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The Past is Present

**Archaeological sites and identity formation
in Southern Africa**

Report from a Minor Field Study

by

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the connection between archaeological sites and processes of identity formation in Southern Africa, as expressed in relation to the Twyfelfontein rock art site and Great Zimbabwe, and, to some extent, the White Lady site. The aim is to understand in what ways people think of, and identify with, archaeological monuments. The Twyfelfontein rock art site is presented in the form of a case study, based on my own fieldwork of 2004, while the descriptions of the other sites derive from literary sources. The theoretical discussion on identity, and ethnic identity in particular, is central to this thesis. In analysing the conditions of the different archaeological sites, a discursive approach is taken in order to highlight the way perceptions of the past, and people's identities, are dependant upon social and political processes.

Keywords

Archaeological sites, identity formation, ethnic identity, Southern Africa, Namibia, Damaraland, Twyfelfontein, Great Zimbabwe.

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1 Introduction

I chose to do my fieldwork in Namibia since Kalle Lindholm, a PHD-student at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History at Uppsala University, spoke so highly of the country and its fascinating history and prehistory. Having studied archaeology as well as anthropology, I was looking for a way to do ethnographic field research without losing touch with the archaeological material. Consulting Kalle Lindholm on this matter proved to be fruitful: he suggested the *Tsisab Ravine* of the *Brandberg*¹, located in north-western Namibia, as a suitable place for doing the fieldwork I had in mind. Here a group of people, on their own initiative, had started to guide tourists to the *White Lady* site, which is the most famous of the numerous prehistoric rock art sites of the Brandberg. Through Kalle Lindholm I came in contact with the Namibian archaeologist John Kinahan, who had carried out extensive archaeological research in the Brandberg and was familiar with the guiding activities there.

I wanted to find out in what ways monumental archaeological sites can be important to members of local communities. At Brandberg it would be possible to work with people that made a living out of working as tourist-guides on an archaeological site, it therefore seemed like a good place for my kind of fieldwork. However, my plans for going there had to be abandoned in the last minute, and Brandberg did not, after all, become the place for my first anthropological fieldwork. Instead, John Kinahan directed me towards *Twyfelfontein*, another famous rock art site, located about 65 km north-west of the Brandberg. John Kinahan had conducted research at Twyfelfontein as well, and he was engaged in an archaeological project at the site during the time of my fieldwork. Here was a group of guides similar to the one at Brandberg. The conditions at the site and the cultural and social background of the guides were also similar. Altogether, this meant that I could still carry out the same type of fieldwork that I had first intended, without having to change the aim of my study in any significant way.

¹ The Brandberg massif, containing Namibia's highest peak, is located about 300 km north-west of Windhoek. The name is a translation of *Dâures*, meaning 'burning mountain' in Khoekhoegowab, and referring to the glowing colour of the mountain at sunset (Kinahan 2000:1).

Shortly after my arrival in Namibia, John Kinahan introduced me to the area of Twyfelfontein and to the guides working there. The guides proved to be a really nice group to work with and they were very positive to my presence at the site. Their optimism and support soon made me realise that Twyfelfontein was the ideal place for my research.

2 Aim of study

Parts of this thesis are based on my minor thesis², which was written with the objective of providing the necessary theoretical and regional framework for my master thesis research. When I first wrote the project proposal for my master thesis fieldwork, I only had a vague idea of the focus of my study. It was clear, however, that it would in some way centre around people's notions of archaeological sites, and the role such sites might play in processes of identity formation. Arriving at Twyfelfontein, I was still not quite sure of what would be my focus of attention. I had, after all, not a clear picture of the conditions at the site. Consequently, the more exact objective of my master thesis research had to be gradually worked out during the course of field research, adjustments being continually made in the face of 'new' information.

I believe that notions of the past are essential for people's sense of belonging and identity. The aim for this thesis is to examine the relation between identity formation and major archaeological sites in Southern Africa. I intend to show what notions of the past, and what identity, can be attached to archaeological remains, as expressed in the ideas of members of local communities as well as those of larger social entities like ethnic groups or nations.

This thesis is not narrowly focused on my Twyfelfontein fieldwork. Much space is devoted to comparative material, mainly exemplified through the analysis of different texts concerning the archaeological site of Great Zimbabwe, which has been subject to much research during the twentieth century. The White Lady site is also discussed, although to a much lesser extent. For the purpose of understanding the processes of identity formation connected to archaeological sites, a theoretical

² Title of minor (C) thesis: *Perceptions of the past. The role of archaeological heritage sites in processes of identification in Southern Africa – the example of Great Zimbabwe.* Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, Uppsala University 2004.

discussion on identity is absolutely necessary, and a special focus is placed on ethnic identity, since this form of social identity is often important for the way people identify with the past, and, thus, with archaeological sites. The discussion on ethnic identity, and its importance to perceptions of the past, is crucial for understanding in what ways identities are attached to archaeological monuments in Southern Africa and elsewhere.

However, the Twyfelfontein fieldwork is of utmost importance as a source of first hand ethnographic experience. As a case study, it has provided me with an insight that I could never have attained by reading ethnographic texts. The information about the conditions at Great Zimbabwe and the White Lady site is retrieved from studies made by scholars acting within the disciplines of anthropology, history and archaeology. Writing a thesis solely concerned with the site of Twyfelfontein would probably not result in the most interesting conclusions. Instead, I hope that by locating the results of my Twyfelfontein fieldwork within the wider perspective of Southern Africa, the study will contribute to a better understanding of the connection between archaeological sites and people's identities.

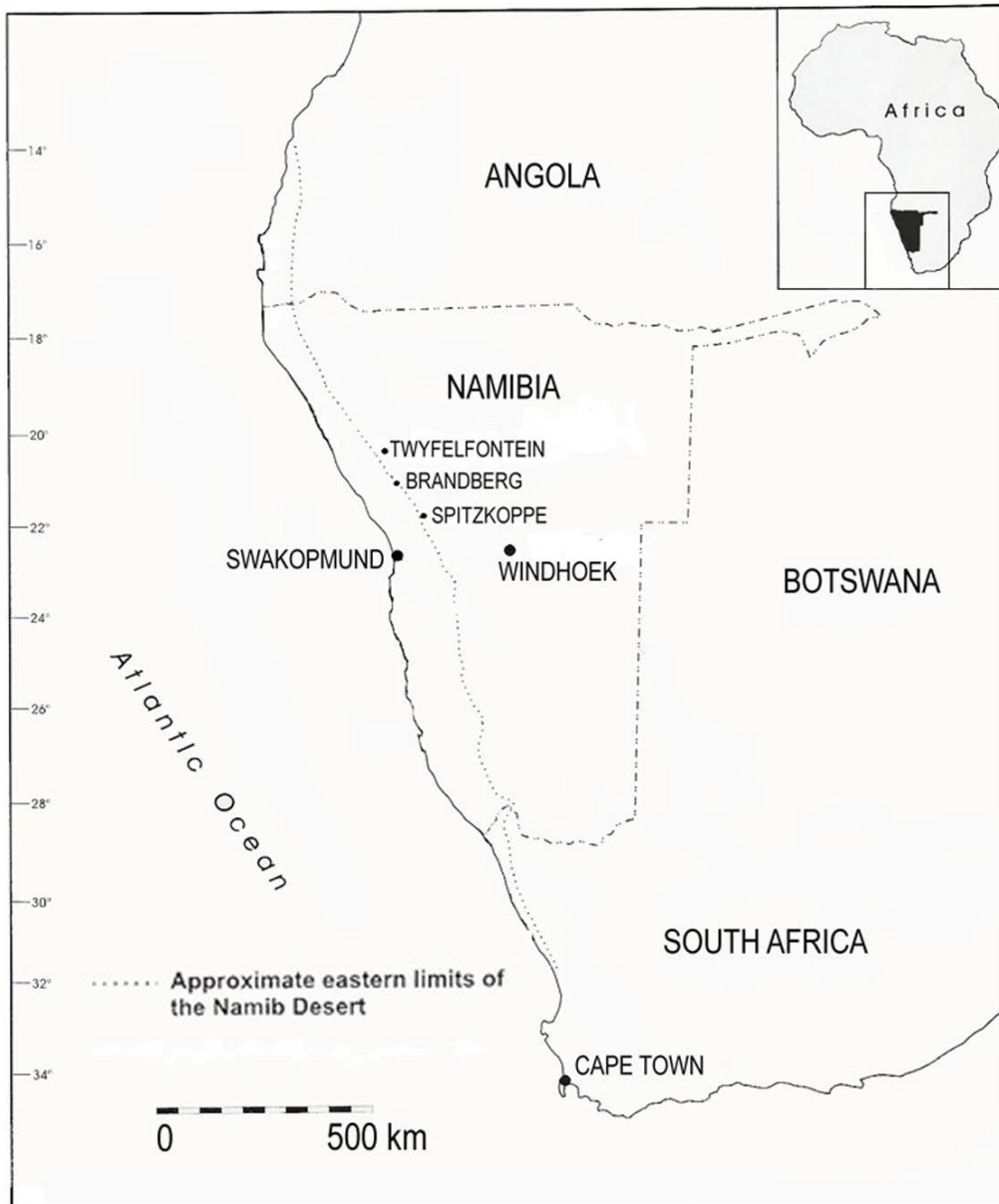


Fig. 1. Map of Namibia (altered version of map from Kinahan, Jill 2000:23).

3 Theoretical perspectives

As mentioned above, I intend to show what kinds of notions of the past can be connected to archaeological monuments in Southern Africa, and how they may affect people's sense of identity in the present. With this objective in mind, I must first establish the theoretical framework of the thesis. This chapter therefore deals with different theoretical aspects of collective identities, and how such identities can be related to views of the past. The main focus is on social identity; subjective or psychological perspectives on identity will thus be of less concern here.

3.1 Identity formation

In everyday life, a person's identity is most often thought of as something quite natural. It is a kind of primordial quality or label, ascribed to a person at birth and part of his or her self. In academic research, on the other hand, identity is usually seen as a social construction. Most scholars are of the opinion that identity is socially constructed by individuals asserting themselves in relation to one another and to the environment. Thus, people are not born with identity, but the circumstances of birth can nevertheless make them predisposed to assume a specific identity (Alexander 2001:148; Calhoun 1994:13). According to John and Jean Comaroff, the human need to classify the material and social world, in order to make it comprehensible and meaningful, is at the heart of identity formation. A collective identity always entails some form of communal self-definition, founded on a marked difference, or opposition, between "ourselves" and "other/s". An identity can therefore be seen as a relation, or a set of relations, that has been given meaning through the cultural structuring of the social universe. Comaroff & Comaroff argue that this marking of relations, of identities in opposition to one another, should be seen as universal, but the substance of a specific identity is always historically constructed, changing over time (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992:51). Collective identity is, according to this line of thinking, the result of a perceived, and recognised, difference between two categories of people, who see themselves, and/or are seen by others, as distinct. An identity can therefore only be formed in relation to another identity. That is why there

can be no such thing as a totally isolated ethnic group (see for example Eriksen 2000:19f).

A point of departure shared by most scholars is the notion of individuals as having multiple identities. According to Thomas H. Eriksen, every person experiences a shared identity with different people at different times according to the situation. Under certain circumstances and for certain purposes one identity will be the most important to the individual. Examples of such identities are those associated with professions, political groups, neighbourhoods, kin groups etc. (Eriksen 1999:57). Writing primarily on ethnic identity, Eriksen further emphasises the situational character. A person can belong to several ethnic communities, and each such identity may be activated, or made relevant, at a certain moment. A person can also consciously choose to emphasise or downplay a certain identity depending on the specific situation (Eriksen 2000:12ff). The complexity of identity has been eloquently described by Liisa Malkki (as quoted by Hutchinson & Jok): “Identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorisation by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a fund of memories...a creolised aggregate” (Malkki 1992:37; Hutchinson & Jok 2002:91).

Craig Calhoun considers recognition to be crucial when analysing processes of identity formation. Collective identity always contains elements of both self-recognition and recognition by others. Calhoun argues that colonial and post-colonial identities are formed through processes of identity politics, which establish ‘sanctioned’ discourses about who it is possible, appropriate or valuable to be. These identities, or discourses, are often expressed in various social movements, like, for example, nationalist movements in nineteenth century Europe or in processes of anti-colonial resistance in African countries in the twentieth century. This kind of politicised identity discourses shape the way we look at and constitute ourselves, but they are not necessarily recognised by individuals in a direct way. Rather, there seems to be room for manipulation of the ‘original’ identity (Calhoun 1994:20ff).

According to Calhoun, processes of identity politics centre on the recognition of certain categories of people, which are assumed to share a common identity. In such a discourse, individuals of one category are treated as if they were unitary and internally homogenous. A collective

identity can, thus, be an abstraction of the concrete interactions and social relationships within which identities are constantly renegotiated and where individuals present some identities as more salient than others. Although seemingly unitary, every collective identity is open to both internal subdivision and incorporation into some larger category of primary identity. The political character of these identity politics movements means that identities that people wish to recognise in individuals also can be refused, diminished or displaced. Claims and resistance to identities should always be seen against the background of other identity claims and social valuations. Various identity claims are seldom given equal recognition; there are usually a few identity discourses that dominate the scene of identity politics (Calhoun 1994:21ff).

Björn Lindgren also emphasises the political dimension of identity formation. Writing about the political aspects of Ndebele ethnicity in southern Zimbabwe, he argues that the concept of identity refers to both personal identity and socio-cultural identity. Lindgren uses the term identity to refer to the merging of the personal with the social in processes of identification. People use social categories to distinguish themselves and others. These categories, which carry meaning, can be self-ascribed as well as ascribed by others. When people construct identities in social interaction, they draw upon categories of belonging that already exist. According to Lindgren, these categories, which are often the result of the relations between political centres and their peripheries, can be employed instrumentally for political ends. People may do so intentionally, aware of the powerful emotions associated with certain categories, or more or less unconsciously. One must remember that these categories of belonging are constantly changing over time, both in importance and in meaning (Lindgren 2002:24ff).

Kevin Dunn's work has much in common with that of Calhoun (mentioned above), in that he too recognises the political aspects of identity formation. Similar to Calhoun, Dunn also deals with identity from a discursive point of view, but his theoretical conclusions are somewhat more clearly expressed and elaborate than those of Calhoun. Dunn defines discourse as "the conventions for establishing meaning, designating the true from the false, empowering certain speakers and writers and disqualifying others" (Dunn 2003:6). Examining identity, as expressed in

historical representations of the Congo and its peoples, Dunn draws the conclusion that identities are constructed through what he chooses to call discursive narratives. These narratives, which are constructed by discourse, or rather, by people acting within certain discourses, form the social identities that give meaning to the world around us. There are multiple narratives whose meaning and importance change with time and space, mainly due to political struggle and the distribution of power (Dunn 2003:7ff).

