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# Interpreting superimposition in the rock art of the Makgabeng of South Africa's Limpopo Province

**Louw, Christian Arno**

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# Interpreting superimposition in the rock art of the Makgabeng of South Africa's Limpopo Province

**Christian Louw**

**692702**

**M.Sc. Rock Art Studies (by research) in the Rock Art Research Institute**

**School of Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies (GAES)**

**Faculty of Science**

**University of the Witwatersrand**

**2016**

# DECLARATION

I declare that all research is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any examination or degree at any other university.

_____

Christian Louw

On this _____ day of _____ 2016

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**CONTENTS**


**DECLARATION** ..... **2**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ..... **3**

**CONTENTS** ..... **4**

**ABSTRACT** ..... **7**

**LIST OF FIGURES** ..... **8**

**LIST OF TABLES** ..... **9**

**LIST OF APPENDICES** ..... **10**

INTRODUCTION ..... 11

**1. OVERVIEW OF THE MAKGABENG** ..... **12**

**Location** ..... **12**

**Geology and geography** ..... **13**

**Literature review** ..... **14**

The Stone Age ..... 14

The Iron Age ..... 15

The 19th century ..... 16

Present inhabitants ..... 17

Makgabeng rock art ..... 17

**2. THEORY AND THE SOCIAL LIFE OF ROCK ART** ..... **26**

**Humans, things, entanglements** ..... **26**

People: groups, individuals and social structure ..... 27

Things and people ..... 28

**The thing itself** ..... **29**

Production ..... 30

Divergences and phases ..... 31
Consumption ..... 32
**Knowledge is power ..... 34**
**Conclusion ..... 37**
**3. FINDING SUPERIMPOSITION ..... 38**
**Sampling ..... 38**
**Challenges ..... 41**
**Categorisation of images ..... 42**
**Analysis ..... 43**
**Results ..... 46**
Khoekhoen and San ..... 46
Northern Sotho and San ..... 54
Northern Sotho and Khoekhoe ..... 69
**Discussion ..... 72**
**4. INTERPRETING SUPERIMPOSITION ..... 74**
**Khoekhoe and San rock art ..... 74**
Category 1 ..... 74
Category 2 ..... 78
**Northern Sotho and San rock art ..... 80**
Colonial imagery ..... 81
Animals ..... 84
Tracing ..... 94
Apron ..... 95
**Northern Sotho and Khoekhoe rock art ..... 95**
Multi-layered superimposition ..... 95
The things and their people ..... 97
**Discussion ..... 97**

A matter of time ..... 97
Terminal superimposition ..... 99
Appropriating power ..... 100
Image copying ..... 102
Superimposing superimposition ..... 102
**From superimposition to the painters ..... 103**
References ..... 105
Appendix 1- List of farm name abbreviations ..... 113
Appendix 2- List of other abbreviations ..... 114

# ABSTRACT

*Northern Sotho, Khoekhoe, and San rock art occur together in many shelters across South Africa's Limpopo province. In some cases, specimens of the rock art of these traditions can be seen to be painted directly over one another. By studying such occurrences on the Makgabeng plateau, this project assesses whether the superimposition of rock art among different painting traditions can reveal new insights regarding the painters and their relationships with 'others'. By looking at how the social life of the rock art is manipulated through superimposition, this study aims to uncover how this manner of consumption reflects upon the nature of the interaction among people of different painting traditions.*

# LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Location of the Makgabeng....12
Figure 2: Masebe River Gorge....13
Figure 3: Thabananthlana....14
Figure 4: Example of site record sheet....39
Figure 5: Percentage of sites with and without evidence of superimposition....40
Figure 6: Categorisation of image classes....43
Figure 7: Superimposition of traditions within the 26 selected sites....46
Figure 8 (GP35): Red, orange, and yellow fine line images faintly visible behind white (yellow in photo) handprints....47
Figure 9 (MB53): Hind section of animal protruding from behind mass of finger dots....48
Figure 10 (NJ19): Khoekhoe aprons (a) in white can be seen to cover some San images (b) beneath completely....48
Figure 11 (LB13): San giraffe figures beneath white Khoekhoe finger dots....49
Figure 12 (BE25): Red Khoekhoe oval and finger dots painted over San rock art....50

# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Database Page 1 ..... 44
Table 2: Database Page 2 ..... 45

# LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Farm name abbreviations……114

Appendix 2: Other abbreviations……115

## INTRODUCTION

Having been introduced to the subtleties and complexities of the Northern Sotho painting tradition during my Honours year, I became increasingly intrigued by the relationship between Northern Sotho and San painters. For my Master's I initially focused on one site where Northern Sotho rock art and San rock art specimens had been painted within a few metres of one another, and became interested in the relationship between the different traditions of rock art. What drew people to paint in shelters that had already been painted in by others when there were many suitable alternatives, especially since this was not the norm? I was then struck by the enormity of the decision to deliberately and consciously paint over the rock art of another person, especially one who represents a different culture, spiritual power, and potential political or economic interest.

The word *superimposition*[1] is used to refer to the painting of one image over another. In its broader sense superimposition includes painting over rock art from the same tradition or over the rock art of another painting tradition, but for the purposes of this project, only painting over rock art from a different tradition is considered.

In order to investigate the complexities of the relationships between different traditions, I decided to study cases of superimposition of rock art on the Makgabeng plateau. Superimposition is not an uncommon sight in southern Africa and is especially widespread throughout Makgabeng. What makes this area particularly well suited for this project is that the rock art of three different traditions; namely San, Khoekhoen, and Northern Sotho, occur together in many of the shelters, and these traditions are often superimposed over one another. The diversity and quantity of superimposition among different traditions in the Makgabeng provides a great opportunity to study many instances of superimposition within a centralised area; however, reference will also be made to studies elsewhere in South Africa. By looking at the relationships between different rock art traditions superimposed over one another at 26 selected sites in the Makgabeng, I set out to uncover what insights they could reveal about the relationships between the painters associated with these traditions.

[1] *Superpositioning* has also been used by some authors (Lewis-Williams 1972, 1974; Vinnicombe 1967, Mallen 2008) to refer to this action; however, I use *superimposition* for the sake of consistency.

# 1. OVERVIEW OF THE MAKGABENG

## Location

The Makgabeng plateau is situated in the Senwabarwana (formerly Bochum) and Seshego districts of South Africa's Limpopo province and covers approximately 225 square kilometres, rising up to 200 metres above the surrounding plains. It lies west of the Soutpansberg, 22 kilometres southwest of the Blouberg, and 45 kilometres southwest of Vivo (Fig. 1). The Makgabeng is commonly referred to as a plateau, but as it is not flat it is more accurately described as a "ruggedly eroded, gently westerly dipping cuesta with a prominent V-shaped scarp towards the east" (Hahn 2011: 35).

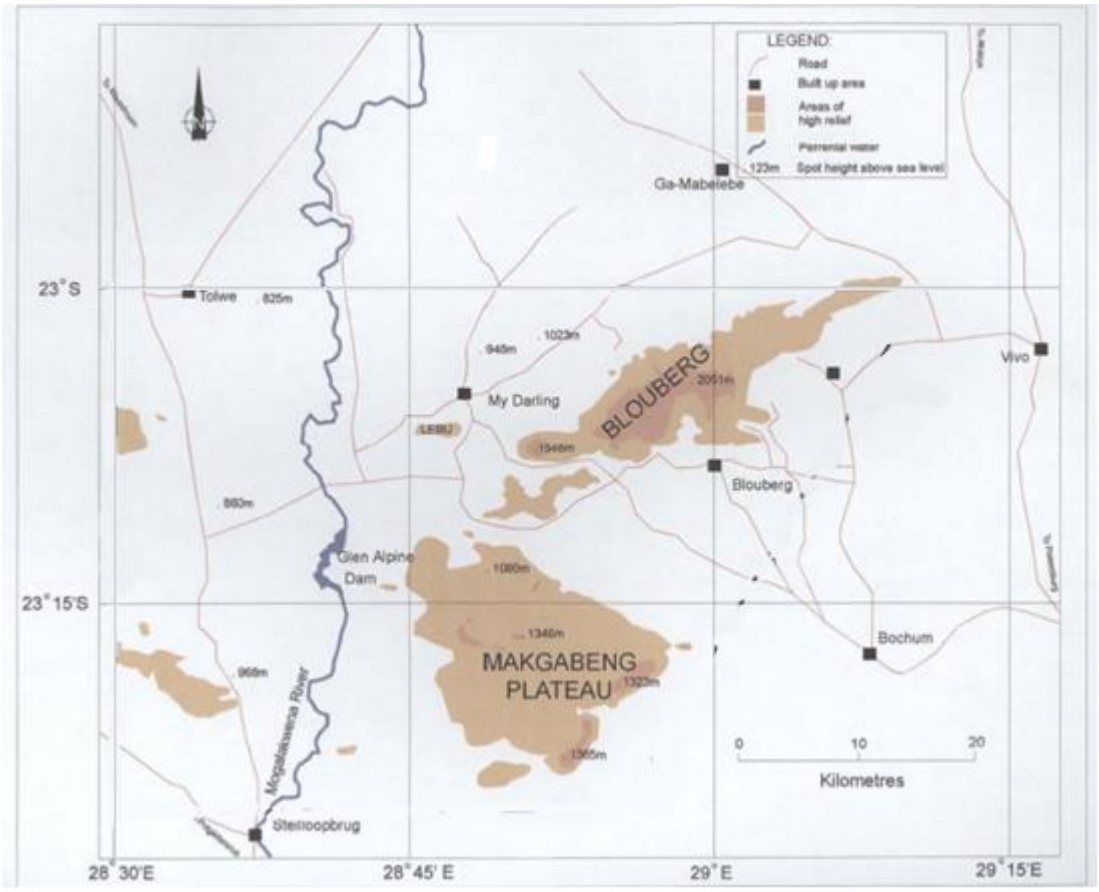


**Figure 1: Location of the Makgabeng**

(Adapted from Bumby 2000: 42)

## Geology and geography

Makgabeng recently became defined as its own unique geomorphic province. The Makgabeng Formation is haphazardly interspersed with the Mogalakwena Formation and mainly overlies the Waterberg Group sediments (Barker *et al*. 2006). The rocks of the Makgabeng Formation were originally deposited as Aeolian dunes, around 1.9 Ga, in which some of the earliest forms of life have been found (Erikson *et al*. 2000).



**Figure 2: Masebe River Gorge** (Photo by Louw 2013)

Today the Makgabeng's rocky landscape is criss-crossed by many small rivers. The cuesta is incised by the deep Masebe River Gorge (Fig. 2), while some parts of the landscape are spired by the remnants of horizontal conglomerates such as the iconic rock formation known as Thabananthlana (Fig. 3). The area receives most of its rain during the summer months, between November and March, and enjoys an average of 300 to 500 millimetres of rainfall annually. The topographic variety has allowed for a similar diversity in terms of plant life and habitats to develop, with savannah vegetation growing in the sandy soils and scrub in the more rocky areas. The Makgabeng boasts a broad spectrum of floral classes such as African

*fynbos*, riverine forest, wetland, grassland, woodland, as well as examples of specialised species such as the endemic *Streptocarpus makabengensis*. Such plant life would have provided an ample diet and suitable habitat for the many species of wildlife depicted in the rock art of the Makgabeng. Herding and hunting in the area has, however, greatly reduced the number of wild animals roaming the area.



**Figure 3: Thabananthlana**

(Louw 2013)

## Literature review

### The Stone Age

During the 1960s and 1970s, excavations and rock art research provided a good basis for understanding the historical context of the Makgabeng. Revil Mason's (1962) excavations in the Makgabeng and Adrian Boshier's (1965, 1972) early studies on the use of hammer stones laid the ground for research into the history of stone-tool industries and rock art; and further

provided an indication of the presence of hunter-gatherers[2] and herders in the area. Although little research has been conducted on the Makgabeng during the Early and Middle Stone Age, evidence from nearby excavations in the Limpopo Makapan Valley World Heritage Site suggests that the area was inhabited by hominids from as far back as 1,500,000 years (Mason 1962). Recent evidence from excavations at the Mphekwane shelter indicates that Stone Age hunter-gatherers occupied the Makgabeng from at least the Late Pleistocene Epoch (Sadr 2007). Although this part of the Limpopo province is considered to have been at the heart of cultural evolution during the Early and Middle Stone Age periods (500,000 – 50,000 BP), Later Stone Age (LSA) ground deposits suggest that hunter-gatherer activity became well established in the area after 2000 BP, coinciding with the arrival of early farming communities in the area (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 39; Eastwood *et al.* 2010: 83).

LSA stone-tool activity in the area is largely associated with Smithfield Industry, some examples of which were excavated from the Makgabeng and dated to 1020 ± 150 BP (Mason 1962: 310). Similarities in production, artefact typology, and tool use over the last thousand years suggest a continuity of hunter-gatherer life up until the 19th century despite the influx of Iron Age farmers in the plains beneath the Makgabeng (Bradfield *et al.* 2009: 180-181).

