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An archaeology of interruption: Expulsion and hiatus in Southern Africa's long past

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ABSTRACT

The long career of hiatus – as a heuristic and archaeological reality – in southern Africa's past demonstrates how episodes of interruption (which differs from rupture) offer insight into expulsion. I emphasize the cadences of interruptions, associations with movement (or lack thereof) and violence, and the role of non-human participants.

KEYWORDS



Interruption; expulsion; archaeology; Southern Africa; mobility; pre-colonial

Introduction

From an archaeological perspective, expulsion implies a number of conditions: coercion, directionality, abandonment, movement. Each of these then contains particular methodological and interpretive implications. As with other social and historical sciences described in this volume's introduction, archaeology on the African continent has sought to nuance interpretations of past violence, considering experiences of coercion subtler, more pervasive, and longer-lived than the major events whose footprints may be the most visible (for example González-Ruibal 2016).

Directionality in archaeological terms denotes provenance: identifying the ultimate source of an object and/or its raw materials to chart its life from extraction through use and, perhaps, disposal. Not all remains lend themselves to this sort of analysis and the ability to be precise in these journeys varies based on the materials themselves, among other factors. Consequently, and in southern Africa especially, our ability to trace the movement of people through the things they carried, exchanged, and used has produced insights into exchange between coastal and interior areas – useful for describing long-distance networks (Mitchell 1996; Moffett and Chirikure 2016), but starting points for considering the social relationships shaping these networks rather than definitive proof of where they were disrupted.

Movement and abandonment are two sides of the same coin when they speak to an interpretive connection between leaving a place and something that occurs primarily because of a stimulus or some form of distress (King 2017b). Following this line of

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reasoning, staying put frequently appears as an equilibrium disrupted by something outside of peoples' control; moving is the best or only way to manage the disruption and return to equilibrium. This broad framework can be appropriate for understanding expulsion, but it comes with a caution that the equation of movement with distress and staying put with normalcy is something to be proved rather than taken for granted (Ashley, Antonites, and Fredriksen 2016), not least because there is a danger of feeding into frameworks that treat transience as a mark of un-civilisation (Kiddey 2017, 36). Again, southern Africa offers a cogent illustration of this where the last 500 years witnessed myriad 'great treks' by people in pursuit of power, resources, and security, with un-settlement by African agropastoral communities historically treated as symptomatic of socio-political ills (Etherington 2001; King 2019, 117–120). Recent cross-disciplinary work has argued for a more dynamic view, in which mobility and un- or re-settlement occupied a meaningful place in social life (Landau 2010; Whitelaw and Hall 2016).

An archaeological perspective on expulsion must also contend with an inheritance of interpretations conflating movement with abrogation of home, with all the rights to livelihood and recognition that this entails. Abandonment and occupation deemed ineffective by missionaries, surveyors, militaries, and bureaucrats in southern Africa formed the basis of land arrogation, forced dislocation, and segregationist policies contiguous across colonial and (in South Africa) union and apartheid-era governments (Braun 2014; King 2017a).

Asking what perspectives on expulsion are available from archaeology therefore entails opportunities for reflection on how we navigate various kinds of archaeological records and the modes of movement (or staying put) that they disclose. Instances where archaeologists have scaffolded material traces of movement with historical evidence represent one approach: the latter can provide textual and oral accounts in detail sufficient to elaborate on or label specific processes of abandonment (expulsion, attrition, political manoeuvring, etc.; for example Boeyens and Hall 2009). Indeed, a global body of literature on the archaeology of forced displacement emphasizes the rich potential for material, oral, and written records to illuminate complementary or contradictory experiences of forced dislocation (for example Scham 2001). Here, though, I want to focus specifically on what the excavated, mapped, and catalogued archaeological record – the perspective unique to archaeologists, including those like myself who move between this, texts, and oral narratives – can bring to a discussion of expulsion on its own terms, whether or not one ultimately turns to additional, multi-modal sources for interpretation.

As such, it strikes me that a good starting point is hiatus, or interruption. Beginning in the first half of the twentieth century and culminating in the 1980s, British and North American archaeological fieldwork experienced a methodological shift that ultimately emphasized the 'sequence of development' on an excavated site: the physical processes (deposition of refuse layers, constructions of dwellings or hearths, making pits and removing material) that constitute stratigraphy, or what Gavin Lucas (2001:, 58) calls 'a palimpsest of discrete events'. Supplanting earlier methodologies that prioritized recovering specific artefacts, this paradigm shift enabled archaeologists working on complex sites to observe not just how the use and character of a place changed over time and what environmental factors influenced this, but where gaps in activity or occupation occurred. These methodological concerns arrived on the African continent via the scientific,

administrative, and patronage networks that linked metropole to colony, academy to extraction site, with Anglophone contexts seeing British and American prehistorians establish fieldworking principles through their own research and that of their students (Schlanger 2003; more below).

Establishing the duration of hiatus, whether it persisted across an entire site or only appeared in patches, whether it represented a genuine absence of human and non-human presence – these and other questions depended then as now on the availability of additional technologies like appropriate radiometric dating. Broadly, though, our ability to characterize hiatus within deeper, wider histories of human presence is arguably a key framework for describing expulsion in archaeological terms. Key also is what stratigraphy alone cannot always tell us: the causes of hiatus and what happened to those no longer reflected in the archaeological record, which in turn raise questions about what useful contextualizing information could look like.

Southern Africa is an appropriate, if not crucial, place for these discussions as movement and mobility are arguably defining features of the region's long past. Domesticated crops and livestock, and the people relying on these, are recent (c. 2,200 years ago) arrivals to a sub-continent in which people hunted and gathered seasonally for over 50 millennia. The emergence of transhumant economies like sheep- and cattle-keeping, changing climatic conditions, and shifting social and exchange networks within the last 2,000 years meant that staying put for too long was not always feasible (Russell and Lander 2018). Hiatus and interruption of human (and non-human) presence, then, are major features of the region's archaeological record.