Dunn argues that “identity is the product of multiple and competing discourses, which construct unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented senses of the Self and Other” (Dunn 2003:10). Identity discourses are interpreted in different ways by different ‘audiences’. The discursive narratives that form identities are not incorporated by actors in a direct way (see Calhoun above for a similar view). They are mediated through the different social and political relations that constitute our social world. Discursive narratives can, of course, be rejected, and they may be interpreted and used in ways that were not originally intended. When ‘consuming’ and reproducing discourses, their meanings are always decoded through the specific framework of knowledge held by a ‘consumer’ (Dunn 2003:10ff).

Dunn also deals with the asymmetric relations of power between Europeans and Africans that characterised the various African countries during colonial times. He refers to this as the imperial encounter; resulting in European hegemonic power. Hegemony is here defined as when “the dominant discourses and narratives of the world accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others” (Dunn 2003:13). Through this hegemony, the colonised Africans were denied access to discursive space. It thereby became difficult for them to articulate or circulate alternative discourses on their own identity (Dunn 2003:13).

It may be argued whether or not discourses on identity can be consumed, and if it really is appropriate to refer to people as consumers in processes of identity formation. Dunn also alternates between referring to discursive narrative and discourse, in very similar contexts. Most others, including myself, would probably settle with just the term discourse since Dunn’s concept of discursive narratives seems to be synonymous with the way the term discourse is most often used. Nevertheless, I can appreciate

the idea of discursive narratives (if only the term would be used more consistently) since it highlights the openness and competition between different discourses on identity. I find Dunn's discursive approach to be most fruitful when dealing with identity processes; perceiving identity as a form of discourse, or as the result of discourses, has the advantage of emphasising identities' dependency on contemporary processes.

All authors referred to above see identity as a social construction, and the theoretical perspective of this study is indeed located within a constructivist discourse. However, I am of the opinion that the actual term 'construction' does not adequately describe the nature of people's identities, since it can give the impression that identity is always a conscious and rational creation. I agree with Paul Richards, who, in analysing the concept of cultural construction, considers the term to imply that something is being built according to a plan or a structural blueprint. When treating social life as something consciously built by individuals, one runs the risk of failing to recognise the improvisations and compromises that are part of people's everyday life (Richards 2001:123). Richards' view can best be accounted for using his own words:

What troubles me about cultural construction is the underlying notion that human worlds are arrived at by stepping out of time and out of our bodies, and that we can in such a condition self-consciously *build* something (Richards 2001:123f).

In order to emphasise that all aspects of identity are the result of social interaction, as an opposite to a more primordial approach, I think the term construction could still be used, and I will therefore use it in this essay. Nevertheless, when dealing with such complex matters as questions of identity, it is necessary to realise that identity is not something that can be built at a 'social construction site' following a blueprint. Reality is, as usual, far more complex.

Richards' text actualises the question of peoples' agency and rationality. The concept of the rational individual is central in much of the literature on identity. Eriksen states that people are loyal to ethnic, national or other imagined communities because this loyalty offers them something essential in return. It is the human being, the individual, that in the end perceives different alternatives and chooses between them. However, the

individual's options are restricted to his or her cognitive matrix, or in other words, to his or her cultural context (see Bourdieu below). Thus, individuals "choose their allegiances, but not under circumstances of their own choice" (Eriksen 1999:55f). Aletta J. Norval recognises the fact that identity formation is not simply a question of individuals consciously choosing which category of people they wish to belong to. She argues that although identities are socially constructed, this does not mean that they can be "picked and chosen as if from a supermarket shelf." Rather, thinking in terms of social construction allows us to understand the processes through which images for identification are constructed and sustained, contested and negotiated (Norval 1999:86).

The choices made by individuals are always in the centre of identity processes, and I believe that people, under nearly all circumstances, can be ascribed a certain degree of personal agency. Choices and decisions are, however, always made within specific, restrictive frameworks consisting of collective values as well as cognitive aspects. Furthermore, a person may not always be aware of the consequences of these choices. I do not find it likely that individuals act in an ideally rational way, always conscious about which choices will be best for them. In the real world, made up of real people, it may not always be possible to analyse agency from the perspective of western philosophical notions about individuality and rationality. Instead I agree with Richards (discussed above) on the importance of improvisation and compromise in everyday life. I also consider some of Pierre Bourdieu's conclusions on agency and structure to be of utmost importance for understanding identity formation. He refers to people's actions as part of strategies. These strategies are not based on the concept of free choice or conscious calculation of the individual, but rather emerge in the interaction between people and their habitus; the incorporated dispositions which allow us to perceive our physical and social world and to act within it (Bourdieu 1999b:104ff; Broady 1996:51ff).

3.2 Identity and the past

David Lowenthal has made extensive research on how people perceive and interact with their past, and his conclusions on the matter may serve as a starting point for the discussion on the past and identity. Lowenthal states

that “we have only present evidence for past circumstances” (Lowenthal 1985:187); it is impossible to ever know the real past, which is always partly a product of the present. The past cannot be reconstructed objectively, only a tiny fraction of past thoughts and things have ‘survived’. The passage of time between past events and the present limits our understanding of the past, since everything we see is filtered through present-day mental lenses. Views and attitudes on contemporary issues in a society change over time, and, according to Lowenthal, this is also the case with people’s views on the past, which are continually reshaped (Lowenthal 1985:26, 187ff, 216). Like many other texts referred to in this thesis, Lowenthal’s theories are situated within an academic discourse that regards people’s perceptions of the past as constructions of the present. This social constructionist discourse on the past is, however, mainly a part of the world of academic research. In everyday life, people normally see their past as something very reliable and ‘real’, and would certainly not agree that it is constantly changing.

Notions of the past are essential for people’s sense of belonging and identity. According to Lowenthal, to know what we were confirms that we are, and the ability to recall and identify with our own past thus gives existence meaning, purpose and value. Our perceptions of the past are often intimately connected to thoughts about where we come from, and awareness of history may enhance communal identity and legitimise a group of people in their own eyes (Lowenthal 1985:41, 197).

Identity is often intertwined with large-scale social and political processes. Lindgren argues that representations of the past, for example those published and distributed in books, influence people’s memories of the past and shape different kinds of belonging in the present (Lindgren 2002:148ff). He concludes that:

History is frequently used for political ends, not least by colonial powers and nation-states. Those who have the power to represent the past, have also the means to relate the past to the present political situation. By controlling the past, one can legitimise the present, and various actors often try to do that (Lindgren 2002:131).

George C. Bond and Angela Gilliam have also recognised the importance of politics and relationships of power for issues of identity. They consider

social constructions of the past to be crucial elements in processes of domination, subjugation and resistance. To represent the past and the present way of life of populations can indeed be an expression and a source of power. These representations are often part of relationships of social inequality, connected to structures of power and wealth. Subsequently, such representations (some scholars would prefer the term ‘discourses’) of the past can express the values and hegemonic ideologies that are held by particular groups of people at a given time (Bond & Gilliam 1994:1). According to Bond & Gilliam, dominant versions of the past are usually vague and general, and therefore have the capacity to absorb diverging interpretations and interests, neutralising any potential threat to the legitimacy of the dominant concepts. At some time or another, however, the dominant representations will become the focus for political struggles, popular opposition and intellectual debates. Alternative constructions, or representations, of the past may emerge, containing their own interpretations and counter-hegemonic elements. The past can thus be an arena for present-day political struggle (Bond & Gilliam 1994:1). According to Lowenthal, political struggles over the past are an integral part of people’s earnest search for a heritage essential to autonomy and identity. Furthermore, different categories of people in a society may have different views of the past; majority and minority, elite and common people, rulers and ruled, trained and amateur all identify, safeguard and interpret the past in different ways (Lowenthal 1994:303ff).

Peter G. Stone & Brian Leigh Molyneaux are both of the opinion that the presented view of the past may be that of a single, dominant group in a society, excluding all members of ethnic minorities. Furthermore, in post-colonial countries the view presented can still reflect the colonialist view, and not that of its indigenous inhabitants. Scholars often address such cases in terms of ‘the excluded past’. The excluded past can be intentionally kept away, reflecting political agendas. One common political reason for this is the intention of developing national or other collective identities (Molyneaux 1994:3ff; Stone 1994:17f).

It seems that views of the past, and the discourses of identity they may be part of, are often closely connected to relationships of power. The political and power-related aspects of identity formation, discussed above, often centre on notions of ethnicity. Ethnic identities can be crucial for the

way people view their past, and identity discourses connected to archaeological monuments in Southern Africa usually have a strong ethnic dimension. In Southern Africa there is, not least among archaeologists, a long tradition of ascribing archaeological sites to specific, and often contemporary, ethnic groups. The rock art site of Twyfelfontein is no exception, and when the guides express ideas about the origin of the rock art they usually relate them to contemporary ethnic groups (as will be made evident in chapter 6). The remainder of this chapter will therefore be devoted to discussions on ethnic identity.

According to Eriksen, ethnicity is, analytically, an aspect of a relationship between groups that consider themselves, and are considered by others, to be culturally distinct. When these real or imagined cultural differences are seen as socially important, one can talk about an ethnic relation (Eriksen 2000:12ff). Eriksen argues that the human need to classify people and different relationships between groups is central to notions of ethnicity. The purpose of ethnic classifications is to structure the social universe, consisting of seemingly endless categories of people, by establishing cognitive maps (Eriksen 2000:33ff). Ethnic relations of this type can, indeed, be seen as a prerequisite for all identities (see Comaroff & Comaroff's view on identity, chapter 3.1). Thus, if one were to use this concept of classificatory ethnicity, all identities could actually, in a sense, be labelled ethnic. However, to talk about ethnic identity normally entails something more than just recognising the presence of an ethnic relation, which does not automatically lead to the emergence of what could be referred to as 'proper' ethnic identities. Crucial for such identities is the notion of sharing certain fundamental properties.

Ethnic identity is, like all identities, relational – the identity of a group is always defined in relation to another group (Eriksen 2000:12ff). The classifications of different categories of people are often expressed through ethnic stereotypes; the members of a group define another group on basis of what they consider to be that group's innate qualities and behaviours. When this practice of stereotyping takes place within the context of unequal power relations, the members of a dominant group may create a negative stereotype of another group. This stereotype may eventually become part of the dominated group's image of themselves, in other words: their self-experienced identity (Eriksen 2000:33ff, 68). The decisive

categorising power lies with the dominant group because it is in the interest of its members to uphold a certain social order (Alexander 2001:149). With regard to the conclusions of Calhoun, Lindgren and Dunn (discussed in chapter 3.1), these stereotype images would not be adopted by people in a direct manner, but there is normally room for interpretation and negotiation. The formation of ethnic identities is, it seems, deeply connected to political and economic relationships. At this level of identity formation, ethnicity is no longer a mere classificatory mechanism: a political dimension has been added. This politicised form of ethnicity is normally the point of departure in discussions on ethnicity and ethnic groups, for example in different forums of mass media and in most of the academic works as well.

Eriksen states that ethnicity, when expressed as a social identity, is characterised by a metaphoric or fictive kinship (Eriksen 2000:12ff). This view is consistent with the opinion of Terence Ranger, who argues that a prerequisite for ethnicity is the ideological assertion that all individuals of a group, including the ruling lineage, are linked by some form of kinship ties. Ranger further argues that ethnicity depends on a group's assertion of the centrality of language, which will make one language or dialect superior to others. The language then will function as a criterion of membership of the collectivity (Ranger 1999:139f). Clearly, Ranger's views on ethnicity are located within a framework of politicised ethnicity, centring around the establishment of tribes, which is one of the most dominant expressions of African ethnicity. Henceforth, when discussing people's ethnicity, I will do so from the perspective of politicised ethnicity, expressed as the tribal or national identity of an ethnic group.

Patrick Harries consider the distinction between classificatory and politicised ethnicity to be crucial when analysing the formation of ethnic groups in Southern Africa. He states that many scholars use the concept of ethnicity without recognising that the term actually covers two different forms of ethnic phenomena:

What must be questioned is the readiness with which historians have fused the two forms of ethnicity – early classificatory ethnicity and later politicized ethnicity – and have consequently extrapolated into preceding centuries the existence of ethnic groups, such as 'the Tsonga', imbued with

a political and social unity that in reality only emerged in the twentieth century (Harries 1989:83).

The quotation from Harries not only emphasises the important distinction between the different forms of ethnicity, it also brings us to one of the main issues of research on African ethnicity, namely whether contemporary African ethnic groups, or tribes, were established in pre-colonial times or if they should be seen as the result of colonial intervention. Central to this discussion is, perhaps needless to say, the question of the extent of African initiative involved in the formation of ethnic identities. Most researchers are of the opinion that notions of ethnicity in contemporary Africa in many ways are connected to the colonial intervention of European empires, but opinions differ regarding to what extent the origins of African ethnic groups should be considered to be the work of Africans themselves or of Europeans.

The colonial influence on the formation of ethnic groups in African countries has been thoroughly discussed elsewhere³, and for the purpose of this essay a short account of Eriksen's and Ranger's conclusions on the matter will be sufficient, since the work of these two authors have very much informed my own standpoints.

Eriksen consider the tribes of the African countries to be the result of colonial administration policies, which in their turn were part of the western process of modernisation. For the peoples first defined as Dinka or Nuer by colonial administrators, it was unimaginable to identify with such over-arching, abstract entities as tribes. The tribal concept should be seen as a colonial construction, intended to bring order to, and administrate, areas perceived as chaotic by the colonisers (Eriksen 2000:112ff). Ranger recognise the presence of pre-colonial ethnic groups, but consider such identities to have been rare in pre-colonial Africa (Ranger 1999:139f). Ethnic identities, he argues, were more often the result of colonial rule:

Nineteenth-century European ideas of race, nation, and tribe, together with missionary language work, colonial administrative requirements, and the ethnographic labours of African catechists and evangelists had combined in many cases literally to invent ethnic identities (Ranger 1999:133).

³ See, for example, Atkinson 1999, Harries 1989, Makoni 1998, Papstein 1989, Ranger 1989, 1999, Vail 1989.

According to Ranger, ethnicity is usually not the most accessible or natural identity. Collective identities can become an expression of asserted ethnicity only when articulated by members of a powerful ideological elite (Ranger 1999:139f). About this colonial transformation of ethnicity, Ranger says:

The colonial invention, in other words, built on much of what was already there. Nevertheless, it *did* represent a profound paradigmatic shift from a situation in which ethnic collective identification existed in rare cases to one in which ethnicities and tribes became the necessary form of African identity expression. Thereafter, the imagination of African organic intellectuals gave moral weight to ethnicity (Ranger 1999:142).

