indeed be used

to infer relationships between two quite different modes of production. In Hodder's (1981:85) terms, the use of material items being traded 'reflect' the differences in the two distinct societies. In Mbukushu society, two distinct pottery vessel sizes are found (Kinahan 1986), and have functional uses. The smaller, used for cooking and water transport, has a characteristic cross-hatched decoration below the rim. Among the Ju/'hoansi and on the later archaeological specimens, similar decoration is found and was recorded as having an Mbukushu source. Pottery to the Ju/'hoansi had scarcity value, along with glass beads, so these items were used for *hxaro* exchange, to maintain social links between individuals.

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