I am of course mindful that introducing hiatus as a point of departure risks invoking rupture, and the concern that in describing long pasts on the African continent we risk reifying divides between modern and pre-modern, colonial and pre-colonial (see, for example Schoenbrun 2006). The distinction I make here is about more than semantics or synonyms: archaeological interruptions are physical gaps of material attributable to human activity but methods for interpreting these specifically reject *a priori* assumptions about the length, cause, duration, or finality of those gaps. Hiatus is therefore something that we describe relative to an array of temporal and spatial contexts. This, I suggest, offers a useful set of perspectives for understanding expulsion in the very long term and in keeping with this collection's commitment to treating expulsion as an 'interscalar' concept that resists hard temporal boundaries.

There is also an epistemic and ethical challenge here. Archaeology can provide patterns that then help us identify where things deviate from those patterns, but there is a strong tendency to associate deviation with aberration – to pathologise disruption or abandonment (Kiddey 2017, 34–35; King 2017a). This can easily slip into recursivity: hiatus entails distress, distress then becomes the context for other archaeological observations. Moreover, a refusal to pathologise interruption is supported by longstanding archaeological concerns to avoid deterministic explanations and prioritize a focus on the agency of collectives, humans, and non-humans to shape the worlds around them. This latter principle, though, quickly finds itself in tension with the fact of systems whose very existence curtails agency, specifically where staying put and moving on are concerned. Such tensions thus present a challenge: how can insights from this essay engage productively with others in this volume that speak to what were often traumatic experiences of forced movement (see, for example Hansen this volume; Twagira this

volume)? Writing as the archaeological voice of this collection and mindful of the directive to examine expulsion in relation to knowledge production, I am left to consider how the ideas I offer here can build chains of inference that treat interruption-as-coercion seriously, while also taking the archaeological record on its own terms *and* refusing to circumscribe hiatus as pathology.

In what follows, I explore the different qualities of interruption accessible in the archaeological record. I do not aim to arrive at what we could call an archaeology of expulsion; instead, I propose insights that capture the senses of movement, intimacy, place, and material options that we can imagine constituting experiences of expulsion. In other words, I want to offer some ways of thinking about the *quality of absence* which then lend themselves to inter-disciplinary discussions of mobility, violence, and time. After charting the career and legacies of hiatus in regional archaeological practice, I consider a wide array of sites and timescales (Figure 1) – from the Pleistocene to the nineteenth

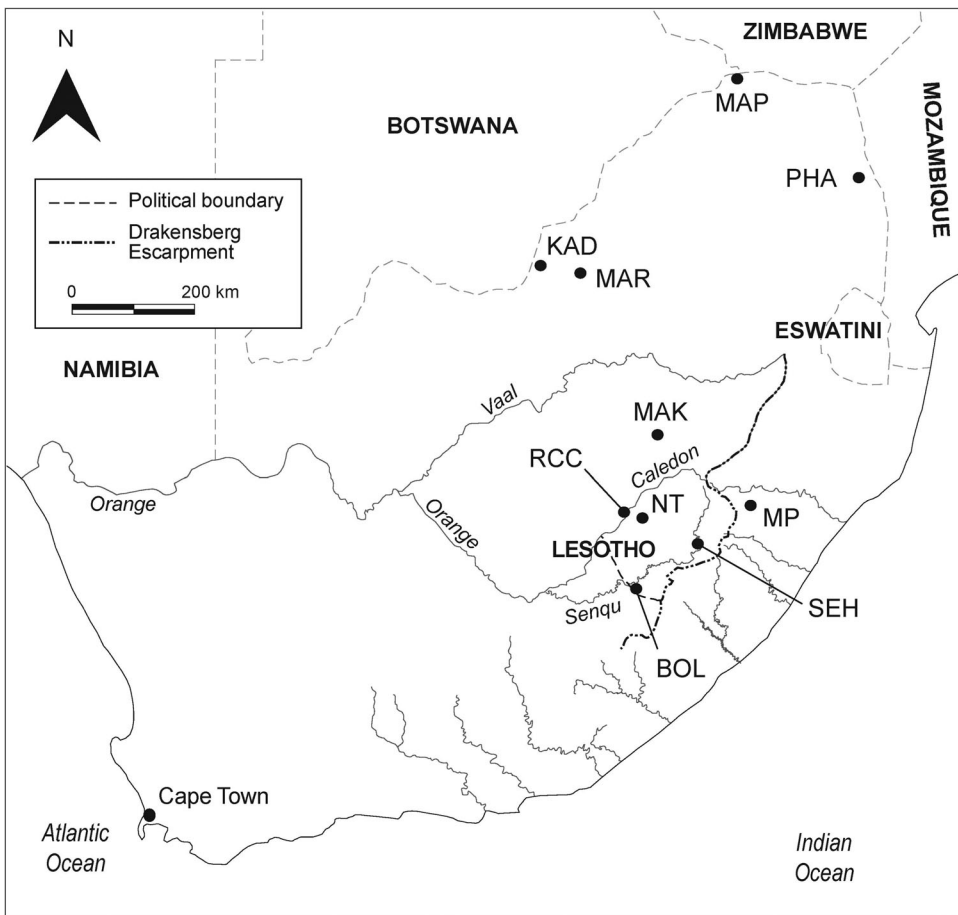


Figure 1. Map of southern Africa showing regions and sites mentioned in the text. Sites are abbreviated as follows: BOL Bolepeletsa, KAD Kaditshwene, MAK Makgwareng, MAP Mapungubwe, MAR Marothodi, MP Moor Park, NT Ntloana Tsoana, PHA Phalaborwa, RCC Rose Cottage Cave, SEH Sehonghong.

century – to illustrate how the nature and function of their records disclose different ways of understanding interruption. I submit that in doing so I can go some way to asserting an archaeological vision of expulsion but can go even farther in describing an epistemic framework for considering the textures and tempos of absence across time and space – one which can, ideally, work across disciplinary concerns.