Ranger's work, and not least his use of the terms invention and imagination, has been criticised for depriving Africans of their agency.⁴ I too consider the term invention to imply that Africans were not part of the formation of ethnic identities. However, from Dunn's point of view (as discussed in chapter 3.1), the agency of Africans was indeed limited during the colonial period, since the European hegemony denied Africans access to discursive space. Recognising Dunn's arguments, I believe that, although Africans were certainly not just passive bystanders simply embracing entities defined by others, much of the framework within which Africans had to act was the result of a dominant European discourse. As to the view of Africans imagining ethnicities, this was true in the sense that all identities are, in a way, imagined. Following the lines of social constructivism, scholars on ethnicity generally share the idea that terms like tribe, ethnic group and nation are mainly constructs of the human imagination, rather than concrete existing entities in the 'real world' (see Atkinson 1999:19).

Once an ethnic identity has been forged, be it an African tribal identity or a nationalist European identity like the Swedish one, this identity will be viewed as something given, as the natural order of the world. Ethnic identity becomes very fundamental, and therefore almost impossible to disregard: it will therefore be projected on our past as well (see Comaroff & Comaroff 1992:59; Ingold 2001:204). Lowenthal argues that the process of projecting the present on the past brings the past closer to people,

⁴ See, for example, Lindgren 2002 and Makoni 1998.

making it ‘their own’ and something they can identify with. The result is often an idealised version of the past; positive customs and virtues are projected on the past, making it a ‘role model’ for the present (Lowenthal 1985:48, 332). Stephen Shennan does not consider academic research to be an exception: the importance of ethnic issues in the modern world partly explains current academic interest in them in the past. Shennan further argues that “...in investigating these questions, as with so many others, we have tended to create the past in our own image” (Shennan 1994:29). As discussed earlier in this chapter, projections of the present on the past may, however, not always be of an accidental nature: they can also be the result of very conscious attempts to manipulate the past to suit the needs of the present. According to Eriksen, an ethnic identity is normally dependent on notions of a common origin, and it can embody an experienced continuity with the past. Hence, interpretations of the past, and an alleged continuity with an original past, can be important to ideologies that aim at justifying and maintaining certain ethnic identities (Eriksen 2000:78, 89ff).

In Namibia, the formation of distinct ethnic identities is very much connected to the establishment of separate ethnic homelands (see chapter 5.2). Discussing the very similar conditions of South Africa, Andrew D. Spiegel argues that the apartheid creation of homelands, which provided each population category with a unique culture and heritage, was legitimised by an image of supposedly separate traditions and pasts (Spiegel 1994:185ff). The past had, thus, been transformed to a role model for the present colonial situation. The ‘reinvention’ of tradition for the homelands was so convincing that it even led the architects of apartheid to believe that Africans still lived in traditional, little altered, milieus in the 1970s and 1980s (Spiegel 1994:188ff). The human tendency to unknowingly project the present on the past may, of course, also have played its part.

After this discussion on the theories of various authors, it is time to give a more detailed account of my own, rather modest, field research, starting with some methodological issues.

4 Method and the field

Altogether, I spent eight weeks, between September and December 2004, with the site guides at Twyfelfontein doing research on their views on different aspects of the rock art site. I participated in their daily work at the site as well as in other activities after working hours. Most of the information was received through daily conversations with guides and other people in the area, but I also made around 20 formal interviews with guides. Eight weeks might be considered a short period of time. The fact that I could communicate with all the guides using English, and not had to depend on an interpreter, meant that I nevertheless was able to gather what I consider to be sufficient information for my purposes. I do not mention any of my informants by name, and I have chosen not to reveal the age or sex of individuals that have provided me with information, since this would make them easy to identify for some. Not that I, at this moment, consider anything they have said to be very controversial, but written statements can easily be misunderstood or misused, and this could cause inconvenience to those I worked with.

When making the first plans for my future fieldwork, I was determined to base my field study on participant observation, together with informal questionings and discussions. More formal interviews were mainly to be conducted as a complement to my main method. However, although I only conducted about 20 formal interviews, I now consider my notes of these interviews to be very important. In addition to containing much information, they also provide structure and concreteness to my material, which, not least, facilitates the transformation of the field notes into academic text. The main body of information was, as originally planned, retrieved through informal conversation. The field notes originating from these discussions are, generally, less well-ordered and hence not as directly accessible as the interview notes, which were made during and directly after each interview.

When stating that my field method consisted mainly of what is usually referred to as participant observation, I am aware that the term implies a distanced, objective observer; a positivist ideal that I do not claim to hold myself. On the contrary, I agree with Michael Jackson's conclusion that anthropology is, rather, characterised by its emphasis on reflexivity:

The reflexive dimension of this work testifies to the ways in which one's ethnographic understanding of others is never arrived at in a neutral or disengaged manner, but is negotiated and tested in an ambiguous and stressful field of interpersonal relationships in an unfamiliar society (Jackson 1998:5).

Kaj Århem does not consider the term participant observation to adequately describe the reflexive character of ethnographic field research. Instead, he suggests the term *participant reflection, or participation and reflection* (Århem 1994:25). Ethnographers should not try to live up to some ideal of disengaged scientific observation, and in reality, ethnography has never been a neutral or objective endeavour. The word participant implies, after all, that the researcher to some degree participates in the lives of his or her informants, and by doing so he or she is inevitably affecting the outcome of the fieldwork. Bourdieu argues that even though

...its objective of pure knowledge distinguishes the research relationship from most of the exchanges in everyday life, it remains, whatever one does, a *social relationship*. As such, it can have an effect on the results obtained (Bourdieu 1999a:608).

It is, according to Bourdieu, impossible to control all effects that an interview relationship may unwittingly produce, for example due to how one presents oneself and the survey, or by the encouragements one gives or withholds, but every ethnographer should, nonetheless, strive to be conscious of their influence on the research result (Bourdieu 1999a:608ff).

I have no doubt that my choice of questions, as well as my behaviour in general, affected the information retrieved. People always have their reasons for telling certain things, and there is also a chance that people, wittingly or unwittingly, tell you what they think you want to hear rather than their own opinions. The risk of building any conclusions on such information may be reduced by repeated interviews or conversations with the same people and also by interviewing or questioning several people on the same subject. In my work with the Twyfelfontein guides such issues were not much of a concern. I was depending on their goodwill in every aspect of my fieldwork, and our relationship came to be very straightforward.

Furthermore, although I tried to present myself as an independent researcher, some people I came across during my field study may certainly have gotten the impression that I was connected to any of the governmental authorities, and thereby some sort of official representative. This would certainly have had an affect on what people chose to tell me and what they kept to themselves. The guides were, however, aware that I was merely a university student, whose only Namibian connection was John Kinahan, whom most of them had known for a long time.

Since I am a student of archaeology and anthropology, several of the guides first assumed that I had come there with the purpose of teaching them about the prehistory of the site and about the origin of the rock art. On that point I could not be of much help considering the fact that my knowledge on African archaeology in general, and consequently also the rock art of Southern Africa, is indeed limited. I had to make clear that I had not chosen to work at the site of Twyfelfontein, which in many ways is an exceptional archaeological site, because I wanted to study the archaeological remains, and that I was not there in order to educate the guides on the archaeology of the area. On the contrary, my main interest was the guides' work and their opinions on the rock art. My purpose of being there was, in a way, to be taught rather than to teach.

It was inevitable that I should come to be regarded as a sort of representative of my part of the world. Everybody knew, after all, that I was to write a thesis on my work when I got back home, and also that I would probably tell all my friends about my experiences in Namibia. The situation was a bit peculiar both to me and to the guides. One could try to imagine the situation from the perspective of the Twyfelfontein guides. Foreign visitors do not usually stay that long in the area, and when they do, it is not because they want to spend as much time as possible 'hanging out' with the guides at the rock art site. Then, all of a sudden, there is a foreign student at your workplace doing enquiries. Day after day he follows you around when you are guiding tourist groups up the mountain slopes, and, perhaps even worse, he is always eager to fill his notebooks with all sorts of information. In such a situation, and given that the time I was to spend in the area was rather limited, people around me probably became somewhat more conscious about their appearance and choice of words than usual. However, despite all this, the guides seemed very undisturbed by having

me around, and regarded me as quite harmless, something that I think contributed to the many open and sincere conversations that we engaged in. My presence at Twyfelfontein also gave the guides a mean to express themselves, and to communicate their thoughts and opinions on various matters. Subsequently, many of the guides took the chance to present themselves and different aspects of their culture to the ‘outside world’.

Bourdieu suggests that the ethnographic fieldwork, and especially the interview relationship it normally builds on, can result in the establishment of an ‘arena’ for the mediating of ideas otherwise seldom articulated:

By offering the respondent an absolutely exceptional situation for communication, freed from the usual constraints (particularly of time) that weigh on most everyday interchanges, and opening up alternatives which prompt or authorize the articulation of worries, needs or wishes discovered through this very articulation, the researcher helps create the conditions for an extra-ordinary discourse, which might never have been spoken, but which was already there, merely awaiting the conditions for its actualization (Bourdieu 1999a:614).

The presence of an ethnographer can give people an opportunity to make themselves heard, and to form their own point of view about themselves and the world. The interview relationship could, thus, not only be for the benefit of the researcher, but it may also offer the respondent time to reflect on thoughts long kept unsaid or repressed, a mean of self-analysis (Bourdieu 1999a:615). I agree with Bourdieu’s conclusions on this matter, with the exception that I do not consider the absence of time constraints, although certainly of significance, to be the most important factor in the establishment of a research relationship of this kind. I find the researcher’s interest in people’s opinions and the ability to listen carefully to what people have to say to be equally important.

I do not claim that my relationship to the Twyfelfontein guides had all the qualities of such an ideal research relationship, but certain elements, like the opportunity to express oneself in interviews and conversations, did open up a discursive space. My main research interest – the local views on the site and people’s notions of the past, expressed in the choice of interview questions and subjects for conversation – was undoubtedly crucial for creating this discursive space, as was my willingness to listen to people’s stories. When I arrived at Twyfelfontein, there existed indeed

plenty of ideas on the area's past and also an alternative discourse on the ethnic origin of the site (see chapter 6), a discourse that, in Bourdieu's words, perhaps could be described as "merely awaiting the conditions for its actualization" (see quote on Bourdieu above).

5 Damaraland and Twyfelfontein

5.1 Damaraland and its inhabitants

The Twyfelfontein rock art site is situated approximately 480 km north-west of *Windhoek* (Namibia's capital), and about 90 km west of the town of *Khorixas*, the nearest urban centre and the colonial administrative centre of the former *Damaraland* (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:24). After Namibia's independence in 1990, Damaraland has ceased to be a formal region. The *apartheid* division of Namibia into commercial farmland districts and ethnic communal areas (*homelands*) was in 1992 replaced by new administrative regions. Hence, the Twyfelfontein area is now part of the district of Khorixas in the *Kunene* region. The former Damaraland roughly comprised an area today covered by the south-western part of the Kunene region and the northern half of the *Erongo* region (Forrest 1998:viii-ix). Informally the term Damaraland is, however, still frequently used to designate the geographical area although it no longer has any administrative relevance. Since this term seems to be preferred by most people in the country, I have chosen to use it in this essay as well.

Maybe more than anything else, Damaraland is characterised by its arid and semi-arid climate.⁵ Twyfelfontein is located on the fringes of the Namib Desert and the average annual rainfall is approximately 100 mm (Hutchinson 1995:21f; Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:39). Areas with such low annual precipitation usually also have a great variability in rainfall (Ahrens 2001:353), and at Twyfelfontein the coefficient of variation exceeds 80% (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:39). The Twyfelfontein area may, thus, receive relatively much rain in one year, followed by a dry period of several years. The vegetation of the Twyfelfontein area is to a high degree a result of the sparse and unpredictable rainfall. However, the main watercourses are flooded almost every year due to heavier rains

⁵ According to Köppen's climatic classification system. For the terminology of arid climates, see Ahrens 2001:353ff.

further inland, and much water can thus be stored in the ground along riverbeds.⁶ This allows for rather substantial vegetation compared to many other areas of equal aridity, for example the occurrence of many tree species, despite the long periods without rainfall (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:39f). The average annual temperature of the Twyfelfontein area is 20-22°C, with an average maximum of 34-36°C and an average minimum of 8-10°C. Summer maximum temperatures, however, sometimes exceed 45°C, mainly due to re-radiation from the surface of the rocky terrain (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:39).

The harsh climate also means that Damaraland is sparsely populated. The majority of the population belongs to the ethnic group *Damara*. Their mother tongue is the Khoisan language known as Damara, Nama, Damara-Nama, Nama-Damara or Khoekhoegowab. This single language is shared by a few different ethnic groups (of which the Damara and the Nama are the major ones), hence the variety in names. According to Alan Barnard the Damara are usually not, by themselves or others, classified as a *Khoekhoe* people, although they share many cultural attributes with both the Khoekhoe and the *Bushmen*⁷. Barnard estimates that the Damara consist of at least 90,000 people (the population of Namibia numbers around two millions). The Damara are by no means restricted to the area of former Damaraland and, in fact, never have been. A majority of them inhabit the north-western parts of the country, but many live elsewhere. During the 1980s, the number of Damaras in *Katutura*, the western township of Windhoek, had increased to more than 30% of the total Damara population (Barnard 1992:199ff).

⁶ There are no perennial rivers in Damaraland, but seemingly dry riverbeds can contain much underground water. There is also a possibility that very old reservoirs of underground water, originating from periods of more moist conditions and thus several millennia old, contribute to sustain the fairly dense vegetation (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:40).

⁷ The naming of these diverse groups of people has been subject to much scholarly attention (see Barnard 1992:7ff and Gordon 1992:4ff). Bushmen and *San* (the Khoekhoe term) are the two most commonly used names today. Both names have derogatory connotations. I prefer to use the term Bushman/Bushmen, since this is the term convincingly argued for by Barnard (1992) and Gordon (1992), two of the most prominent scholars on this subject. My use of the term in this thesis may in some cases give the impression that I consider 'the Bushmen' to be a coherent ethnic group sharing a proper ethnic identity - this is certainly not the case, and I use the term in such manner strictly for the sake of convenience (see discussion in chapter 8).