The excavations in the Makgabeng and the works formulated around them allow for specific cases of archaeology or rock art to be appreciated within the context of time and space, while also creating a timeline through which the social and political intensification of the landscape can be understood.

**The Iron Age**

People speaking Bantu languages have been traced back to the Cameroon/Nigeria border, where they are believed to have practised a variety of subsistence strategies north of the Congo Basin by 1000 BC (Mitchell 2002: 259-260). Bantu-language-speaking farmers, associated with the Early Iron Age (EIA), began to settle in the Limpopo valley by roughly 200 AD (Maggs 1976; Hall & Vogel 1980; Hall 1987; Huffman 1970). Archaeological evidence suggests that the EIA farming communities occupied the Blouberg-Makgabeng area by about 700 AD and coexisted with the stone tool-using hunter-gatherers whom they encountered (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 39). Excavations by Van Schalkwyk (2004) shed light on the Early Iron Age activity and material culture in the area. Ceramics from

[2] The term 'hunter-gatherers' is used to refer to people called foragers or gatherer-hunters in other texts.

excavations at Beauley and Millbank date to between 750 and 980 AD; they are thought to be associated with the Lydenberg tradition, a predecessor to what later became the K2 and Mapungubwe ceramic traditions (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 39).

From 1200 to 1300 AD, farmers associated with the Later Iron Age (LIA) moved into southern Africa and gradually became more integrated with EIA farming communities, eventually absorbing and/or replacing them (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 39). Moloko-style ceramics from Millbank and Randjies, associated with the Sotho-Tswana branch of LIA farming groups, provide evidence for their settlement in the Makgabeng area from around 1530 to 1725 AD (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 39-40). Oral history and archaeological evidence indicate that communities speaking Venda, Ndebele, Tswana, and Sotho languages settled in the larger Blouberg area between 1650 and 1850 AD, with the Hananwa arriving during the last phase of LIA occupation (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 40). The Hananwa are classified as Northern Sotho, a complex linguistic group that derives from the Sotho side of the LIA Sotho-Tswana faction (Mönnig 1967; Moodley 2008: 120). By means of aggressive and cooperative strategies, the Hananwa managed to dominate and establish themselves in the landscape, although they were exiled and forced to seek refuge on the inaccessible Makgabeng plateau during the 19th century period of conflict and discord in the region (Eastwood & Van Schakwyk 2002: 40-42).

**The 19th century**

Disease among livestock coupled with raids by Nguni warriors, such as those of Mzilikazi (c. 1820), threatened the livelihood of many people in the Makgabeng and Blouberg areas, drastically marginalising the power and stability of the Hananwa during the 19th century (Smith & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 237). This period coincided with the arrival of European settlers and missionaries.

Initially, the presence of Europeans was limited to the odd trader or hunter, but these individuals were soon followed by an influx of colonial officials, such as Native Commissioners and land surveyors, who exerted a strong influence over the Hananwa from where they were stationed at Kalkbank, approximately 50 kilometres south of the Blouberg (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 43). In 1868 the Berlin Mission Society set up a mission station in the Blouberg, and a second one was established in the Makgabeng in 1870 (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 44). Although these missionaries were said to have been relatively unsuccessful in gaining converts, they established the first schools and hospitals in

the area and assisted the Hananwa in political matters, often siding with them against the government of the time (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 44).

In 1870 the ZAR (Transvaal) government imposed hut taxes on the people in the Makgabeng-Blouberg area, forcing many men to seek employment in the mines in order to pay these taxes (Smith & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 237). During this period, many migrant workers were introduced to colonial industrialisation, and upon their return they brought back many western goods, including guns, leading to their being perceived as a threat to the ZAR government (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 44). In addition, the Hananwa chief Maleboho resisted payment of the hut taxes and disregarded relocation orders, which resulted in the infamous Maleboho war of 1894 (Smith & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 237). From the beginning of May until the end of July of that year, burghers under the command of General Piet Joubert lay siege to Maleboho's stronghold, eventually forcing him to surrender after strategically cutting off food and water supplies to him and his men. Chief Maleboho was captured and taken to Pretoria, where he was imprisoned for six years. However, after the South African War (Anglo-Boer War) Maleboho was released, in 1900, when the English gained control of Pretoria (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 45).

**Present inhabitants**

Today the Koni and Ndebele people occupy the areas around the Makgabeng, while the Hananwa are mainly found on the Makgabeng plateau itself (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 45). The majority of these inhabitants live in poverty. As predominantly subsistence farmers, they grow millet, sorghum, maize, beans, and cowpeas, while also relying heavily on the rearing of cattle, goats, sheep, and chickens, so as to provide for their families (Namono 2004: 4). Although these inhabitants live among the rock art sites of their ancestors, they no longer practise any rock art traditions.

**Makgabeng rock art**

***Previous rock art research in Makgabeng***

The Reverend Noel Roberts (1916a, 1916b) conducted research on the rock art, archaeology, and people of the Makgabeng and published his findings almost a century ago. These papers mention superimposition of rock art, but were composed at a time before more advanced rock art research and interpretive approaches emerged, and thus lack the insight of more recent studies. Besides the works of Roberts, Boshier's interest in rock art was noted in Lyle

Watson's book *Lightning Bird* (Watson 1982) although the interpretations offered by Watson are not very convincing as his book is not an academic work. A number of rock art sites were later rediscovered by the botanist Clifford Thompson and his son Nipper during their search for endemic flora in the Makgabeng; some of these sites were also visited by the artist Walter Battiss and later by Harold Pager (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 48).

The most extensive account of rock art in the Makgabeng is contained in numerous site reports composed by Edward Eastwood, who was aided by Johnny van Schalkwyk and Jonas Tlouamma. These are collectively titled *The Rock Art of the Makgabeng*, and have been condensed into ten unpublished volumes. Started in 2002 and completed in 2006, these volumes provide detailed records of all the documented rock art sites on the Makgabeng plateau and include notes on subject matter, tradition, technique, coordinates, and presence of superimposition. Furthermore, the volumes provide an outline of the history and environment of the area as well as tentative interpretations and in-depth discussions pertaining to the rock art mentioned in the site records. These volumes, together with Edward and Cathelijne Eastwood's (2006) book, *Capturing the Spoor,* are key data sources for studies of the Makgabeng and its rock art. These publications encapsulate the Makgabeng and explore issues such as interaction dynamics, categorisation and authorship of rock art. Eastwood, Van Schalkwyk, and Smith (2002) provide a good outline of the Makgabeng's rock art and archaeology. Namono (2004) provides a comprehensive overview of the Northern Sotho and their rock art in the Makgabeng, specifically of rock art viewed as being connected to girls and women. Moodley's (2008) research on Northern Sotho rock art in the Makgabeng further sheds light on the history of the Northern Sotho people as well as their initiation symbolism.

Although there have been interaction studies undertaken elsewhere, scant literature has been published on the interaction dynamics in the Makgabeng. This project draws on insights regarding Limpopo Valley interaction studies, such as that of Van Doornum (2005) and Van der Ryst's (1998) work in the nearby Waterberg.

The Central Limpopo Basin (CLB), covering the northernmost part of South Africa, comprises four distinctive rock art areas: north-eastern Venda, the Soutpansberg, the Limpopo-Shashe Confluence Area (LSCA), and the Makgabeng (Eastwood 2008: 130). In the Makgabeng, as in the other regions of the CLB, three distinct rock art traditions have been identified. These are the rock art traditions of hunter-gatherers, of herders, and of Bantu-

language-speaking farmers (Namono 2004: 16; Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002; Eastwood & Eastwood 2006).

***Hunter-gatherer painting tradition***

Although the indigenous hunter-gatherers of southern Africa have names for the linguistic units to which they belong, they have no inclusive terminology for the larger collective. The 17th century word 'Bushman' was originally employed by Europeans to describe people who lived off of the *veld*, but this word, having become associated with negative and derogatory connotations, was replaced with the equally problematic Nama word 'San' during the 1960s (Mitchell 2002: 7).

The hunter-gatherers who occupied the Limpopo-Shashe area are believed to have spoken a Khoekhoe language and referred to themselves as *Hietshware*, but are remembered as the *Barwana* or *Basarwa* by the Northern Sotho people (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 8). These hunter-gatherers traditionally subsisted off of *veld* plants and wild animals. However, owing to interaction with other people, they later adjusted their lifestyles and sometimes herded animals and even planted crops (Eastwood & Van Schakwyk 2002: 9). The term 'hunter-gatherer' is used for archaeological contexts without ethnography; for those cases more closely tied in with identity and rock art classification, however, the word 'San' will be used as an umbrella term for hunter-gatherers, while rejecting any derogatory connotations these words might have.

According to Eastwood and Van Schakwyk (2002), hunter-gatherer art in the CLB is nearly entirely representational and depicts a range of animals and human figures, as well as geometric motifs believed to be depictions of loincloths and/or aprons (Eastwood & Van Schakwyk 2002: 29). The use of brushes made from bristles, feathers, quills, or twigs allowed for a fine line quality to be achieved in their paintings, while they may have used their fingers to block the solid areas within these fine lines (Eastwood *et al.* 2010: 79). Forager rock art in southern Africa often includes emphasis placed on a particular animal in certain localised areas through frequency of depiction, detailed variation in pigment, as well as the depiction of such images in strikingly more complex contexts (Eastwood *et al.* 2010: 80). The most frequently depicted animal in the Makgabeng and LSCA is the kudu (Eastwood & Cnoops 1999a, 1999b).

Although hunter-gatherer rock art is representational, it is not a record of medial everyday life; nor is it 'art for art's sake'. The rock art of this tradition serves as a record of the accounts and observations of spiritual specialists in their encounters with the transcendental realm of spirits and mythical creatures (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989). The rock face serves as a 'veil' between the immanent world and the spirit world, which could be passed through by ritual experts during altered states of consciousness (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990).

***Herder painting tradition***

Herders in southern Africa are poorly understood and much uncertainty exists regarding their origins (Sadr 1998, 2008). Herders are seen either as a distinct ethnic group that migrated down into southern Africa, or as hunter-gatherers who gained access to domesticated animals and pottery by means of diffusion (Sadr 1998, 2008; Smith & Ouzman 2004: 500).

Herders in southern Africa were also subjected to derogatory and racist labels. The word 'Hottentot', originally used to refer to the Khoisan, began to be used specifically to refer to herders during the 19$^{th}$ century; but was later rejected by scholars and replaced with the Nama words Khoe (singular), Khoekhoen (plural), and Khoekhoe (adjective) (see Mitchell 2002: 7). The Venda referred to the Khoekhoen as 'Masatedi', while the Northern Sotho identified them as 'Bakgutho' (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 186). These names given to herders specifically by outsiders indicate that they were identified as traditionally and culturally separate and different from the hunter-gatherers. Smith and Ouzman (2004), using patterns in distributional evidence, suggest that a particular style of geometric rock art geographically coincides with certain suggested paths along which Khoe languages moved. This, combined with evidence from excavations, reaffirms herder ways of life as being rooted in the relationship between sheep, goats, Khoe languages, geometric rock art, and perhaps pottery arriving in Southern Africa about 2000 years ago (Smith & Ouzman 2004: 512).

Herder rock art, described as a 'Geometric Tradition', is the most poorly understood art in the region. It comprises finger-painted and engraved geometric shapes, dots, strokes, handprints, and aprons (Eastwood & Smith 2005: 63). The painted depictions occur in a range of pigments: predominantly red and white and occasionally black, yellow or orange (Eastwood & Smith 2005: 66). This tradition occurs at approximately 16% of all rock art sites in the Makgabeng (Eastwood & Tlouamma 2006a) and though it has often been referred to as non-representational, Hollmann (2014) suggests that certain geometric motifs may represent

recognisable and tangible objects such as the sun, moon, and headbands. There are also similarities in depiction of dots, strokes and circles in the rock art, in terms of ochre and fat patterns made on the faces of Khoekhoe female initiates (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 65). Some depictions of parallel double rows of dots and lines are similar to skin scarification marks on male initiates (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 67). The word 'geometrics' is therefore used to describe certain rock art images, but it is acknowledged that these may in fact be representational in nature.

The group of herders discussed in this study is identified through linguistic archaeology as the 'Limpopo Khoikhoi', believed to have been settled in several parts of the present-day Limpopo province by the end of the last century BC (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 59). The herders and hunter-gatherers appear to have disappeared, although there is some scant evidence suggesting remnants of their presence into the early 20$^{th}$ century (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 45-47). Although these groups no longer exist as such in present-day Makgabeng, a continuing distinction between and an awareness of their identities is reflected in language use through words such as *Masetedi*, meaning "yellow-skinned herders" (Boshier 1972), and *Senwabarwana*, the name of the district (formerly Bochum), meaning "the place where Bushmen drink" (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 187).

