FINDING BOSUTSWE: ARCHEOLOGICAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE PAST[1]

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Two Worlds

Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural
able to slip from "How's life"
to *M'estan volviendo loca*,
able to sit in a paneled office
drafting memos in smooth English,
able to order in fluent Spanish
at a Mexican restaurant,
American but hyphenated,
viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,
perhaps inferior, definitely different,

[1]The authors are grateful for the graciousness of the Bosutswe people who hosted us over several field seasons of work. We are also grateful to the University of Botswana archeology students who provided many fresh, new voices as they added to our discussions of the past (and present). We are indebted to several readers who provided comments and suggestions: Maria Franklin, Denné Reed, Zacharys Gundu, Carla Klehm, Polly Strong, K. Kris Hirst, Kirsten Atwood, and Jan Vansina. Finally, we acknowledge the National Science Foundation for funding the 1990, 2001, and 2002 excavations at Bosutswe.

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viewed by Mexicans as alien
(their eyes say, "You may speak
Spanish but you're not like me")
an American to Mexicans
a Mexican to Americans
a handy token
sliding back and forth
between the fringes of both worlds
by smiling
by masking the discomfort
of being pre-judged
Bi-laterally.[2]

I

This paper presents a micro-scale examination of archeological field praxis and its impact on archeologists, students (foreign and indigenous), and the local communities that both host and labor for them. It is a reflexive journey that attempts to bring coherence to the multiple and changing registers of meaning, contradiction, and transformation that have taken place during excavations at Bosutswe in "post-colonial" Botswana. We discuss our interactions with one another and our encounters with "the past" as we sought to validate, transform, or escape the contemporary entanglements of multilateral "pre-judgments" that have their roots deep in the soil of colonial encounter.

II

Pat Mora in her short poem, *Two Worlds*, captures some of the contradictions inherent in a post-modern, post-colonial, transnational world, where one is sometimes offered the possibility of inhabiting multiple universes, with multiple cultural and linguistic positionalities, and sometimes even trans-ethnic or transnational identities as possible choices. Enmeshed in such a bewildering variety of "posts-," our diverse theoretical and interpretive paradigms are often constructed in vague relation with, or in contradiction to, academic modes of understanding and interpretation that include Marxism and the dialectics of power, gender, feminism, ageism, constructions of memory and forgetting, the need for reflexivity, and the fourfold hermeneutic involved in interpreting the past from the present, and the past in its own terms. Discussions of post-colonial archeology reflect these

[2]Pat Mora, *My Own True Name* (Houston, 2000), 39.

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diverse approaches, as well as the many different scales of analysis and theoretical perspective that are possible.

Rather than focus on southern African archeology on a regional scale, we will turn our attention to a micro-scale examination of the archeological process in the field and its impact on archeologists, students (foreign and indigenous), and the local communities that both host and labor for them. This is a reflexive memory journey as we try to bring some sense of coherence to the multiple registers of meaning, power, contradiction, and transformation that have taken place during the course of our work together in Botswana. The discussion centers on the rediscovery and excavation of a site known as Bosutswe in the eastern Kalahari. Denbow's initial interactions with the site, and subsequent excavations there, span more than two decades. His early work begins the discussion. Later sections are followed by interjections from Morongwa Mosothwane, currently a PhD student in archeology at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, and Nonofho Ndobochani, a Senior Curator at the National Museum of Botswana, as they react to the text. Both are Batswana archeologists who participated in the Bosutswe excavations in 2001 and 2002.[3] Their voices, which are set in italics, provide additional breadth and depth to the account. While we concentrate on a microcosm, we hope to reveal some of the larger and more diachronic issues of archeological praxis in the post-colonial period–its changing contexts, assumptions, contradictions, multiple dialectics, and lived conditions and transformations.

In the context of a post-colonial Africa, the sense of Mora's poem is repeated in multiple circumstances and registers: the slide between rural and urban settings that indigenous archeologists and students make as they shift from the office or classroom to the field; the multiple positionalities of foreign and indigenous researchers who introduce new constructions and contestations of race, gender, power, and identity into the communities around the sites they excavate, sometimes in spite of their best intentions; the multiple levels of confrontation with decentered relations of power and prejudice that lie close to the surface of indigenous constructions of identity and place; the often dialectical vacillations between tradition and modernity; and the sets of memory traces, conflicting assumptions, diverse behaviors, and cultural misunderstandings experienced during the course of our interactions with one another and our encounters with "the past." All of us

[3]For recent excavation results at Bosutswe see James Denbow, Jeanette Smith, Kirsten Atwood, Nonofho Ndobochani, and Duncan Miller, "Excavations at Bosutswe, Botswana: Cultural Chronology, Paleo-Ecology and Economy," *Journal of Archeological Science* 35(2008), 459-80; James Denbow and Duncan Miller, "Metal Working at Bosutswe, Botswana," *Journal of African Archeology* 5(2007), 3-46.

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engaged at different times in activities and conversations that sought to validate, transform, or escape from the entanglements of "pre-judgments" of the sort that Mora writes about–pre-judgments with their conceptual, practical, and memory roots embedded deep in the soil of colonial encounters.

Denbow, in e-mail to Ndobochani and Mosothwane: This morning as I was driving in I thought what might be fun, provided you are actually willing to be part of it, would be to interleave your comments, thoughts, and experiences into the narrative as separate voices. They could be identified by italics or a different typeface. That way we would be able to show our different takes on things, or our different points of view about what is important, and what impacts our working together has had on us, or our relations with people at Bosutswe and elsewhere. It might be interesting and certainly "post-colonial" since we could incorporate multiple voices and perspectives. But maybe you think this idea is crazy?

Nonofho: That is good Jim. We can even quote the villagers. I actually always wanted us to contribute something about public archeology because our involving the community at Bosutswe was quite intensive and is worth sharing with the world. I know that involving communities is the "in thing," but "practicals" are still lacking—something that we did quite well.

III

The beginning of this dialogue takes place over 30 years ago, when I first started to conduct archeological surveys and excavations along the eastern edge of the Kalahari. At that time colonial histories of Botswana depicted it as an historical and cultural backwater, "climatically unsuited to farming settlement . . . and occupied largely, if not exclusively, by hunting-gathering peoples of Late Stone Age stock until very recent times."[4] Oral histories compiled by expatriate colonial administrators, anthropologists, and historians, most working from the comfort of the Victorian verandas that fronted the offices of the District Commissioner or magistrate, agreed with this summation of an empty past. Indeed, the very locus and modus operandi of colonial research served to reinforce entrenched power structures as kings and local authorities were "requested" to send delegations of "knowledgeable men" to the cool imperial shade where they could be interviewed by visiting scholars–usually through an interpreter. The results were politicized histories generally favorable to colonial interests on the one hand, and the

[4]David Phillipson, "Early Iron Using Peoples of Southern Africa" in *African Societies in Southern Africa: Historical Studies*, ed. Leonard Thompson (London, 1969), 35.

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local authorities through whom they ruled, if sometimes uneasily, on the other.

Through this process educated Batswana internalized a colonial definition of history as lists of kings, age-regiments, myths, and battles. In the process, the potential for more critical and culturally diverse social histories was silenced. Little attention was paid to the complex dialectics between nobles and commoners as they negotiated power and position within larger Tswana polities, or to the undercurrents of racism and prejudice that were often explicit in relations between elite and subaltern peoples—relations that ranged from near enslavement or serfdom in the case of the Khoisan (Sarwa) and Kgalagadi, to political discrimination against or disenfranchisement of other so-called "minor" ethnicities such as the Kalanga, Yei, Subiya, Mbukushu, and Herero.[5] Not surprisingly, the truncated colonial histories produced by such "itineraries of silencing,"[6] and developed through the collusion of colonial and local power structures, profited by portraying the cultural and social past of the Kalahari as a recent phenomenon, with Tswana-speaking agro-pastoralists only being pushed into the desert two or three centuries ago as a result of the disruptions of the Mfecane in South Africa.[7] Following Fabian, if any archeology was to be done, it was only to document the prehistory of the "Stone Age," a concept adopted locally to encapsulate and separate into discrete "cultural gardens" the histories of marginalized peoples from those of more "progressive" colonial powers and their indigenous allies.[8]

As in earlier times, colonial definitions and constructions of history were controlled by an indigenous gerontocracy shored up by distanced colonial overlords in Mafeking. What seems to have been common to most histories written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is its positivism, its belief in a single truth and the negation of alternative voices. This is not to say that there was no resistance to the imposition of colonial power or its

[5]E. Tagart, *Report on the Conditions Existing Among the Masarwa in the Bamangwato Reserve of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Certain Other Matters Appertaining to the Natives Living Therein* (Pretoria, 1933). L. Nyati-Ramahobo, "The Language Situation in Botswana," *Current Issues in Language* 1(2000), 243-300.

[6]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (New York, 1990).

[7]Isaac Schapera, *The Ethnic Composition of the Tswana Tribes* (London, 1952); Anthony Sillery, *The Bechuanaland Protectorate* (London, 1952); Adam Kuper, "The Kgalagadi in the Nineteenth Century," *Botswana Notes and Records* 2(1969), 45-51; Thomas Tlou, *A History of Ngamiland, 1750 to 1906: the Formation of an African State* (Gaborone, 1985);V. F. Ellenberger, "History and Pre-history in Botswana," *Botswana Notes and Records* 4(1972), 135-38.

[8]Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York, 1983).

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daily negotiation. But the histories of Botswana developed during the colonial and immediate post-colonial periods generally silenced or reinforced a marginalized view of other pasts, while supporting the belief that the Tswana nations had expanded into an essentially "empty" land occupied by a few groups of nomadic hunters and gatherers.[9] One of the first "post-independence" statements by Sir Seretse Khama, the first President of Botswana, was a call for the production of new national histories to replace the "colonization of the mind" he attributed to the colonial process. As he wrote four years after independence:

> We were taught, sometimes in a very positive way, to despise ourselves and our ways of life. We were made to believe that we had no past to speak of, no history to boast of. The past, so far as we were concerned, was just a blank and nothing more. Only the present mattered and we had very little control over it . . . It should now be our intention to try to retrieve what we can of our past. We should write our own history books, to prove that we did have a past, and that it was a past that was just as worth writing and learning about as any other. We must do this for the simple reason that a nation without a past is a lost nation, and a people without a past is a people without a soul.[10]

But what should such new, post-colonial histories (and prehistories) look like? Who was to write them? What new concepts of local identity or translocal nationhood, if any, would inform them? How would they differ in substantive ways from the older histories? In many cases, colonial ideas about what history was were so entrenched or "taken for granted" that it was difficult for new generations of post-independence historians (and archeologists) to conceptualize, at least from the inside, what such histories could be–or what types of data would be needed to construct them. Many new writings consequently focused on reactions to the excesses and racism of earlier colonial histories, rather than grappling with more theoretical questions regarding the politicized nature of all histories, and the import of silencing or marginalizing alternative voices. In post-independence Botswana, the production of new national histories was encouraged as part of the exercise of nation-building, but this did not necessarily mean that any reworking of the conceptual frameworks of earlier histories took place. This may seem a

[9]Nyati-Ramahobo, "Language Situation."

[10]Sir Seretse Khama, speech of Chancellor at University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland graduation ceremony, 15 May 1970; *Botswana Daily News*, 19 May 1970, supplement.

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harsh conclusion, but I write it to contextualize my first encounters in the field with local concepts of "history" and "archeology" as I began my initial fieldwork work in east-central Botswana in 1977. Almost no Iron Age research had been conducted in the country, archeology was not part of the school curriculum at any level, and there were no archeological exhibits at the newly established National Museum opened in Gaborone in 1969.

At the time of my graduate studies, British expatriates dominated the teaching of African archeology in American universities. Almost all had PhDs from the United Kingdom. Without exception, their archeological experience in Africa had benefited from the "old school" social and logistical contacts available to them under the remnants of the colonial system. My advisor, Patrick Munson, was one of a new generation of American-born scholars who had few or no colonial ties or connections. Once on the ground I therefore had no "old-boy" network or "boarding school" commonality to draw upon. My work began under the remnants of a colonial network that, even in post-independence days, was still powerful enough to cast negative aspersions on my academic preparation, intellectual capacity, and even my ability to speak, write, and spell "properly" the English language. From a Batswana perspective, such fine distinctions in social status and power, and their impact on logistics, access to resources, and so on were not apparent. I was, after all, privileged and "white." They had their own struggles with the impact of colonial expectations on academic preparation, impacts that included the teaching philosophies and prejudices imbibed from colonial and apartheid dominated contexts that informed not only white expatriates, but an older generation of African scholars as well.