5.2 Colonial history of Damaraland

– the idea of ‘ethnic homelands’

Knowing something about the history of Damaraland is crucial when trying to understand present-day issues. One has to realise that Damaraland is purely a colonial construction, a result of the South African enforcement of apartheid policies in Namibia. Many different political decisions and circumstances have contributed in forming the homelands of Namibia, but the single most important factor is probably the so called *Odendaal Commission*, which will be the focus of the text below.

Between 1921 and 1990, Namibia was under South African colonial rule⁸, but for some period of time, up to the 1960s, South Africa had gradually allowed white Namibians to build and develop governmental institutions that were increasingly autonomous from Pretoria. Most South African governmental institutions, however, regarded Namibia, or *South West Africa*⁹, to be an integrated part of the Republic of South Africa. Plans were therefore made to reclaim the direct running of the entire Namibian bureaucracy (Forrest 1998:32). Thus, in September 1962, the South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd appointed the *Odendaal Commission of Enquiry*, named after its chairman F. H. Odendaal, to investigate social, economic and political conditions in Namibia (du Pisani 1986:159; O’Callaghan 1977:40). The objective of the Odendaal Commission was to integrate the territory of Namibia more closely with South Africa and also to minimise the impact of decolonisation in the rest of Africa (du Pisani 1986:159f, 172).

The commission presented its report in January 1964.¹⁰ The report followed the lines of the official South African ideology of ethnic

⁸ Prior to this, Namibia (then called Südwest-Afrika or South West Africa) had been a German colonial territory. The territory was occupied by South African troops during World War I and through the Treaty of Versailles Germany was required to renounce all colonial claims. In 1921 the League of Nations granted South Africa a formal mandate to administer South West Africa (Holmberg & Palmberg 2005).

⁹ South West Africa was the official name of the territory until 1966, when the United Nations General Assembly terminated South Africa’s mandate for South West Africa. The General Assembly marked the country’s right to independence by giving it the new name Namibia (after the Namib Desert covering the entire coast area). South African authorities continued to use the name South West Africa, disregarding the demands of the United Nations (du Pisani 1986:179; Holmberg & Palmberg 2005).

¹⁰ Title: *Report of Enquiry into South West African Affairs, 1962-1963*.

particularism, and it recommended that the South African system of ethnic institutional segregation, apartheid, should be extended to Namibia as well in order to administer the communal (*native reserve*) areas of the territory. A policy of integration was out of the question, since the socio-cultural differences between different ethnic groups were perceived as too fundamental to allow for them to become part of one central authority. Any sort of integration of the various groups, it was argued, would certainly lead to social unrest and tribal violence, and the result would be a climate where socio-economic progress was impossible (du Pisani 1986:159ff; Forrest 1998:32f). The implementation of apartheid policies was considered necessary for the effective administration of the Namibian territory:

‘...The Commission is therefore of the opinion that one central authority, with all groups represented therein, must be ruled out and that as far as practicable a homeland must be created for each population group, in which it alone would have residential, political and language rights to the exclusion of all other population groups, so that each group would be able to develop towards self-determination without any group dominating or being dominated by another’ (Report of Inquiry into South West African Affairs, 1962-1963: as quoted in O’Callaghan 1977:42).

The commission therefore recommended to the South African parliament that Namibia’s communal areas should be divided into ten separate homelands: *Damaland* (or *Damaraland*), *Bushmanland*, *Namaland*, *Tswanaland*, *Hereroland*, *Rehoboth Gebiet*, *Kaokoveld*, *Ovamboland*, *Okavangoland* and *Eastern Caprivi* (Bruwer 1966:108; Forrest 1998:33). In the late 1960s, South Africa began to implement the recommendations of the Odendaal Commission. Each ‘homeland’, or *Bantustan*¹¹, was to be governed by its own tribal government, and the first of these homeland governments were established in 1968¹². In reality, their power was very limited, and the ethnically based ‘mini-governments’ were usually dominated by chiefs and headmen appointed or approved by South African

¹¹ Bantustan is a term used for the (Bantu) homelands in the Republic of South Africa.

¹² These homeland governments were in 1980 replaced by ethnic administrations, so called representative or second tier authorities. The model of separate ethnic authorities, however, remained intact. South Africa remained strongly committed to the second tier authorities right to Namibian independence (Forrest 1998:33ff).

authorities. The authorities of South Africa were also in direct control of many policy matters that concerned the homelands, especially those involving issues of security, land use and water resources (Forrest 1998:33).

The South African form of institutional segregation, apartheid, should not be seen as isolated from other colonial enterprises in Africa. Apartheid was but a development of the British Colonial Office's policies of indirect rule.¹³ The creation of distinct homelands was part of the classic colonial strategy of divide and conquer. However, to change societies in such fundamental ways required a very high degree of force and brutality:

The context in which apartheid came to be implemented made for its particularly harsh features, for to rule natives through their own institutions, one first had to push natives back into the confines of native institutions (Mamdani 1996:7).

In semi-industrialised and highly urbanised South Africa, the indigenous Africans had allegedly become too much like Europeans. Forced removals were deemed necessary, since it was thought that the lifestyle and traditions of the African groups could be preserved only if the majority of them resided in their 'traditional' lands (homelands). It has been estimated that more than 3.5 million people, over 10% of the entire South African population, were uprooted by forced removals between 1960 and 1985. In that way the politically enforced system of ethnic pluralism could be maintained, and every person would remain part of an ethnic minority, which, on its own, did not pose any political threat to the colonial authorities. Forcing Africans to live in reserves also meant that many people had no other choice but to become migrant labourers engaged in cycles of annual migration between homeland and workplace.¹⁴ The industrial workforce was thus restructured into one composed principally of migrant labour. The homeland concept guaranteed that white-owned industries and farms would have continued access to cheap black African (migrant) labour. Economic progress was indeed one of the main motives

¹³ 'Association' was the French colonial equivalent to British indirect rule (Mamdani 1996:7).

¹⁴ Migration labour was often compulsory, and this led the United Nations General Assembly to declare South African labour policies to be akin to slavery (O'Callaghan 1977:80).

behind the very idea of apartheid, and the enforcement of migration labour systems is perhaps the most exceptional aspect of the South African colonial experience. The homelands that were established could, thus, mainly be seen as labour reserves essential to the continuation of white political and economic domination, which was deemed crucial to peace and economic stability for all groups of South Africa and also for Namibia (Mamdani 1996:5ff, 28, 102).

Forced removals were considered necessary in the Namibian case as well, and the Odendaal Commission promoted the relocation of selected African communities (Forrest 1998:33). According to one estimation, the establishment of the proposed homelands would include the movement of about 130,000 people, mainly from the Bushmen, Damara, Herero and Nama ethnic groups (du Pisani 1986:163). It is difficult, however, to estimate the number of people that were actually forced to move. Many of the Damara who took up residence in their new 'homeland' seem to have done so voluntarily, or at least that was the case according to M C Botha, South African Minister of Bantu Administration and Development. Similarly, the chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner in Windhoek claimed that a faction of Damara, led by Headman David Goroseb, were on the move to settle in Damaraland on voluntary basis, due to the promise of future self-government. This faction consisted of some 244 families bringing about 20,000 head of cattle. Another group of about 900 people were in 1973 subject to an official plan to move them from a Roman Catholic mission at *Riemvasmaak*¹⁵ to Damaraland (du Pisani 1986:243f). These are but examples of larger groups of people moving to the area. Ever since the homeland reform, individuals and smaller groups, like families, have moved to settle within the borders of Damaraland, but, on the other hand, many people have left the area as well. The harsh climate of Damaraland limited the economic possibilities for many people, as stock breeding (one of the few possible economic activities) demanded vast pasture areas and modern wells. According to the 1970 population census, only 11 to 12% of the entire Damara population resided in Damaraland (du Pisani 1986:243f; O'Callaghan 1977: 75).

¹⁵ Riemvasmaak is located near the Augrabies falls on the Orange River in southernmost Namibia.

The geographic territories of most homelands were based on pre-existing native reserves.¹⁶ In the far north of Namibia, the boundaries of the reserves in large part corresponded to the location of the new homelands, but in the case of Damaraland the homeland territory was very different from that of the former native reserve, and was to become many times larger (Bruwer 1966:16, 109; Forrest 1998:33). Today, about 43% of the total area of Damaraland consists of surveyed and fenced farmland previously owned by white farmers.¹⁷ In terms of the recommendations of the Odendaal Commission, these farms were incorporated into Damaraland and thus became part of the communal land tenure system (Adams, Werner & Vale 1990:147).

5.3 Twyfelfontein

The site of Twyfelfontein was declared a national monument in 1952, and is presently nominated for *World Heritage List* inscription¹⁸. The site has the largest concentration of prehistoric rock engravings in Southern Africa, and, so far, more than 2,000 engravings have been recorded, as well as a small number of rock paintings. A few archaeological excavations have been carried out at the site, primarily dating the prehistoric activities to the Late Stone Age (041005 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book). Rock engravings and paintings are difficult to date in a more exact manner, but it is likely that the Twyfelfontein rock art was made some time between 3000 B.C. and 1000 AD (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:13).

The modern history of the Twyfelfontein site began in 1946, when the settler David Levin came to the area to establish a cattle farm (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:44). Levin built his farmhouse right next to the rock art hillside. The reason for settling on this particular spot was a spring, one of the few permanent water sources in the area (except for underground water). This spring had most likely been the reason for the prehistoric settlement as well (041004 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book). During a certain period Levin was very concerned with the spring and doubted if its

¹⁶ 'Homeland' replaced 'native reserve' as the official term of ethnically based communal areas (Forrest 1998:33).

¹⁷ This was at least the case in 1990, according to Adams, Werner & Vale (1990:147).

¹⁸ UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) ascribes World Heritage status to sites considered to have special values and need for preservation.

flow of water would last the whole dry season. Due to this preoccupation, one of Levin's neighbours started to refer to him as David Twyfelfontein. Twyfelfontein, meaning 'doubtful spring' in Afrikaans, soon became the name of both the spring and the newly established farm, and, consequently, the name of the rock art site as well. The older Khoekhoegowab name for the site is *ui-/ais or /ui-//ais*, which variously refers to a "single spring" or a place "among packed stones" (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:24, 44). The farm would not last very long. After an insecure beginning, Levin was granted a license in 1952 to pasture his livestock at Twyfelfontein, and he attempted to make a living out of the place as a farmer for the next twelve years. However, in 1964 he was informed that Twyfelfontein was to be incorporated in the designated communal area of Damaraland, as recommended by the Odendaal Commission. Levin therefore left in 1965 and the land of Twyfelfontein was leased out to adjacent private farms for a few years. In 1971, the government proclaimed that communal lands such as Twyfelfontein were to be used only by Damara farmers, and the area was thus abandoned for many years to come. In reality, it would take almost 20 years before the area of Twyfelfontein was again used for stock farming (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:44f).

When Levin first arrived at the site in 1946, there was a Damara family of six people living near the spring in a settlement of 32 huts. These people were probably not permanently settled here, but rather used the site on a seasonal basis. Perhaps they were part of a larger, dispersed group of nomadic pastoralists. The Damara group, and their flock of goats and sheep, was soon moved by police truck to *Sesfontein*, due to a government decision to secure the area for settler farmers (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:30, 44ff). North-western Namibia was never densely populated, and when the traditional economy, based on nomadic pastoralism, was destroyed by the *Rinderpest* epidemic of 1897 (a cattle epidemic) together with a series of government policies encouraging people to leave the land and seek employment in commercial enterprises, the area became even more sparsely populated. The Damara had thus become largely urbanised by the time of Levin's arrival at Twyfelfontein, and the Damara family living there was probably one of very few groups that still remained in the area (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:45ff).

Due to these conditions, most people living in the Twyfelfontein area today have no long-term historical link to the area, but have moved here, or are children to people who have moved here, in the last decades. Regarding the rock art site, interviews with three elderly men yielded little information on its history. It seems that people were aware of the many rock art sites in the area, at least during the last three generations, but generally stayed away from them because they were seen as powerful places, in some way connected to the ancestors. There is, thus, no ‘traditional’ knowledge of the content of the rock art or any rituals that may have been performed at the rock art sites (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:46f).

Today, the area surrounding the Twyfelfontein site is a conservancy, called the Uibasen Twyfelfontein conservancy, established on the initiative of local farmers¹⁹ following the guidelines of Namibia’s Communal Area Conservancy Programme²⁰. Since the Twyfelfontein rock art site is a national monument, it is excluded from the conservancy area (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:45ff; Sullivan 1999:2). A conservancy is a form of local residents cooperation in an area of communal land. The idea of conservancies is that local residents should be involved in, and gain from, the economic activities of their home area, usually from different forms of tourism-based enterprises. The major strategy for attracting increasing numbers of tourists to conservancy areas is to promote local wildlife. By combining their resources in a joint effort, local people usually manage the nature of the area and establish various tourist facilities, as a way of creating incomes. In Damaraland this may be a good alternative, or complement, to more traditional economic activities, since the harsh natural conditions often make stock farming, the predominant agricultural activity, a hard enterprise (Sullivan 1999:1f).

Tourism is Namibia’s fastest growing economic sector, and at present, the rock art at Twyfelfontein is the main tourist attraction of the former Damaraland. In fact, Twyfelfontein receives four times as many visitors as any other rock art site in Southern Africa (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:13,

¹⁹ In these parts of Namibia, the term ‘farmer’ normally refers to someone who practice extensive stock breeding, either on common lands or on commercial farms. The term ‘farm’ may be used either to denote a commercial farm, or to denote a homestead, or a group of homesteads, on common lands.

²⁰ Officially launched by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism in 1998 (Sullivan 1999:2).

25, 70). The site currently receives nearly 40,000 visitors per year. About 80% of these are Europeans, and Namibians comprise only approximately 1% of the visitors. Between March 2004 and February 2005, the Twyfelfontein site generated almost N\$1 million²¹ in gate fees (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:58f, 64f). Due to the special values of the site, efforts are made to raise its formal status to that of a World Heritage Site (see previous statement in this chapter), something that would definitely further increase the number of people visiting the place. Today most of the households in the area are involved in tourism, one way or another. From the 1990s and onwards there has been a population increase in the Twyfelfontein area. Quite a few people have moved here from rather distant places, but many have also come from nearby farms, contributing to a somewhat more dense population in the surroundings of the Twyfelfontein rock art site. The reason for this increase in residents is mainly that more and more foreign tourists are visiting the area, usually to see the Twyfelfontein rock art, but also to experience the area's fascinating flora and fauna. The increasing amount of visitors in recent years has resulted in the establishment of several tourist accommodation facilities leading to many new job opportunities, which have attracted people to move here. Many of the tourism enterprises in the conservancy are not run by local people but are the result of outside investments, with permission from the conservancy. The biggest tourist facilities in the conservancy are the *Twyfelfontein Country Lodge*, the *Mowani Mountain Camp* and the *Aba-Huab Camp* (041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book).