The presence of interruption

Approaches to archaeological excavation have, over the last two centuries, been conditioned by what excavators have aimed to recover – buried treasure, the total history of a place, or information in imminent danger of destruction. In the early to mid-twentieth century consensus about effective excavation practices in the UK, Europe, and North America converged on a geological approach: using principles of stratigraphy to define each layer of anthropogenic or environmental material deposited in the occupation history of site. By the latter half of the century, this understanding of stratigraphy would encompass structures built, pits or burials made and filled, and features beyond the purely geological (McAnany and Hodder 2009, 3–7). The result was a vertical story of human habitation captured in the section or profile – the side-face of a trench that offers a window into the layers comprising a site's deposits (Figure 2; see Section 4 below for an example). Horizontal exposure – plan excavations to reveal surface area (Figure 3) – varied widely in significance and methodological purpose (for example understanding the total shape of a dwelling; Lucas 2001, 37–44), but as we shall see this was not a major element of early archaeological practice in southern Africa.

By the early twentieth century, archaeologists in southern Africa were relatively quick to adopt stratigraphic, geologic strategies. As A.C. Haddon remarked on the occasion of

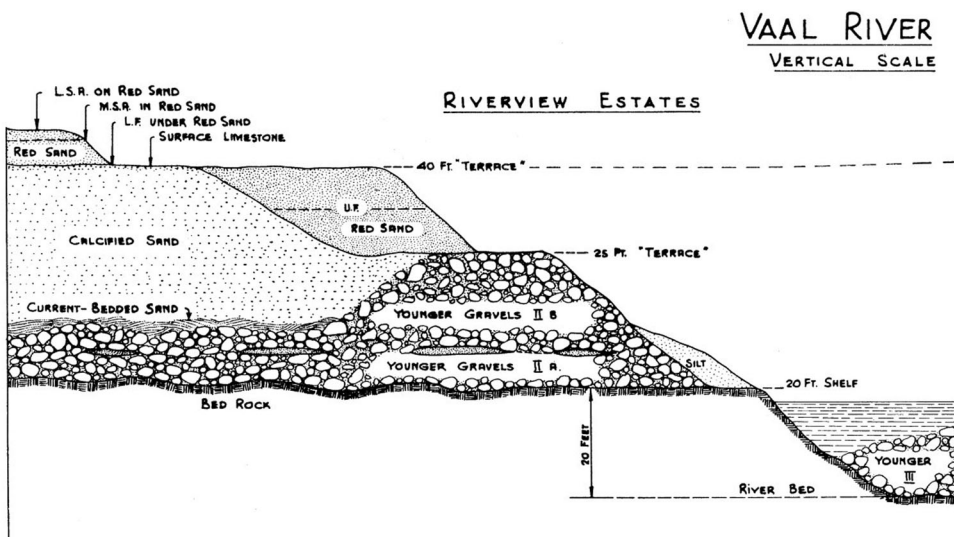


Figure 2. Van Riet Lowe 1952: Figure 3, a section drawing of archaeology as seen in the south bank of the Vaal River. Abbreviations are as follows: LSA Later Stone Age, MSA Middle Stone Age, UF Upper Fauresmith, LF Lower Fauresmith.

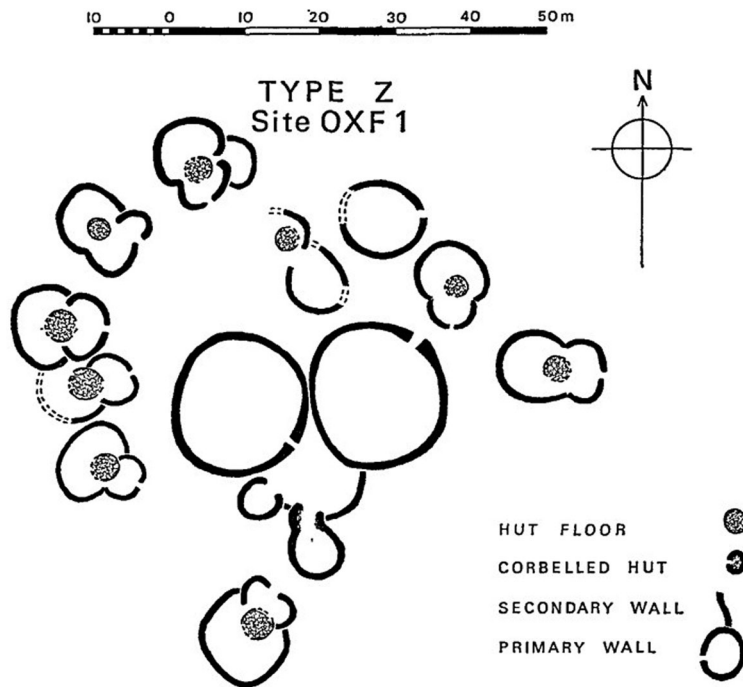


Figure 3. Plan of site OXF1, representing Settlement Unit Type Z. Taken from Maggs 1976b: Figure 16.

the British Association for the Advancement of Science's 1905 South Africa visit, a focus on individual artefacts instead of geologic formations offered little 'evidential value' as one could not be certain whether these represented widespread phenomena or one-off finds; establishing the sequence of a site's creation should therefore be the priority (Goodwin 1935, 315). Nevertheless, for the first decades of the twentieth century amateur and professional excavators targeted individual exemplars of particular technologies with or without attention to their stratigraphic contexts (for epistemic transformations of these specimens into artefacts, see Chazan 2018).

More systematic excavation arrived through several routes and personages, all related to early twentieth-century imperialist projects. By this point, formal archaeological field methods were essentially genealogical: archaeologists such as Gertrude Caton-Thompson, Clarence Van Riet Lowe, and Anthony Goodwin professionalized excavation by adapting the methods of mentors such as W.M. Flinders Petrie and Miles Burkitt (Schlanger 2003; Shepherd 2003). The extension of these global professional networks to southern Africa represented the expansion of scientific interests in African prehistory that intertwined with and received support from political agendas advancing white supremacist rule, particularly visible during the period between South Africa's 1910 Union and the National Party's 1948 ascension to power (Dubow 2019; Morris 2021; Schlanger 2002). Archaeological methods of data collection were enmeshed with these personal-political influences, meaning that foregrounding the archaeological sequence as the primary aim of excavation reified and supported evolutionist, racialised narratives of African pasts (Stahl 1999).