Morongwa: My first encounter with the word archeology was in 1995 when I had to choose subjects for my BA Humanities courses. I chose History as one of my majors and "Introduction to Archeology" was one of the modules. There was no such thing as career guidance in secondary school and most of my teachers up to that point had no idea about "Archeology." It happened that the Archeology module came at the very end of the semester and we did not have time to finish the course outline. There was only time for me to be briefly introduced to the world of Australopithecines, which I found very exciting and mysterious. I had no doubt that I wanted to register for more advanced courses in Archeology the next year, but at that point my plan was to just understand the evolution "thing," and leave it at that.

Now I have moved from the ancient world of Australopithecines to the modern world of Forensic Anthropology where I have conducted several studies, exhumations, and have even ventured into cases of human rights violations.

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IV

The year 1977, when I began my fieldwork, was an eventful one. In that year the Botswana Defense Force (BDF) was established to defend the country against aggression from white-ruled regimes in South Africa, Rhodesia and Southwest Africa, as well as to counteract potential problems stemming from the ongoing civil war in Angola–a war also equated in global terms with the cold war fight between capitalism and communism–West versus East fought in the South. The threats to Botswana security were not idle. In that year forces under the control of the rebel Rhodesian government of Ian Smith ambushed and killed 15 BDF soldiers in the northwestern part of Botswana. The country was put on alert as people were urged over the radio to report any suspicious behavior, especially on the part of "whites" or *makgoa*.

Soon after this incident, I began to receive delegations of men in my camp who had come to inquire, always in a roundabout and therefore "polite" fashion, why I was climbing all the nearby hills, digging small test holes in some of them. "Some people think you are 'Smith,'" pronounced one old man. "We have come to find out what you are doing here."

After figuring out that "Smith" was their shorthand for "Ian Smith," which stood for "spy," my answer, that I was "doing archeology," met with blank stares. So I tried again, explaining that archeology is a kind of history (*ditsô*), a term with somewhat different connotations in Tswana.[11] I then tried another tack, announcing that I was affiliated with the National Museum in Gaborone. No one had heard of it, let alone visited it. "What is it?" one asked.

In my halting Tswana I tried to explain that it was a place where old heirlooms, tools, and other materials relating to the country's past were stored and displayed so that younger people could learn from them how people lived long ago. Thinking to make a local connection, I added that a large kaross or skin rug manufactured in 1952 by age regiments in Serowe, and given to Queen Elizabeth in honor of her coronation, could be seen in the Museum. She had returned it as a gift to the Nation at Independence.

This was met with consternation. "Why did she give back a gift? Did she not like it? Did she think it not worthy of her?" Then, returning to the task at hand, they asked: "We are still not sure what a museum is, but if you are interested in history, why don't you consult with the Chief in Serowe [the District capital]? He can direct you to the elders who know about such things."

[11]The Tswana term is generally used to refer to the origins of peoples or nations, rather than chronologically or historically ordered events, or cultural history.

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I tried to explain that the history I was interested in was "different" and that I could learn new things about the distant past by finding the places where people had lived long ago, and by examining the tools, pottery, and other remains they left behind there. That's why I was climbing all the hills–to find the settlements where people had lived long ago. "Oh," they said, their faces clearing. "Now we see. We can take you to such places. Come along."

Excited, I followed my guides through the dense scrub near my camp, visions of overgrown stone ruins and ancient middens running through my mind. They led me instead to a place where a small number of rusted tin cans and pieces of broken glass could be seen glinting in the sun between the tall weeds and thorn bushes. "Here is where my grandfather lived," one man stated proudly. Judging from his age, and the types of tin cans and glass bottles visible, the village had probably been occupied in the late 1940s or early 1950s.

"But I am interested in finding really o-o-o-o-old places (*bohololohololodala*)," I replied, raising the tone of my voice significantly as I pronounced the term in order to emphasize the temporal distance from the present to the very ancient periods in the past in which I was interested. But no matter how long I drew out the syllables or raised the pitch of my voice to emphasize time depth, all afternoon I was guided to the same kinds of places: sites with modern detritus that varied in antiquity directly with the age of my guide. They could sense my disappointment and we parted with uncertain glances at one another.

The next afternoon the delegation returned for more clarification of my role. "Some people, not necessarily us, you understand, still think you are 'Smith.'" While I suspect that it was the members of the delegation themselves who were in the forefront of that group, in typical Tswana fashion they diffused the potential confrontation by politely attributing the belief to "others." I repeated that I was not "Smith," and showed them a copy of my research permit from the Office of the President, which I had dug out from my backpack. It stated that I had permission from the Government (*Goromêntê*) to carry out archeological research in the district.

The official-looking letterhead and signatures silenced them and they left, still bewildered by the crazy kind of history for which I claimed to be looking. I probably wasn't "Smith" but, if not insane, then my climbing, digging, and claims to be doing something called "archeology" was a mask for my true job: a clandestine hunt for diamonds, gold, or other commodities of worldly value. Only that could make sense of my visits to places otherwise best avoided by sensible people.

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Nonofho: It is a challenge for archeologists and other professionals like geologists who, following more distanced and positivist approaches to science, have in the past had little reason or concern for interacting with local communities - that is until their activities were questioned. To me this is typical of the problems that researchers can get into if they do not introduce themselves and explain clearly their objectives. In this case, one could even argue that the men thought you were looking for old settlements with traces of your *ancestry - European. They might not have been able to imagine why a foreigner would be interested in evidence of* their *African ancestry.*

V

I did eventually go to Serowe to ask the Chief whom I could talk to about the history of the area. I had not been trained in the complexities of oral histories and their interpretation, but I figured: how could I go wrong by consulting the local authorities? I was given a list of about ten people and I started to look them up in the village. In my first interview, my host said, "I know a lot about our history, but just let me get my copy of Schapera to make sure I don't leave anything out. I'm getting old, you know."[12]

I listened to him as he went through Isaac Schapera's book with me, pointing out the names of past kings and regiments in Serowe. I left a little disappointed and tried to take a different tack at the next interview. After our introductions, and explaining that the Chief had recommended him to me as someone knowledgeable about history, I began: "What was it like when you were young? Did people have to work harder in their fields than now? Were there more problems with jealousy and witchcraft in the past than today, do you think? How did young people behave toward their elders back then?" This interview went even worse than the first one. My informant had no idea what I was asking for, but it certainly had nothing to do with history so far as he was concerned.

While conducting these interviews I stayed in a sort of "self-help" hotel, the Tshwaragano, perched on the side of a hill in the center of Serowe. It was run by a large, voluble Kalanga woman, who always had something to say each evening as she served up the set menu: a 25-thebe plate with mealie meal, or the 50-thebe plate with rice. After a few days of watching me look over my list of old men as I ate, alone, she asked: "What have you got there?"

"It's a list of men knowledgeable about the history of this area. I got it from the Chief," I answered proudly.

[12]Isaac Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* (London, 1955).

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"Let me see it," she responded, somewhat curtly. She looked at my list and then threw it down on my table with a snort. "Those men don't know anything!" she exclaimed.

"That's not possible," I said. "The chief gave me this list. He surely knows who knows about history."

"Give me your list," she responded. "I'll give you the names of people who REALLY know the history of this area." She promptly wrote a new list of "historians." There was not a name in common between them.

I then went to talk to *her* experts. They gave me a history of the region that made no mention at all of the names and events that had been included by the gentlemen on the Chief's list. I soon realized I was out of my depth. It appeared as though Serowe had multiple histories. Depending on which ethnic groups one engaged, one got a segment of the whole, usually with little or no mention of the contributions of other peoples with whom they must have lived and interacted, but were not part of their group. I thus learned the hard way that *all* history is political. While at that point I decided that I had better stick with archeology, I remained with the conviction that better ways must be found for the collection, interpretation, and integration of oral histories and traditions within archeological research.

Morongwa: My experience with interviewing people about the past was a little different. At university, my lecturers persuaded me to do an ethnographic study on initiation schools, rather than an archeological study as I really wanted to do. I agreed, thinking I had no other choice, but in the back of my mind I thought I knew everything there is to know about initiation; I thought it would be boring. But it turned out to be fantastic. No one prepares a young girl to study initiation rites among her own tribe, in her own village, and I had mixed feelings and expectations about it.

My major source of information came from interviews with initiates. I started by asking my father how to proceed. He promised to talk to some elderly people he knew and ask them to grant me interviews. A few days later, with my father's connections, I hit the village. The first two or three people were expecting me, and I had no difficulties introducing myself. Each gave me the names of additional informants and I thought I had everything under control. But to my surprise I found I had nothing under control!

Almost all of the elderly men and women I talked to were shocked to be asked about initiation by a young "girl." In my culture, initiation is a very secretive institution. Nobody knows anything about it before they go through it themselves, and you don't talk about it afterwards unless it is to those who have also undergone the experience. Unfortunately for me, the last initiation ceremony had been carried out in the early 1980s,

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when I was a young child. So I never had the opportunity to go through it. To the elders, I "lacked manners" and was undermining the culture and customs of the Bakgatla by asking about it. I was expected to know that it was wrong for a young, uninitiated woman to dare to carry out such a study. I was "lenyala phafana," *someone old enough to be initiated, but who had not been. No one would reveal the deeper, divine secrets of the male and female initiation I was looking for. Those who did speak only gave me generalities, not the details.*

My father became interested in my work and asked for daily updates. Realising that I needed help, he went to talk to the paramount chief, Kgosi Lincwe II, and his wife Mma Seingwaeng. He explained that some people were reluctant to share information. I eventually met with Kgosi Lincwe myself. He was very excited that a Mokgatla wanted to undertake such a study, adding that previous studies done by white people [principally Isaac Shapera] were sometimes flawed and misrepresentative of the practice. He trusted that I would put the interests of our culture first and would write a good report.[13] *He and his wife granted me interviews and referred me to more people; they made me feel important and worthy. I was allowed to call them anytime I needed help, and I often used their support as bargaining power if people objected. They even gave me the names of relatives of the royal family to interview.*

In one of my interviews, Mma Seingwaeng explained the symbolism of the opening of the drum used in female initiation. I mentioned it in passing in my first report on my work to my university supervisors, leaving out the details. When my supervisor asked for them, I felt I could not reveal them unless I had permission from Mma Seingwaeng. She was pleased that I had respected her and our culture by waiting for permission. In another incident, Kgosi Lincwe told me all ingredients in the traditional medicines used to heal men after circumcision. During my departmental presentation, everyone asked me to list the ingredients, but I refused. It was clear to me that some information was privileged and I was not willing to jeopardize the trust I had been given. Suddenly I was back in control.

VI

Shortly after my encounters with the elders in 1977, I began excavations at Taukome ("where the lion swallowed") about 25 kilometers east of the

[13]Morongwa Mosothwane, "An Ethnographic Study of Initiation Schools among the Bakgatla bo ga Kgafela in Mochudi (1874-1988)," *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 15(2001), 144-65.

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sandstone escarpment that marks the commencement of the Kalahari sandveld in this region. The small hill (of a type termed a "female" hill under local categorization) was surrounded by a dispersed scatter of thatched houses anchored by a borehole owned by an absentee cattle baron. After meeting with people in several households, where I explained what I wanted to do and why, I hired seven local men, along with a student from the University of Botswana who was there visiting relatives while on holiday. He was curious to learn what archeology was about, though at that time the subject was not even envisioned as a possible field of study at the university. He was also eager to make money before returning to school.

During my interviews with possible workers one old gentleman named Solomon, whose origins were in Zambia, announced that he was a traditional doctor or ngaka and that he knew "what human bones looked like." Curious, I asked him how he could tell whether bones were human.

"They are red," he replied.