²¹ 1 N\$ is currently (2005-09-19) worth approximately 0,16 US\$ (*The Namibian*).



Fig. 2. Guiding of visitors at the Twyfelfontein rock art site (photo by author).



Fig. 3. Laow Inn (photo by author).

.4 The guides

The Twyfelfontein rock art site did probably not receive many visitors until 1964, when a road was constructed making it more available (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:64). The first known person to regularly guide tourists at Twyfelfontein was the Damara man Gabriel Eiseb, who in 1979 moved to Levin's abandoned farmhouse. During his stay there, Eiseb often guided visitors up the rocky hillside to let them see the rock art (041004 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book). When I conducted my field research in the Uibasen Twyfelfontein Conservancy in 2004, there were about 20 people, men and women, working as guides at the Twyfelfontein rock art site, and also three persons mainly working as receptionists. All of them belonged to the ethnic group Damara, and ages ranged between 17 and 35. The guides were divided into two working teams, taking turns in working a seven day shift followed by a seven day leave. Many of the guides originally come from Khorixas, a small town about 100 km east of Twyfelfontein, while others are from local farms and some from more distant farms. Those who come from farms in the area usually have some connection to Khorixas, since they went to school there, and, subsequently, in part have grown up there. A few of the guides have worked at the site on and off since the mid 1990s, but the majority of them have joined the group later (041011, 041012, 041130 Twyfelfontein, Interviews).

Most of the guides live in *Laow Inn*, a settlement located some eight or nine km from the rock art site, although many of them also stay on farms or in Khorixas for some periods of time. *Laow Inn* was originally a cattle post to the farm *Blaauwpoort*, but it later became a more permanent settlement, and due to the new job opportunities in tourism it has grown to a settlement with 40 to 60 residents. The number of residents varies, and some only stay here on part time basis, spending the rest of their time in Khorixas or on family farms. The residents of *Laow Inn* are, like the guides, mainly people working at the different tourist facilities, often accompanied by their families. The name *Laow Inn* originates from a small shop and bar established here in the mid 1990s by a man nicknamed *Laow*, and it soon became the name of the whole growing settlement (041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book). *Laow Inn* mainly consists of small square houses and homesteads, and many of the buildings are made of various recycled materials. The inventiveness when it comes to building

materials is often rather impressive, and materials used are, for example, corrugated iron sheets, flattened food-cans, wood, and cardboard boxes. There are also houses constructed in a more traditional matter, of wood (usually from Mopane-trees) and covered with a mixture of soil and dung. Several of the houses have roofs made of sheets of corrugated iron and floors made of concrete, but these materials are more expensive and harder to come by than others. Some houses have been built by combining all these different building techniques and materials (041021 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book).

In the beginning of 2004, all the guides presently working at the Twyfelfontein site were officially made employees of the *National Monuments Council*²². Up to this point in time, when the National Monuments Council was able to include the guiding activities in their overall management of the site, all guiding had been organised locally. Furthermore, all revenues from the site had gone directly to local entrepreneurs. A long and complex process of negotiation was required before the National Monuments Council could gain control of the place, which, at least formally, was already under their management. Prior to this, the guides themselves had formed a guide association called *Twyfelfontein Tour Guides Association* and through *Nacobta (Namibian Community-Based Tourism Association group)* received some basic guide training (041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book).

Today, 75% of the income generated from the site through gate fees goes directly to the National Monuments Council, and 5% goes to the conservancy. The remaining 20% is distributed by the guide association, in the form of a relatively fixed salary to each guide (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:58f). Work opportunities are scarce in this part of the country and although the guide job is by no means well-paid, the salary, together with tip money from visitors, means that the guides get a chance to provide for themselves and their families (041003, 041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book). The guides at Twyfelfontein are not the only group of local guides working at tourist sites in Damaraland. The economic potential of this form of tourism enterprises have led to the establishment of several Damara guide communities at various places. Except for Twyfelfontein, the two

²² The National Monuments Council was recently renamed *National Heritage Council*.

largest of these groups are probably the ones working at the White Lady site in the Brandberg massif (the group I originally intended to work with) and at the *Petrified Forest*²³, not far from Twyfelfontein.

5.5 Previous anthropological research

The fact that Namibia previously was under South African colonial rule has very much formed the arena for anthropological work. There is a history of rather strong governmental resistance against allowing foreign researchers to conduct fieldwork in the country. The reason for this resistance was that South African colonial authorities realised that foreign anthropologists, through their fieldwork and writings, could potentially undermine and question different aspects of colonial rule. This became especially obvious in the years of full-blown apartheid politics, when the power of the South African regime depended on the ability to present a positive view of its politics to the outside world. The regime wanted to be perceived as legitimate by the international community; its territorial claims were indeed contested (Gordon 2000:1ff).

While many foreign anthropologists often had problems with obtaining necessary research visas, those who sometimes have been called politically correct anthropologists, referred to as *ethnologists*, were more appreciated by colonial authorities. According to Robert J. Gordon, the South African government used such ethnologists to justify apartheid policies. The involved ethnologists were to impress outsiders by presenting the apartheid system as a highly scientific, and therefore legitimate enterprise. However, the biggest South African employer of anthropologists was the South African Defence Force, which from the early 1970s onwards had a full-time ethnological section working in Namibia. This section was to become the largest single employer of anthropologists outside the United States. Its aim was to gain local support for the South African side in the low intensity guerrilla war fought with SWAPO²⁴, the major indigenous organisation fighting for independence. The advice of these anthropologists/ethnologists was used when recruiting local soldiers

²³ A geological site containing the fossilised remains of tree trunks, located north-east of Twyfelfontein.

²⁴ The South West African Peoples Organisation, today the major political party of Namibia, was established in 1960.

of different ethnic groups, and they played an important role in the WHAM (Winning Hearts And Minds) strategy (Gordon 2000:8).

In the same way that foreign anthropologists outside of state control threatened the authority of the colonial regime, they might be seen as a threat to the present-day independent nation as well. Their books and films, which are based on fieldwork experiences, are likely to present opinions on contemporary problems of the country that are not consistent with the views of Namibian authorities. This, and the role anthropologists played in the South African Defence Force, means that anthropologists are still sometimes viewed with suspicion in Namibia (Gordon 2000:8ff).

Despite the rather difficult conditions mentioned above, quite many anthropologists, with no ties to the South African government or the Defence Force, have worked in Namibia over the years.²⁵ However, most of the studies carried out have focused either on the various groups of so called Bushmen in eastern Namibia or the *Himba* in the Kaokoveld (outermost north-western Namibia). Hence, some small and marginalised groups of people are well-represented in the literature, while a people like the *Ovambo*, the major ethnic group of Namibia, have received comparatively little anthropological attention (Gordon 2000:5ff).

There are many reasons for the focus on Bushmen. Early on, the Bushmen received very high international status as objects of study (Gordon 2000:6), and they were seen as a kind of Stone Age remnants. Their way of life as 'primitive' hunter-gatherers supposedly had very much in common with pre-Neolithic human societies, and one could almost see them as a common human cultural heritage. The survival of this 'pristine culture' was threatened and anthropological studies were seen as absolutely necessary in order to save and preserve as much as possible of the knowledge of this people. From the early 1950s, the Bushmen were therefore subject to intense anthropological research. There was also a very practical reason behind this research focus, namely the foreign researchers' difficulties in obtaining visas. It was rather easy to get permission to study the Bushmen (at least compared to other groups), since colonial administrators did not perceive these peripheral groups to be politically articulate or in a position to threaten the colonial authority. Studies of

²⁵ For an overview of the history of anthropological research in Namibia as well as recent developments, see Gordon 2000.

Bushmen were not likely to lead to any state criticism or governmental embarrassment overseas (Gordon 2000:5ff). This view of the Bushmen was in part based on ideas from early colonial times, when Bushmen were often not even viewed as full members of the human species. Back then, it was widely believed that Bushmen were very primitive, indeed without culture at all, and thus should be seen as a natural part of the fauna. Like many of the African animals they therefore, at best, deserved some sort of legal protection so that they would not become extinct (Gawe & Meli 1990:104).

In later years much anthropological attention has also been directed towards the Himba, to such a degree that Gordon refer to it as the 'himbanisation' of Namibian anthropology. Between 1975 and 2000, more than half of all doctorates completed on Namibian subjects have concerned the Himba and the Kaokoveld. Like in the case of the Bushmen, one of the reasons for the intense research on Himba groups is rather practical. The field of 'Bushman studies' (primarily groups of Bushmen in the Kalahari, practising what was assumed to be a traditional hunter-gatherer economy) had simply become overcrowded with researchers. At times there were even anthropologists studying other anthropologists who studied Bushmen. Many research institutions chose to redirect their efforts to the Himba instead (Gordon 2000:10). Many Himba groups have also, due to both geographical and political isolation, to a higher degree than most of today's Bushmen preserved major parts of their 'traditional' life-style. Popularly, the Himba of the Kaokoveld are often seen as members of a pristine human society, unaffected by modernity and living in close contact with nature. Although most anthropologists would probably not admit sharing these romantic notions, they are nevertheless drawn to the Kaokoveld in great numbers (Gordon 2000:9f). In many ways, the Himba represent a classic anthropological object of study: an ethnic minority with a largely 'intact' traditional (pastoral) economy and culture.

Other ethnic groups in Namibia have not been subject to the same intensive anthropological research. The Damara have, compared to the Bushmen and the Himba, received little academic interest. The terminology of the relatively few ethnic accounts of the 1800s and early 1900s can be somewhat confusing to a present-day reader. At this time the colonial authorities spoke of Damara and Damaraland when referring to the

*Herero*²⁶ and their territory. This is probably due to the fact that the Herero was called Damara by *Tswana*²⁷ groups and Bushmen, and possibly also by the *Nama*. In colonial accounts, the preferred terms for the ancestors of today's Damara were *Berg Damara*, *Bergdama* or *Dama* (Barnard 1992:209ff; Palgrave 1877:14). William Coates Palgrave, of the Ministerial Department of Native Affairs in Cape Town, thus used the term Berg Damara when writing about some of the ethnographic observations he made during his official expedition to Damaraland (the Herero territory) and *Great Namaqualand*²⁸ in 1876. His report, published in 1877, only mentions the Berg Damara quite briefly since they were not his primary object of investigation (Palgrave 1877:15, 50f). There is obviously a big difference between the early colonial and present-day usage of the ethnic term Damara. Furthermore, one also has to be aware of the fact that the vast 1876 Herero territory called Damaraland is something completely different than the much smaller South African colonial region, or homeland, of Damaraland, which was bound to the 'actual' Damara ethnic group. As for my own thesis work, the terms Damara and Damaraland normally refer to the later colonial and modern people and the homeland allocated to them in terms of the Odendaal Commission.

Palgrave was not the only one making ethnographic observations of the Damara during early colonial times. Prior to Palgrave's expedition, the Rhenish missionary Carl Hugo Hahn had written some ethnographic accounts of the Damara (Palgrave 1877:51f). Other early ethnographers who have written about the Damara are Hugo von François (1896) and Viktor Lebzelter (1934). The main ethnographer of the Damara was, however, the Rhenish missionary and historian Heinrich Vedder, author of *Die Bergdama* (1923) and co-author of *The Native Tribes of South West Africa* (1928) (Barnard 1992:200ff).

In more recent times, anthropologist Alan Barnard has conducted some field research on the Damara. In his comparative analysis *Hunters*

²⁶ The Herero is a Central-Bantu-speaking ethnic group, traditionally living as pastoralists.

²⁷ The Tswana is the major ethnic group of today's Botswana. There is also a small Tswana-speaking minority in Namibia, to which the territory of Tswanaland was allocated by the Odendaal Commission (see chapter 3.2).

²⁸ The territory that in 1876 belonged to the Namaqua, today referred to as Nama, an ethnic group speaking the same Khoisan language as the Damara.

and Herders of Southern Africa: Comparative ethnography of the Khoisan Peoples (1992), Barnard focuses on the Damara as they were during what he calls “the golden age” of Namibian ethnography, the German colonial period before the wars of 1904-07 and 1914-17 (a period he definitely not regards as the golden age of Namibia itself). Since Barnard is interested in aspects of social organisation of the pre-colonial and early colonial periods, his fieldwork has mainly depended on elderly Damara informants as a complement to the information of early ethnographers (Barnard 1992:199ff). Furthermore, Sian Sullivan carried out anthropological and ecological fieldwork in the central and southern Kunene region between 1994 and 1996. Effectively combining natural science and anthropology, Sullivan focuses on the usage of natural resources in Damara-speaking farming communities, especially the principles guiding the collection of grass seeds from harvester ant nests, and wild honey (Gordon 2000:12; Sullivan 1999:1ff).

6 Local views on Twyfelfontein

6.1 Twyfelfontein as a workplace – the guide job

When asked in what ways the rock art site is important, the guides of the Twyfelfontein Tour Guides Association often mention the economic values of the site first. In such an environment as this, with the high unemployment numbers in mind, economy is of course the far most obvious aspect to be considered. Not only is the site of economic importance to the guides themselves, but people all over the area are depending on the continued tourism around the site for their livelihood. The tourism in the conservancy is indeed seen as crucial for raising the incomes and living standard of members of the local communities. It is vital to maintain the high number of visitors to sites such as Twyfelfontein since this contributes to the economic development of the whole region and to the entire country as well. More tourists means more job opportunities and raised incomes, and the establishment of a new facility can lead to many new jobs. The Twyfelfontein Country Lodge, for example, employs about 80 people. Big tourist accommodation facilities need huge staffs, and many of the employees of such facilities are usually recruited locally (041011, 041012, 041017 Twyfelfontein, Interviews). Smaller tourist

enterprises also contribute significantly to the local increase in employment possibilities. The Aba-Huab Camp is a very moderate establishment compared to the Twyfelfontein Country Lodge, but, nevertheless, around 15 people work there (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:75). Furthermore, if more visitors are attracted to the area, more guides will be needed, both in the form of site guides and wildlife guides.