Methods advanced by Goodwin, Van Riet Lowe, and colleagues were tailored to a focus on recovering evidence of Stone Age occupation – a model of technological change spanning more than one million years (Goodwin and Van Riet Lowe 1929) and largely pre-dating the regional arrival of domesticated livestock and plants. A distinctly South African approach advocating a multitude of deep digs at a large number of sites facilitated the aims and major questions established at successive Pan African Prehistoric Congresses (the first of which was convened in 1947). These were particularly concerned with the proliferation of numerous archaeological missions across the continent, and expressed a need to agree upon regional or continent-wide chronologies of human occupation – a cross-referencing and consolidation of archaeological data that would enable the partitioning of deep time into periods defined by culture history (which is to say, heritable material culture traits) (Clark 1957; Underhill 2011).

Hiatus was a major (if often implicit) concern of these efforts at both a national and continental scale. Sequences are, logically, about succession. Gaps contain information about where successions break down because a site was vacated or rendered inhospitable or inaccessible. Comparing multiple sequences based on large samples of material from across multiple sites would, ideally, provide enough detail to determine whether a hiatus represented evidence of absence (that is, there was no significant human presence anywhere) or absence of evidence.¹ By tracking culture histories, these sequences were focused on large-scale trends: which groups of people were where, doing what activities, at what times.

John Parkington (1993, 96) has suggested that southern African Stone Age – particularly Later Stone Age (LSA) – archaeology retained this methodological commitment to big sites, deep trenches, and big samples to continue participating in ‘the game of cultural chronology’. As Arthur (2018, 51–52) has argued, this trend persisted through the 1980s because archaeologists’ overriding interest in environmental and economic explanations for long-term change encouraged the focus on deeper rather than wider excavations. This in turn led to a disregard of sites with more ephemeral traces of human occupation. While interpretive emphasis eventually became less deterministic and more focused on social relations (Mazel 1989; Mitchell 2005), methodologies aimed at opening up more surface area to obtain fine-grained individual site formation histories – sufficient to track what happened within a place, how that place and the people who lived there changed – did not come to the fore until the 1990s (for example Mitchell et al. 2011; Parkington, Fisher, and Tonner 2009), with consequences that we will see below.

Horizontal exposure was, however, more of a methodological mainstay in Iron Age archaeology – primarily defined by the presence of ancestral Bantu-speakers practicing mixed agropastoralism – since the 1960s and 1970s. This is partly related to the physical nature of Iron Age sites: these are typically occupied for shorter periods than, for example, the cave-like rockshelters characteristic of many LSA sites, leaving shallower deposits and with architectural features that cover more ground. While new archaeological methods were thus necessary to approach these sites, the first pathbreaking, systematic studies of the Iron Age derived directly from methods for the deep trenches of the LSA. Writing in 1961, Revil Mason (regarded as one of the founding fathers of Iron Age research) introduced an experiment in which he applied to Iron Age stone-walled settlements the same statistical methods used to determine genuine presence/absence across stratigraphic layers – this time targeting surface areas instead of sections. Mason (1961)

obtained aerial photographs of the highveld North of the Vaal River, identified all historical stone-walled sites visible, divided these into stylistic groups, and analysed the distribution of these to determine whether or not this was random.

Hiatus was a crucial aim of this exercise: were the gaps that Mason saw on the photographs genuine gaps in human settlement, where archaeologists should look no further because nothing would be found? Mason carried out excavations to establish details about the use and duration of the sites he identified, but with the caveat that stone architecture was only the most visible of possible building traditions – reed-walled structures, for instance, would not appear consistently on aerial images and the presence or absence of such buildings could not be adduced through remote study alone (cf. Maggs 1976a, 5). This strategy combining large-scale survey of aerially-visible sites with targeted excavations became a feature of Iron Age work across the southern African interior (as we will see), with additional environmental factors included in describing settlement distribution as more precise technology became available (for example Maggs 1976a; Sadr 2019).

Of course, archaeology as a practice is not limited to the methods I have described. I have not addressed hiatus in rock art or in approaches focused on recovering hominin remains, among other sub-fields with their own methodological histories. Large swathes of southern Africa's archaeological record are built on the strategies discussed above, which are equally about methodology and interpretation: have excavations exposed a broad enough surface area to determine gaps in human use of that area? Have aerial surveys and analyses thereof confirmed whether gaps in site distribution are genuine, and have these taken into account other kinds of sites on the landscape? Have we established our sections such that we can observe how occupation sequences change in comparison with other sites, or even *within* a site?

These concerns are crucial to understanding how the archaeological record describes interruption, and in turn how to offer useful perspectives on expulsion, as I explore in the following sections. The issue of whether the material absence of a (proverbial) human footprint is genuine or a consequence of either poor environmental preservation or our own methods of detection is a longstanding concern. This also relates to assumptions about where we can reasonably expect humans (and their animal colleagues) to live and move. In other words, querying what an interruption in the archaeological record actually represents prompts us to look at what is happening elsewhere on that same landscape – were people present in places where we had not thought to look for them, and if so why?

Deep, extensive sequences of human activity can show clearly where the range of resources available to people dwelling in a place have changed: where access to foodstuffs and raw materials have shifted, with consequences for how feasible it was for people to have remained in place. A hiatus if not in human presence, then in the resources necessary to support this, which may ultimately have had the same effect. While deep, narrow excavations can reveal much about the long-term past of a site, building from these to emphasize both surface area *and* depth in complex rockshelters are only now providing insight into how people could occupy different spaces *within* a site. This raises the question of whether we can posit expulsion happening on a micro scale as facets of a single locale become challenging to cope with (see below). Finally, descriptions of expulsion-as-interruption demand an understanding of un-settlement as part of a critical approach to mobilities of humans and non-human entities (compare with Grace,

this volume): how people have been compelled to uproot themselves and for how long. In archaeological terms, to consider interruption and un-settlement entails nuanced consideration of the relationships between people and the place they were un-settled from.