I hired him. But several times over the next weeks crew members came to me privately saying, "You better watch old Solomon, he's putting bones in his pocket." I never saw him do it, and I don't know if he really did, or if the informers had other motives–perhaps the firing of Solomon and the hiring of one of their friends or relatives in his place. But I saw no point in making an issue of it since in some respects archeology is a statistical field. With large samples, Solomon's impact on the excavation results, even if he were guilty, was negligible.

As the excavations began, one of the first questions to come up was whether we would uncover human remains. I tried to be honest and said, "I can't be sure, but I am not really looking for them. I am more interested in old pottery, glass beads, and so on." About a week into the excavations we began to expose a pile of stones in one corner of the unit. "It must be a burial," several said. Worried about how they might react, I replied that there could be many reasons why people had piled stones there–maybe they were the foundation for a grain bin, or an anchor for a windbreak, or some other kind of feature. Quietly, everyone went back to work and as the week wore on, more and more stones appeared. Finally, one man came to me and said, "It has to be a burial."

"No, not really," I replied. He then grabbed my hand, led me to the other side of the pile, and pointed to a very large, white, round "stone" that was emerging from under the rocks. There was then no doubt what we had uncovered. I agreed that it was indeed a human skull, and I waited with trepidation to see what their reaction would be. I was certain that we would have to stop the excavation on the spot. But the first response I got was, "Can we touch it?" While there were likely to have been different opinions

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in the village below, and doubtless conflicting feelings among the crew as well, they seemed at the same time to have come to personal accommodations with what they were doing and its involvement with the accidental discovery of old skeletons. That underlying tensions existed, for instance, were hinted at on another occasion when I set up the theodolite to lay out a new excavation unit. Five burials were recovered there, and I overheard people whispering that I had used this instrument to "look beneath the surface of the ground" to discover ahead of time where the skeletons were buried. While no one complained openly, or objected directly to these discoveries, tensions obviously lay below the surface and I was taken aback one day when I overheard two men quarreling and one shouted angrily, "I am going to kill you. And then I'll dig you back up again."

Over the course of the excavation a routine developed in which the men would gather in my camp after work to share a cup of tea and talk. It was at this time that I learned they had a local term, *lerotobolo*, for the grass-covered prehistoric middens I was discovering, mapping from aerial photographs, and excavating.[14] As we gradually came to know one another, talk turned to what they perceived as the "perils" of my work. I learned that they believed that all *marotobolo* (pl.) were protected by ancestors (*Badimo*), ghosts (*baloi*; *dipoko*), and other supernatural forces, including giant snakes (*kgwanyape*; *dikgongoro*) that some believed could fly through the air and possibly had human heads.[15] If one climbed these hills and disturbed the spirits, the air would turn "blue" and one would simply disappear. If I ever dared to climb the large, flat-topped hill (*Rraswaneng*) outside Serowe, they offered as an example, I would never return.

"Oh, I have been there and I saw several large stone walls on top," I said. This caused some consternation, but then they offered up the name of another hill, "from which you would surely never return." I had been there too. Eventually this became a kind of parlor game played out around the campfire over many evenings, with new sites being named as the men dug deeper and deeper into their geographical memories to search for a place I had not been. But my response was always the same. That is until the night someone said, "Bosutswe."

Morongwa: My first field experience also involved dealing with human remains. At the end of my second year at University, I registered for a

[14]James Denbow, "*Cenchrus ciliaris*: an Ecological Indicator of Iron Age Middens using Aerial Photography in Eastern Botswana," *South African Journal of Science* 75(1979), 405-08; James Denbow and Jocelyne Denbow, *Uncovering Botswana's Past* (Gaborone,1990).

[15]For additional examples of stories about *Kgwanyape*, see Isaac Schapera, *Rainmaking Rites of Tswana Tribes* (Leiden, 1971).

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field school trip to Mosu, on the edge of the Makgakgadi salt pans. I had never even been on a camping trip before, and I had no idea what to expect. The most difficult thing was deciding what to pack, so I packed my best night gowns, jeans, and other clothes. I had planned to stay only two weeks, but instead stayed three months! Contrary to expectations, I found that I didn't mind going for three days without a bath or the other "girly rituals." (I also liked being seen as the belle of the camp by my male classmates, even in my dirty condition.) The following year I left my best clothes at home and used a torn tracksuit as my sleepwear.

Our lecturer, Andrew Reid, told many stories about his archeological work in Uganda around the campfire; he became one of my greatest sources of inspiration. During those field experiences, I came to the realization that archeology is a multidisciplinary field and I found I was particularly fascinated by stories of burial practices. One day, by some miracle, as I began excavating a new unit not too far from the big excavation square, I started finding many bones about 20 cm below the surface. It seemed unusual to find so many bones in one spot and I called to Andrew to come over.

He looked at me, grinned, and said, "Well, you asked for it, so go for it."

I didn't know what he meant.

Sighing, he said, " That's a human burial you've got there. Go for it."

I felt a rush of mixed emotions: excitement, surprise, and perhaps a little fear as well. My friend Ingrid and I worked for hours on the burial and when we were satisfied with our workmanship Andrew took photos, drew maps, and took endless notes. And we did not pass up the opportunity to pose for a photo with "our burial" in situ.

Coming home after three months in the bush, I found I was a family celebrity. I had a million stories to tell to my sisters, my father, and my cousins – and I had lots of photos to illustrate them. Attention was on me, and I loved it. The photo of the burial was the most popular. No photos of human skeletons had ever been seen before by my friends and family. It was the most unbelievable thing. But one question kept cropping up over and over: "Weren't you scared?" Avoiding a direct reply, I usually answered that, "You can only do this work if you are brave enough."

At that point only five burials had ever been excavated by university expeditions, so I could not pursue my dream to carry out a BA project on prehistoric burial practices. But Andrew knew I was serious about studying human remains and he offered me two of his field guides on the identification and excavation of human remains. He insisted that I could "learn a thing or two on my own" and use it as a ticket to my future.

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VII

That evening in 1977, when the men mentioned Bosutswe to me, I didn't know where it was and so answered that I had never been there. There was an immediate and satisfied response as some of the men pointed vaguely off at the Kalahari escarpment to the west and said, "Its out there, near Mashoro [a small village about 100 km away]." Then the stories started to flow, one after the other.

"Tshekedi [a former chief] had a cattle post near there. One night when he was driving along a track near the hill a giant snake crossed in front of his vehicle. The truck just stopped running. Even its lights went out until the snake had passed over the track. Afterward, the truck started again and the lights came on all by themselves," said Maluki, one of the workers.

"Yes," added "Mainline," "and if you pass by the hill at night you can hear cattle lowing and people singing on top of it, but there is really no one there–just ghosts or spirits. Bosutswe is a place of powerful ancestral spirits [*Badimo*]. If you climb up there you will see the snake with a human head that cries like a sheep. It will rise up and when you look at it, you are gone." Some even believed the snake would have a playing card, an ace, in its mouth. Everyone was pleased to have stumped me, but it was to be more than five years before I had a chance to look for Bosutswe, "the hill you must not point at or you will die."[16]

By 1980 I had been hired by the National Museum in Gaborone to help set up the Antiquities Program for the country. While familiarizing myself with the legal protection of sites, I came across an old list of gazetted National Monuments from the 1930s.[17] The list had later been attached to the National Monuments and Relics Act of 1970 in order to afford the sites continued legal protection. All of the sites but one, Galesupiwe, were very well known to local historians, and Museum staff had visited most of them. But Galesupiwe was "lost." No one had a clue as to its location other than that it had to be in the Central District somewhere. Looking at the name I realized that Galesupiwe, "do not point at it," appeared to be the same as Bosutswe, "the place one should not point at." Since these early lists named only the largest and most significant places in local memory, I thought it likely that the two names were variant toponyms for the same place. I went to Mashoro (a Khoe term meaning "tobacco") to begin the search for the "lost" monument.

[16]J.A. Raffle, *Place Names Commission: Second List of Names and Recommended Spellings* (Gaborone, 1981).

[17]V. F. Ellenberger, "Preliminary Notes on Known Sites of Archeological, Ethnological and Historical Interest in the Bechuanaland Protectorate." Unpublished manuscript on file at the National Museum of Botswana, (Gaborone, 1937).

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As it turned out, Bosutswe was over 25 kilometers southeast of Mashoro across an expanse of heavy black cotton soil covered with almost impenetrable Mopane scrub and thorn brush. It took two days to cover the 25 kilometers, but my first sight of the hill took my breath away. It was at least as large, if not larger, than the well-known site of Toutswemogala, 150 kilometers to the east. And the entire hilltop was covered from end to end in a golden cap of waving *Cenchrus ciliaris*, a grass indicative of deep midden deposits.[18] Over the next few years the Museum made many excursions to the site, and it was even included on a field trip organized after the Southern African Archaeological Association (SA3) meetings in Gaborone in 1982, the first time those meetings had been held outside apartheid-ruled South Africa. During those brief visits, we had little substantive contact with the people who lived there.

VIII

In 1990 Ed Wilmsen and I finally succeeded in getting an NSF grant to carry out excavations at Bosutswe. The first thing we noticed as we climbed the hill to begin planning our excavation strategy was the remains of a campfire draped with the partially melted remnants of several white candles. The soil nearby was white with spilled sugar that had been emptied from several plastic bags, their contents scattered to the wind. Old coins, most of South African vintage and no longer usable as currency in Botswana, and several empty whiskey bottles, completed the assemblage. We had never seen evidence of ritual activity during our earlier visits, and we were concerned that our excavations, despite being sanctioned by a research permit from the central government, would put us in conflict with local people. It was therefore with much anxiety that we approached every household within a 5-6 kilometer radius of Bosutswe to explain who we were and to seek local permission to excavate.

I began each conversation by explaining that we were from America and wanted to dig on the hilltop in order to learn more about the people who had lived there long ago. Beginning somewhat obliquely, and with apprehension that they would say no, I then asked if they thought it would be OK to carry out excavations? To a person, everyone said yes–perhaps thinking about the wage-paying jobs that would become temporarily available in this remote area. I then said, "But I see that some people are conducting ceremonies on the hill, burning fires and leaving behind melted candles, sugar and coins. What about them? Who are they? Do you think they would also agree?"

[18]Denbow, "*Cenchrus ciliaris*."

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"We don't know who they are," answered an old man nicknamed Bosutswe, after the hill. "We have never met those people. They come from Serowe [about 80 kilometers away] in a lorry at sunset once a month or so on the night of the full moon. They climb the hill, dance and sing, and then leave again at sunrise. We don't know them, the name of their church, or even where they live in town. They never talk to us. As far as we are concerned, you can dig." Since the local people living around the hill appeared to have done so for generations, we decided that their permission to excavate might help us in discussions with the unknown "outsiders," if the occasion should arise.

So the excavations began with some foreboding, waiting for the night the visitors from Serowe might appear and discover our activities. In addition to the local laborers, our crew included Ed Wilmsen and me, a female graduate student from the University of Texas, two archeological assistants from the National Museum of Botswana, an undergraduate student in archeology from the University of Botswana, and a Tswana-speaking political refugee from South Africa with an MA degree in Archeology. We had been digging for about a month when the dreaded evening arrived. Just after dinner we were sitting around the campfire when the sound of a lorry was heard, grinding along the rough track on the south side of the hill. Drumbeats and people singing echoed down the valley as the vehicle approached Bosutswe from the side opposite our camp. We scurried up the hill and met the congregation just as they were topping a rocky ledge that formed its southern edge. A priest wearing a long white robe was in the lead, holding a staff surmounted by a large crystal. About forty people, ranging in age from children to the very elderly, were making their way up the hill behind him. We exchanged greetings and I explained who we were and that we were conducting archeological excavations on the hill in order to learn more about the people who had lived there long ago. I added that some of our excavation units were quite deep (some over 3 meters by that time) and I was concerned that someone could fall into one and get hurt. To avoid that, I asked if I could point these out to him before the sun went down and they could no longer be seen.