The tourism in the Uibasen Twyfelfontein conservancy is actually so important to many people living there that it becomes a natural point of departure when discussing all kinds of matters. Almost everything circles around the tourism business and an increase in visitors to the area is seen as the solution to many problems. People consciously try to make the conservancy more attractive to tourists by creating a safe environment. The idea is that the Twyfelfontein area must be devoid of any open conflicts or criminal acts if visitors are to feel safe in these surroundings, and efforts are therefore made against criminality and violence to ensure that tourists will not be afraid to come here (041129 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book; 041011 Twyfelfontein, Interview). When the guides talk about the future they do so from within a framework based on the possibilities of tourism. They want to remain in the tourism business since they find guiding to be a very good occupation, and the continued increase in tourism means that their sustenance is rather secure. The guide job at Twyfelfontein may also be the first step towards the most desired employment, namely that of a travelling tour guide. Becoming a professional tour guide is the dream job for almost every guide I interviewed. The tour guides working for safari companies travel around the whole country, and often to other African countries as well. They experience new places, meet many interesting people, and they earn a reasonable amount of money. However, to become a tour guide is not easy, the competition is hard, and you need special education. The necessary courses are expensive and sponsors (for example companies or foundations) are hard to find (041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book; 041011, 041012, 041017, 041130a Twyfelfontein, Interviews).

The wealth generated through different tourist activities in the Twyfelfontein area is by no means evenly distributed. Despite the increased economic activities in recent years, Damaraland remains underdeveloped, and there are local concerns that much of the income goes directly to outside investors, and thus not benefiting the local residents. Nevertheless,

working as a guide at the rock art site, or being employed at a camp or a lodge, makes a big difference to people and their families (041017, 041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book).

On an individual level, getting the guide job has changed many things, or as one person put it: “I was struggling, now I don’t struggle anymore” (041012 Twyfelfontein, Interview). Another guide expressed a similar opinion: “I had a useless life before I got this job” (041130 Twyfelfontein, Interview). A few are even convinced that, without this job, they would have ended up in the streets of some town, pushed into becoming criminals. Their work at Twyfelfontein now makes it possible for them to make a decent and honest living (041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book). Working at the site has indeed changed the lives of many of the guides. The income gives them the means to support themselves and their families; they can buy food, clothes, medicines and pay their children’s school fees. Besides the income, there are also many other positive sides of the guide job. Working with tourists, the guides have been able to improve their language skills learning more English and other languages like German, since Germans are the most frequent visitors to the site. The opportunity to learn languages and communicate with people from all over the world and of various cultures on a daily basis, is by many considered to be one of the most rewarding aspects of this kind of work. In this way, the guides’ knowledge of the outside world has increased dramatically. Their new language skills, and the sense of doing something really meaningful when teaching visitors about the site, have also made the guides more confident in themselves. Of course their improved economic situation has also contributed to this self-esteem. Indeed, many of the guides feel that they lead a more worthy life due to the job at Twyfelfontein, and they take pride in working at such an extraordinary place. The guides provide a service and get to teach foreign tourists, or even the occasional Namibian school class, about the area, and they are usually listened to since they are regarded as experts on this particular site (041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book; 041011a, 041011b, 041012a, 041012b, 041012c, 041013, 041017a, 041017b, 041130a Twyfelfontein, Interviews).

Naturally, the guide occupation also has its downsides. The guides receive a salary and they get tip money from visitors. Some also add to their income by making and selling different kinds of souvenirs.

Nevertheless, working as a guide at Twyfelfontein does not lead to wealth. All guides consider the salaries to be far too low compared to the amount of work required, and there are indeed many expenses (041011, 041012, 041017 Twyfelfontein, Interviews). Furthermore, a few guides express remorse over not being able to be part of the traditional Damara culture, since their work prevents them from practising stock farming. The cattle and small stock farming common all over Damaraland is viewed as being the very essence of Damara culture. Although some of the guides own livestock, usually kept on their family farms, the fact that they are not full-time farmers means that they in part are living ‘outside of their culture’. Farming remains the ideal way of life, especially to those guides that grew up on farms. When getting to old to work with tourists, many seem to consider leading a farming life on their own farm to be the best alternative (041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book; 041011 Twyfelfontein, Interview).



Fig. 4. Twyfelfontein guide in action (photo by author).

6.2 Twyfelfontein as a cultural heritage site

One guide was of the opinion that the Twyfelfontein rock art site must be preserved so that future generations will be able to experience it, and also in order to allow for more research to be carried out, “so that prehistory must not die and go out” (041012c Twyfelfontein, Interview). In this matter, the work of archaeologists is seen as crucial, both to enhance people’s knowledge and to ensure the continued livelihoods of local residents. Much of the guides’ knowledge on the rock art and prehistory of Twyfelfontein – a knowledge necessary for a guide to do a good job – is due to the teaching of archaeologist John Kinahan, who has done field work at the site on several occasions. Some of the guides state that by managing and presenting prehistoric sites ‘discovered’ and investigated by archaeologists, local people can earn a living. Archaeologists also know how to best preserve material remains, and the preservation of an archaeological site means that it will be available as a local source of income on a long-term basis as well. Taking these different positive aspects of archaeology into consideration, a couple of guides are of the opinion that the economy of many local residents of the area is directly dependent on the continued research of archaeologists (041210 Twyfelfontein, Interviews).

For some guides, the work at Twyfelfontein has raised many questions regarding the nature of this place. Why did the ancient nomadic peoples keep returning to this particular spot and what was their purpose of making the engravings and paintings on the rocks? Perhaps the site and the spring were considered sacred, a place where one could communicate with the ancestors, who had probably guided the people here in the first place (041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book; 041210a Twyfelfontein, Interview). Who were these people, what language did they speak, and what sort of life did they lead? The people behind the rock art of Twyfelfontein have been subject to much thinking and discussing among the guides (041017b Twyfelfontein, Interview).

It has been long since any rituals associated with rock art were carried out in the area around Twyfelfontein, and local residents, be they old or young, do not seem to have any sort of traditional knowledge of the content or purpose of the rock art (see chapter 5.3). However, this does not mean that the Twyfelfontein rock art site is devoid of cultural meaning, and

several guides do consider the site to be an important part of their cultural heritage, one way or another. The cultural, or ethnic, affinity of the rock art is currently subject to different theories within the ‘guide community’ (040812 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book).

The origin of the rock art at Twyfelfontein is usually ascribed to the Bushmen²⁹, both in the tourist-oriented travel literature and by academic scholars on the rock art of Southern Africa. This view is also presented by many of the guides working at the site, but it is not shared by all of them. One of the guides argues that the only reason why the site is ascribed to the Bushmen is that they are the only ethnic group that in historical times have practised such religious traditions that scholars think could result in engravings and paintings of this kind (041210 Twyfelfontein, Interview).

The guides draw on many different sources when discussing the ethnic origin of the Twyfelfontein rock art. Their conclusions are based on, for example, history lessons of their school years, history textbooks, various other texts on rock art and archaeology, as well as tourist management courses and the instruction of archaeologists (041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book). Through these mediums the guides have learnt that the ancestors of the modern Damara most probably were indigenous to present-day north-western Namibia and that they, before pastoralism was introduced, lead a hunter-gatherer way of life. Some guides therefore argue that since the Damara and the Bushmen share a similar cultural background, it is as likely that the hunter-gatherer rock art site of Twyfelfontein is of Damara origin. After all, the two groups use similar languages and the Damara have, like the Bushmen, lived as hunter-gatherers in the past. A further argument of the guides supporting this alternative view on the ethnic origin of the site is the Damara’s historical connection with the north-western parts of Namibia, and the fact that many old place-names are in their language, like the Twyfelfontein site name /ui-ais or /ui-//ais, while there is no evidence in historical records of the presence of Bushmen in the Twyfelfontein area (041130, 041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book; 041024, 041210 Twyfelfontein, Interviews).

²⁹ Some scholars prefer the term ‘San’ (as discussed earlier), which also seems to be the term preferred by most non-specialists, for example authors of travel literature. Many of the Twyfelfontein guides alternate between using the terms ‘San’ and ‘Bushman’.

There is some ambivalence regarding the ethnic relationship between the ancestors of the Damara and the Bushmen. A few guides consider the prehistoric Damara and Bushmen to have been two distinct groups, while others are of the opinion that the Damara and the Bushmen share the same ancestors, and that the site therefore is part of both groups' cultural heritage. According to this view of common ancestry, the Damara and the Bushmen emerged from one original group of people. Another version regards the Bushmen to be the ancestors of the Damara. There are obviously different opinions on the ethnic origin of the Damara and the Bushmen, and there are some variations in the reasons, given by different guides, why the Twyfelfontein site should not be considered to be of Bushman origin. All these views, however, have one thing in common: they are all based on the rejection of the idea that the Twyfelfontein rock art site should automatically be seen as the work of Bushmen. The fact that Bushmen in historic times have lived as hunter-gatherers and practised the sort of religious customs normally associated with rock art in Southern Africa is not considered to be evidence enough to ascribe the whole rock art tradition to the ancestors of today's Bushmen. On the contrary, it is argued that people from other ethnic groups, who also have lived as hunter-gatherers in past times, probably had similar religious beliefs and therefore may have created rock art as well. Consequently, and regardless of the different local views on the ethnic relationship between Damara and Bushmen, there is a possibility that the Twyfelfontein rock art site could actually be the work of Damara ancestors. This conclusion is even deemed likely, given the historic presence of the Damara in the area, and the Damara, or Khoekhoegowab, name of the site (041130, 041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book; 041011b, 041024, 041210a, 041210b Twyfelfontein, Interviews). According to archaeologists John and Jill Kinahan, the local view that the rock art site of Twyfelfontein might be connected to Damara ancestors also evokes a sense of ownership of the site, or a sense of responsibility for it (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:47f).

One guide says that the whole question of the ethnic origin of the site could only be solved through further archaeological investigation. If one could find prehistoric burials in the area it would be possible to identify these remains with certain ethnic groups, for example by comparing rests

of garments and ornaments with those used by different ethnic groups during historic times (041210a Twyfelfontein, Interview).

The varying theories on the ethnic affiliation of the site become even more complex when one asks whose cultural heritage the place is part of today. In fact, there seems to be many different levels of identification involved. Many archaeologists and rock art researchers consider, as do some of the guides, the site to be located within a Bushman cultural tradition, and, thus, part of the cultural heritage of this ethnic group. This does not mean, however, that they do not see the site as part of the cultural heritage of all Namibian citizens, or, for that matter, of the whole human race. The rock art site of Twyfelfontein is indeed a national monument, and it will probably also receive the status of a world heritage site, thus becoming a sort of universal human heritage.

Consequently, some of the guides see the site as both a local and a national heritage. They also recognise the fact that the site already have international status, it is, after all, subject to immense foreign interest and it is visited by people from all over the world (041210a, 041210b Twyfelfontein, Interviews). The differences of opinion about the ethnic origin of the site mainly concern the local level of identification: the site may be the (local) heritage of Bushmen or Damara, and, to people arguing for the common ancestry of the Damara and the Bushmen, it may be the heritage of both groups, as would also, in part, be the case when talking about Twyfelfontein as a national cultural heritage site.

One of the guides states that the specific ethnic origin of the site is not really important: the Twyfelfontein site should, at least officially, not be said to belong to any single ethnic group, since this would only encourage tribalism in a time when national unity is seen as essential for the well-being of the country. Rather, the site should be the common cultural heritage of the whole nation (041210b Twyfelfontein, Interview).

The guides' opinions on the origin of the site of Twyfelfontein show that they consider it to be very important from a cultural point of view. Working at the site has definitely made some of the guides more interested in, and conscious about, their own cultural background. They now have more respect for their culture, and one guide told me that just being at Twyfelfontein in a sense brought the origin closer. This is important, not least since many of the guides feel that they have left much of their culture

behind, living a more modern way of life. Some feel that they are living in a world that is changing dramatically, and with each new generation some ancient customs or beliefs will be abandoned. At Twyfelfontein it is possible, however, still to be in touch with part of your cultural heritage, despite all these changes. Being here allows you to learn about the lives of ancient people, and it can be a way of ‘coming back to your ancestors,’ whose engravings and paintings are something to be proud of (041208 Twyfelfontein, Field Note Book; 041017b, 041130a, 041202 Twyfelfontein, Interview). One guide, who is convinced that the site was made by Damara ancestors, argues that the people living here in ancient times had a very clear purpose for creating the rock art, and that the place therefore remains culturally important even today. According to the guide, cultural consciousness will always be essential to people, and future generations must be able to experience this sacred site. Twyfelfontein must indeed be seen as a place of spiritual importance, where people can learn to respect their forefathers (041011b Twyfelfontein, Interview).

7 A comparative perspective

There are certainly similarities between notions connected to the Twyfelfontein rock art site and notions attached to other archaeological monuments in Southern Africa, but there are many differences as well, and this makes it difficult to reach any general conclusions on the matter. However, comparing Twyfelfontein with a couple of well-documented archaeological sites may give a wider perspective on the various notions of the past and identity that may be connected to archaeological monuments.

A historical perspective has the advantage of showing in what ways the views of archaeological monuments in Southern Africa have shifted over time, and how ideas and interpretations of the past are always dependent on present attitudes. In Southern African countries a large part of the historical period coincides with the period of colonial rule. The colonial influence on people’s perceptions of their past have indeed been strong, and in many ways it is still of importance. Colonial views have contributed in creating long-lasting interpretations of archaeological monuments, and they have also shaped the way people view their past in

general, thereby affecting the way discourses on archaeological sites and identities are formed in post-colonial times as well.

The colonising agents of Southern Africa, such as colonial authorities, officials and settlers, very much acted within a tradition of invoking their version of the history of the colonised areas, both in order to demonstrate that indigenous African polities had no stronger claims to the land than they did, and also as a way of creating a link between colonial communities and their new land as part of the forging of new identities. This strategy of appropriating the indigenous past is often evident in colonial efforts of writing history in South Africa. Here, historians claimed that the presence of Bantu-speaking farmers, with whom the white settlers were competing for the right to occupy land, was the result of recent migrations into the area. The apartheid history of South Africa relied heavily on the myth that the first Bantu peoples crossed the Limpopo river in the north around the same time as the first white settlers landed at the cape. Consequently, generations of schoolchildren have been taught that the area had no history prior to the year of 1652. White settlers' occupation of land was presented as being carried out in areas without any previous population; thereby legitimising private ownership of that land by small groups of families. These perceptions of the past served the purpose of making the history of white settler communities synonymous with the history of progress, justifying continued settler domination of black Africans (Hall 1994:167ff; Kiyaga-Mulindwa & Segobye 1994:49; Mazel & Ritchie 1994:229ff; Witz & Hamilton 1994:41).