***Farmer painting tradition***

The third rock art tradition present in the Makgabeng is attributed to Northern Sotho farmers (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006; Namono 2004: 19). Paintings in this tradition are applied with the finger and occur in several pigments: mainly a thick, chalky off-white, as well as red, and sometimes orange and black (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 27; Smith & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 239). The imagery consists of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and geometric designs as well as animals, humans, trains, wagons, vehicles, and men on horseback (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 27; Namono 2004: 19) believed to hold either political, historical, cosmological, or ritual significance for the Northern Sotho people (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 37).

It is possible to relate the symbols in this rock art to modern rituals and symbolic practices, as the current inhabitants of the Makgabeng are only a few generations removed from the original painters (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 28). Despite difficulties encountered in dating rock art, a distinction can be made between recent Northern Sotho rock art that often depicts human figures with hands on their hips, wagons, and people on horseback; and older

art wherein no attempt is made to capture a true likeness of a 'natural' object, and which often depicts exaggerated key features (Van Schalkwyk & Smith 2004; Namono 2004). The older art comprises human figures and images of about 20 different animal species, and a small portion includes crocodilian motifs known as *kōma*, which are associated with boys' initiation rites (Van Schalkwyk & Smith 2004; Namono 2004; Namono & Eastwood 2005). Namono (2004) describes a third category of this tradition, closely associated with female initiation, predominantly comprising variations of the motif described as *kōma*, as well as other geometric motifs, some of which are said to represent aprons. These motifs are said to be connected to female sexuality and fertility (Namono 2004; Namono & Eastwood 2005: 82).

***Contact and rock art***

The rock paintings of farmers, herders and hunter-gatherers occur together in many of the Makgabeng's large rock shelters. The overlapping of these different traditions of painting on a rock face hint at a bigger picture, providing tentative clues as to how and why boundaries between formerly different cultures began to blur and fade (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 173). Rock art reflects such interaction in its subject matter, juxtaposition of images, borrowing of concepts from different traditions, and through the direct superimposition of one tradition over another.

Hall and Smith (2000: 30), combining evidence from rock art superimposition with information obtained from excavations, regard rock shelters as "places of social power of which hunter-gatherers gradually lost control in the face of farmer appropriation…who, in part, sought to appeal to the ambiguous power of the 'first peoples' as a resource in the regulation of their own social needs". Diverse and complex contact situations range from groups maintaining cultural autonomy or independence to the subjugation of herders and hunter-gatherers by farming communities (Van der Ryst 1998: 3). Throughout the Limpopo province, interactions differ in the extent to which farmers dominated herders and hunter-gatherers (Van Doornum 2005) but it is generally thought that reduced mobility and extensive exploitation of the environment led to hunter-gatherers and herders losing their autonomy, which meant that cooperative relationships with farmers became the most viable economic strategy (Van der Ryst 1998: 4). The explicit and often exclusive concept of land ownership held by farmers was discordant with the sense of custodianship held by the hunter-

gatherers, resulting in land and resources becoming central to conflict and political contiguity (Ouzman 1995: 59).

Ground deposits at Salt Pan shelter suggest that by sometime after 1300 AD the population of hunter-gatherers was small compared to that of farmers and likely held little control over resources (Hall & Smith 2000:43). Farmers therefore did not perceive them to be a threat and saw no danger in acknowledging the hunter-gatherers' ritual and spiritual power (Hall & Smith 2000: 43). Although early farmers had been present in the Makgabeng since 700 AD (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 39), relationships between farmers and hunter-gatherers in the Makgabeng can be expected to have become similar to those at Salt Pan shelter following the settlement of Sotho-Tswana groups between 1530 and 1725 AD (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 39-40), when the farmers' presence intensified. There is no evidence to suggest that hunter-gatherers were involved in rain-making rituals in the LSCA, although there is substantial evidence to suggest that Venda and Sotho people 'made rain' at sites painted by foragers or herders (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002). The hunter-gatherers of southern Africa were widely perceived as having a spiritual advantage because of their extensive knowledge of the land's myths, its rhythms, and its cycles (Ouzman 1995:59).

Herders controlled some key resources but still had little impact on the larger hunter-gatherer population. They were therefore hesitant to acknowledge the spiritual power of the hunter-gatherers: they feared it would cost them the upper hand in contact relationships (Hall & Smith 2000: 43). Khoekhoe images are found both over and under San images in the Makgabeng, thus proving that the two communities shared and painted in the same shelters (Hall & Smith 2000; Eastwood & Eastwood 2006; Eastwood *et al.* 2010: 91). Herders, as demonstrated at Salt Pan shelter 50 kilometres northwest of the Makgabeng, made no attempt to adopt San beliefs. Rather, they sought to dominate such sites visually with symbols and motifs distinctly different from those of the San (Hall & Smith 2000: 42). Such use of rock art and the contestation of space reflect the competitive nature of interactions between hunter-gatherers and herders in parts of the LSCA. The reaction of hunter-gatherers to herders is evident in depictions of fat-tailed sheep. These sheep were not only domesticated and herded, but were considered to possess intense ritual spiritual power due to their high quantities of fat, thus strengthening the herders' position in the context of interactions (Hall & Smith 2000: 43).

This method of contrasting rock art, according to age, tradition, and content, suggests a manner of interaction by means of painting that is likely to have been conscious, particular and deliberate. The process of interaction between painter and painting speaks to the relationship between people and rock art, as well as to the relationships between people and the 'others' with whom the underlying art is associated.

***Previous research on superimposition elsewhere in southern Africa***

Lewis-Williams (1972, 1974) conducted extensive research on superimposition at Giant's Castle in the Drakensberg and in the Barkly East district. Though this research was limited to San paintings, it considered superimposition as being meaningful rather than random. This was the first step in understanding the significance of superimposition, as well as towards establishing a technical model for dealing with a large sample of sites demonstrating superimposition. Lewis-Williams (1972, 1992, 2006) and Vinnicombe (1967) explored concepts such as the construction of a rock art panel for developing ideas about conceptual links between images, in order to better understand the intrinsic meaning of acts such as juxtaposition or superimposition in rock art. Subsequently, superimposition has been used to set up Harris matrices for the temporal categorisation of rock art (see Pearce 2010) but as this project does not deal with relative dating of adjacent images, this is not discussed.

Hall and Smith (2000) went beyond the stratification of multi-traditional rock art and, combining superimposition and excavated sequences, questioned the purpose of multi-traditional superimposition. It is as a result of this argument that Hall and Smith proposed that superimposition of different traditions of rock art in the Limpopo province can be understood as politically-motivated manipulations of social space.

In the northern region of the Eastern Cape province, Blundell (2004), Mallen (2008) and Henry (2010) explored aspects of the production, regulation, consumption, and identity in rock art, which tie in closely with the approaches of this study. Fairen's *Rock art and the transition to farming* (2004) discusses rock art and superimposition in Spain, making reference to changes in social space and the function of rock art and style during times of transition. Though these studies provide worthwhile approaches to the issues discussed in this study, it is preferable to draw mostly from research undertaken in the vicinity of the Makgabeng so as not to assume a homogeneous continuation of culture across vast geographical areas or even continents.

### *Superimposition and the confluence of artists*

Superimposition as a form of interaction among different societies is an enticing premise for the study of relationships and group dynamics. However, such an argument must be very carefully structured so as to avoid making unsupported assumptions. The following chapter therefore establishes the theoretical viewpoints from which the subject will be approached.

# 2. THEORY AND THE SOCIAL LIFE OF ROCK ART

When the rock art of one tradition is painted over the rock art of another, an interaction occurs between the painters even if they never met; but as these images become composite or block each other out, an interaction takes place between the actual images as well. In order to demonstrate this and assess the multiple levels of interaction between people and rock art it is necessary to focus on the social structures, of both the people from different painting traditions and the rock art itself, as 'things'. To this end, Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things* (1986) will be considered, and the research project will draw on his models of commodities and politics of value, which will be accepted as applicable to instances of superimposition in the rock art of the Makgabeng.

Appadurai (1986) discusses the flow of commodities and the lives of things as integral parts of society. A redressing of this framework in an archaeological context provides unique theoretical insights into how people and things function within a broader social context. Such insights will be useful for exploring relationships between people and paintings within broader theories of agency and entanglement, so as to create a social context through which tournaments of value, consumption, knowledge, and power can be grappled with.

## Humans, things, entanglements

Before considering the social life of things it is important to come to terms with how people and things are entangled and how they function within a social environment. Agency theory has become commonplace in archaeology (Dobres & Robb 2000: 3): it offers insight into the interconnectivity between humans and things and the manner in which they operate within a broader social system. However, agency is a diversely applied and diversely constructed theory (see Giddens 1984: 1-5). This project does not expound an analysis and critique of agency theories; rather it focuses only on key elements thereof as a window through which the social life of rock art and its originators can be discussed. A consideration of agency, in terms of how actors operate within a broader social context, will be followed by a discussion of agency considered as a system, routed in and expressed through material culture.

**People: groups, individuals and social structure**

The social and material structures in which social action occurs are context specific, and it is within these frameworks that practice theory and social agency coincide (Dobres & Hoffman 1994: 222). The trajectories of people and things are therefore set within these structures. Bourdieu (1977) refers to the role of an individual within society as *habitus*. He defines *habitus* as "a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures in which the agent's interests are defined" (Bourdieu 1977: 76). Hodder (1992: 74) further explains Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* as situated between 'structure' and 'practice', noting that *habitus* is a set of strategy-generating principles that allow agents to cope with unanticipated situations. Such systems both influence and are influenced by an agent's decisions. This concept was explored in the writings of Marx:

> "Men [sic] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx 1963: 15 [orig. 1869]).

Agency therefore involves the role of the individual's actions in sculpting his/her social structure as well as the system through which such an individual's actions are determined. Social structures are both the medium and the outcome of social interaction and encompass the social and material guidelines and resources available to agents and groups (Dobres & Hoffman 1994: 222). However, this does not mean that people are uniform automatons merely reacting to changes in the external world or following fixed social rules (Dornan 2002: 304; Bourdieu 1977: 29); rather, people are actively involved in the broader establishment of the social environments within which they operate (Barfield 1997: 4). Although individuals' actions are embedded in and constrained by the rules and resources that they manipulate, people are not controlled like puppets by pre-existing social structures. Some individuals have a greater understanding of society and its structures than others, allowing them to manipulate certain resources and social guidelines more effectively and to a greater extent (Lewis-Williams 2001: 33). Individual agents and groups of agents are therefore part of the social structure and its processes.

Whereas agency largely focuses on the role of the individual, the premise of this study is grounded in interactions among different groups. Smith and Ouzman (2004: 501) note that "[d]ecentering the sovereign Cartesian individual and acknowledging the dynamic relationships of time, place, people, and artefacts is especially important in contexts of cross-

cultural contact". A broader view of these dynamic relationships is addressed by considering superimposition in the rock art of the Makgabeng according to three painting traditions: those of the San, Khoekhoen, and Northern Sotho peoples. 'Tradition' in this context refers to a grouping of stylistically similar rock art images. Sackett (1977: 371) refers to such stylistic groupings as a "historically bounded transmission of culture", arguing that the degree of similarity in terms of the choices made among historically related people depends upon the intensity of their social interactions.

These painting traditions, as social systems, are not closed, and an agent's *habitus* or sphere of influence may transcend the faded and interlocking boundaries of that agent's traditional grouping, especially in an area such as the Makgabeng, where multiple traditions are found in the same landscape. The boundaries of such groupings may, furthermore, be more or less easily transgressed depending on the relationship between groups, allowing for different levels of "social osmosis" (Jolly 1996: 287). Although distinctions between groupings may become even more difficult to pinpoint, as cultural practices are shared or adapted, such uncertainty about where boundaries begin or end does not mean that these categories do not exist (Smith & Ouzman 2004: 502).

**Things and people**

Beyond the group and the individual, *things* and their production are considered an integral part of social structures. "As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce" (Marx & Engels 1970: 42). Things of production are essential components in the understanding of past social systems because of the interconnectivity between people and things. Alfred Gell (1998) suggests that things abduct agency from the people who produce them and are defined by their roles in social relationships. Things are secondary agents; they are extensions of the agency of their makers and are thereby enmeshed in social relationships (Layton 2003: 451).

Hodder (2011) refers to these enmeshed social relationships as an *entanglement* of things and people. He notes that because things cannot reproduce themselves, they cannot exist without humans, and humans are therefore part of a looped system, depending on things that in turn depend on humans (Hodder 2011: 162-164). According to Hodder, these bonds of entanglement should not be thought of as strings but rather as cables, strengthened by the

interaction between material, biological, social, cultural, psychological, and cognitive strands (Hodder 2011: 164).

The study of a thing, such as a rock painting, embraces the study of all people entangled in its cultural network. Things, however, are not only bound in a network with people: they are entangled with other things as well. While humans and things have intricate two-way relationships, things are connected to other things in ways that draw people in (Hodder 2012: 59). This relationship will be referred to as a 'thing-thing dependency'.