We spent the next half hour touring the site, unit by unit, and I used the opportunity to point out the soil changes in the stratigraphy, with its evidence of burned houses. The ages of the different strata exposed could be determined, I added, by "radiocarbon dating" those burned layers. I showed them fragments of iron slag, and explained that the "ancestors" knew how to make iron tools from rocks–they didn't have to buy metal tools and ornaments in stores because they made them themselves. (This was a rather calculated statement on my part that was met with some pride by the priest and

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his congregation because expatriates owned most of the stores in Serowe at that time and profited, sometimes greatly, by selling iron goods and other wares. Here was certain proof that the ancestors knew a thing or two.)

At the end of the tour, I waited with bated breath for the response to our excavations. The priest paused, looked around, and then said, "I see you are not digging over there," pointing to the northwest corner of the site. "We could carry out our activities there and not disturb anything."

With relief, I concurred and we shared the site, each for our own purposes, for the remainder of the winter. We had no other encounters with spiritual healers that year, though we later learned that other priests and healers had visited the hill intermittently between 1990 and 2001. They left behind traces of melted candles and coins around our datum stake, and in several small caves on the northern and southern sides of the hill. I never did learn more about the Serowe church, and by the time we returned to Bosutswe in 2001 for a new series of excavations, the congregation appeared to have disbanded, or at least had long since stopped their monthly sojourns to the site.

IX

Our 1990 field camp, situated next to a basalt outcrop on the northern side of the hill, was distant from the homesteads that were strung out along a low valley to the east and south of the site. Once our camp was established, we sent word that we would like to hire people to work for us. The next morning a handful showed up in camp, including four women. Ridiculous as it sounds now, I had never had women asking for work on an excavation; it had always been men. I explained that I had jobs for two women to work in the camp washing dishes, artifacts, and so on, but that all the other jobs entailed digging and "heavy" work on top of the hill. Two of the women, Lesego and Elinah, therefore astonished me when they asserted, rather forcefully, "We want to dig too." In reality, I knew that Bosutswe women were well accustomed to hard physical labor, and women as archeologists were now common in the United States. In fact, our graduate student from Texas was a woman. But I suppose that I had lived for so long enmeshed in the remnants of an old colonial system that often reserved wage labor for men that I was not conscious of my prejudice until these women confronted me with it. "OK," I said, "you're hired, but you will have to keep up with everyone else."

It was a good decision and these two women brought important skills to the excavation. Not only were they two of the hardest workers, their skill at sweeping the floors at the end of each excavation level was so superior to the men's that many features were revealed that might otherwise have been

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missed. And I will never forget the day that Lesego, working the sieve, quietly placed in my hand a tiny fragment of gold bangle, the only gold I have ever recovered.

Morongwa: During my project on initiation in Mochudi, Kgosi Lincwe agreed to work with Andrew Reid to map out and document a male initiation site that was threatened with destruction by developments in the village. Andrew set up a data station at the base of the hill at a point where he could see all the features. Kgosi Lincwe had the job of moving from feature to feature with the prism stick; I sat under a tree and recorded the numbers Andrew called out to me over a radio. People in the neighbourhood were peeking through their fences, surprised to see a young girl was ordering the paramount chief to move from spot to spot. I have to admit I must have looked odd sitting under that tree waiting to hear from Andrew over the radio. But when Andrew appeared out of the bushes at the base of the hill at the end relief and understanding appeared on the neighbour's faces as they realised that a young woman had not been ordering men around . They were thinking, "She was only a secretary for the white man and Kgosi Lincwe. It is only the white man and the chief who know how to operate the machines; she was just taking notes for them."

X

A second thing I learned that year was that the households around Bosutswe were very diverse ethnically, with many undercurrents of race, privilege, and power that were subtly negotiated on a daily basis. Some of our crew were Khoe or "Bushmen" by ancestry; others were drawn from a variety of Tswana, Kalanga, and even Herero heritages. While relations across these ethnic divisions were always friendly on the surface, none of the Khoe discussed their ethnicity directly, and none spoke a word of Khoe in our hearing–even though we were to learn a decade later that it is still spoken, at least by the older generation. Subtle differences in status were revealed, however, if one watched who was first to enter the excavation units to learn to dig (seen as higher status) and who would remain outside the units, sifting or sweeping up–jobs that soon became relegated in unspoken fashion to the women and Khoe men. In many ways it reminded me of Durham's description of the ways in which Herero men tentatively negotiate "age" (and therefore status) in their seating arrangements in the "men's circle" at weddings and funerals:

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> One of the most telling forums for the management of age is the men's circle at weddings and funerals. Here older men sit around a fire on chairs provided by the host, on their own wooden folding chairs, and on overturned buckets and the like, and they talk, are served tea or food, and occasionally direct their juniors in some task. . . . At around the age of 30 . . . young men begin to sit in the inner circle in a manner that is not quite as deferential and subservient. A man may assert his claim to that space by not moving from a seat when another man comes into the circle. Or he may carry a walking stick and wear a felt hat, or even an overcoat [all symbols of age and status]. To do so is risky and takes confidence—any of these acts may . . . invite good-natured ridicule or chiding, or be overturned when a senior commands the young man to fetch something or to respect his "parents." . . . Some men in their fifties and even older, herdboys or others who have failed to gain dependents and household independence, sustain very fragile claims to the men's circle.[19]

Such daily negotiations of power and status were not confined to the Bosutswe community. Batswana students, by virtue of their education and knowledge of city ways, introduced new power dynamics into the local community. In addition, we *makgoa* were also being accused of acting in a racist manner by some of our Gaborone-based team because we were seen to have taken all the "white collar" jobs on the dig. Both Ed and I spent most of our time mapping the site with the theodolite, measuring and laying out new units along the grid, mapping the unit profiles, and moving between excavation units to answer questions or to describe and record levels and finds. Our time actually digging was minimal and was usually related to determining stratigraphic relationships or working out an excavation strategy for specific artifacts and contexts. I was also experimenting with creating a video record of the excavations. Our graduate student spent most of her time in camp, where she supervised the women washing and sorting artifacts; she then tabulated and entered them into a computer database.

"Why are only Black people doing the digging?" asked the University of Botswana student one evening at dinner. This led to many hard and uncomfortable discussions around the campfire about power, exploitation, racism, colonialism, and other situations of seeming unfairness and inequality that arise in part through the social hierarchy of the excavation process–not just in terms of "white-black" and "foreign-local" relations, but also in terms of

[19]Deborah Durham, "Disappearing Youth: Youth as a Social Shifter in Botswana," *American Ethnologist* 31(2004), 593-94.

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"old-young," "Khoe-Bantu," and "male-female." The situation was especially complex because a dissonant chord of notes, the pervasive refrain of apartheid South Africa, hovered around us as a recurring leitmotif. There were no happy resolutions, but through these encounters we were all forced to become more reflexive and sensitive to the complexity, and indeed the invidiousness, of power, gender, and race on levels we had not had to consider much before. In the post-colonial world, we were also finding that power was becoming much more decentered and Mora's "pre-judgments" had blossomed into a symphony written in multiple registers, incorporating at once many languages, races and ethnicities–even in a small, remote community on the edge of the Kalahari.

XI

At the end of the 1990 field season we sent word that everyone in the area, whether they had worked directly for us or not, was invited to a party in our camp. We slaughtered a goat and brewed a small metal barrel of traditional beer of a type with a dubious reputation known as *khadi*, made from wild *grewia* berries. We wanted to thank everyone for having allowed us to excavate, and for sharing with us their precious stores of water, firewood, and, in some cases, milk. More than a hundred people came, some on donkeys from as far as 20 kilometers away. "My 4x4," one said. "It never gets stuck."

We had not expected such a response, and I felt badly that we had only one small goat and a rather small drum of *khadi* to feed such a multitude. Therefore, as the party began, I gave a short speech apologizing that we had so little to offer, but that the point of our party was to thank everyone in the Bosutswe area for having been such gracious hosts during our excavations. I expected grumbling, but what we got instead was a kind of unspoken respect that suggested that we had somehow "done the right thing" with our limited resources. They too were familiar with compromise and doing without, and there appeared to be a kind of "inverted" satisfaction in seeing that we too could fall short. The incident reminded me strongly of Richard Lee's story about having purchased a huge ox for a Christmas feast, only to have it belittled by his guests.[20] Making fun of the "scrawny" animal, Lee argued, kept him from being elevated above others who could never afford such a beast. In our case, our limited resources seem to have worked in our favor. But unlike Lee, we made no essentializing assumptions that the acceptance of our shortfall was the product of a singular "leveling ethos" found only among "egalitarian hunters and gatherers." Everyone at Bosutswe, regard-

[20]Richard Lee, "Eating Christmas in the Kalahari," *Natural History* (December 1969), 14-22, 60-63.

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less of ethnic origin or social status, was all too familiar with the dreary concept of limited means, and with the desire to use what little one had to promote commensality.

After the announcement, the party began in earnest. Ed had arranged with a man to come and play dance music. He owned a battery-operated record player and for payment we had agreed to purchase two new PM-9 batteries for his "disco" in town: one for use at the party and the other to be reserved for his later enjoyment. That morning he had ridden his bicycle 20 kilometers from his home to our camp, the speakers and record player strapped to the back with long lengths of rubber inner tube. He had six 45 rpm records, all, I was amused to note, on the "Great Zimbabwe" label with a picture of stone ruins etched in green ink on each side. We danced with much laughter, whistling and shouting, far into the night. Then, the next morning, we packed up and drove away.

XII

When I returned to Bosutswe eleven years later, I expected to find few familiar faces. One of the first people I ran into was Lesego, who recognized me. Soon the word spread and later that afternoon an old woman named Molelo came into the camp and said, "I know you. I was at the party!" The 1990 party, it seems, had became one of the local memory "echoes" by which events are measured.[21] Her exclamation was quickly followed by another, "When are we having the next one?"

Just three days after beginning the new excavations, I found that plans (really plots) were already well underway for the next party, with discussions about who might have a goat to sell, whether they could convince me to spring for factory-made "Shake Shake" or Chibuku rather than brewing traditional beer, and so on. The 2001 party, and two more the following year, served to integrate our diversity–and the unusual work we were doing–into the Bosutswe community. I was quite flattered to learn quite by accident at the beginning of the field season in 2002 that a song had been composed about our archeological excavations. During our absence it had become a brief hit in a local shabeen (informal bar) about 6 kilometers from our camp. The song even included dance steps mimicking the picking of "di-artefacts" from the sieves, and had a chorus that started, "When Denbow puts on his dungarees to climb the hill . . ."[22] Our imported crew, composed of a highly-educated group of Batswana B.A. students, Museum curators, and two Americans (myself and Paula, an African-American graduate stu-

[21]Gavin Lucas, *The Archeology of Time* (London, 2005).

[22]"di-" is the prefix used to make artifacts "plural" for this noun class in Tswana.

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dent), was a novelty at Bosutswe. Some of the university students came from urban and educated backgrounds, others from more rural homes. All of us had some learning to do about the conditions, cultural expectations, and social roles at Bosutswe. And we had not been there long when Nonofho threw up her hands in exasperation and shouted, "Oh, the people here are all mixed up. I can't make any sense of this."

When asked what she meant, she replied, "It is not like villages in southern Botswana. There are so many different people here, all living together. I am sure some are Basarwa (Khoe), but I can't be completely sure because they all speak Tswana. Others seem to be Kalanga, Pedi, or Tshwapong, but they are all interacting and sometimes intermarrying with one another. There is no tradition here. It's just all mixed up." While it was certainly the case that the Bosutswe people were drawn from many ethnic backgrounds, this did not at first glance seem to be a product of the recent past. Many, of both Bantu and Khoe origin, had lived there for generations. As for the Khoe, their name for themselves, //àòò, or people of the black cotton soil, appeared to denote a long-term association with the land around Bosutswe.

XIII

During the 1990 season, we uncovered no human burials. In 2001, despite opening a fairly large excavation unit, we encountered only a single burial, a newborn infant buried in a seated position under the floor of an Early Lose period house dating to around CE 1200-1300. I suspected, however, that as we moved our attention the following year to the deposits on the western side of the hill, we might have a greater probability of uncovering human remains, though these were not our focus.[23] I was therefore very pleased to receive out of the blue an email from someone named Morongwa Mosothwane, who was asking if she could take part in the excavations. Somewhat selfishly, I thought that not only could I help her with some field experience, but if we did encounter burials she could help me by diffusing the thorny "pre-judgment" issue of expatriates digging up African burials.