Coping with constricted choices

For the reasons described above, archaeology's methods and records are well-suited to documenting the constrictions of choice leading (possibly) to expulsion. These include shifts from people coping with changes in place (through familiar practices and resources) to leaving entirely. While archaeological evidence on its own may not always be able to state definitively that a particular interruption represents expulsion, it can describe how peoples' habits and livelihoods changed around that interruption: when a place became so hostile or untenable that leaving represented a viable option.

Within southern Africa, establishing these contexts for interruption has been key to discussions of how mobile foraging peoples coped with big- and small-scale environmental transitions over millennia. Major climatic episodes like the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM, regionally bracketed between 24–17,500 cal BP²), which signalled the shift from the Pleistocene to Holocene eras, represent events that are so long-lived and disruptive as to be both visible in the archaeological record and telling as to how people could live with extreme change. Deep and relatively continuous sequences at multiple sites across the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains illustrate this particularly well, detailing how foraging groups coped with major climate upsets.

Consider the comparison between Rose Cottage Cave in the Western lowlands and Sehonghong in the highlands, both of which show human presence from more than 65,000 years ago to the nineteenth century AD. Obtaining a large number of dates on diverse organic materials (charcoal, plant and animal remains) provides information about when a place was used and how intensively, while statistical modelling of these dates determines where interruptions in occupation layers are likely genuine (Loftus et al. 2019; Pargeter, Loftus, and Mitchell 2017).

This granular, long-sequence view provides a before-and-after picture of the different ways people contended with change in place or left a site for varying lengths of time. While human activity is noticeable before the onset of the LGM, the presence of this activity is relatively ephemeral at both sites. People occupied Sehonghong in short, interrupted bursts, while at Rose Cottage the pattern was slightly longer-lived residencies, although with stone tool production suggesting some degree of mobility. At the onset of the LGM (c. 30–24,000 cal BP) evidence of duiker and steenbok at Sehonghong demonstrates that people were still able to hunt these antelope and that some shrubs and bushes were available to support their populations, even while the climate became cooler and drier (Plug and Mitchell 2008). From c. 24–23,000 cal BP, Sehonghong saw a burst of activity while humans were either absent entirely from Rose Cottage or so fleetingly present as to leave negligible traces (Loftus et al. 2019). This supports Stewart and Mitchell's (2018) suggestion that highland sites like Sehonghong could serve as a refuge for people during climate stress: variable elevations and summer rainfall offered a range of micro-climates, and (as today's boom in dam-building in Lesotho attests) mountain-fed rivers offered access to water. To be clear, the suggestion is not that people moved from Rose Cottage to Sehonghong, but rather that when it became difficult to cope with

pervasive, ambient climate challenges in the lowlands the highlands offered more opportunities.

The flurry of activity at Sehonghong was followed by nearly 10,000 years of short-lived occupation, and during the LGM itself both sites were inhabited only infrequently. By the conclusion of the LGM, Sehonghong's deposits featured remains of smaller, browsing antelope that thrive in wooded environments which, combined with other palaeoclimate data, suggest that people using the site were taking advantage of the return to warmer conditions to hunt a different range of animals (Stewart and Mitchell 2018). The picture at Rose Cottage is similar: not only were people able to hunt grazing animals, but analysis of grazers' tooth chemistry show they were living in an increasingly wet environment (Smith, Lee-Thorp, and Sealy 2002). After this point, occupation picked up again in both the highlands and lowlands until another climate upset in the form of the Younger Dryas (13–11,500 cal BP). Once this abated, thick deposits accumulating at Rose Cottage over the next 3,000 years attest to sustained, intensive use of the shelter by humans, suggesting that it was feasible to stay there on a relatively stable basis (Stewart and Mitchell 2018).

Detecting interruptions and constricted choices at Sehonghong and Rose Cottage show where some of archaeology's strengths come into their own: the ability to cluster dates on different materials, to treat different types of artefacts as archives of both human action and environmental conditions, and to answer questions about what materials humans were able to acquire and bring into the places they lived. The programme of comparative work on-going in the Maloti-Drakensberg illustrates the profound potential for archaeological sequences to track change through time with a high degree of both resolution and specificity about human-place interactions.

That said, the ability of the archaeological record to chronicle constrictions of choice is not constrained solely by the availability of long, tightly-dated sections, but also by the ability to identify the range of options available to people at particular points in the past. In the south-eastern midlands, for instance, changing climate conditions from the mid-second millennium AD presented challenges for communities heavily reliant on farming. This may have made locales like Moor Park – higher up the Drakensberg range and closer to people with expertise foraging in straitened conditions – an attractive possibility (Whitelaw 2015, 161–164; 189–194). Evidence from historical linguistics supports the view that the early second millennium AD saw ancestral Nguni-speakers becoming increasingly able to adapt technologies and mobilities to different aspects of the Drakensberg (Jimenez 2020).

Access to goods reliant on manufacturing or exchange can also represent an arena in which choice could be restricted, and which could in turn lead to interruptions. Decades of excavations at twelfth- and thirteenth-century AD sites within the confluence area of the Shashe and Limpopo Rivers demonstrate a vast disparity between the concentrations of exotic goods (derived from Indian Ocean and trans-Kalahari trade networks) like celadon and worked metals at Mapungubwe and the low quantities of these at neighbouring sites. Mapungubwe may have controlled access to these materials across a network of contemporaries (Huffman 2009). But re-dating a number of these contemporary settlements and recovering a greater sample of goods from across Mapungubwe's wider posited 'client' network has highlighted where these sites were able to operate more or less autonomously, accessing the same 'prestige' goods that Mapungubwe's occupants were (theoretically) consigning (Chirikure et al. 2016). Antonites and Ashley

(2016, 480–482) have argued from these finds that communities during this period were incentivised to relocate farther from Mapungubwe’s immediate power centre to engage in less-mediated trade networks, hence the emergence of small but wealthy (by the standards of exotic economies) thirteenth-century settlements at a considerable remove from the Mapungubwe heartland.