There are two ways to approach this thing-thing dependency. First is the manner in which a composite thing may rely on all its components to function, such as a fishing rod, hook and line; or the different parts that comprise a car (see Hodder 2012: 47). The second approach is concerned with how various things make up a collection or classification of things. Appadurai (1986) makes the distinction between cultural biographies (see Kopytoff 1986) attributed to a single thing, and social histories, which refer to a class or type of thing. The social history of things and their cultural biographies are not exclusive; the social histories of things over time and at extensive social levels are the boundaries for the meanings of the short-term trajectories of individual things (Appadurai 1986: 36). Furthermore, the many small changes in the cultural biographies of things may, over time, lead to shifts in the social history of things (*ibid*). Things and groups of things therefore function in a similar manner to individual people and groups of people. In other words, a single rock art image is to a tradition what a painter is to a cultural grouping of painters.

## The thing itself

Any notion of *the thing itself* seems "indefensible given the notion of co-constitution and it remains true that most anthropological and archaeological accounts of materiality or material agency or material cognition remain human-centred" (Hodder 2011: 157). Hodder specifically focuses on things themselves, not in a manner that disregards their entanglement in the larger system but rather by exploring the social life of people through the lens and perspective of things. This approach attempts to use the characteristics and stories of the things to gain insight into the people whose agencies they have abducted. Appadurai (1986) notes that even if one regards things as "necessarily having no meanings apart from those bestowed upon them by human interaction this does little to shed light on the concrete and historical circulation of things obtained by considering their forms, uses, and trajectories where their meanings are inscribed" (Appadurai 1986: 5).

The trajectories of things are of particular interest to this project, as it proposes that rock art should be regarded, not as static or unchanging, but rather as having biography (Kopytoff 1986, Gosden & Marshall 1999). The term 'biography' is used here to refer to *life stories,* as it would be applied to the life story of a person. It is therefore the "things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context" (Appadurai 1986: 5). In this manner one breaks away from a Marxian view, which focuses mainly on production, thereby allowing for the inclusion of other stages of the thing's life, such as exchange, distribution, and consumption (Appadurai 1986: 13). There is no simple recipe for a biography, and things, like people, can move in and out of different states of being. Such movements can be "slow or fast, reversible or terminal, normative or defiant" (Appadurai 1986: 13). The life of a book, for instance, may be regular, functioning as a tool for education or entertainment and gradually gaining value as it ages. It may also follow an irregular path, as it could be used as a doorstop. A state of value may be gained instantly if it were to be inscribed by the author, while the value may decrease if the author is discredited. As the binding loosens the thing might slowly shift out of a state of value, but if it were to be repaired the state shift is reversed in a day. If the book had to perish in a fire the shift would be permanent or terminal.

Biographies of things are just as partial as those of people (Kopytoff 1986: 67-68) and certain aspects of these biographies are selected for the purposes of this study. Regarding the social biographies of the rock art in the Makgabeng, it is necessary to consider three points: 1) the production or painting of the lower layer; 2) the shifting of the painting from the state of an originally intended ritual context to a state of being desirable to the people who come into contact therewith; and 3) the consumption of the rock art when it is superimposed by another painting tradition.

**Production**

Production places a thing within a social network of entanglement. It is the phase wherein rock art is embedded with a context, purpose, and agency that allows it to function as intended. This intended function can be regarded as the customary path of the thing. Appadurai (1986: 28-29) stresses the importance of understanding the customary paths on which things are set, as it is only in relation to these paths that divergences in the social life of things can be understood. We therefore must understand what a thing is before we can understand what it becomes and why. In this regard, the underlying rock art in a

superimposed stratigraphy must be considered by itself, as it was before superimposition occurred. This entails the identification of the image, what that image may have represented to the painter, as well as the visual qualities of the image, such as elongation and style, and its entanglement with adjacent images that were produced in the same context or beforehand. This approach enables one to understand the part an image may have played in the immediate social context or tradition in which it was created, as well as how it might have been perceived by actors from different, but entangled, painting traditions.

**Divergences and phases**

"Divergence is frequently a function of irregular desires and novel demands" (Appadurai 1986: 29). When there is a desire or demand for rock art to be painted over it can be thought of as shifting into a state of value. For Appadurai (1986) and Kopytoff (1986), this state of value is seen as commoditisation. Commodities, however, are special kinds of goods that are commonly associated with capitalism (Appadurai 1986: 7) and exchange (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). Is it then possible to regard the rock art of the Makgabeng as a commodity although it does not conform to the ideas of capitalist production?

In this case it is the manner in which commodities are regarded and how systems of value are dealt with by Appadurai and Kopytoff that are of interest. By simultaneously drawing towards and breaking away from the commodity approach, it is proposed that rock art be regarded as a special sort of product that conforms to some behavioural qualities of commodities but differs from others. Rock art can be seen to fall within a unique arena for tournaments of value, which is specific to the time and place in which it is produced and consumed. Although rock art cannot be equated to a thing within an industrial capitalist society, the concept of commodity can help track the manner in which it functions as a thing of value. Weiss (2005) approaches rock art from this duel perspective by noting the following:

> "In tracing the seemingly immobile materiality of the rock face, a perspective on the turbulent interface of these two divergent regimes of valuation is gained- a perspective that avoids either simplistic economic determinism or mere ethnographic analogy" (Weiss 2005: 48).

It is therefore perhaps better to adopt some of the looser definitions of commodity *states* from Appadurai (1986) in order to avoid the pitfalls of stricter capitalist or economic frameworks. Rock art paintings can thus be regarded rather as "things with a particular social potential"

(Appadurai 1986: 6). Specifically considering the state of value into which the rock art moves when it becomes desired, before it is superimposed upon, allows us to consider "the commodity potential of … things rather than searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sorts of things" (Appadurai 1986: 13). This implies considering exchange potential, rather than exchange itself. Commodity is hence not one kind of thing rather than another, but a phase in the life of some things (Appadurai 1986, Kopytoff 1986).

This concept, furthermore, allows a stationary thing such as rock art to be regarded as a thing with trajectories, and which may pass from one hand to another. Rock art, unlike many other things, cannot be set in physical motion, and its trajectories are therefore the phases through which it moves. An example of this is how a stationary thing, such as a plot of land, can be seen to move down a genealogical diagram, in which one notes concretely how it passes from hand to hand (Kopytoff 1986: 66). The next phase shift that occurs in response to a phase of value or desire is that of consumption.

**Consumption**

For the purposes of this study, superimposition is considered to be the main form of consumption. The notion of 'consuming' rock art is useful when referring to the use or appropriation of a rock art site. Rock art can be viewed as being consumed in many ways by many people in southern Africa; and as discussed above, as with any phase shift, consumption may be slow or fast, reversible or terminal, normative or defiant (Appadurai 1986: 13). Consumption may even be regarded as compounding or constructive, where one phase of consumption overlies another without reversing or erasing it.

Ouzman (2001) discusses an instance involving a rhinoceros engraving in the Free State, South Africa, where rock art is argued to have been consumed. A black rhinoceros was engraved on a rock that had been used as a rhino rubbing post. This engraved rock shows further signs of hammering below the rhino, human rubbing on the rhino's horn, and the human removal of at least four flakes from the rock (Ouzman 2001: 248). These markings on and around the engraving do not represent a terminal state of consumption but rather the continuous and accumulative life story of a site. Ouzman further suggests, firstly, that the intensive layering of usage would have served to mark the rock as a cynosure that attracted attention; and secondly, that such a rock was sought out and flaked by people wishing to possess a piece of a potent object (Ouzman 2001: 249-250). The rock art among the studied

sites in the Makgabeng was never physically flaked or removed as things, referred to by Ouzman as metonyms, "capable of evoking compound totality comprising image, site, personal relations, and the Spirit World" (Ouzman 2001: 250). It can be argued, however, that by superimposing the rock art of others the painters sought to take control of the site and evoke (or supress) similar compound totalities.

The trajectory and flow of commodities is a "shifting compromise between socially regulated paths and competitively inspired diversions" (Appadurai 1986: 17). It is within this competitive context that a distinction is made between compounding and terminal consumption. In the example of the rhinoceros engraving the site is partially consumed by those who rub, hammer, or flake the rock, and the marks left as evidence of their consumption contribute to the layering that enhances the rock's status as a cynosure or focal point. Farming communities in southern Africa are known to draw from the autochthonous powers of San rock art (Hall & Smith 2000) and in cases where Northern Sotho painters superimposed their imagery over that of San painters in order to draw from such powers, the underlying rock art is not entirely obliterated and is still partially visible. This type of consumption is therefore not terminal, as it shifts the underlying rock art into a new state that is, in part, defined by its relationship with the overlying images. It is difficult to say whether such a shift to a new composite state adds value to the site in the same manner as the markings on the rhinoceros engraving discussed above. It is perhaps, in such a case, the underlying rock art that adds value to the overlying rock art rather than the other way around. Nonetheless, in both cases a shift occurs that entangles one thing with another and therefore, as secondary agent of the painters, entangles one painting tradition with another, so as to create a new complex and intertwined composite thing. As the underlying rock art is still visible, it becomes an important and contributing (though perhaps not equal) part of the new state in which the composite thing finds itself and, therefore, remains susceptible to further potential commoditisation.

Underlying rock art that is blocked out or visually dominated to the point where it is barely visible (or not visible at all) could be regarded as being terminally consumed and having shifted out of any state of further potential commoditisation or exchangeability. An example of this is the superimposition of Khoekhoe rock art over San rock art, as referred to by Hall and Smith (2000: 43). In such a case the painter acts as an agent representing his/her immediate social division by means of the imagery affiliated with his/her painting tradition, while simultaneously displaying a greater understanding of the social system by manipulating

the resources for social, spiritual, economic, or political purposes. Appadurai, referring to the Kula system, notes that in such tournaments of value, strategic skill is measured generally by the success with which actors attempt diversions or subversions of culturally conventionalised paths for the flow of things (Appadurai 1986: 21). Although value is not static within or between cultures, the diverging of a thing from its intended path for one's own benefit is a formidable and crafty strategy for taking control of commodities that may yield varying degrees of success. A deliberate effort is thereby made to disable the compound totalities of the site, removing the opposition's thing from its value state by means of consumption, so as to prevent it from playing a part in advancing further social relations. Where underlying art is blocked out completely, the success of terminal consumption strategies could be seen to result, due to a lack of further superimposition over predominantly covered rock art. Inversely, such an interpretation could be debunked or the strategies shown to be unsuccessful by further superimposition over previously visually dominated rock art.

Consumption by superimposition is therefore an act of taking control of the rock art of others, either to draw from the agency of another's image, or to block the image from view or further agency. This would be the primary objective of superimposition. The secondary result, then, would be that consumption shifts the original image into a new phase in its biography. This is either a terminal shift out of any state of further potential commoditisation, or a shift into a new composite relationship between two or more images. These politically, socially, or spiritually motivated shifts provide some insight into the relationships between the producers and consumers, but still lack specificity with regard to why certain images were chosen for the upper and lower layers and, furthermore, what such new composite phases might represent.

One of the key elements of production, consumption, and to an even larger extent, manipulation of resources for personal gain, is knowledge. In the next section the systems of 'knowledge of production' and 'knowledge of consumption' are assessed in order to deduce how coherence or disparity in meaning between components of composite imagery may lead to an enhanced understanding of the painting traditions of others.

## Knowledge is power

Complex shifts in the organisation of knowledge, which often go beyond changes in economy or technology, do occur (Appadurai 1986: 47). These knowledge systems not only provide a window through which the relationships between interacting people can be studied; they

furthermore affect the trajectories and values of things. Hodder (2012: 34) uses the example of a potsherd that is passed around a classroom, noting how the interest of the students peaks when they are told how old it is. The agency and flows of things therefore depend both on the thing itself and what we know of the thing, how we perceive the thing and how we imagine the thing (*ibid*). It would have been equally interesting to observe the students' reactions had Hodder told them that it was a piece of a toilet bowl. Such knowledge may have evoked disinterest or even disgust. Knowledge of the thing adds or subtracts value and makes it either more desirable or undesirable.

Appadurai (1986: 41) differentiates between two sorts of knowledge: the knowledge (technical, social, aesthetic) that goes into producing the thing, and the knowledge that goes into appropriately consuming the thing. In the case of rock art superimposition, the underlying images are unlikely to have been produced with the intention of their consumption by superimposition, and 'appropriate' consumption is relative to the desires and insights of the consumer. What is essentially being tested here is whether the rock art was shifted into a state of potential commoditisation because of specific insights that the consumers may have had into the meaning or production of the original image, or whether the images were consumed on the grounds of separate mythologies created by the consumers. The superimposing painter, then, consumes the thing based on learned or assumed knowledge, by means of further production. This entails tapping into his/her own system of production knowledge in order to create the overlying image and embed within it the agency and cosmology of the consuming painting tradition. The new composite thing, therefore, comprises two distinct vessels of agency, knowledge, and worldview, which are either complementary, or in opposition.