The apartheid historians did, on the other hand, recognise the pre-colonial, and indeed prehistoric presence of the various hunter-gatherer communities usually referred to as Bushmen (Kiyaga-Mulindwa & Segobye 1994:49; Witz 2000:318ff). These groupings were probably not perceived to be a threat to the settlers to the same extent as the politically well-organised Bantu groups. The colonial occupation of Bushman territories could be legitimised in a different way, namely with the help of western theories on evolution. The Bushmen were considered to be an archaic remnant of an early form of humans, and even in today's Southern Africa, Bushmen are sometimes still portrayed as representatives of the earliest stage of Homo-sapiens, the type of humans 'just learning to think'. In some museum displays on human evolution, a skull, described as a

'bushman skull', is situated directly below the skull of a *Homo erectus* or a *Homo neanderthalensis* (Mazel & Ritchie 1994:232f; Ucko 1994:241). Considering such exhibitions, there could be no doubt that Europeans considered themselves to be evolutionarily superior to the indigenous Bushmen, and thereby also the rightful owners of the land. It follows from this discussion that museums are never neutral: their presentations reflect the dominant values, norms, beliefs and ideas of a society. Hence, museums of history and prehistory give physical expression to specific interpretations and versions of the past, normally those held by members of the dominant groups of a given society (Mazel & Ritchie 1994:229ff).

Not much has been written on archaeological sites' importance to processes of identity formation in Southern Africa. The prehistoric site of *Great Zimbabwe*, located south-east of *Masvingo* in south-central Zimbabwe, is an exception, since it has attracted much attention in this respect. In the literature on Namibian sites, the White Lady frieze is probably the most prominent example. Early research and popular views on these two archaeological sites closely resemble the conclusions of South African colonial writers of history, whose work was characterised by the appropriation of the local past (see discussion above). Since the White Lady frieze and, in particular, Great Zimbabwe have been subject to very specific views on the past regarding questions of identity, they will be the focus of attention in the remaining part of this chapter.

The White Lady frieze, located some 65 km south-east of Twyfelfontein, represents an interesting case of how archaeological research is always dependent on the attitudes of contemporary society, and how it can be connected to the legitimising enterprise of a political elite. The origin of the painting was, according to John Kinahan, subject to much debate in the first half of the twentieth century. Topographer Reinhardt Maack, who 'discovered' the painting in 1917, identified the prominent main figure of the frieze as male. However, Henri Breuil, a French archaeologist and priest, later claimed that the painting depicted a woman, apparently of non-African origin due to her light skin (hence the name White lady). Mary Boyle, Breuil's assistant, supported his theory on alien origin and assured that certain details of dress and other features of the painting undoubtedly placed the painting within an Egyptian or Cretan context. In fact, the frieze probably depicted Isis herself, in the Lesser

Mystery of Egypt, and was, thus, evidence of a hitherto undocumented journey by a foreign group into the African interior (Kinahan 1995:79ff).

Although these theories were immediately rejected by most scholars on the subject, they were welcomed by many colonial officials, including Breuil's patron Jan Smuts³⁰, the prominent South African politician. When Breuil became president of the South African Archaeological Society in 1947, he did not tolerate any serious debate on the authorship of the rock art. Through the work of other, more thorough, archaeologists in the 1950s, it became clear, however, that the painting's indigenous origin could no longer be questioned.³¹ The current view on the site firmly establishes that the White Lady frieze does not represent the depiction of an antique coloniser: the main figure of the frieze is not a western or Mediterranean woman, but an indigenous man. Since the 1950s, scholars no longer attribute the rock art of Namibia or Southern Africa to foreign, exotic groups (Kinahan 1995:79ff; Kinahan 2000:3ff).

Great Zimbabwe requires a far more extensive discussion, since its history is very complex. The fact that an entire country, Zimbabwe, is named after this archaeological site shows how central it has been to people's notions of the past and their origin. The word Zimbabwe is derived from the *Shona*³² word *dzimbahwe*, meaning houses of stone. Great Zimbabwe, gradually constructed between 900 AD and 1500 AD, is the largest and most spectacular representative of a number of sites built within the same monumental architectural tradition. Characteristic of this building tradition are the dry stone walls of large enclosures and other types of stone constructions. The remains of Great Zimbabwe cover a vast area and the place is declared a national monument and a World Heritage Site (Ndoro 1997:109f; 2001:21ff). Great Zimbabwe lost its status as a political and economic centre during the sixteenth century, but there is evidence that part of the site was used as a religious shrine and as a place of refuge during the nineteenth century (Ndoro 1997:110; 2001:22f). As we shall see, the site becomes the focus of interest for many different groupings during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

³⁰ Minister of Defence 1910-20, Prime Minister 1919-1924 and 1939-48, Minister of justice 1933-1939 (Nationalencyklopedin).

³¹ Mainly through the work of R. Mason (1955) and J. Rudner (1957) (see Kinahan 1995).

³² Shona is the major ethnic group, and language, of Zimbabwe.

Ideas about Great Zimbabwe were of importance when the first colonising enterprises aimed at this part of Africa were organised in the Cape Colony of South Africa. The colonising efforts were inspired by historical legends circulating among the settlers. These stories evolved around the Portuguese colonists of East Africa, present in the area from the sixteenth century, and their trading contacts with the incredibly wealthy and powerful kingdom of Monomotapa, supposedly located at Great Zimbabwe. People believed that this empire could have its roots in the biblical city of *Ophir*, and that it contained the legendary mines of King Solomon. This view was confirmed by the German explorer Carl Mauch, who was the first European to visit Great Zimbabwe in 1871: the site was truly (so he believed) the remains of an ancient city connected to King Solomon's kingdom (Kuklick 1991:135ff).

Cecil Rhodes, Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, was a driving force for the colonisation of the area. Rhodes began financing research projects on Great Zimbabwe shortly after his men had occupied *Mashonaland*³³, and when he first visited Great Zimbabwe in 1891, the local chiefs of the area were told that the 'ancient temple' had once belonged to white men. The first report on Great Zimbabwe, published in 1896 by the English author and explorer Theodore Bent, made clear that the Shona in the area could not have been the builders of the site. Africans were just not perceived as intelligent enough to form the complex social organisation that such a task would have required. Instead, Bent concluded that the builders must have been migrants from somewhere in the Middle East; a colonising 'Semitic' people. These 'Semites' were most likely Assyrians, Egyptians, Phoenicians or Sabeans (the Queen of Sheba's people), which would make Great Zimbabwe a part of the western heritage (Kuklick 1991:135ff).

The early theories on Great Zimbabwe, claiming its 'Semitic' (and thereby western) origin, served to justify colonial interests in the area. Archaeologists working at Great Zimbabwe from the beginning of the twentieth century, however, soon started to question these interpretations. The greatest part of all the archaeological research carried out at the site since then has led to the same conclusion: Great Zimbabwe was built by

³³ This area, in which Great Zimbabwe is located, was part of the territory that in 1895 would become the colony of Rhodesia, named after its founder.

indigenous people and it was the centre of an indigenous kingdom. Although the theory of the site's indigenous origin was supported by a number of internationally recognised archaeologists, it was for a long time met with much scepticism within the white settler community. The myth of Great Zimbabwe's western origin was at the core of a settler ideology that would live on for decades in the popular mind, despite recurring statements made by archaeologists (Kuklick 1991:144ff). One reason why the settler myth of Great Zimbabwe proved to be so long-lived was that Rhodes had made huge efforts in making the site a symbol of the glorious new colony. This was achieved, at least partly, by making the Zimbabwe bird³⁴, an artefact found at Great Zimbabwe, a symbol of Rhodesia. This bird has remained a national symbol through all the political changes that have occurred in the territory during the twentieth century (Kuklick 1991:135ff).

According to Godfrey Mahachi and Webber Ndoro, the rise of African nationalism on the continent and the attainment of political independence by some African states caused the debate on the origins of Great Zimbabwe to re-emerge. Local African political parties recognised the significance of using the past as a basis for uniting the various ethnic groups of the colony. They named their political parties after Great Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), today united into ZANU-PF (PF standing for Patriotic Front). These two parties also declared that Rhodesia would be renamed Zimbabwe once independence had been achieved (Mahachi & Ndoro 1997:98).

The Rhodesian Front Government (1962-1979) tried to suppress all African aspirations for equality and it was aware of the political potential of a place like Great Zimbabwe. Any expressions of an indigenous historical achievement could be used to promote black cultural pride and political consciousness. A counter-attack was immediately launched at the new political parties' appropriation of Great Zimbabwe. This enterprise was supported by the archaeological dating of the site, which indicated high age (although not as high as the 'Semitic' theories). The high age automatically ruled out any possibility of an African origin, since the Bantu populations were assumed to have arrived in the area just prior to, or

³⁴ A carved soapstone bird, owned by Rhodes, that originally was part of a group of eight birds found by treasure hunters at the site of Great Zimbabwe (Kuklick 1991).

simultaneously with, the white settlers from the Cape Colony.³⁵ It was therefore claimed that the Africans now using the ancient name of Zimbabwe had no historical or cultural right to do so (Mahachi & Ndoro 1997:97ff).

Rhodesian authorities manipulated archaeological research in order to downplay all historical and archaeological writings that suggested that Great Zimbabwe was of indigenous origin. They interfered with research carried out at the site and also attempted to make the archaeological results less accessible to the public; museum displays and guidebooks were controlled and censored, and state employees at Great Zimbabwe were forbidden to mediate any version of the theories of the site's indigenous origin. To the white settler community, it was of utmost importance that Great Zimbabwe remained a symbol of the rightness and justice of colonisation, not least since it gave the subservience of the Shona an age-old and tangible precedent (Mahachi & Ndoro 1997:98f; Kuklick 1991:159).

Rhodesia Broadcasting corporation even banned any mentioning of the political groups operating under the banner of Zimbabwe. However, despite the measures taken by colonial authorities, Great Zimbabwe had already become an important symbol of African political consciousness. The regime based on white minority rule ended when independence was achieved in April 1980 (Kuklick 1991:160). Henrika Kuklick summarises the political struggle over the right to use Great Zimbabwe in the following words: "White supremacists and African nationalists thus revived the debate over the building of Great Zimbabwe because they were contesting the ownership of the entire country" (Kuklick 1991:160).

There are differences of opinion regarding the site of Great Zimbabwe today as well. As in colonial times, the present day conflict at the site is concerned with rights, but this conflict does not evolve around the origin of the site. Instead it is caused by differing opinions on how the site should be used and presented to the public. Great Zimbabwe is in the centre of a conflict that involves professional archaeologists, state authorities and the local communities of the area. The issue is about who should have the right to interpret, present and utilise the site.

³⁵ Theories on Great Zimbabwe's indigenous origin was thus no longer discarded simply by stating that Africans were not capable of constructing such buildings.

Ndoro states that, although most people agree on the site's great national value, different groups do not agree on why or in what way the site is important. The administration of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), which manages the site, often blames the local communities for not appreciating the values of the site since their activities are thought to endanger the preservation of the archaeological remains. The members of the local communities, on the other hand, accuse the government officials of desecrating the monument (Ndoro 2001:97ff). Archaeologists and officials of the NMMZ have mainly been concerned with the scientific and educational values of Great Zimbabwe. They mediate a view of the past that emphasises the need for preservation and archaeological research. The demands on preservation and presentation of the site are not the result of national requirements alone. Besides being declared a National Monument, the site is also part of the World Heritage and therefore subject to international guidelines on site management. Archaeologists and officials of the NMMZ are thus acting within a universalised discourse on archaeological heritage. This discourse is firmly rooted in western academic ideas of the past and how it should be treated (Ndoro 2001:5ff).

Such an academic view of the past is, however, really somewhat of an exception, and most people perceive their past in a much less clinical way. The focus on archaeological ideas of preservation has tended to exclude the local communities at Great Zimbabwe, and members of these communities have been denied access to the site. The local communities can no longer carry out their traditional rainmaking ceremonies at Great Zimbabwe, which is considered an important shrine. They are also prohibited from using the site's natural resources, which once were part of their livelihood. The reason for this is that these activities are considered harmful to the ruins. However, religious places like Great Zimbabwe have always been sacred and consequently protected by taboos and restrictions. The main part of the damage caused to the ruins of Great Zimbabwe is actually due to European interference. Besides the combined excavations and treasure hunts of the early days of colonisation, the various preservation methods applied by archaeologists and conservators have often contributed to the deterioration of the physical remains instead of their preservation (Ndoro 2001:5ff).

Great Zimbabwe's value to local communities is connected to the belief that the ruins house their ancestors. According to Ndoro, some local informants are of the opinion that the monument was built by ancestor spirits that still dwell there. The spirits lead all ceremonies at the site, they own land and they control the rain, and are therefore more influential than political chiefs. Since the site is rendered with so much meaning, some religious ceremonies are still conducted here, although the prohibition of such activities makes this a difficult task. Furthermore, the archaeological restoration of decayed walls is unacceptable to many of the local inhabitants, since walls are believed to fall down because the ancestor spirits that once built them are now tearing them down. They are simply 'redecorating' their home or preparing to move to another place (Ndoro 2001:99ff). The local inhabitants do not think of Great Zimbabwe as an ancient relic but as part of a cultural landscape from which they derive their spiritual and economic livelihood (Ndoro 2001:99ff). The importance of the many sacred sites in the territory was also recognised by missionaries during the early days of colonisation. In order to effectively spread the gospel and suppress paganism, missionary churches were therefore established near some of the major sacred sites. Following the colonial tradition of appropriating indigenous people's history and culture, the Dutch Reformed Church was thus established at the foot of Great Zimbabwe (Ndoro 2001:16f).

Great Zimbabwe is also ascribed significant economic values by the local inhabitants. The protection of the monument leads to a serious reduction of the land resources available to the local communities. People can no longer use any of the natural resources located within the protected area, and this has resulted in unsustainable land use practices. Not surprisingly, the area surrounding Great Zimbabwe has major problems with high population density, overgrazing and soil exhaustion (Ndoro 2001:87). Great Zimbabwe has long been a source of substantial economic incomes due to tourism. However, the local communities have seldom been offered to partake in the economic activities at the site. Ndoro argues that cultural tourism may be a way in which the local communities around this and many other sites could begin to develop economically, if only they were to be involved instead of excluded (Ndoro 1997:122).

Great Zimbabwe and the White Lady site, as well as the rock art site of Twyfelfontein, have been attributed to distinct ethnic groups. In a museum display arranged at Great Zimbabwe after the independence, the monument was presented as the centre of a city-state established by the Shona, the dominant ethnic group of the country (Kuklick 1991:162). Today, the main part of all rock art in Southern Africa, including the White Lady frieze and Twyfelfontein, is generally considered to be the work of Bushmen or Bushmen ancestors.³⁶ These ethnic connections are, as will be made evident in the following chapter, not absolute, but subject to competing discourses. The work of archaeologists is central to the theories on the ethnic origin of various pre-historic sites. People in general seem to have high expectations of objectivity in archaeology, and often consider knowledge generated through archaeological research to be more objective and scientific than that of history research, which is easily manipulated. The reason for this perceived ‘objective reality’ of archaeological evidence probably lies in the fact that the archaeological discipline is concerned with tangible material remains that can be experienced by anyone at first-hand in museums and at archaeological sites (Kane 2003:2f; Witz & Hamilton 1994:41). However, as we have seen in this chapter, the practise of archaeologists is all but neutral, and always intertwined with social and political currents in contemporary society.