Morongwa: My interest in studying human remains began at the SA3 conference held in 1998 in South Africa. As a young BA student at the University of Botswana, I attended a session on human remains and was quickly mesmerized. I never knew there was so much to study in addition to burial customs. I couldn't believe it, and became more determined than

[23]For more discussion of cardinal directions, burials, and the ancestral world see James Denbow, "Heart and Soul: Glimpses of Ideology and Cosmology in the Iconography of Tombstones from the Loango Coast of Central Africa," *Journal of American Folklore* 112(1999), 404-23, and Denbow/Miller, "Metalworking."

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ever to pursue that line of study. Presenters from the University of Pretoria dominated the session, and I made sure to keep the conference program where contact details were given. Back in Botswana, I sent an email to Maryna Steyn, a professor in Forensic Anthropology at the University of Pretoria. Her presentations at the conference were, to me, absolutely beyond my imagination. She responded the same day, telling me of the requirements for enrollment. By post, she sent me application forms and some additional reading material.

Months later I arrived in Pretoria to fulfill my dream of studying human remains. To my surprise, I was the only student registered for fulltime Honors that year. Everyone in the department was good to me and made me feel at home. Maryna and the late Susan Loth even agreed to give me extra tutorials to get me up to speed since I had had no background in human anatomy. When I mentioned that I wanted to do a thesis project on the human burials from Mapungubwe one of my tutors, Coen Nienaber, objected strongly. Instead, he suggested I go to the National Museum in Botswana to look up a collection of skeletons exhumed at Toutswemogala in the 1970s. He thought there might be enough there for a study. My interaction with the National Museum in Botswana up to that point had been minimal, and I was embarrassed to have learned about the Botswana skeletons from Pretoria. I felt I should have known of burials in my own country; it suggested that I had not done my homework. So I went to search the museum storerooms in Gaborone.

As I was ushered into one of the dark, tomb-like museum storerooms, I found Coen had been right. The boxes from Toutswemogala, along with others excavated by Denbow, seemed sufficient for an MSc data set. At the museum library I photocopied Denbow's and Lepionka's theses and other reports, then went back to Pretoria to devise my strategy. Coen's advice made a lot of sense. The remains from Mapungubwe had already been intensively studied and, rather than following in other's footsteps, I should seize the opportunity to open up my own path.

About half way through my MSc work I found that I needed more information about the skeletons from one of the sites excavated by Denbow. He had been a big part of my undergraduate archeology studies and had "discovered" the three tier settlement hierarchy of the Toutswe communities. He had also excavated at many locations in Botswana and was one of the big contenders in the popular "Kalahari debate."[24] *I knew nothing*

[24]For the origins of this debate, see James Denbow, "Prehistoric Herders and Foragers of the Kalahari: the Evidence for 1500 Years of Interaction" in *Past and Present in Hunter Gatherer Studies*, ed. C. Schrire, (Orlando, 1984), 175-93; James Denbow and Edwin Wilmsen, "The Advent and Course of Pastoralism in the Kalahari," *Science* 234(1986), 1509-15; J. Solway and R. Lee, "Foragers, Genuine or Spurious? Situating the Kalahari San in History," *Current Anthropology* 31(1990), 109-46; Edwin Wilmsen and James Denbow, "Paradigmatic History of San-Speaking Peoples and Current Attempts at Revision," *Current Anthropology* 31(1990), 489-524.

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about him personally but I suspected that, if not retired, he was most probably dead. By chance, I mentioned to a colleague at the Museum that I needed more information vital to my study on some work carried out by Denbow, and it was too bad he was not available. My friend looked at me across the table and said, "Why don't you just send him an email? He is very quick with responses."

"You mean he is still alive?" I asked. "How can I get hold of him?"

He laughed his lungs out and narrated the story to others. I found that Denbow was very much alive and was planning to excavate at Bosutswe that winter (2002). I emailed him to introduce myself and told him what I was looking for. A few hours later, I received a full "lecture" containing the information I needed, along with photos and diagrams. He also said that he would be pleased to have me on the excavation. Only one burial had been recovered at Bosutswe up to that point, but more might be found in the new season.

XIV

As our work at Bosutswe progressed, in the back of my mind I began to wonder about the antiquity of the cultural and linguistic diversity I was seeing. Could it reach back to the period when the site played a much more pre-eminent role in the political and economic landscape? Could it indeed be a product of that more distant past? And if so, how could we begin to detect evidence of this in the archeological record? How would our research questions have to change, or be modified, if we consciously opened our hypotheses to encompass constructions of histories that would not silence such diversity, even if inadvertently?

Though difficult to count, people of Khoe or mixed Khoe-Bantu background make up at least 50% of the local population at Bosutswe. The remainder, based on their totems (hare/*mmutla*, duck/*sehudi*, elephant/*tlou*, duiker/*phuti*, monkey/*kgabo*), are Kgalagadi, Ngwato, Kalanga, Pedi, and Kgatla. In most parts of Botswana there continues to be considerable social stigmatization against Khoe culture and heritage. As a result, many people prefer not to signal their origins to outsiders through language or other distinctive cultural behavior. By 2002, however, some people at Bosutswe felt comfortable enough to speak Khoe around us, and to try to teach us their dialect, if asked. Khoe place names also began to be mentioned.

It soon became apparent that regardless of cultural background, most people were fluent in the cultural practices and beliefs of the others, an understanding born of daily interaction. Two examples make this clear. The first was an attempt to resurrect, with marginal success, traditional Khoe

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dances. An old Khoe man nicknamed Bosutswe (after the hill), wanted to put on an exhibit of Khoe dancing. He mentioned that he felt bad that we had seen only Tswana dances (during our visits to an ancestor-based curing ceremony discussed below), and he wished that we could see "their" dances as well. He tried, but because of his age he could no longer do the steps in the way he wished. A powerfully-built Tswana man, "C4," took the dance rattles, disappeared behind the tents, took off his trousers, tied his shirt around his loins, and emerged with the rattles tied to his legs. He did the dancing for Bosutswe, accompanied by much whistling, shouting, and ululation as everyone entered into the spirit of the dance.

On another occasion "C4," while dancing to music on the radio, quickly shifted into a rendition of a Khoisan "eland dance," an initiation dance for young women. Raising his arms beside his head to mimic the eland's horns, he danced suggestively toward the area where several young ladies were sitting, thus hoping, I think, to engage them in some of the more uninhibited behavior sometimes associated with this dance. At some point, I began to realize that "C4" had set himself up as my "protector," or the "enforcer" of rules. At the first party in 2001, as the hour approached 10 PM, I announced that as an "old man" I was now tired and was going to sleep. After a few minutes had passed, "C4" began to shout "*Pula, Pula*" (Rain, Rain), a traditional cheer of celebration and praise. He then made a very short speech and the party broke up as people returned to their homes.

Through our daily interactions, I slowly began to understand that in the Bosutswe area there was considerable overlap in cultural understandings between peoples with varied heritages, beliefs, and practices–understandings that cut across and confounded the models anthropologists and archeologists have used to assign people to separate cultural traditions, and sometimes even different "evolutionary stages." Most people at Bosutswe shared in the knowledge of multiple cultural traditions, and in some cases they could shift or "slide" rather comfortably between them when desired, as the story about C4 illustrates.

But it was only after people had become more comfortable with our presence that some of the more socially marginalized knowledges were expressed. It is not only archeologists and anthropologists who have constructed the separate "cultural gardens" that are too often used to underwrite the social dynamics of discrimination.[25] During recent debates over the resettling of Khoe from the Central Kalahari, for instance, President Festus Mogae chose to frame the issue in essentialist terms: "How can a Stone Age creature continue to exist in the age of computers? If the Bushmen want to

[25]Following Fabian's use of this term in his *Time*.

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survive, they must change or otherwise, like the Dodo, they will perish."[26] No less atavistic are the comments of outside, western authors who also stereotype Khoisan culture, though more positively, as an unchanging "garden:" "Diamonds, the curse of modern Africa, were discovered under their hunting grounds and to President Mogae "they are worth more than the human treasures of a culture lasting 10 millennia or more."[27] Obviously, no culture has remained substantially unchanged for 10,000 years. But such antiquated, colonial categorizations are still invidious and difficult to transform. And at Bosutswe they continue to underwrite social relations on some levels, while on others they are contested or contradicted by the behavior and shared knowledges that crosscut such imposed divisions.

Our presence at the site clearly had a social impact beyond that of an archeological site as a workplace. Indeed, to be honest, the greater truth is that *all* archeological excavations and research have social and cultural impacts. And the diverse, complexly interwoven fabric of the local community was also having an impact on my thoughts about the time depth of such "mixed" communities and their relationship to prehistoric sites so frequently bracketed by archeologists as "Iron Age." Rather than recognizing the temporal coevalness of these traditions, all too often archeological writing has produced dichotomized prehistories that conceptually separate "Iron Age" from "Stone Age."[28] If coevalness is recognized at all, it is reduced from a complex dialectic of interaction and negotiation to simple juxtapositions of pre-figured typological categories whose dynamics are eviscerated through the use of such static concepts as "encapsulation," "domination," and "resistance."[29] By such definitions, sites such as Bosutswe sites could not be part of the essentialized past of so-called "Stone Age" peoples.

My musings were met with derision by the Batswana archeologists. "Nonsense," exclaimed Nonofho. "We all know these people were hunters and gatherers. Their past could have nothing to do with places like

[26]John Simpson, "Diamonds Are Curse of Ancient Bushmen," *Daily Telegraph* (8 November 2002).

[27]Ibid., emphasis mine.

[28]James Denbow, "Stolen Places: Archeology and the Politics of Identity in the Later Prehistory of the Kalahari" in Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, eds., *Africanizing Knowledge: African Studies across the Disciplines* (New Brunswick NJ, 2002), 345-74; Fabian, *Time*; Ann Brower Stahl, "Introduction: Changing Perspectives on Africa's Past" in *African Archeology: a Critical Introduction*, ed. A. Stahl, (Malden, 2005), 6. Wilmsen/Denbow, "Paradigmatic."

[29]For use of concepts of essentialized and static concepts such as "encapsulation" see Karim Sadr, "Kalahari Archeology and the Bushman Debate," *Current Anthropology*, 38(1997),104-12, and Richard B. Lee and Richard Heywood Daly, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, NY, 1999).

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Bosutswe. Their history is in the Stone Age sites. Their ancestors were hunters and gatherers. They could have had nothing to do with places like Bosutswe where metal jewelry, pole and daga houses, glass beads and other evidence for long-distance trade networks is so common. We don't know who the descendants of the Bosutswe people are, but they could not be these 'mixed' people."

XV

That the colonial dichotomization of the past into separate Stone Age and Iron Age histories and the political forces that benefit from such divisions continues to find traction was made evident in 2002 as we began to interact with a charismatic or spiritual healer, Motofela Molato. He had begun to conduct "purification" rituals at Khubu la Dintša, a hilltop site 12 kilometers west of Bosutswe. Beginning in 1994 he used dreams of the ancestors at Bosutswe to legitimize his power and presence on Khubu la Dintša, to which the ancestral spirits of Bosutswe had purportedly guided him.