This underscores something significant about expulsion: if one pursues an understanding of interruption as contingent on a shifting array of options for coping with change, getting a sense of the breadth of those options (how widely available they were, who took them up and who could not) is essential. The new research from Limpopo offers conclusions that chime with those from West African sites implicated in Atlantic trade networks (Canós Donnay 2016; Richard 2018): interruption – which is to say, movement away from a place and/or changes to longstanding ways of doing things – need not have been a community’s last-ditch effort to survive in the face of changing circumstances. Movement can be strategic, as can coping-in-place, which becomes accessible through a more detailed and thorough understanding of how a specific living place changes during the course of its life.

Intimacies of interruption

Excavation entails choices about how to circumscribe a site into analytical blocks of space and time. These choices enable (or foreclose) understandings of how peoples’ use of different aspects of a site change, including if and when they abandon the site. Were all areas in use for the entire time that a place was occupied? If not, how were different spaces used and by whom? Did some spaces fall into dis-use and if so why? These questions are smaller-scale than the visions of movement that expulsion connotes, and few would refer to the abandonment of one part of a site for another as expulsion.

I want to stay with this exploration of small-scale displacement, though, for what it demonstrates about the insights a focus on interruption offers. If sequences provide detail about the constriction of available choices and how this affected the conditions that made expulsion possible over time, what can we learn from instances where such changes prompted people to re-locate within a familiar space? In such cases of (very literal) internal displacement, is it possible to consider these moves as changes to the nature of a place itself, either creating conditions for a larger-scale, more enduring expulsion or representing some other fundamental shift in peoples’ relationship to home and to each other?

The ability to clarify in detail how, when, and for how long people used various areas of a site depends on both the quality of archaeological preservation and the strategies used in site survey and excavation. As described earlier, for much of the time that archaeologists have been excavating LSA sites the dominant focus has been on achieving deep trenches and large samples, often at the expense of exposing more surface area and thus understanding how the total space in question was used. Excavations at Ntloana Tšoana rockshelter represent an attempt to rectify this situation, asking what perspectives on peoples’ habits of dwelling in or leaving a place become visible through a methodological shift to excavations emphasizing depth *and* breadth. This labour- and time-intensive strategy was made possible by the necessity of near-total archaeological recovery

ahead of the site's destruction by the (now-completed) Metolong Dam (King and Arthur 2014), but nevertheless allowed for a unique approach to establishing site history.

The excavation approach deliberately sought alternatives to the 'telephone booth' style of trenching that characterizes much rockshelter excavation, proceeding from the premise (well-understood if difficult to put into practice) that deposits in these spaces represent a complicated intermingling of anthropogenic and environmental processes almost always heavily disturbed by later occupants and distributed unevenly across the site (Arthur 2018, 1–2). Moreover, and while Ntloana Tšoana did produce a long sequence of occupation (Figure 4), opening up an excavation area that was contiguous across an exceptional 13m² enabled a nuanced story about how just how much interruption can occur in a relatively small space within a thin section of time (around 60 cm thick, beginning c. 10,900–10,500 cal BP and taking 900 years to accumulate).

From a combination of artefactual and sedimentary data, it became possible not only to identify hearths and groups of variably worked and used stone tools, but also to infer how long these residues took to form before people re-located due to flooding from the adjacent river, among other factors (Arthur 2020). At numerous points in this short sequence, especially the older, lower elements, excavations documented instances where floodwaters deposited silts, onto which people then built hearths and waste dumps while they were still soft. This pattern of short bursts of use between floods was sometimes punctuated by a phase of more extensive hearth-building, tool-making, and/or processing animal remains. During several of these longer stays, sharp, clear boundaries between hearths and the surrounding silts suggest that something prevented burnt material from spilling over – possibly a wind-break or other structure. Later during



Figure 4. Photograph showing excavated section at Ntloana Tšoana. Image copyright and courtesy Jessica Meyer.

the period in question, a large deposit of silt across the whole excavation area formed the base of hearths and a large quantity of faunal remains that shifted the focus of activity southward from what had preceded it. The fact that these features were interlensed with the silt below it suggests that everything happened very quickly.

The general impression is that at least three times within this sequence people came together very quickly and relatively intensively around a number of hearths built in particular parts of the shelter. At some points, people would have been able to see the residues of those who had come immediately before them – perhaps some or all of the same individuals, perhaps others separated by generations. Where flooding or other factors caused interruptions and made some or all of the shelter uninhabitable, people left or returned but used a different area than had previous occupants (Figure 5).