To test these presuppositions, comparative ethnographies, as systems of knowledge, can be used to determine similarities and differences in the manner in which certain images were valued by consumers and producers. In the event of ethnographic similarities in meaning between the upper and lower layers of a composite thing, one can assume that the consumer had specific knowledge and insight into the cosmology of the producer and that there had been significant social osmosis. This would furthermore suggest similarities in desires, such as for rain control or fertility, and may indicate why certain images were chosen (or avoided) for superimposition. Such complementary or harmonious composite images may be sought in Northern Sotho rock art that is similar in content or meaning to the San rock art over which it is superimposed. Similarly, Khoekhoe imagery that is superimposed over San rock art in a

non-terminal or non-dominating manner of consumption may be testament to the complex interaction in which it is engaged, suggesting a mutual recognition of form and probably of content: the type of knowledge that is characteristic of sustained cultural contact (Smith & Ouzman 2004: 513). These images are not negatively appropriative and do not propose impermeable identities, instead forming part of the "essential business of people's positioning and repositioning themselves in evolving social contexts" (Ingold 2000). Though these translations are often skilled, they are the work of people with incomplete social information, which may have unintentional consequences for the underlying rock art (Smith & Ouzman 2004: 513).

"Even in more homogenous, small scale, and low technology loci of commodity flow, there is always the potential for discrepancies in knowledge about commodities" (Appadurai 1986: 41). In the event of disparity between the associated meanings of the components of a composite thing, one can assume that there was a knowledge gap between the producer and the consumer. Since there is no evidence for the involvement of third-party traders who could mistranslate knowledge, as with modern commodities, knowledge gaps could be attributed to the reasons suggested by Appadurai (1986: 48) which pertain to the alienation of either the producer or the consumer.

Disparity in meanings could be due to the knowledge of the underlying tradition being closely guarded and not shared with those who wished to consume it. When consumers are kept ignorant of the conditions of production the result is a deprivation in terms of the knowledge that creates the mythologies of an alienated consumer (Appadurai 1986: 48). Alternatively, such knowledge may have been shared with but disregarded by those of the consuming tradition, who chose to rely on their own mythologies of consumption. In a case such as this, one might expect to see a disparity between knowledge of production and knowledge of consumption, but a sense of harmony or concord when viewing both underlying and overlying images from the perspective and mythology of the consumer.

As relationships in areas of contact range from being mutually profitable client-patron interactions to the subjugation of hunter-gatherers into an active form of slavery (Van der Ryst 1998: 3), so the social permeability and sharing of knowledge may vary. Such varying permeability and the "accommodations that each rock art tradition makes to the other are key in understanding how people constructed and adjusted their identities" (Smith & Ouzman 2004: 513).

## Conclusion

The discussion thus far has highlighted the ways in which things and people come together within the larger context of social structure and how things and people are mutually bounded, shedding light on one another's life stories. The thing itself cannot exist without its contingent relationships with people and other things; but by momentarily singling things out and using them as lenses, we gain insights into the people who made, controlled, understood, misunderstood, manipulated, and/or appropriated them. The life story of rock art and its relation to the rock art of others through superimposition therefore reflects the subtle interactions between the agencies of the painters.

It is by means of the trajectories of things in motion that we can observe their dynamic roles within society; and it is through the reasons for the shifts in these trajectories that the painters' agencies become visible. These theories will therefore be applied to instances of superimposition in the Makgabeng so that the different relationships among the people who are entangled with the rock art can be examined. Within each instance of superimposition the upper and lower layers are identified as representations of production and consumption. They are then categorised according to painting tradition, subject matter, and manner of superimposition, so that a workable data set can be created, from which the full trajectories of their social histories and cultural biographies can be assessed.

# 3. FINDING SUPERIMPOSITION

In this chapter the techniques used to collect, categorise and analyse the data needed for this project will be presented. Bearing in mind previous research, as highlighted in Chapter 2, the objective is to determine how instances of superimposition can be analysed so that they can be tested against the theoretical methodology proposed in Chapter 3. In this project, an 'instance of superimposition' refers to a single conceptual relationship between two rock art traditions, where an image of one tradition is painted over an image of another tradition.

Within each panel 'instances' of superimposition were identified and documented. Where two or more images of the same tradition were painted over a single image from another tradition, this was regarded as a single instance of superimposition, owing to the single conceptual link or relationship between the upper and lower layer of the rock art, though such images may be regarded as separate for purposes of quantification. The same concept applied to the inverse, where a single image of one tradition was painted over two or more images of another tradition in the lower layer.

Lewis-Williams, while conducting research on syntax and function at Giant's Castle in South Africa's Drakensberg mountain range in 1972, suggested that slight overlaps in rock art may be eliminated in a non-diachronic study (Lewis-Williams 1972: 58). In the Makgabeng, however, there are occurrences of slightly overlapping superimposition at some rock art sites that cannot be eliminated as Lewis-Williams suggests. These instances are therefore regarded as meaningful and are thus included in the samples considered for this study.

## Sampling

Identification and sampling of the sites considered for this project was conducted by means of referring to the extensive unpublished site records compiled by Edward Eastwood, with the help of Jonas Tlouamma and Johnny van Schalkwyk (see *The Rock art of the Makgabeng Plateau*, 2002-2006, Vols 1 to 10). These reports list the painting traditions at each site, the image types and the frequency of image type occurrence within the site, pigment colours, techniques, and other general information (Fig. 4).

| | |
|---|---|
| **Research subarea:** | Makgabeng West |
| **Site name:** | **De La Roche 42** |
| **Reference number:** | MKW/DR/42 |
| **GPS reading (Garmin GPS 12):** | 23.17.850 S; 028.46.787 E |
| **Map sheet:** | 2328BD Treves |
| **Site Type:** | Shelter |
| **Aspect:** | North-west |
| **Dimensions: L/D/H** | 9;3;3 |
| **Environmental damage:** | Water runoff, dust, exfoliation |
| **Human damage:** | None |
| **Deposit:** | Sandy |
| **Surface artefacts:** | LSA microliths, pot sherds |
| **Surface features & structures:** | None |
| **Tradition co-occurrence:** | San, Khoekhoe & Northern Sotho |

**Northern Sotho Paintings:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Animals: | Indeterminate | 2 |
| | Elephant | 1 |
| Circles: | | 5 |
| Dots: | | 3 |
| Comb: | | 2 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Techniques:** | Monochrome |
| **Pigment colours:** | White, yellow |

**Khoekhoe Paintings**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Finger dots: | Lines | 37 (2 sets) |
| Apron: | Front | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Techniques:** | Monochrome |
| **Pigment colour:** | Red, white |

**San Paintings:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Humans: | Indeterminate: | 36 |
| Animals: | Indeterminate: | 2 |
| Antelope: | Indeterminate: | 10 |
| | Kudu: | 2 |
| Other animals: | Giraffe: | 3 |
| | Hyena: | 1 |
| | Antbears? | 2 |
| | Felines? | 2 |
| Plants: | Landolphia: | 1 |
| Aprons: | Front: | 2 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Techniques:** | Monochrome, bichrome, superposition |
| **Pigment colours:** | Red, white, yellow |

**Figure 4: Example of site record sheet**

(Adapted from Eastwood & Tlouamma 2003: 51)

A database was thus created, listing all recorded rock art sites on the Makgabeng plateau comprising more than one painting tradition, for sampling purposes. These sites account for 214 of the 660 documented rock art sites in the Makgabeng. Of these 214 sites, 65 (30%) showed evidence of superimposition. At the remaining 149 sites (70%) superimposition was absent (Fig. 5).

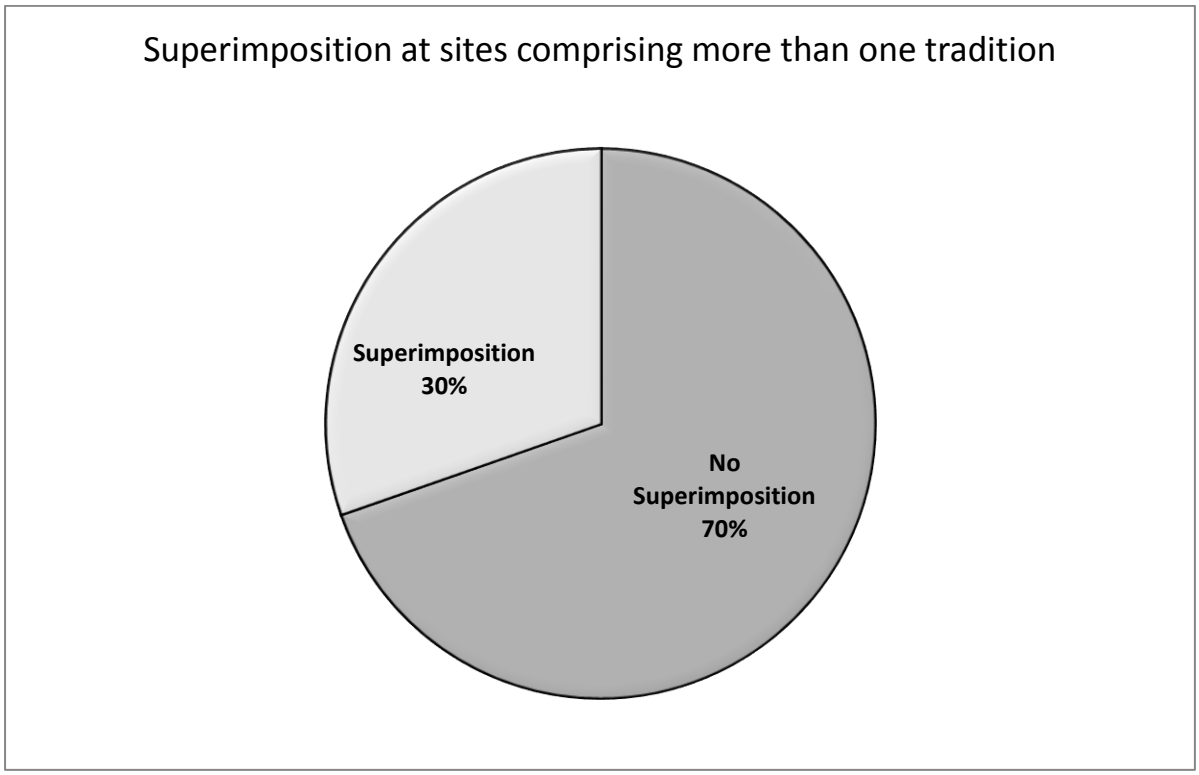


**Figure 5: Percentage of sites with and without evidence of superimposition**

The 65 relevant sites were then assigned consecutive numbers and listed in the order in which they were recorded in Eastwood's ten volumes. Using a random number generator, 15 of these sites were selected for re-recording for the purposes of this project. Each of these 15 sites was then comprehensively photographed in TIF format using a Nikon D300s camera, from the left-hand side of the panel surface to the right. Instances of superimposition were photographed in more detail and rough sketches were drawn, to ensure clear identification from the photographs. A new database of these 15 selected sites was then created, listing each instance of superimposition within each site as well as the image types, painting traditions, and relative positioning in the superimposed contexts.

After establishing the second database, it became apparent that the data set needed to be expanded, by investigating more sites, to allow for a more comprehensive approach to finding superimposition. To this end, all the Makgabeng sites listed in the South African

Rock Art Digital Archive (SARADA) at the time, and which could be identified as demonstrating both superimposition and rock art from more than one tradition (using Eastwood's records), were included. A total of 11 sites from SARADA, which were not re-documented in the field, produced instances of multi-traditional superimposition. The 11 sites were added to the 15 sites already in the database in the same manner as those documented in the field, bringing the total number of sites to 26. These 26 sites produced 74 instances of multi-traditional superimposition. Although not all 74 instances are discussed in detail below, they were all considered for quantification purposes.

Since the focus of this project is on categories of superimposition rather than on statistics, frequency of image types in the upper or lower layers was only considered to determine image type correlations and the extent to which each tradition has been superimposed over another.

## Challenges

Fieldwork was time consuming, as sites were chosen at random and were often far apart. Not all the relevant sites in the Makgabeng were visited; as this would have taken months and the data collected would have been unworkable within the prescribed timeframe. Although site visits were costly in terms of both time and funds, they were successful and comprehensive, given the weaknesses of working with other researchers' data. For instance, the quality of a standard photograph cannot be equated to seeing an example of rock art with one's own eyes. Nuanced details are sometimes lost in photography, compromised by poor light in rock shelters. When the sites were re-documented, detailed notes were taken so that images that would otherwise have been ignored or not immediately recognised could be identified with the help of sketches and descriptions. Although collecting data from SARADA allowed for much time and many resources to be spared, high-resolution images are only available on request and the picture displays on the website, from which superimposition was initially identified, are of moderate quality. This often rendered it impossible to see small fragments of pigment behind or beside another picture, and where these were visible, it was not always possible to determine whether these were indeed paint, or a result of natural deposition or weathering.

There were further limitations encountered in studying the rock art. Often with superimposition both the upper and lower layers of the rock art are visible; however, in other instances, the lower layer is completely covered and is barely visible without advanced

imaging software. Hence, it is probable that a number of instances of superimposition may have been unknowingly overlooked.