Every year in July, Molato holds an ancestral cleansing or curing ceremony (*phekolo*) at Khubu la Dintša. Signs placed along the track from Mashoro to Bosutswe, and on the main Orapa-Serowe road, direct people to the ritual. Molato, in his mid- to late 30s, was born in Matshumo on the southern edge of the Makgadikgadi Pans. His congregation is drawn from homesteads that stretch from Mashoro westward to Orapa and Matshumo, a distance of more than100 kilometers. He attributes his abilities to cure to the following experiences, related in an interview at Khubu la Dintša in July 2002:

> In 1991, I was troubled by voices—like somebody talking to me during my sleep, and even when I was awake. The voices said that I should go to Bosutswe. I ignored them and continued with my everyday life. I am a mechanic by profession [in Letlhakane, a large diamond mine]. But the voices troubled me a lot and I became very thin. I asked people what it meant to hear voices and instructions. A man named Mr. Larga, an Ndebele, told me this is a sign of *Badimo* [spirits]. I kept . . . dreaming that I should go to Bosutswe, so finally I gave up and followed what the voices were telling me. . . . I went to the hill alone and slept there. During the night it was revealed to me that I should see Mma Borotho and that she would perform some rituals on me. . . . I was told to set up a church at Khubu la Dintša rather than Bosutswe because white people [ie. archeologists] had been poking the *Badimo* in the ground with their tools

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> and had driven them away. I was told . . . [people] would be inspired by the spirits to come and follow me. That was in 1994. . . . Many people now realize the importance of this hill [Khubu la Dintša]. There are other spiritual places, but they are different from Bosutswe and Khubu la Dintša. . . . We have begun filing forms to be legally registered. The name we have chosen for our church is '*Tumelo mo Badimong*' [faith in ancestral spirits].[30]

The name Khubu la Dintša means "hill of the dogs." But this is a deliberate shading of its true meaning: "the hill where lions were chasing the dogs." This in turn has embedded within it deeper religious connotations that associate wild animals such as lions, (nature's wild creations) within a spirit/nature::culture dichotomy, at least in Molato's mind. In two places on Khubu la Dintša, "Russia," an elderly Deacon in Mr. Molato's church, pointed out rock formations he claimed were "lion footprints" made in the mythical time "when the rocks of the earth were still soft." In one case whitewashed stones had been placed around the marks.

The hilltop, a peninsula that extends from the Kalahari sandveld out into the floodplain formed by the headwaters of the Matloutse River, has a grey ashy *Cenchrus* midden bracketed on two sides by low prehistoric stone walls that ran across the promontory from edge to edge. The "ancestral church" chose the hilltop precisely because it was an archeological site. Where else would ancestors be? Over the course of a decade, Molato's congregation has transformed the layout of the hilltop according to designs revealed to Molato in his dreams by the ancestors. A pathway wends from a campground at the base of the hill through an entranceway framed by two daga enclosures containing planted *mosimama/mosiama* succulents, a plant whose name implies purging. The plant is also said to relieve "bad luck." The succulents, not native to the hill, were brought there for their purification and spiritual properties.

Beyond the entranceway, the path up the side of the hill was lined with whitewashed stones. In 2002 roughly 150 people camped below the hill a week before the ceremony in order to rebuild the old pathways, construct new ones, replaster the entrance ways and healing basins, and refurbish an artificial cave they had constructed at the eastern end of the hill. We visited the congregation several times during this period to learn about their beliefs and practices. As it turned out, one of the emblems of church membership is glass beads, which members wear around their wrists and ankles, and other places.

[30]Filmed interview of Motofela Molato at Khubu la Dintša, July 2002. Video CD on file at the National Museum of Botswana, translation by Nonofho Ndobochani.

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The white, black, and red colors of the beads are believed to be important, and almost all the beaded bracelets were composed of these colors. When I mentioned that we had found many glass beads in our excavations at Bosutswe, people expressed an interest in seeing them. Seeing a potential connection with the church members, I told them I would bring some on our next visit. On the day of the visit, I quickly grabbed a few level bags containing glass beads from different excavation units and drove to Khubu la Dintša. Since they were excavation samples, the bags also contained the remains of ostrich eggshell and *achinata* or land snail beads that had been present in those levels.

As soon as people saw the beads, their faces fell. While a few were red and black, most were turquoise, green, or yellow. The congregation had not expected this. "Those must be Pedi beads," Russia announced. The prehistoric beads clearly did not match their ideas about color and, in this case, its ethnic significance. Russia then related a story about how, during the Matebele raids in the nineteenth century, Tswana of royal blood along the Boteti River had worn large blue beads. "If they fell in battle, their bodies could be recognized by the beads. Commoners wore different colors." Clearly the separation of "cultural gardens" was important here and the fact that the ancestors at Bosutswe more often wore turquoise and yellow, rather than black, red and white beads, was a disappointment. Molato later elaborated on color symbolism:

> The colors of the banners [at the dance floor] duplicate those in the beads worn on the hands and legs (red, white, and black). The arrangement is symbolic. You see that red banner? It symbolizes that you come here very ill and you know you are in trouble. The black banner shows you are between life and death. The white banner, when you go under it, means you will be healed. Even if you have doubts, or despise the *Badimo*, you will realize the truth after passing the white banner. If you had pains, you will feel better.[31]

The ostrich eggshell beads caused even more consternation. "Those beads were made by Basarwa [Bushmen]," one woman said. "They could not have been used by the ancestors." When asked about the white agate amygdule disks found in a cache at Bosutswe, Russia suggested that "*Ngaka ea Badimo*," or "ancestral doctors" could have used them as divining dice because "the white stones are 'God's' creation;' 'ordinary' *ngaka* would use animal bones for divination."

[31]Ibid.

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XVI

When we asked Molato if we could attend the purification ceremony the following week, he answered in the affirmative. But there were two conditions. First, no one could wear any metal (though an exception was made in my case for my eye glasses). That was easy enough, but the second condition, that women must not have braided hair, caused consternation. Tightly braided hairstyles, sometimes with extra hair and beads woven into them, were sported by all our urban team members. Such hairdos take many, many hours to produce and are fairly expensive. To take them apart is no simple matter and to do so marked a significant sacrifice; in one woman's case, I offered to pay for her new hairdo because the other would have to be undone just for the ceremony. (This also gave me, as a European man with quite different hair, a greater appreciation for why the women on the dig always wore tightly wrapped headscarves covered by hats to protect them from the blowing dust and dirt of the excavation). With the assistance of the other women in the camp, Morongwa took apart her hairdo and shaved her head. Paula, who had perhaps the most intricate hairdo of all, refused to go along with these conditions and decided to stay behind in camp.

On the evening of the *phekolo* ceremony, people gathered at the base of the hill to sing hymns composed by members of the congregation. Accompanied by a simple 4/4 drumbeat, most songs appealed in some way to the *Badimo* from the past, "*tsa maloba*," for help. While Molato vehemently denied any association with Christianity, a few songs included references to Jesus, punctuated by choruses of "Hallelujah" and "Amen."

As the moon set, the congregation formed into a single file and began a slow climb up the hill by starlight; no fires, flashlights, or other means of illumination were permitted. Molato assured us that the *Badimo* would protect us from the bites of any poisonous snakes. The whitewashed stones lining the pathway up the hill served as a guide in the darkness, and we eventually came to the first stone wall that separated the pathway from the prehistoric midden where a dance floor had been cleared in the *Cenchrus* grass. Stones collected from prehistoric grain bin foundations and other features had been used to encircle the dance floor, which was about 75 feet in diameter.

Before passing over the stone wall, our shoes had to be removed to respect the sacred ground where the ancestors would be addressed. Menstruating and lactating women were directed to another stone circle for additional purification before they could cross the wall separating the more secular from the sacred areas of the site.The entrance to the dance area was flanked by two sets of painted daga pillars surmounted by poles. A red, and then

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black, cloth was tied between the pillars. Crossing under these banners, the attending deacons instructed the congregation to take white ash from a pile deposited near the entryway and drop it in the center of the dance floor, where a large white cross had been traced in ash. The cross was enclosed in a large ash circle that ran around the edge of the dance floor, producing a design that looked like a giant version of the circled white crosses of Kongo cosmograms.[32]

The white ash used to make the designs (which included another drawn at the entrance to the site at the base of the hill) was dug from the prehistoric midden to one side of the dance floor. The substance, composed of burned animal dung, is spiritually important to the congregation. It is also the preferred matrix for human burials at Bosutswe and many other prehistoric sites in eastern Botswana.[33]

To begin the ceremony, Molato offered up prayers to the ancestors, assisted by his deacons dressed in black robes with white crosses sewn onto their backs. The singing and drumming then increased in volume and intensity as the church leaders, along with five or six young women dressed in white, began to circle the floor. The singing was punctuated by the swishing sound of the wild silkworm dance rattles they had wrapped around their ankles. After a few turns, the rest of the congregation joined in, slowly circling the dance floor as their shuffling feet raised a halo of grey dust from the midden. Songs of praise to the ancestors accompanied the dust high into the night. As Molato had explained earlier,

> No medicine is given to people. They are healed, their problems are solved, and they get luck by dancing. If people say they want promotion, we tell them to go with the dust [of the midden] on their feet and wash them the following day. That is how they are healed, blessed, and their problems solved.[34]

[32]For examples of the use of circled crosses see Denbow, "Heart and Soul;" John Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey, *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Texts from Lower Zaïre* (Lawrence, 1974); and Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington, 1981).

[33]For examples of dung deposits as favored locations of burials in Botswana see James Denbow, "The Toutswe Tradition: a Study in Socio-economic Change" in Renee Hitchcock and Mary Smith, eds., *Settlement in Botswana* (Johannesburg, 1982), 73-87; James Denbow, "Iron Age Economics: Herding, Wealth and Politics along the Fringes of the Kalahari Desert during the Early Iron Age" (Ph.D., Indiana, 1983); idem.,"A New Look at the Later Prehistory of the Kalahari," *JAH* 27(1986), 3-28; Denbow/Miller, "Metalworking."

[34]Motofela Molato, Khubu la Dintša, July 2002.

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Although Molato denied that trance or ecstasy states were part of the healing or purification process, one woman went into trance for about 15 minutes while the rest of the congregation looked after her. With the dust hovering in the air around them, individuals were then led one by one under a white banner that separated an enclosure of upright wooden poles from the dance floor. Here, an ochre tinted floor containing five shallow clay basins had been built, one for the ancestors of each of the ethnic groups represented in the congregation–Pedi, Kalanga, Kgalagadi, Hurutse and Ngwato. Each basin was decorated in alternating red and white panels using a clay wash; Molato had filled the basins with traditional sorghum beer, which he blessed. While many in the congregation, including at least one of the deacons, were Khoe in appearance and were overheard speaking Khoe among themselves on several occasions, there was no Khoe ancestral basin. They presumably used one of the others.

Some Kalanga also used a separate ancestral basin built outside the enclosure. It was attached to a small clay floor, creating a vaguely human shape with the basin serving as the head. A phrase inscribed around the feature read, in a highly metaphorical dialect of Tswana, *Badimo ba sebata thompa sebata ôpa segofi* ("Ancestral spirits of this open space [dance floor], respect the dance floor, clap hands"). This exhorts people to praise the ancestors (by clapping), and to act respectful toward them. An anthill growing inside the "head" had been allowed to remain, perhaps because it reflected the "natural/Badimo: cultural" dichotomy that Molato often referenced. (Or perhaps this spot had been chosen for the head because there was already an anthill there.)

When all who wished had visited the ancestral basins in the pole enclosure, Molato concluded the ceremony by praising the *Badimo* and prophesying that the next year would bring gentle, "female" rain–at which everyone cheered. The next prediction, that in the next year many would succumb to an illness of the lungs (perhaps an oblique reference to TB, the "official" diagnosis of many AIDS sufferers), brought silence. And on that disquieting note the congregation broke up as men and women left the dance floor to grope in the tall grass for their shoes. In darkness, they then hobbled quietly down the stony pathway to their campsites below.

At dawn, some of the congregation completed a final ritual by ascending the hill once again, following a pathway that led behind the pole enclosure, over another prehistoric stone wall, to a graveled space fronting a small cave. The cave was not natural, but had been built by rolling several large stones together and plastering the interstices with mud. Offerings of glass beads and safety pins were left in a clay basin made in front of the cave; coins were deposited in several naturally eroded holes in the bedrock. After

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the visit to the cave and the consumption of a sacrificed black ox, people were told they had been healed. The camp broke up and the congregation members headed back to their homes in Mashoro, Lethalkane, and other locations; none of the congregation was drawn from the Bosutswe area. We parted with Molato's congregation amicably, little realizing how their beliefs would later impact our work.

XVII

The first intimation we had that something was wrong was when I overheard a man at a table behind me in a bar in Serowe say to his friend, "I hear that some kind of digging near Mashoro is killing people."

"How can digging kill a person?" his friend replied.

"I don't know, that's just what they're saying in Mashoro."