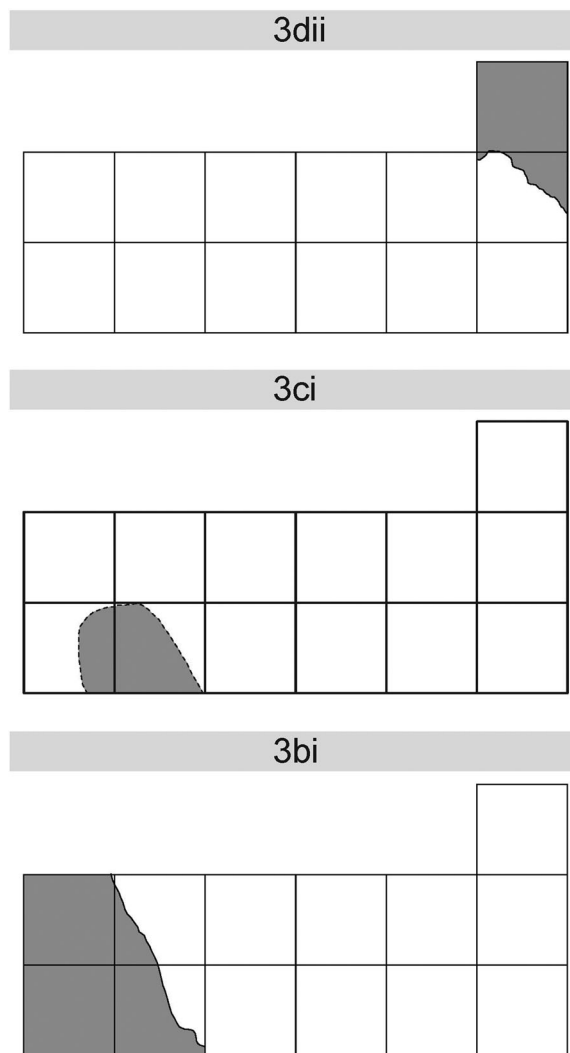


Figure 5. Diagram of spatial shifts in hearth location across Phase 3 at Ntloana Tsoana, adapted with permission from Arthur 2020. Shaded areas represent hearths. Each square represents 1 square metre.

In later-period sites with shallower deposits and more extensive architectural features, identifying phases of occupations in different zones similarly demands rejecting the assumption that all parts of a site will have been occupied contemporaneously. We see this, in for example, Tim Maggs' (1976a; 1976b) excavations of Makgwareng, an Iron Age site on the southern Highveld. Trenching in five different zones of one settlement unit (comprising 19 buildings and three large enclosures likely for livestock) revealed multiple episodes of building across various zones beginning in the late sixteenth/early seventeenth centuries AD. By the time the settlement was abandoned (likely in the early nineteenth century), the number of stock pens had been reduced substantially and animals kept in areas more densely populated by humans and cattle alike (Maggs 1976a, 135–136). Maggs proposed that this shift was a response to an increase in cattle raids from the mid-eighteenth century, which prompts further questions about how internal un-settlement within a place was experienced: even though people were able to continue to stay put (at Makgwareng, this later phase saw its peak human population), these pressures could still lead to spatial interruption and eventually large-scale abandonment.

Viewed in this way, internal changes to the nature of a site or displacements within it could be seen as precursors to wider disruption and abandonment; as another part of coping-in-place; or as a transformation to the nature of home itself that is so significant as to effectively render it a totally new place. This happened at least twice in the life of Ntloana Tšoana: once, around 11,090–9,690 cal BP when a flood deposited enough silt to cover the shelter floor so that traces of previous uses became invisible (Arthur 2020); and in 2009 when excavations removed roughly two metres of deposit and let in more light, prompting people living nearby to note that 'Ntloana Tšoana' ('Dark House') was no longer an appropriate name. The latter represented a process whereby the place instead of residents were dis-located (King and Nic Eoin 2014).

Experiences like these suggest further questions one could ask of expulsion: can we consider transformation of place – in addition to or rather than more direct processes provoking un-settlement – within our understanding of expulsion? Can we do so even where people stay put in a place that is no longer recognizable as home? Understanding interruption within these and any situation involving displacement entails a more fundamental consideration of place and home: how did people imagine and experience these? What was it like to leave them? One can see parallels with Benjamin Twagira's (this volume) argument that shifting materialities of a place condition experiences of expulsion from that place.

The place of interruption

The archaeological record can be described as an interplay of contexts: what happens within the lifespan of a site, what is happening in the wider world to which that site is linked? The horizons of that wider world can sometimes be global (recalling the Indian Ocean and trans-Kalahari network incorporating the Shashe-Limpopo), and sometimes more proximate. Consequently, when interruptions happen in one place, we are compelled to ask what else is happening on that landscape or in that network. What other spaces come into view and might conduct or affect movement by humans and non-human alike? This is partly a way of asking where people might go when they leave a

site, but also of insisting that nuanced, ontological understandings of place and movement are necessary prerequisites for fruitful consideration of un-settlement and expulsion.

Tracing the movement of cattle and people who valued, traded, and extracted resources from them during the last three centuries illustrates these multiple understandings of settlement and un-settlement. While cattle have been significant economic and social actors since their early first-millennium AD arrival in the region, oral historical sources suggest that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a rise in violent competition for cattle acquisition tied to the emergence of new political formations in the eastern interior (Landau 2010). As described above, the archaeological visibility of stone-walled townscapes and settlements associated with these cattle-keeping communities has been a major theme in Iron Age archaeology, along with their abandonment (King 2018; 2019, 113–118). Such abandonments and the concurrent appearance of small-scale, refuge-like hilltop or rockshelter sites into the nineteenth century have been consistently attributed to disruption from cattle raids and conflict among rival polities.

These inferences rest on particular understandings of how cattle raids destabilized settlements, for how long, and what these ephemeral sites could offer by way of ameliorating that destabilization: higher ground and few access points to weather short-term violence (Rooikrans, Hall 1985), or one of several contemporary, strategic fall-back positions for people who were both subject to and active in cattle raiding with little reliance on long-term, stone-built homesteads (Bolepeletsa, King 2017b). These two examples illustrate that punctuated, ephemeral occupations at Bolepeletsa and Rooikrans may look archaeologically similar if taken individually (short-lived, expedient use of sites with defensive walling and capacity for keeping livestock), but placed in the wider context of how their respective landscapes were used reveal these to be qualitatively different patterns of interruption.

Similarly, the question of just how much mobility was accommodated in settled life remains something of an open one, which has implications for how people experienced the process of up-rooting and/or exploiting multiple facets of a landscape. Animals are key to this, including those with particular social valence such as cattle whose added transactional and nutritional significance contributed to decisions about movement. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that valence is homogeneous across space and time. The availability of animal remains (that is, zooarchaeological data) depends on taphonomy, which is to say preservation of remains in sufficient quantity and quality to say something meaningful about animal presence or absence. Despite the ethnographically- and historically-attested significance of livestock in the last two millennia, such preservation is disappointingly rare, although available data provide glimpses of how the needs and socialization of cattle featured in experiences of interruption.