To determine whether an image was painted over or under another, the segments of overlap between pigment fragments were considered; either where one image protruded from beneath the other, or where pigment was mottled and weathered. Where images had faded, making layers difficult to discern, a magnifying glass was used to determine which image was painted first.

However limiting, the combination of these techniques allowed for a collection of dispersed sites to be explored, which would not have been possible at the time when Lewis-Williams conducted his research without the benefit of resources such as SARADA and computerised spreadsheets (Lewis-Williams 1972: 49). Digital photography, archives, and databases not only allow for time to be saved before and during field work: they also make retrieval of data quick and easy, so that discrepancies can be rectified and findings can be verified in an instant.

## Categorisation of images

Determining the subject matter of each image is difficult when pigments are faded or obscured, or when the manner of depiction makes it difficult to discern the subject. Eliminating unidentifiable images from the data could have resulted in the loss of other images within instances of superimposition. Images within instances of superimposition were therefore documented according to categories such as ‘vague’ or ‘indeterminable’ in terms of gender and species identification. Vague or indeterminable images were labelled as ‘indeterminate’ (Ind.). Categories included humans, animals, objects, geometrics, and other. These five categories were further divided into more specific sub-categories (Fig. 6).

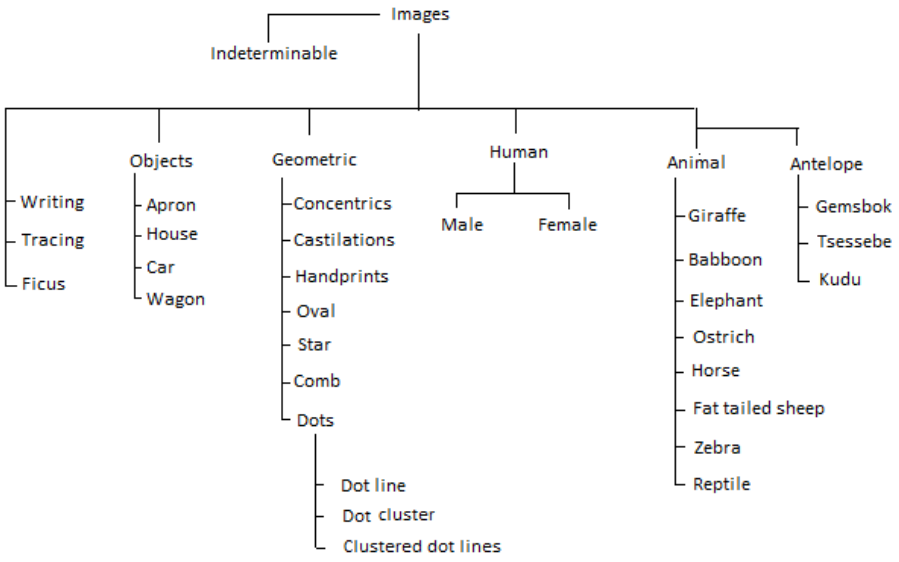


**Figure 6: Categorisation of image classes**

## Analysis

Tables 1 and 2 present image type and tradition, and the categorisation and recurrence of images, so as to determine the frequency of superimposition of each tradition over another as well as frequency of image types in the upper and lower layers.

Sites are referred to by the numbered abbreviations designated by Eastwood, Van Schalkwyk, and Tlouamma (*The Rock art of the Makgabeng Plateau*, 2002-2006, Vols 1 to 10), as these are simpler references than lengthy farm names (see Appendix 1). Instances of superimposition were identified within each site and the image types from these instances were separated into three columns showing the relationship between two specific traditions. The first column shows the Khoekhoe rock art images (left-hand side) painted over the San rock art images (right-hand side), with the exception an instance from site LB40 where the San rock art is painted over Khoekhoe rock art (indicated with double arrows). The second column shows the Northern Sotho rock art images (left-hand side) painted over the San rock art images (right-hand side) and the third column shows the Northern Sotho rock art images (left-hand side) painted over the Khoekhoe rock art images (right-hand side).

Where three traditions are painted over one another, all three columns are filled in and the relationship between each of the three layers is regarded as a separate instance of superimposition within a single line. Where a single instance is discussed in separate parts, it is split over two lines and connected with a square bracket ([ ). Sites sourced from SARADA are indicated with an asterisk (*).

**Table 1: Database Page 1**

| Site name | Khokhoe over | San under | Northern Sotho over | San under | Northern Sotho over | Khokhoe under |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| BE 2 | | | Reptile | Antelope and Animal | | |
| | | | Reptile and Tracing | Antelope and Animal | | |
| | | | Human (sticks) | Geometric | | |
| NJ 9 | | | Ostrich | Ostrich | | |
| NJ 19 | Apron | Animal | | | | |
| | Apron | Human | | | | |
| TL 3 | | | Car | Human | | |
| | | | Writing | Human | | |
| TL 11 | | | Kudu and Antelope | Antelope | | |
| | | | Animal | Human and Antelope | | |
| | | | Human and Horse | Animal | | |
| | | | Animal | Animal | | |
| | | | Animal and Animal | Ind. | | |
| | | | Animal | Antelope | | |
| | | | Human and Geometric | Human and Ind. | | |
| | | | Ind. | Antelope | | |
| | | | Man on Horse | Human | | |
| | | | | | Kudu and Animal | Dots |
| LB 8 | | | House | Human | | |
| | | | Writing and House | Human and Ind. | | |
| | | | House | Animal | | |
| | | | Human | Human | | |
| | | | Wagon | Human and Animal | | |
| LB 40 | | | Animal | Animal | | |
| | | | Antelope | Animal | | |
| | | | Wagon | Humans and Antelope | | |
| | | | Horse and Human | Human | | |
| | | | Ind. and Animal | Animal and Human | | |
| | | | Giraffe | Human | | |
| | | | Animal | Geometric | | |
| | Dot line | Antelope and Human | Ind. | Antelope | Ind. | Dot line |
| DR 42 | | | Elephant | Apron | | |
| | | | Tracing | Antelope | | |
| | | | Ind. | Antelope | | |
| | Dot lines | Antelope | | | | |
| | | | | | Comb | Dot lines |

**Table 2: Database Page 2**

| Site name | Khokhoe over | San under | Northern Sotho over | San under | Northern Sotho over | Khokhoe under |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| BE 2.5 | | | Giraffe | Zebra | | |
| GP 11 | | | Ind. | Human | | |
| | | | Giraffe | Zebra and Female | | |
| | | | Elephant | Humans and Zebra | | |
| | | | Giraffe | Ind. | | |
| GP 35 | Hand Prints | Ind. | | | | |
| | Hand Prints | Star | | | | |
| GP 47 | Dots | Antelope and Castellation | | | | |
| | | | Apron | Ind. | | |
| DS 8 | | | Ind. | Human | | |
| | | | Animal | Tsessebe and Antelope | | |
| MB 53 | | | | | Ind. | Dots |
| | Dots | Antelope | | | | |
| BE 27 | | | Baboon | Ind. | | |
| *GS 8 | | | Fat tail sheep | Ind. | | |
| | | | | | Ind. | Rayed concentric |
| | | | Human | Ind. | | |
| | | | Ind. | Animal | | |
| *LB 13 | Dot lines | Giraffe | Giraffe | Giraffe | Giraffe | Dot lines |
| | Dot lines | Giraffe | Rhino | Giraffe | Rhino | Dot lines |
| | | | | | Animal | Dot lines |
| *NJ 21 | | | Human | Human | | |
| *DR 4 | | | Animal | Animal | | |
| *DR 7 | | | Animal | Geometric | | |
| *BE 4 | | | Giraffe | Antelope | | |
| | | | Giraffe | Antelope | | |
| | | | Gemsbok | Human and Tsessebe | | |
| | | | Giraffe and Animal | Animal | | |
| | | | Giraffe | Human | | |
| | | | Ind. | Ind. | | |
| *BE 12 | | | Animal | Human | | |
| | | | Animal | Human | | |
| *BE 13 | Apron | Ficus and Gemsbok | | | | |
| | Apron | Antelope | | | | |
| *BE 15 | | | Ind | Fat-tailed sheep | | |
| *BE 25 | Dot lines and Oval | Antelope | | | | |
| *BE 29 | | | Giraffe | Antelope | | |

## Results

From the 26 sites, 57 instances (77%) of superimposition are attributed to Northern Sotho paintings over the rock art of the San; 8 instances (11%) are of Khoekhoe rock art painted over San rock art; and 8 instances (11%) consist of Northern Sotho paintings over Khoekhoe rock art. In one instance (1%) San rock art is painted over Khoekhoe rock art. These ratios are shown in Figure 7. For an understanding of the manner and instances of superimposition, relationships between the painting traditions were considered. Some of the images discussed here have been enhanced or traced using DStretch and Adobe Photoshop software to allow for greater clarity of the subtleties of superimposition. Black and red indicators have also been added to highlight details.

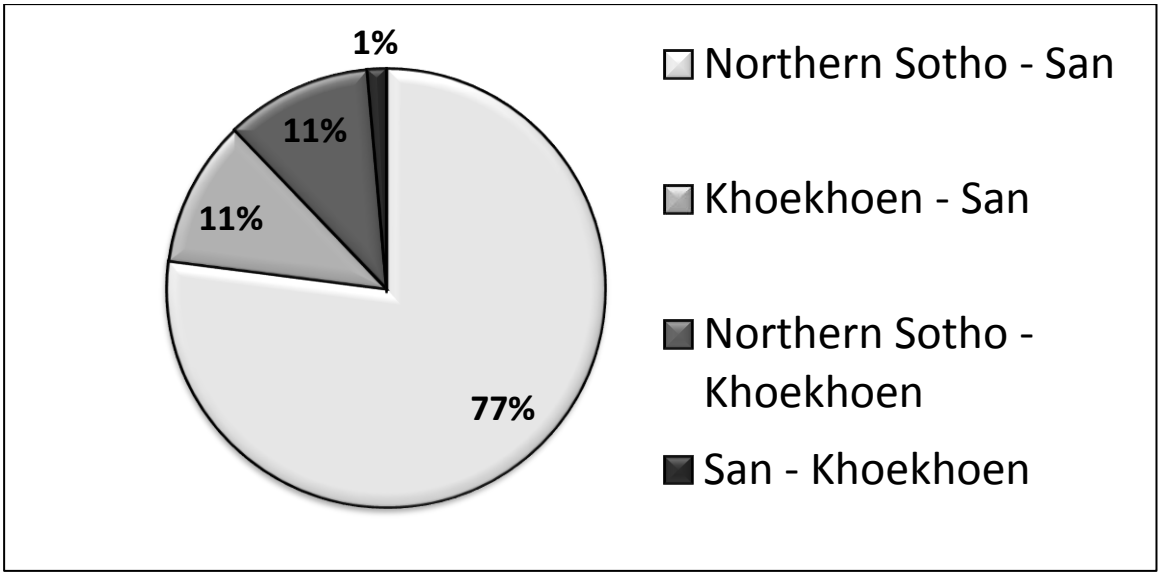


**Figure 7: Superimposition of traditions within the 26 selected sites**

### Khoekhoen and San

The small sample size and absence of a homogeneous pattern meant that, rather than focusing on specific correlation of one image type painted over another, the focus was on the various ways in which rock art attributed to the Khoekhoen visually imposes on the rock art of the San.

For example, in Figures 8 to 10 below, San images appear to be subdued by Khoekhoe handprints, finger dots, or aprons. This manner of superimposition is similar to that which is described at Salt Pan shelter, where San rock art is 'relegated to visual obscurity' (Hall & Smith 2000: 42). These instances of superimposition show Khoekhoe rock art painted over

animals, humans, or both, with no particular pattern of subject matter in the superimposed image.

Site GP35 (Fig. 8), also known as the Cave of Hands, depicts more than 20 Khoekhoe handprints on the rock surface, with the original San rock art barely visible beneath. Superimposition cannot be seen clearly due to the faded San pigments and it is clear that the Khoekhoe rock art dominates the shelter visually. What initially appears to be smearing and mineral salt wash at site MB53 (Fig. 9) is actually a series of white finger dots covering a San animal image. Only the rear end of the animal is visible. At site NJ19 (Fig. 10) several apron motifs of Khoekhoe rock art completely cover many of the San rock art images beneath so that they only become visible when digitally enhanced. .