Nonofho and I suspected we knew the answer and hurried from the bar to the Serowe Private Museum. As we pulled up the Director came running out, saying, "The Chief in Mashoro just called. He was very angry and wanted to know what is going on at Bosutswe that is causing people to die. He's very upset."

We immediately got back into the truck to begin the 100-kilometer drive to Mashoro. Arriving unannounced at the Chief's office, we had to wait for some time before he was free to see us. As we were ushered into his office, he began to accuse us of sneaking around behind people's backs, digging at Bosutswe without anyone's knowledge or permission. "Nobody there knows what you are doing!" he shouted.

"On the contrary," I replied, "everybody there knows what we are doing. And most of the people even work with us on the dig."

"Oh," he said, pausing briefly, "but some people here have told me quite the opposite. They blame you for the deaths of five people in the village in just this week. That is too many deaths. It is unnatural. Who are you? Why have I not heard of this digging before now?"

I apologized and answered that we were archeologists from America and the National Museum in Gaborone. We have a research permit from the Office of the President to carry out our work. Copies of the permit had been sent to Serowe, the District capital, but they apparently had not made it down to his level. I explained this and added that I deeply regretted what had happened and that I was sorry that we had put him in such a difficult position. "But who has been telling you these stories, and accusing us of murder?" I asked. It turned out to be Russia.

I explained about the healing church to the Chief, who said that he had heard vaguely about it, but he didn't really know what they were up to on

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the hill outside of town. He had never been there. I suggested it might help clear the matter up if he put together a delegation of people to visit the excavations so that we could explain more clearly what we were doing and why. "But we should also stop at Khubu la Dintša," I added, "It's on the way and you should also see what is going on there."

Several days later we met at the base of Khubu la Dintša hill. The Chief had brought six or seven men ranging in age from about 40 to 65. His official policeman, in full dress uniform, complete with black, brightly polished, knee-high boots, accompanied him. Molato was not there; he was in Letlhakane. We were met instead by Russia, who explained to the Chief and his delegation, as we climbed, that the hill was a sacred place now controlled by the church. When we reached the first prehistoric stone wall, he instructed us to take off our shoes in respect for the ancestors. The policeman didn't want to do this and said something to the Chief, who told him he could just wait outside the stone wall. Two other old men decided they didn't want to go to the dance floor either. I heard one mutter, "What a lot of nonsense. Look how much time and effort people have put into constructing this. It would be better if they spent their time cleaning up the village and making it better."

His companion replied, "Yes, I used to hunt here when I was young. And if I want to hunt here again I will just do it. They can't tell me I cannot come here, or how to behave." These gentlemen were clearly not members of Molato's church!

I have to admit that I was somewhat comforted to overhear these complaints. Up to that point, I had expected that the whole village would be unified against us, particularly since we were outsiders. It had not occurred to me that there might be many different points of view within the community about our work and about Molato's activities.

The Chief and I, along with Nonofho and the remaining men, removed our shoes and walked to the center of the dance area where Russia explained what the church was about. Pointing to me, he then accused us of digging up ancestors at Bosutswe. He argued that ancestral anger at our work was the cause of so many people dying in the village. Pointing to a large hole behind the pole enclosure with the ancestral basins, I said that the congregation was also digging in places where the ancestors reside. In fact a large rusty shovel was still stuck in the ground there where they had been digging out the white, ashy earth and dung they used in various ways during the curing ceremony. "If the ancestors are angry at being disturbed," I countered, "how could we know who had disturbed them more–Russia with his shovel, or us with our trowels?"

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Russia switched course and mentioned that Molato had recently applied to the government for official ownership of the hilltop as a place for their rituals. The forms had been circulating in Gaborone for some time. Nonofho, in fact, had seen them because they had been forwarded to the Museum as a matter of course in case there were archeological remains that might be impacted by church activities. The notion that the church had asked to be granted rights to the hilltop raised a small ruckus. "He did what?" one man asked incredulously. "My cattle post is at the base of the hill." It turned out that this delegate was actually Molato's father, who was as much in the dark about his son's activities on the hilltop as the Chief had been. Another man, pointing in a different direction said, "And my cattle post is over there. He can't do that."

With that, Russia decided that it might be a good idea to move on to Bosutswe. Before we left, however, Nonofho explained to Russia and the Chief that the National Museum had oversight over all prehistoric sites in the country. While the church had certainly moved around grain bin foundations and other prehistoric features on the hilltop, which was technically against the law, this could not be undone. She thought, however, that it might be possible to develop a joint "site development plan" with the church that would help minimize further damage to prehistoric resources while allowing the church to continue their use of the site for their own purposes. The digging, though, would have to stop.

We then motored on to Bosutswe, where we parked next to our rudimentary camp. All the local workers seemed pleased to have this attention from such a high official and delegation. We climbed the hill, crested the rocky ledge on the southern side, and crossed to the excavation units where the students and crew were working. The chief was taken aback to see the old man Bosutswe there. "Bosutswe," he said, "what are you doing here?"

"I work here," replied Bosutswe.

The chief could then see that Russia had been telling him stories: we were obviously not digging in secret, without the knowledge of the local community. Indeed, over a dozen community members were in sight and working on the dig. The Chief did "scold" Bosutswe, however, for not having informed him earlier of our work on the hill. To this Bosutswe had no answer, but I could see that a man in his position–a poor Khoe herder–was unlikely to have seen the need to approach the Chief in his *kgotla* unless it was absolutely necessary.

We took the delegation around the site, with Nonofho explaining the meaning of the different colors of soil in the exposed stratigraphy. I filmed them while Nonofho, speaking in very rapid Setswana with a "correct" southern Tswana accent, explained the archeology. She showed them sam-

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ples of the artifacts we were recovering, and explained the methods we used to dig. She also discussed how we could determine how old the remains from different levels were. At the time of the visit, no human burials were in the process of being exposed, so we could only explain that we treated these very carefully and that at the end of the excavation they would be taken to the National Museum in Gaborone for further study and careful conservation. After the 45-minute tour, I turned to the Chief and his delegation and asked if they had any questions. We were surprised when the Chief said, "No, you have explained everything."

On the way down the hill, I asked whether the Chief thought it might be a good idea if we came to Mashoro to give a presentation about our work to the village. He thought that was a good suggestion and we arranged a day about a week later for it to take place. Since I wanted to make it a PowerPoint presentation, I asked whether there was any electricity in the village and, if so, could we do it in the evening. "Sure," he replied, "I have electricity in my office next to the *Kgotla*."

XVIII

Over the next several days, we constructed a PowerPoint presentation about our work. We had plenty of photos to use and we were even able to extract and embed video of the visit by the Chief's delegation to the site. I telephoned the National Museum to inform them of the upcoming *kgotla* meeting and Phillip Segadika, Senior Curator of Archeology at the Museum, agreed to bring an LCD projector on the day of the meeting, along with an extension cord to run power from the Chief's office to the kgotla. Nonofho, Morongwa, and the other students and crew members all worked to develop the presentation, putting it into Tswana in ways they thought people would follow. No one at the National Museum had done a public talk describing excavation work before, and everyone was interested to see how it would work out.

On the day of the talk, Nonofho and I drove to Serowe to take a shower at the Serowe Museum (a luxury). We didn't want to appear in Mashoro as dirty as we usually were around the dig. Afterward, I stopped in the grocery store to buy supplies. As I was leaving, Russia came running up to ask, knowing in advance the answer, "Are you coming to the village this evening to talk?"

"Yes," I replied, "We are giving a presentation about our work at Bosutswe."

"Could you do me a favor and bring these supplies with you? I am putting electricity into my house and I need to carry all these things back to

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Mashoro. Otherwise, I will have to rent a truck," he said, pointing to a large pickup load of PVC conduit, junction boxes, circuit breakers, and electrical wire.

"Sure," I replied, thinking that the church business must involve the acquisition of significant money at some level since these items were quite expensive and Russia appeared to have no other job. "We'll bring them with us this evening."

Everyone from Bosutswe, our university crew as well as all of the laborers, wanted to come to the meeting. We arrived in town, a delegation of about 25 people, an hour before sunset to set up the equipment. As we laid out the long extension cord from the Chief's office, people began to drift into the kgotla to watch the preparations. Before long, there were more than 600 people there. The Chief's office was about 50 yards away, so we ran the extension cord over the ground and into the kgotla, where we began to set up a projection screen, the computer and projector resting on a table loaned by the Chief. As we worked, people began crowding closer and closer to see what we were doing; we could hardly move. Without a word, C4 took up a position directly behind us to give us space.

As dusk approached, I turned on the projector to test it. It worked for about a second, then went out. The people crowding around us had stepped on the cord, pulling the wires loose in the electrical socket. "Anybody have a screwdriver or a knife?" I asked. I was nonplussed to see a very large Okapi knife appear from the back of the crowd. In a few minutes I had rewired the outlet and the projector was up and running. We began the presentation with me speaking in English and Phillip Segadika translating into Tswana. When the first pictures appeared on the screen 600 people, about half the village, fell into hushed silence.

We talked for about an hour, discussing what we were doing and what we had learned so far from our excavations. At the end, I asked if there were any questions. One of the first comments was from a young man who said, "We already know all this. We learned about it in school." As it turned out, a children's book on Botswana prehistory that I had written with my wife many years before had been used by some schools as part of the school curriculum.[35] So what we had told him was already old news. To others, particularly the older generation, what we had presented was novel, though some were still puzzled about why our digging at Bosutswe had not killed us. At the end of the question period, the Chief summed up: "Thank you for coming with this presentation on Bosutswe. We all know that several people died in the village a few weeks ago, and some have blamed it on this work. We can now see that while it is true that people died, we can also see that it

[35]Denbow/Denbow, *Uncovering Botswana's Past*.

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was not as a result of your work at Bostuswe." While not everyone was convinced, this was to be the "official" word.

Before and after the presentation we kept looking for Russia because we had all of his electrical goods on the back of our truck. It turned out that the church had boycotted the meeting and he had not come. Luckily, I knew where he lived. As we drove up to the gate of his house in the darkness, he came out to meet us holding up a kerosene lantern. He spoke not a word about the meeting, and simply pointed to a place near his house saying, "You can put it over there."

I wish I could say that everything worked smoothly after that, but people in the church continued to die from a variety of illnesses and we, along with other outsiders, continued to be blamed for killing them because of the ancestral anger our work and, I presume, our very presence, induced. As "outsiders" we were convenient scapegoats when Molato's claims of ancestral blessings and cures fell short. We were not alone. The nurses at the local clinic were also regularly accused of having given people AIDS, or of killing them, with their medicines. Even the provision of condoms was blamed for deaths because it "blocked the semen and caused it to return inside."[36] Molato's hold on the minds of his congregation continued. But other members of the community now saw our work in a new light and were interested in, or at least not threatened, by it.

Nonofho: I agree. We archeologists need to change our approach – not of our professional methodologies, but with respect to talking with local people. We should create relationships with interested communities before *people begin to "die," rather than waiting until deaths or other problems are blamed on anything and everything, including archeological excavations. We should act first, not be "forced" to react.*

XIX

For the people living at Bosutswe, their work on the excavations had engendered a new sense of awareness and identity, with feelings of "ownership" and stewardship over the hill that had not been there earlier. Before our last party to celebrate the end of the excavation, I told everyone that if they wanted to come in their best clothes I would take pictures of them with their family and friends. I would send them copies after I returned home. When I asked people where they would like to stand for their portraits, and what they would like to have in the background of the picture, one expected response was, of course, "next to the truck." But I was surprised at how

[36]Interview with Nurse Bakwena, Mashoro Clinic, August 2002.

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many people insisted that "the hill" should form the background. It had now clearly become "their hill" in ways that it had not been before.

My only wish was that this awareness could be reinforced in some practical way through the provision of jobs looking after the site, or by working as tour guides to it. While lack of education to enable them to explain the scientific significance of the site was a problem mentioned by Nonofho, the biggest difficulty was that the site would take longer to feature on any tourist itinerary since the Serowe-Orapa road was not a preferred tourist route. The Government had plans to develop the sister site of Toutswemogala as a "cultural village" and major tourist attraction, but nothing was planned for Bosutswe yet. That is a pity, because by the end of our excavations what the people at Bosutswe had experienced during the dig made them knowledgeable communicators about the past, and the methods archeologists use to uncover it. In addition, the site had now become important to their own self-identity and, with a little encouragement, they were not likely to allow people to vandalize it.

