**Engaging community on the bioarchaeology of marginalised peoples in southern Africa**

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In South Africa, the bioarchaeological study of marginalised people has mostly taken on an osteological approach. Isotope analyses can complement these studies and provide another facet to understanding the lived experiences of oppressed peoples. Slavery, indenture and migrancy have characterised South Africa’s economy over the past 500 years. Some studies have used isotope systems to elucidate the enslaved experience in the colonial Cape. However, the history of marginalisation did not end with the emancipation of enslaved persons, and there is much more to learn about exploited populations over the last 150 years.

Here, we build on archival research and isotopic studies to bring to the fore the lives of migrant labourers after the discovery of diamonds and gold in late 19th century South Africa. Understanding how dietary and migratory histories changed due to the mineral revolution will help illustrate the effects of this event on individual and group histories.

Part of the permit application process for analysis called for community engagement. Conversations with a Griqua descendant community in Vredendal, Western Cape, from which human remains earmarked for potential sampling for this study originated. The desire to expand the study to include DNA analysis to determine kinship with those buried without headstones or finding other burials that had been obscured by the commercial farms in the area. At times the conversations were educational, at times the somber atmosphere was oppressive. Mostly, I was amazed at the extraordinary resilience considering the community’s history of dispossession, shared by other peoples in South Africa. A leader of the Griqua whose forefathers lead the community to Vredendal was excited by the academic nature of the bioarchaeological study. The community was not anti-science, but rather curious about their questions that science could answer.