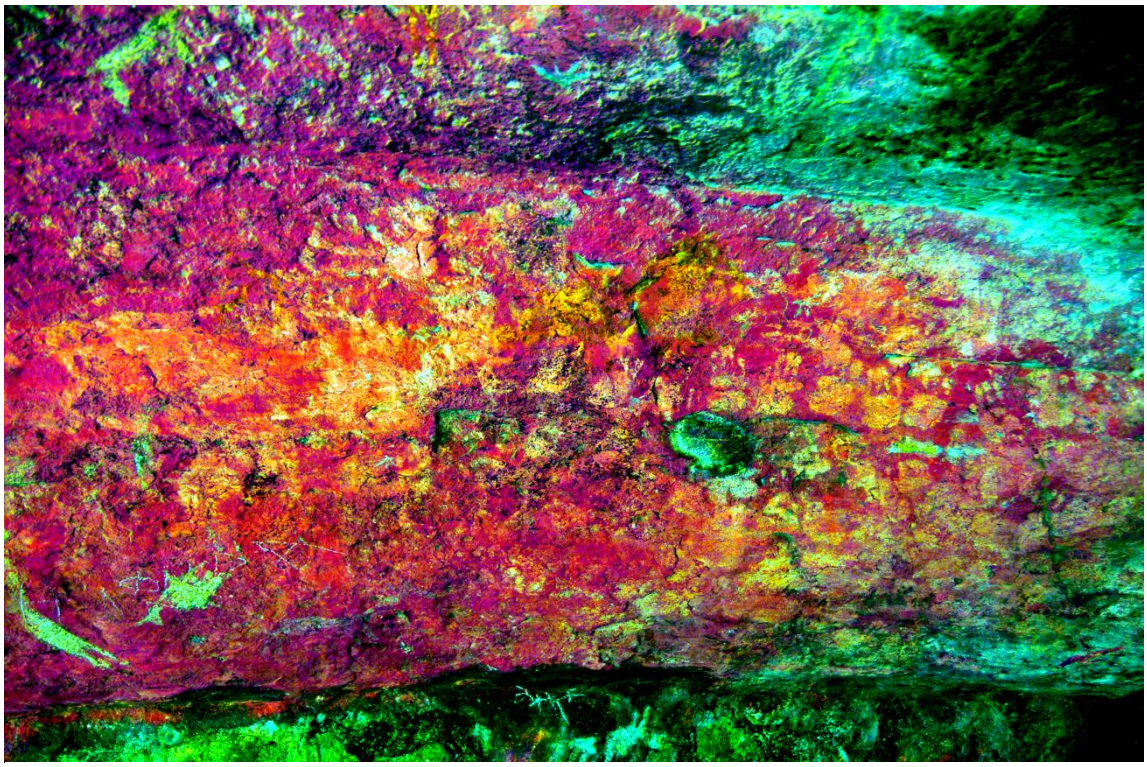

**Figure 8 (GP35): Red, orange and yellow fine line images faintly visible behind white (yellow in photo) handprints**

(Louw 2013)

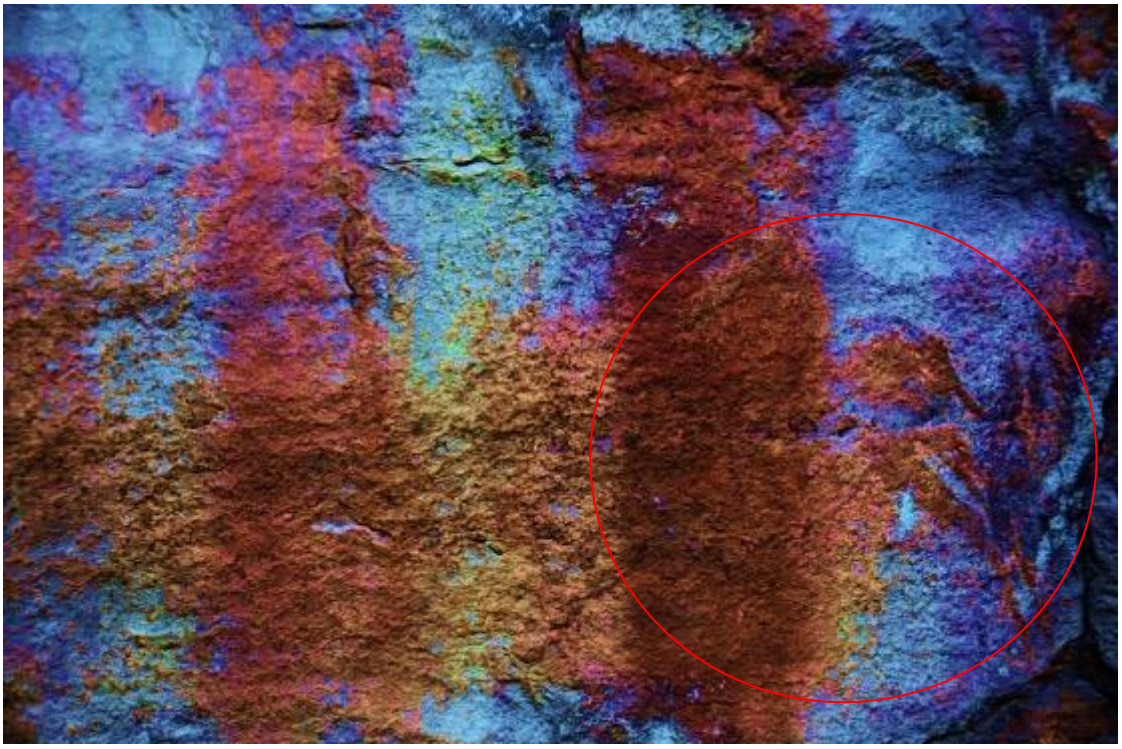

**Figure 9 (MB53): Hind section of animal protruding from behind mass of finger dots**

(Louw 2013)

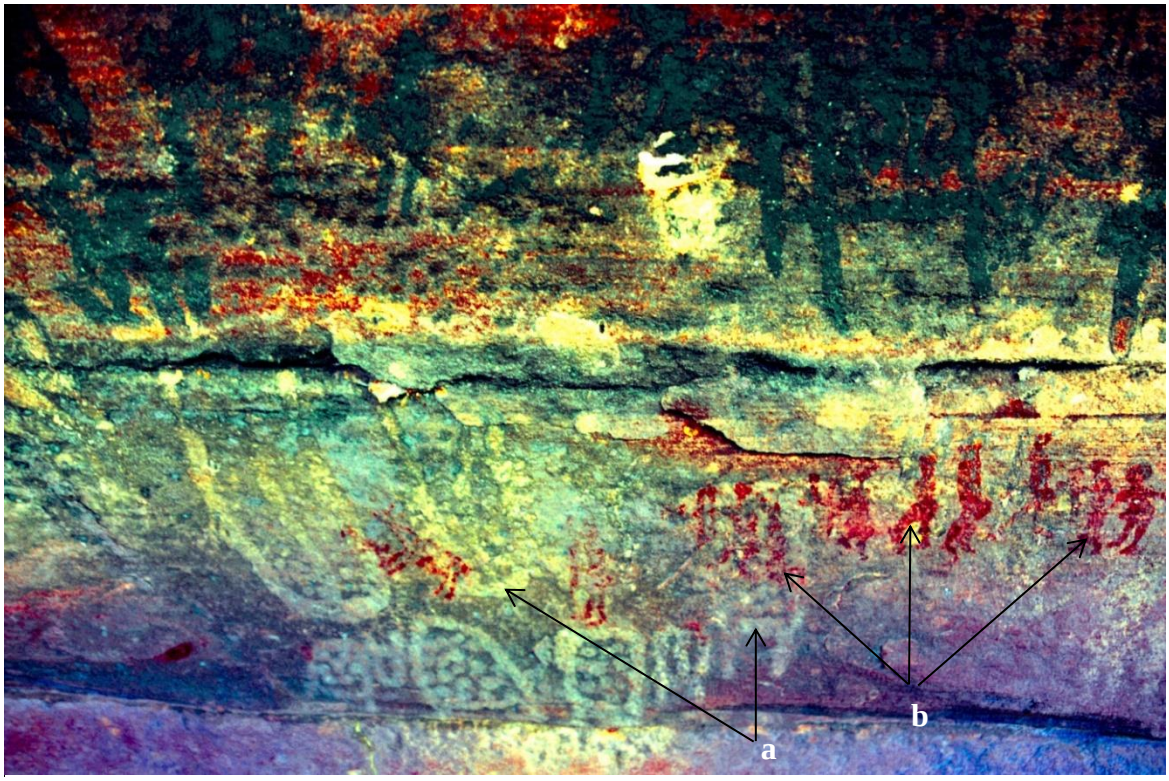


**Figure 10 (NJ19): Khoekhoe aprons (a) in white can be seen to cover some San images (b) beneath completely**

(Louw 2013)

Sites BE25 and LB13 demonstrate an intermediate instance of superimpositioning, with Khoekhoe finger dots overlaying the slightly visible lower layer of San paintings. At site LB13 (Fig. 11) white Khoekhoe finger dotes are painted over white San giraffe images, allowing them to remain visible. At site BE25 (Fig. 12) red finger dots are painted over orange San animal figures, diverting or stopping before they completely cross the underlying rock art. The dots are also painted so that they appear to form a platform on which one of the San images is standing. A Khoekhoe oval also overlies the San rock art but its centre is unfilled and the underlying San rock art remains visible.

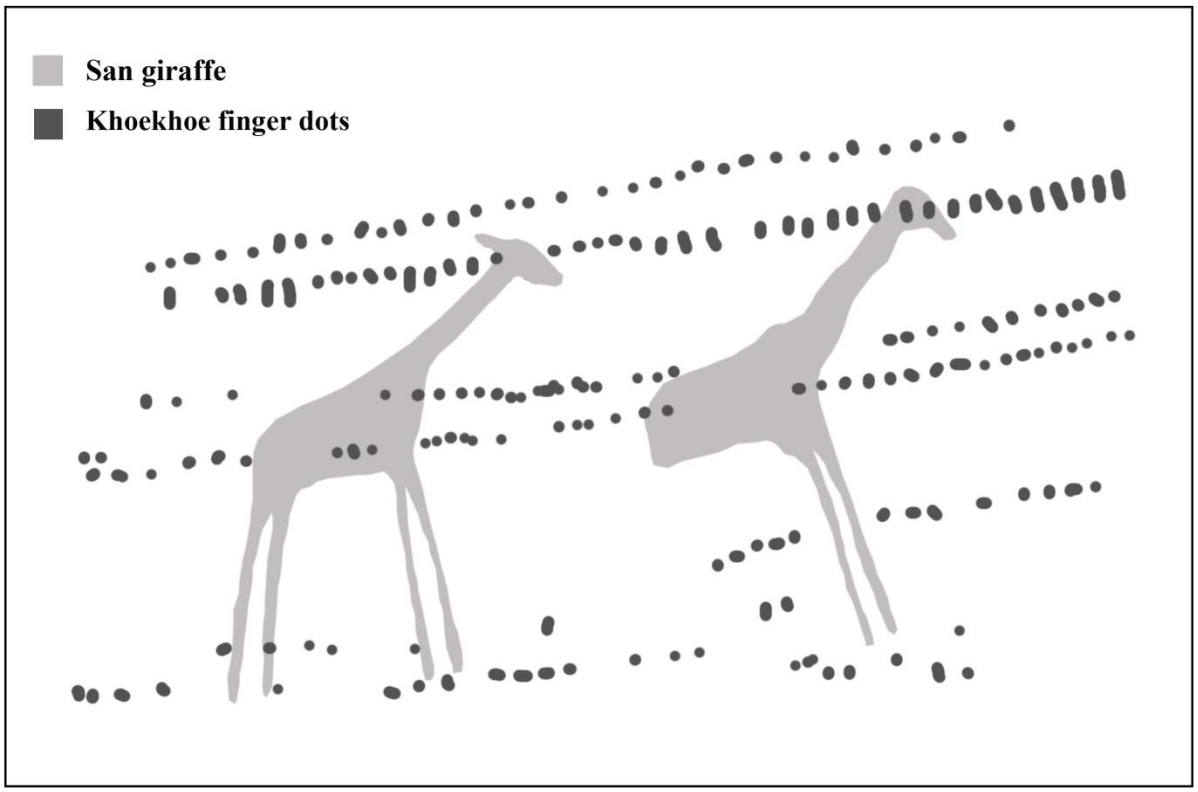


**Figure 11 (LB13): San giraffe figures beneath white Khoekhoe finger dots**

(Adapted from RARI 2002)

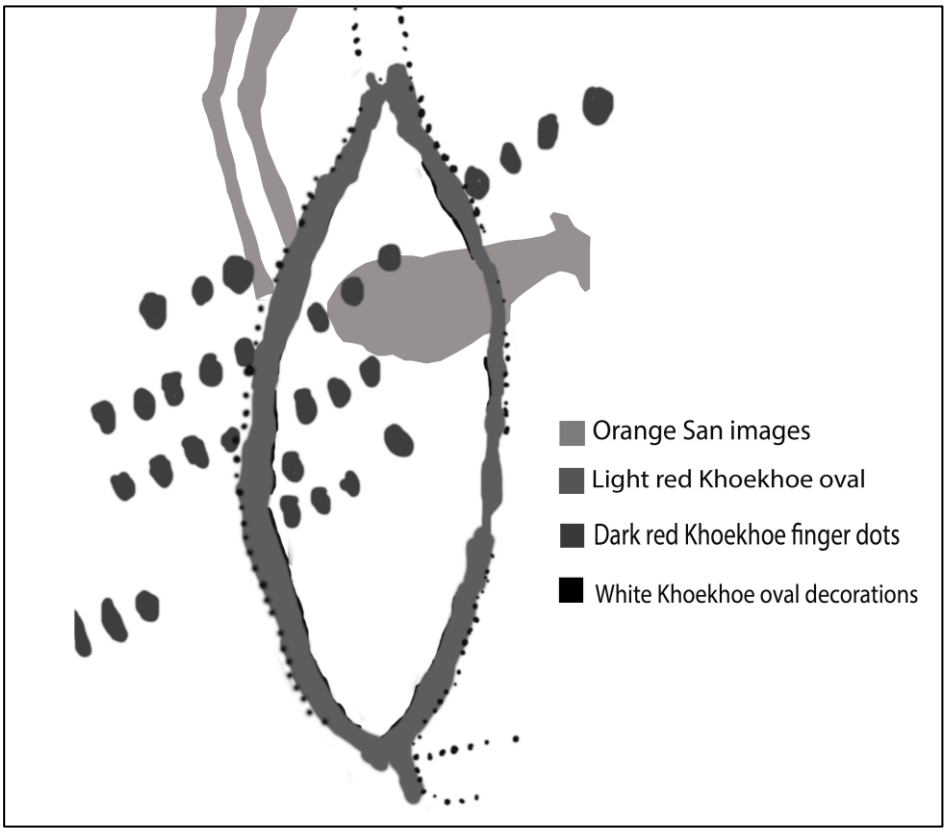


**Figure 12 (BE25): Red Khoekhoe oval and finger dots painted over San rock art**

(Adapted from RARI 2002)

Another type of superimposition apparent in the painting of Khoekhoe rock art over San images is at sites GP47 (Fig. 13) and DR42 (Fig. 14). These sites have rows of dots painted over clearly visible San images. The superimposition is subtle and only slightly covers the images horizontally. The dots in Figure 14 are hardly intrusive, giving the illusion that the underlying antelope is standing on the dotted line.