XX

As the excavation finished, I suggested to Nonofho and Paula that it might be nice to visit one of the popular tourist spots for which Botswana is famous: the Chobe Game Reserve in the northeastern corner of the country, not far from Victoria Falls. Paula had never been to a game reserve and Nonofho was also interested in seeing the animals. I wanted to go in order to get a GPS reading from an archeological site, Serondella, where I had conducted test excavations almost 30 years earlier. It is situated deep in the game reserve on the banks of the Chobe River.

After a grueling ten-hour drive, part of it cross-country using a short cut along the eastern edge of the Makgadikgadi salt pans to avoid a longer, more roundabout drive on tarmac, we arrived in Kasane. Nonofho knew of an inexpensive hotel and she and Paula shared a room in the main structure; my room was a space that had been carved out of a large, metal truck container by cutting a door and window on one side and putting a shower with vinyl curtain on the other. A line of such containers formed a "wing" of the hotel. After settling in, we decided to go to one of the new luxury lodges that had just opened on the edge of town.

When we got there, I thought we had arrived in Disneyland: the trees were illuminated from below with indirect lighting. A large wooden veranda had been erected around one side of the hotel with a lighted artificial waterfall rushing beneath it to the river. Patrons eating dinner thus enjoyed the sounds of the cascading water punctuated by the occasional deep grunt

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of a nearby hippo. After being told that we could only pay in foreign currency unless we were Botswana residents (all price lists were in American dollars or Euros), we were shown a typical room. It was a suite, really, complete with a sitting area with mini-fridge and wet bar, a beautifully tiled shower and tub in muted earth tones, and a king-size bed draped with an immaculately-laundered mosquito net. To make the picture complete all we needed was to hear the African Queen docking at the bank below.

Paula and I were impressed, especially when we compared these rooms, newly constructed to look like the old, "real Africa," with our much more modest and of course more truly "genuine" accommodations. These rooms were lavish, and came with a lavish price tag. But we found it hard to shake the feeling that local people were not entirely welcome; we didn't fit in with those wearing newly-pressed camouflage togs, replete with artificial aging and tears, or with the glamorized images of a miraculously preserved Africa "on the brink of disappearing" that was being marketed to the outside world. It was, of course, the old problem of the denial of coevalness rearing its head again. When Paula and I wanted to have dinner in the "lodge" that evening, Nonofho put her foot down. "I'm not going back to that lodge," she said. "It is very nice, but I don't feel welcome or comfortable there."

Putting her feelings in the context of larger "post-colonial" issues raised by the "vanishing Africa" trope, she pointed out that the power differentials between white and black generated during the colonial era remain deeply embedded in almost everyone's consciousness and experience. Many middle-class Batswana are now in an economic position to want to go "on safari" and many, like Nonofho, are indeed interested in seeing the animals and other sights. But the tourism industry, particularly that segment interested in game-viewing in the "unspoiled" context of the African wilderness, continues to be dominated by colonial imaginings cast in the visual and behavioral metaphors of white power and privilege. Our romantic visions of the "white hunter," Hepburn, Bogart, Hemingway, and so on, do not resonate in a positive way with indigenous people and in fact are quite demeaning. Indeed, in the minds of many, such images, with their echoes of colonial disenfranchisement, represent everything that is wrong with tourism and tourists. Cultural tourism, including visits to archeological sites such as Toutswemogala or the World Heritage rock art site in the Tsodilo Hills, is gaining in popularity in Botswana, but it is still in its infancy. Yet one too often finds that it is being sold using the same hackneyed tropes inherited from the colonial past: "come visit the 'unchanging,' or the 'vanishing,' Africa."

Many safaris now advertise cultural performances as part of the tourist experience: "The Kalahari Bushmen are our oldest relatives, the people who

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stayed behind. Visiting them is coming home," reads one web page on the internet. Another invites: "Spend some time with these fascinating people, learn about the incredible knowledge of their harsh semi-desert environment and how to survive in it. Join them on nature walks and witness them trance dancing and story telling." Such cultural performances are also common in the West, as actors dress-up and pretend they are still living in the nineteenth century. The difference is that in the West both sides of the performance are fully aware that it is an enactment, not a real-life experience. The essentialized ahistoricity of such tourist presentations is one of the legacies of colonial archeology, and unfortunately the power structures within which it was designed and produced are still the easiest way to sell them globally. I couldn't help but wonder how the complicated and multiple layerings of culture, language, and ethnicity typical of daily interactions at Bosutswe could be depicted and sold.

XXI

> All right, you must listen carefully, because in my story, in everyone's story, there is always a lesson. If you miss the lesson, then you might as well have blocked your ears to the story. . . . One day you will have to tell all these stories to your own children. This will give you practice.[37]

The challenging part of this paper is: how to make sense of our experiences? How much interpretation should we interject, and how much should we leave to the reader? It's a little like interpreting a dream, or art, where many interpretations are possible, but not all interpretations are equally good. One of the lessons we learned from our experiences, I believe, is that there are multiple stories that can be told about the past, from different sets of beliefs, points of view, and understandings. We all took something personal from the excavations, whether expatriate and indigenous archeologists, local university students and museum personnel, or rural laborers. We had come to see our relationships to one another, and to our varied constructions of the past, in new, but not always identical, ways. But unlike Unity Dow's depiction of growing up in the village of Mochudi, the lessons may be as varied as the participants, with multiple levels of meaning attached.

As the first burials were exposed in the Western Precinct in 2002, for instance, the excavation unit became like a theatre, as workers from our camp below, as well as visitors from the surrounding villages, sat on the

[37]Unity Dow, *Juggling Truths* (Melbourne, 2003), 130.

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back dirt piles to watch the skeletons as Morongwa carefully and slowly exposed them. They came again and again, watching in respectful silence, as the process unfolded. We could think of no easy way to probe their thoughts. I was grateful therefore that Morongwa was in charge of the exhumations. This helped to diffuse somewhat the expatriate/local power dialectic, since skeletons were her field, and analysis of the human remains featured significantly in her M.A. thesis that she subsequently completed at the University of Pretoria.[38]

Several observations do follow from our work. First, as our narrative evolved it became increasingly apparent how much traditional structures of authority continue to be central to the identity of indigenous archeologists, and to the context and conduct of archeology, even in the "post-colonial" period. Much of precolonial archeology was not community-centered. The archeologists were the specialists who knew "everything" about the "archeological past," and they had little reason to involve and engage the community in their studies. In every community there are "gatekeepers" that include chiefs, but also other community leaders as well. Even when archeologists are given permission by the central government to explore and excavate, it is still helpful prior to fieldwork to identify these "gatekeepers."[39] When this is done, there is likely to be less suspicion or opposition to fieldwork, particularly if sensitive issues arise. In our case, we underestimated how wide our communication network around the site needed to be. Even if our archeological work only involves very early periods in the past, it is still being conducted in the present and it necessarily involves contemporary people.

A related issue is the general lack of training archeologists get in the methodologies and concepts of oral history. This is a lapse that should be corrected if "community archeology" is to succeed in Africa. While it is often difficult to collect and interpret oral traditions, dialogues that include them are critical to the construction of better contexts in which post-colonial archeology in Africa can be carried out. A premium should therefore be placed on their collection, even if they might sometimes lead to a multiplicity of accounts. They are the foundation on which new and perhaps more scientific dialogues about the past can be built.

Another observation is that local communities, even those as small as that around Bosutswe, are very diverse–both in terms of ethnicity and in

[38]Morongwa Mosothwane, "Skeletal Characteristics and Population Demography as Reflected by Materials from Toutswe Tradition Sites in Eastern Botswana, West of the Shashe-Limpopo basin" (M.Sc. thesis, Pretoria, 2004); see also Morongwa Mosothwane and Myrna Steyn, "Palaeodemography of Early Iron Age Toutswe Communities in Botswana," *South African Archeological Bulletin* 59(2004), 45-51.

[39]I am indebted to Dr. Zacharys Gundu for this point.

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terms of their opinions about our work. I began to realize that a lot had changed since the time of "Smith," when I had first tried to explain what archeology or a museum was. Many young people now had at least a passing knowledge of archeology, and it appears to be a fairly popular subject for students at the University of Botswana, where it was introduced in the mid-1980s. Interest in the field is great enough that students often take a minor in archeology, even though they realize there are few job opportunities in the field.

Third, while our differences with Molato's church were never resolved, and likely never could be, our efforts to create a sense of working together with the local community at Bosutswe were profitable, as were our attempts to create better lines of communication with the people in Mashoro. But I can't escape the feeling that these remain ephemeral changes, memories that are likely to be reworked, changed, and transformed in unpredictable ways as life returns to what it had been before the excavations. When I returned to Bosutswe for a brief visit in 2003, I was greeted at one borehole with the respectful and somewhat old-fashioned term "*morena*" (lord), a word that I had not heard in almost 20 years. Two years later, a visit by Morongwa found that most people believed I had died. Whether this was because I had not come back again to work with them, or because of deep-seated beliefs about the nature of our work at Bosutswe, I am not sure.

Another insight from the Bosutswe excavations is that in "post-colonial" Botswana contemporary power structures are far more diffuse and decentered than they were under colonial, or even earlier, rule. While government edicts may come from Gaborone and get distributed to District Officers, local people are increasingly able to push back on many fronts. As one of Molato's choir ladies threatened, "We are going to talk to Ian Khama (the Vice President and son of the first President, Sir Seretse Khama) about you." In some cases, such as the Kalahari Khoisan, indigenous people might find it advantageous to adopt imported tropes of "the first people" to aid in their struggles with the government.[40] In other cases, such as that of the spiritual healing church at Khubu la Dintša, power is wielded on a local level through numbers and through the ability to contribute to the "rumor mill" to influence local power structures to their benefit. Post-colonial archeologists will need to work much more closely with such communities, while recognizing their diversity. And it seemed to me that the interactions we observed between people from varied ethnicities and linguistic groups at

[40]Robert Hitchcock, "'We are the First People': Land, Natural Resources and Identity in the Central Kalahari, Botswana," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28(2002), 797-824; Edwin Wilmsen, "Mutable Identities: Moving beyond Ethnicity in Botswana," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28(2002), 825-41.

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Bosutswe in some deep but illusive way confounded, through shared knowledges and interaction, the trope of isolated and homogeneous "cultural gardens" generated during the colonial era. Such approaches also underwrite archeological interpretations focused on static "worldviews" rather than the shifting contexts and conditions that generate them. New, post-colonial, archeologies might benefit by searching for more incorporative cultural models where differences and similarities are not simply essentialized, but constantly negotiated through daily interaction.

Finally, reflexivity and openness to alternative views and interpretations does not mean that scientific rigor must be jettisoned. Much is to be gained from the interpretive tension generated by differences of opinion and frank exchanges of ideas. But no one has to "win." Rather, we can each explain our points of view and, if possible, agree to disagree. The point is that we need to develop communication networks with local communities, and then work consistently to keep them as open and as honest as possible, without at the same time being paternalistic or generating hostility. We should not sacrifice scientific rigor or integrity, but rather develop it and communicate it as an important "voice." Of course, that is not always possible. Molato's church continues to accuse us of killing people through our work, but he seldom does this directly in Mashoro anymore.

Flexibility of approach, and a necessity to create and maintain communication networks around a site, seem to me to be key ingredients for a changed, post-colonial archeology that will work to encourage more local voices and participation. While our experiences have profoundly affected our ways of thinking about the past and our ways of doing and communicating archeology, our praxis, this is not something that can be done with a single lecture, presentation, or excavation. It is an ongoing process. In this regard, the experiences of the University of Botswana students in the Bosutswe excavations went far beyond learning how to set up a grid, or excavate a level. They, too, became enmeshed in contexts where multiple registers of power, knowledge, and privilege were negotiated daily. But writing about such experiences is fraught with difficulty: how does one write, for instance, without falling into what seems like the unavoidable trap of becoming a ventriloquist for "other" voices?

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