At Kaditshwene, a townscape associated with Hurutshe Tswana and dated between the mid-seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries AD (but likely at peak occupation during the latter end of this range), the zooarchaeological assemblage yielded sufficient information about the age, number, and variety of animals present to determine that residents' consumption emphasized livestock over wild game, especially in elite spaces (Boeyens and Plug 2011). Not only does this qualify longstanding historical and ethnographic assertions of Tswana reluctance to slaughter cattle, but it also lends

support to wider theories of landscape use. Archaeological identification of cattle posts (grazing areas at a remove from settlements) pertaining to Kaditshwene remains elusive, but historical evidence suggests that these were myriad and relatively close to home, conforming to a particular sense of Tswana territoriality (Morton 2013, 22). Moreover, radiometric and oral historical dates indicate Kaditshwene and other contemporary sites were relatively short-lived, with the availability of water a factor in length of stay (Lane 2004). To what extent, then, did cattle facilitate or shape the ways these communities moved across the landscape, given the likely reliance on cattle posts and water to support herds?

We can ask similar questions of Makgwareng (recalling that this was longer-lived and partly contemporaneous with Kaditshwene but farther to the south-east), whose zooarchaeological assemblage similarly shows an overwhelming reliance on cattle for protein, along with dogs whose presence could reflect a commitment to herding (Maggs 1976a, 127–129). Makgwareng's residents also exploited red hartebeest and blesbuck for meat (and likely hides), which attest to the use of hunting strategies capable of capturing these relatively less-migratory antelope whose tolerance of high grasslands means that hunters would not have had to range far (Estes 1991, 133–134; Maggs 1975). This combination of cattle and antelope suggests that residents could exploit both near to home. Given this, when Makgwareng's residents began to live more closely together and ultimately left their home in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries AD, how dramatic was the move from this intimate animal landscape? Or were residents able to avail themselves of cattle posts that were familiar but nevertheless represented a major change (cf. Klatzow 2010; Wadley 2001)?

On the other hand, sites in the Phalaborwa area to the north-east of Kaditshwene and occupied between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries AD disclosed a relatively limited assemblage of livestock remains (possibly owing to intensive tsetse fly infestations, Plug 1996, 98). However, throughout these infestations these sites show a strong emphasis on iron and copper production within what we know was an exchange network of worked metals; the early nineteenth-century disruption of this network may have been the proximate cause of the site's abandonment (Plug and Pistorius 1999). The suggestion, then, is that livestock were part of Phalaborwa life but not in the same way as at Kaditshwene or Makgwareng, and entailed a different use of strategies for provisioning them. We can consider a similar social shift for cattle at work at Marothodi, a contemporary peer of Kaditshwene: based on architectural modifications rather than zooarchaeology, Mark Anderson (2009, 123, 160–163) demonstrated that one neighbourhood closed down a cattle kraal and re-purposed the area for metal-working, indicating a major change in the literal social position of cattle. When Marothodi was abandoned in the late 1820s, to what extent were cattle empowered to dictate the terms of the movement based on their role at the time? Would this have traced the same paths as at Kaditshwene?

There is a general dearth of data sufficient to answer these questions in detail. However, the idea of a landscape composed of multiple waypoints rather than moorings (cf. Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006) is valuable for considering the pace and tenor of movement (compare this use of moorings with that of Grace, this volume). Applied broadly, this focus on waypoints illuminates how both in southern Africa and elsewhere they are contingent on the actors, needs, familiarities, and aversions affecting paths taken

(for example Straight et al. 2016). Understanding the nature of a place at multiple scales – the facets, uses, and dis-uses that comprise it – is essential to understand its *dis*-placement.

Concluding thoughts

This paper began with a consideration of inference and ethics within the intellectual work of this volume, asking how to take the archaeological record on its own terms – with its affordances of multiple agencies, cadences, and intimacies – without qualifying other, historically- or ethnographically-known experiences of trauma and coerced movement. I have attempted to demonstrate that it is worth thinking precisely about the epistemic work that archaeology's records and methods do, and how this may enable means of understanding expulsion.

Ultimately, and as promised, what has emerged is less a definition or quantification of expulsion than an array of contexts related to this. The ways in which people experienced change through time and choices for managing this offer insight into where conditions leading to interruption may have crept up slowly but pervasively. Peoples' relationships to a place – the nature of a site, its articulation with other places on a landscape, how these are remembered, accessed, and exploited – texture our understanding of what it meant to leave that place, including whether leaving and returning were familiar or wholly new. Settlement itself emerges as a context that can accommodate quite a lot of mobility, which can be directed by humans and non-humans alike.

These archaeologically-derived insights are, as I suggested earlier, in aid of creating a shared basis for considering lived experiences of expulsion across disciplines. That this constitutes essential epistemic ground-work bears repeating because in cross-disciplinary discussions of the sort contained in this volume, establishing our diverse inferential routes and their priorities is as significant as our terms of reference, if not more so. It may be the case that there is no specific archaeology of expulsion available to us, in that there is no set of diagnostic indicators whereby we can identify this confidently. An archaeology of interruption is, however, a means of examining the *quality of absence* – the varied tempos and materialities that this includes. I suggest that this framing lends itself to nuanced understandings of coercion and violence and makes space for subtle or intense, abrupt and protracted visions of these.

Notes

1. These determinations have become considerably more secure since the advent of radiometric dating and Bayesian models thereof.
2. Archaeological conventions for quoting dates vary depending on the time periods and dating methods involved. All radiometric dates require calibration to account for environmental variability, and calibrated dates are reported as 'cal BP', with 'BP' referring to 'Before Present [1950 AD]'. For relatively older dates such as those on either side of the LGM, discussion in the literature tends to retain 'cal BP', especially where dates have been modelled statistically. More recent dates (e.g. within the last two millennia) are reported using 'cal BP' but we frequently see these converted to BC or AD in discussion, particularly when working in dialogue with historical sources and for very recent periods that can be highly susceptible to imprecisions in radiocarbon dating.

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