8 Analysis

Over the years, archaeological monumental sites of Southern Africa have been subject to various interpretations reflecting different views of the past and also different political agendas. They have been ascribed different values by different groups and at different times. I consider Dunn’s and Calhoun’s theories on identity discourses (see chapter 3.1) to be useful when analysing how people identify with archaeological sites. A discursive approach on identity formation emphasises how notions of the past, and identities built upon them, are connected to contemporary processes and thus never fixed, but, indeed, the result of multiple and competing discourses.

³⁶ The National Museum of Namibia, however, presents a more critical view, stating (on the web page) that ethnic labels of historic times, namely the ‘Bushman’ or the ‘San’, should not be projected on to prehistoric periods (National Museum of Namibia).

As shown in chapter 7, early interpretations of Great Zimbabwe and the White Lady site are situated within a discourse of colonial appropriation of the past, a ‘settler discourse’, expressed in ‘Semitic’ myths and the conviction that Bantu peoples had recently migrated to these parts of Africa. Characteristic of this discourse of colonial ideology is the denial of indigenous pasts, making prehistoric sites a part of the western cultural heritage. The ‘settler discourse’ allowed white settlers to identify with their new environments: prehistoric sites, the material evidence of an early western presence, became their links to the new homeland, and this was essential to their sense of belonging. The ‘settler discourse’ was the result of colonial hegemony (as discussed by Dunn), and denied indigenous Africans access to the discursive space necessary to express their views of the past. In time, both Great Zimbabwe and the White Lady frieze became subject to a competing discourse, articulated in the archaeological theories claiming them to be of indigenous origins. In Rhodesia, where the effects of the ‘settler discourse’ were particularly severe, this discourse on indigenous origin would eventually provide inspiration to the liberation movements.

The Twyfelfontein rock art site has, to my knowledge, never been directly involved in any theories constructed within the ‘settler discourse’. One reason why the White Lady frieze received so much attention was, obviously, that it pictured a human who could actually be interpreted as a white woman (at least by less thorough researchers). The engravings and paintings at Twyfelfontein have no such features, and this lack of imagined white people may explain why the Twyfelfontein site remained neglected for quite some time following its ‘discovery’. Although ‘discovered’ around the same time as the White Lady frieze, Twyfelfontein did not receive any substantial academic attention until the 1950s (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]:48), and at this time ‘Semitic’ interpretations had already lost much of their appeal, at least in the academic sphere. The Twyfelfontein site did not play a significant role in twentieth century processes of identity formation, something that was perhaps, at least partly, due to its late recognition as an extraordinary archaeological place.

The ethnic origin of the White Lady frieze was first and foremost the subject of an academic debate, without the level of political competition surrounding the history of Great Zimbabwe. The reason why Great

Zimbabwe has been the focus of such intense political struggle is that it in early colonial times became an important source of identification. Myths about Great Zimbabwe inspired settlers and contributed to the colonial enterprise in the first place. The settlers had, thus, a perceived connection to the area even before setting foot there. Furthermore, Rhodes invested much effort in making the site a symbol of Rhodesia, and it did, indeed, become a strong national symbol. Great Zimbabwe's alleged connection to the origin of the nation and its people made it a place which people could identify with; the 'settler discourse' was thus at the heart of colonial rule in Rhodesia. When liberation movements appeared on the political scene in the 1960s, they were fully aware of the value of Great Zimbabwe, and, consequently, aimed at appropriating the site. This could be achieved by ascribing an alternative origin to the site in order to imbue it with new meaning. A 'liberation discourse', deeply rooted in the political parties of ZAPU and ZANU and centred around black African consciousness, stressed the indigenous origin of Great Zimbabwe and offered Africans a competing discourse on the past. This alternative discourse challenged the 'settler discourse' and allowed people to form a social identity that was not consistent with the oppressive discourse imposed by the settler community. The new identity discourse pictured Africans as capable of greater things, manifested in their ancestors' construction of Great Zimbabwe, and perhaps they were even capable of creating an independent African nation.

Today, Great Zimbabwe is a place of conflict between local communities and the archaeologists and officials of the NMMZ. The latter can be said to represent a dominant academic discourse on the past that focuses on research and preservation. People acting within this 'cultural heritage discourse' have, due to its hegemonic character, been able to establish a view of the site that downplays its importance to local communities. The 'cultural heritage discourse' is mainly based on archaeologically derived ideas about the past and thus connected to international management guidelines. However, in opposition to this discourse, voices are also raised claiming local people's rights to the area. According to this 'local discourse', local communities must get access to the site in order to use its natural resources as well as to conduct ceremonies such as rainmaking rituals, which are crucial to people's well-being.

The 'cultural heritage discourse' has much influence at Twyfelfontein and the White Lady site as well. These sites are considered part of a cultural heritage that must be preserved for the sake of future generations. The preservation is also a guarantee that the sites can be subject to continued archaeological research, and, thus, sources to knowledge on the past. The conditions are very different from those at Great Zimbabwe, and differences of opinion between official managers and local people are perhaps of lesser concern here. The Namibian sites are, after all, located in remote areas of the country and have not had any permanent official management establishments.³⁷ The local communities at both sites are also very small and newly established. There have been conflicts here as well, but these conflicts have not centred on differing views of the past or whether or not sites may be used in religious ceremonies, but on the rights to tourism-generated incomes. Moreover, at Twyfelfontein, the National Monuments Council has (in 2004) been able to recruit local people to the management of an archaeological site, in the form of the already established guide group, and to secure a stable income for the local conservancy. The Council has thus succeeded in incorporating local interests into the framework of their 'cultural heritage discourse'. The wish to involve local communities stems from new ideas within archaeology and site management, which emphasise the importance of allowing local people to partake in such enterprises. Sites like Twyfelfontein would probably be impossible to control if local interests were to be ignored.

The case of Great Zimbabwe clearly illustrates the theory that identities are always formed in relation to other identities (see Comaroff & Comaroff in chapter 3.1, Eriksen in chapter 3.2). Consequently, the 'liberation discourse' was formed in opposition to the 'settler discourse', and local ideas about the site's past would probably not have been articulated in a 'local discourse' if officials and employees at Great Zimbabwe had not acted within the very dominant 'cultural heritage discourse'. Alternative discourses, like the 'liberation discourse' and the 'local discourse', can actually be seen as replies to, and ways of questioning, the advocates of dominant discourses such as the 'settler discourse' or the 'cultural heritage discourse'. However, alternative

³⁷ An official centre for visitors has, however, been constructed at the Twyfelfontein site in 2005.

discourses do not simply replace established discourses as the dominant versions of the past. Rather, different discourses often coexist for a long time, as is the case with, for example, the ‘settler discourse’ and the ‘liberation discourse’.

All three sites discussed in this chapter have been connected to ethnic identities. The ‘settler discourse’, which ascribed the origins of the White Lady frieze and Great Zimbabwe to foreign groups, obviously contained elements of ethnicity, expressed as an opposition between white settlers and black Africans. This opposition of ethnic identities was at the centre of the ‘liberation discourse’ as well, which claimed the indigenous origin of Great Zimbabwe. Although the ‘liberation discourse’ originally seemed to connect Great Zimbabwe to an indigenous African past common to all Zimbabweans, this is certainly no longer the case: as mentioned in chapter 7, the site is today considered to have been the work of the Shona. This interpretation excludes the past of other ethnic groups in the country (see discussion on ‘the excluded past’, chapter 3.2). The cultural and political rights of minority groups, like the *Ndebele* or the white population, may be neglected due to this discourse on the origin of Great Zimbabwe. The ‘Shona discourse’ may very well be part of a strategy for justifying the Shona (or ZANU-PF) political dominance.

Great Zimbabwe remains a contested place and very much an arena for political competition. However, the Twyfelfontein rock art site is also subject to competing views on its ethnic past. Many rock art researchers uncritically ascribe the majority of all Southern African rock art sites to the Bushmen, as do the writers of travel literature which have great influence on people’s views of the past. This is, at least partly, due to the fact that today’s dominant archaeological interpretations of rock art centre on the religious life of hunter-gatherers, as documented among people commonly referred to as Bushmen or San during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I agree that the majority of the rock art is most probably connected to the religious beliefs of hunter-gatherer communities. This is not, however, the same thing as regarding almost all rock art sites in Southern Africa as the work of Bushmen – such a stance represents a very simplified, and indeed doubtful, interpretation of the past. According to Ranger, scholars have to free themselves from the illusion that the African customs recorded by officials and anthropologists in historic times could be

used as a direct guide to the African past (Ranger 1992:262). Recognising Ranger's statement as valid, I am of the opinion that the view of the Bushmen as being the creators of pre-historic rock art is a clear case of projecting modern conditions on to the past.

Most contemporary researchers agree that the Bushmen should not be seen as some sort of Stone Age cultural remnants, who, consequently, are incapable of change. In fact, it is difficult even to talk about 'the Bushmen' or 'the San' when discussing historic conditions, since this group is a rather late construction. Over the years, various groups of people have been labelled Bushmen or San. These groups have usually shared some cultural and linguistic similarities. According to Gordon, they have, however, not been part of any common political structure: they have not seen themselves as a single unit or called themselves by a single name. The Bushmen were not an ethnic group, but more of a socio-political category into which all those who led a certain way of life, and failed to conform to the norms of colonial society, could be 'dumped' (Gordon 1992:4ff). The Bushman identity had, thus, no meaning to the ones being labelled, and it has existed only in the form of an oppressive ethnic stereotype originally imposed on people perceived as homogenous, by the settler society (see Eriksen on ethnic stereotypes in chapter 3.2). An over-arching Bushman ethnic identity, naturally characterised by a more positive image, has only more recently begun to emerge following the work of NGOs, especially Wimsa³⁸, aiming at empowering indigenous minorities.

To say that the Bushmen made most of the rock art of Southern Africa would be to suggest that their identity has remained unaffected for ages, and that they considered themselves, and were considered by others, to be a distinct nation or tribe already several millennia ago – something I find very unlikely.³⁹ This view of the past has its origin within an essentialist discourse on the Bushmen, based on ideas about hitherto pristine societies suddenly losing their original culture in the face of modernisation.

Ascribing the Southern African rock art to the Bushmen might be a way of recognising their cultural accomplishments and perhaps an attempt

³⁸ *Working Group for Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa.*

³⁹ The oldest known examples of rock art in Southern Africa are a series of painted stone slabs, approximately 26,000 years old, found in the Apollo 11 Cave in southern Namibia (Kinahan 1995:84; Nationalencyklopedin). The majority of the rock art in the region is, however, much younger.

to restore parts of their culture. The wish to empower these marginalized groups of people deserves credit, and scholars advocating this view of the past may certainly have very honourable intentions. People categorised as Bushmen have indeed been oppressed and are even today given little political recognition. My critique of attributing the rock art to Bushmen might possibly be seen as yet another attempt of appropriating the local history and cultural heritage of Bushmen. I do, however, consider the rock art of Southern Africa to be part of this group's heritage, but it should not be ascribed to this group alone. When connecting archaeological sites to one single group of people, there is a risk that people belonging to other ethnic groups will be totally estranged from a heritage that is, in reality, meaningful to them as well. Such is the case with Twyfelfontein, where the archaeological site, in a way, has been separated from the Damara people that have lived and worked there in historic times as well as the Damara doing so today. It also enables contemporary groups of people to claim their rights to specific sites, something that might further alienate communities belonging to the 'wrong' ethnic groups from their pre-history. Any attempts to present the theory of Bushmen as the only makers of rock art as an absolute truth must therefore be considered most unfortunate. The fact that this view on the origin of the rock art is supported by several archaeologists contributes in rendering it unquestionable, since archaeological knowledge is often thought to be objective and therefore true (see end of chapter 7).

I firmly believe that archaeology, like all research disciplines, can never be fully objective, and that an archaeological perspective, which is based on material remains, seldom allows us to grasp such complicated and multi-faceted questions as ethnic identity. It is very complicated to talk about ethnic groups in prehistory, and even more so to talk about ethnic groups of today in prehistoric terms. Once formed, ethnic identity is usually regarded as the natural order of the world, and it will therefore be projected on our past as well. Consequently, modern ethnic categories may not be considered valid as proper labels for prehistoric people.

The local views on the ethnic origin of the Twyfelfontein rock art should be seen in the light of the dominant discourse on the rock art of the whole of Southern Africa. The Twyfelfontein site is of great economic importance to most people living in the area. The guides' opinions on the

cultural aspects of the site are probably less obvious to most visitors, but they deserve attention since they are certainly no less important than other theories on the origin of the site. The local views do not form one coherent discourse, but, rather, a set of different ideas and interpretations. What these views have in common is that they all connect the site to contemporary ethnic groups. It is difficult, and probably not meaningful, to think about the site in non-ethnic terms. After all, the ancient people that once dwelt there must have had proper identities. Not giving them an ethnic identity would perhaps make them too elusive, and alienated from the people working at the site today.

The local interpretations that question the dominant view on Twyfelfontein's past, claiming that the rock art may very well be of Damara origin, may indeed be seen as a more coherent discourse. As shown above, people usually identify with archaeological monuments from the point of view of an established discourse. When this discourse no longer lives up to people's expectations, an alternative discourse may be formed. There are probably many reasons why an alternative discourse on the ethnic origin of the Twyfelfontein site has emerged, but one such reason might be that some of the guides working at the site have been unable to adhere to, or identify with, a discourse that whole-heartedly ascribes it to the Bushmen. Instead, they may have been forced to re-evaluate what they have learned, and to form their own ideas about the origin of the rock art. The result is a discourse that imbues the rock art site with meaning, allowing local people to identify with the site, and to feel that it, in a sense, has become part of their own heritage. The Twyfelfontein rock art site has thus been incorporated into a framework relevant to the people residing in the area at present.

This thesis shows how people at certain times and in certain places have interacted with the past, and how they have identified with specific archaeological monuments. I do not claim that the conclusions made from these examples can be applied to all archaeological sites in Southern Africa, but I do think that they may be relevant in many modern time cases where archaeological sites have become essential to people's identities, be it in Southern Africa or anywhere else in the world.

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