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Architecture for resilience: dialogues with place in the indigenous communities of Kuruman during the Holocene period

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Abstract

Since the latter part of the 20th century to the present, we have seen growing concerns about the potential collapse of socio-ecological systems due to climate change. On the other hand, palaeoenvironmentalists, archaeologists and anthropologists consistently point to evidence of how *Homo-sapiens* have survived within climate variability underpinned by an embodied/embedded relationship to their environments. Archaeological data shows how indigenous groups such as the Bushman have inhabited landscape features such as caves for longer than 10 000 years and thus survived through periods of climate variability.

Another well researched element of Bushman life is their ritual practices. Given the low supply of livelihood resources within the contexts where such communities have survived, this study hypothesised a possible relationship between Bushman ritual practices and their long-term resilience when faced with variability. Using the Holocene habitation of the Wonderwerk Cave as the main case study, this study explored the relationship between people, place and ritual. Furthermore, the study applied phenomenology as the primary data collection method. The resultant first-person experience guided the researcher in engaging with secondary data from archaeology and ethnography.

The study found that Bushman ritual practices such as trance constituted a critical adaptation tool in response to perpetually variable environments. Through such practices and their related tools such as art, space and myth, such communities managed to sustain a synchronised dialogue with place thus facilitating for ongoing dissolution of maladaptive behaviour. Another key finding is that our inability to change constitutes a key characteristic of our species today as we have been seduced into the trap of our deep psychic longing for existential continuity.

The study argues for an architecture for resilience whose primary role would be to facilitate higher fluidity in our embeddedness to place and allowing for faster and trauma-free transitioning in synchronicity to our changing environments. In conclusion, the study finds that our own contemporary climate change has implications far beyond the techno-scientific understanding which has prevailed so far and is instead calling to be understood as an existential phenomenon to be primarily resolved through relevant/responsive ritual practices to facilitate our own transitioning and continued resilience.