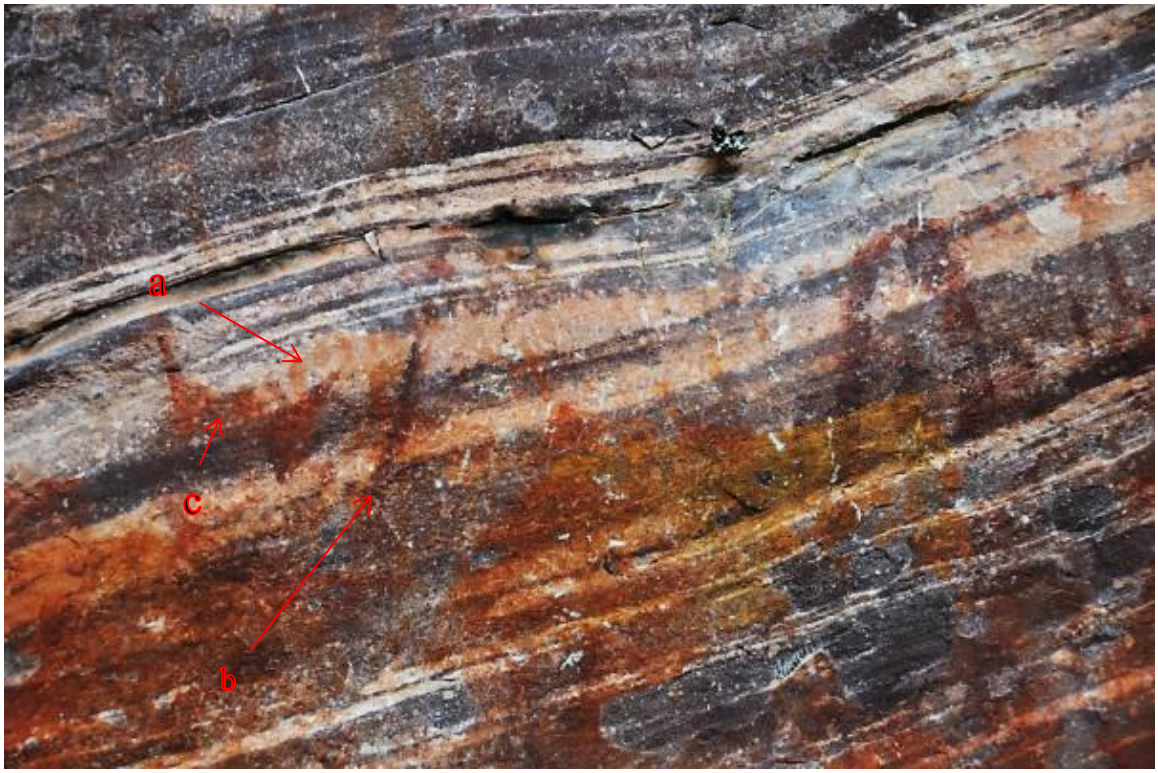


**Figure 13 (GP47): Light orange finger dots (a) running horizontally across San castellation lines (b) and antelope figures (c)**

(Louw 2013)

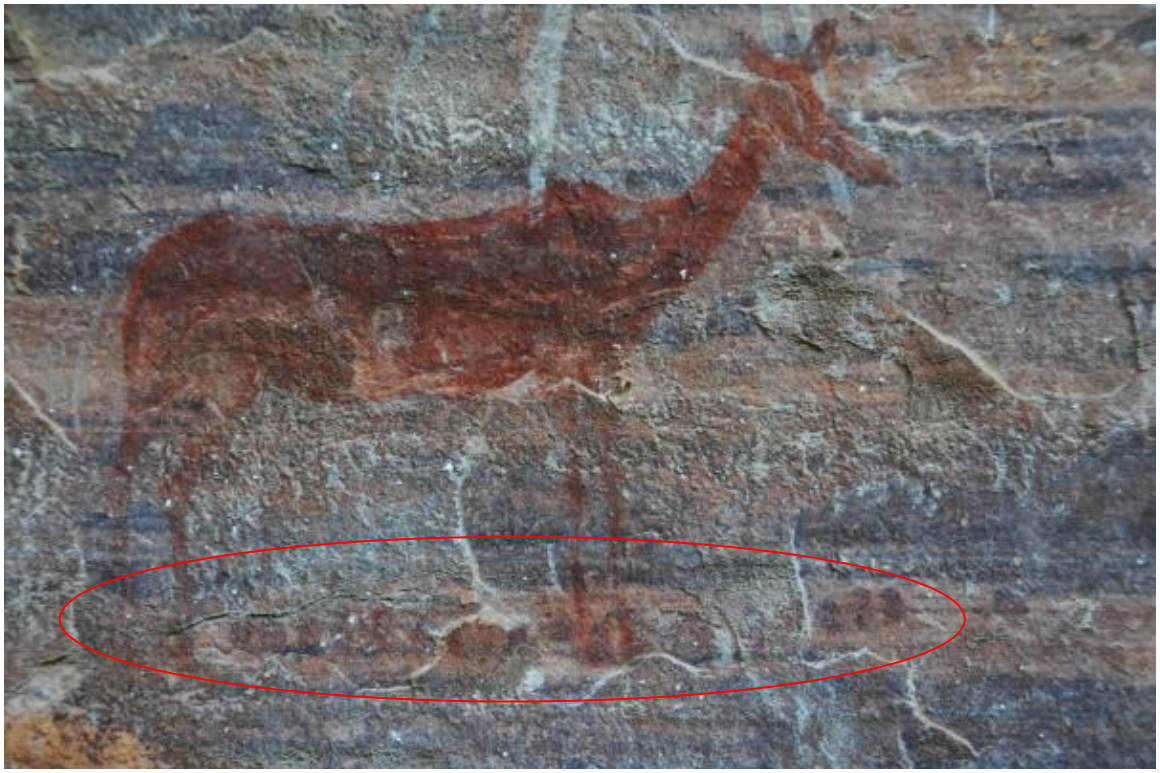

**Figure 14 (DR42): Purple dots running horizontally along feet of antelope**

(Louw 2013)

At site BE13, two Khoekhoe aprons partially cover the San rock art beneath (Fig. 15). The apron on the left-hand side is superimposed over a small section of a tree depiction. The fruit-bearing branch of the much larger tree depiction is visible beneath the top-left quarter of the apron. The bottom-right of the apron slightly overlays a San depiction of a gemsbok. The apron appears to nestle between the two San paintings.

The second apron is almost completely superimposed over the San depiction of an antelope. This second apron is depicted in a similar manner to the first, which indicates its depiction was likely influenced by the San paintings as well as by the first apron.



**Figure 15 (BE13): Aprons over gemsbok and *Ficus sur* tree branch**

(Adapted from RARI 2000)

At site LB40 (Fig. 16) a San antelope depiction and San human depiction are painted over a Khoekhoe dotted line. The San antelope is painted so that its body overlies a single horizontal line of purple Khoekhoe finger dots dots while a second Khoekhoe finger-dot line runs beneath the image, untouched. The San human image is painted so that its feet only just touch on the dot line, giving the impression that the human is standing on the line. This is the only instance among the studied sites where San rock art is superimposed over Khoekhoe rock art.



**Figure 16 (LB40): Khoekhoe finger dot line painted over San antelope image**

***Visual dominance and colour***

The two apron depictions from site BE13 are discussed as a single conceptual instance of superimposition on the basis of the stylistic similarities and proximity, but are tallied separately for Figure 17 as the one apron is partially superimposed while the other visually dominates the San rock art beneath. This raises the total number of studied types of Khoekhoe superimposition over San rock art to eight, with one instance of San rock art superimposed over Khoekhoe rock art.

Of the eight studied instances where Khoekhoe rock art is superimposed over San rock art, three are visually dominant. In these three cases the overlying rock art covers large parts of the underlying rock art, no effort having been made to avoid concealing it. In all three of these instances the overlying Khoekhoe rock art is painted in white.

At two of the eight instances of Khoekhoe superimposition over San rock art, at sites LB13 and BE25, the overlying Khoekhoe rock art covers the underlying San rock art but allows it to remain visible through spaces between the finger dots. The finger dots at site LB13 are painted in white pigment while the dots and oval at site BE25 are painted in red pigment. The extent of this type of superimpositioning will be referred to as intermediate.

Three of the eight instances of Khoekhoe rock art painted over San rock art are less invasive, only partially covering the underlying San rock art. In each of these cases an active effort has been made to avoid completely concealing the underlying art. Two of these instances comprise red or orange Khoekhoe finger-dot rows passing over San rock art, only touching the top or bottom of the original image. In one of the instances (tallied as two) two white aprons are painted so that the one only touches San antelope and tree depictions while the other completely covers a San antelope depiction. In one instance a San antelope depiction overlies a purple Khoekhoe finger-dot row. Figure 17 shows the relationship between pigment colour and the extent to which Khoekhoe rock art covers underlying San rock art.

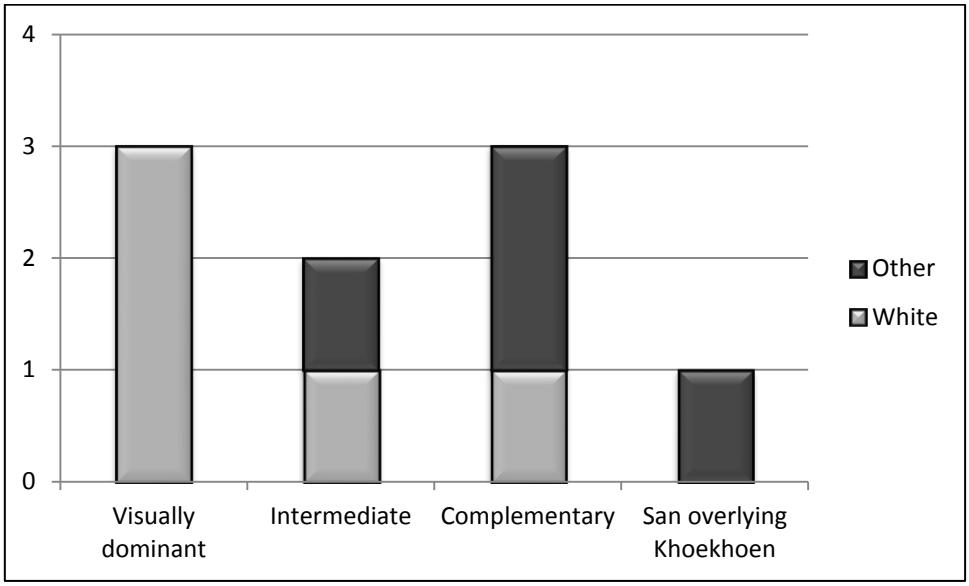


**Figure 17: Visual dominance and pigment colour**

## Northern Sotho and San

Instances of Northern Sotho rock art superimposed on San rock art are the most frequent form of superimposition among the 26 sites analysed for this project. Although all instances appear to be superimposed differently, a pattern did emerge, pertaining to repetition of image types, manner of superimposition, and image relationships in the upper and lower layers. For quantification purposes, only 39 of the 57 images could be clearly identified and were tallied to obtain the frequency of image types occurring in the upper layer. Images perceived to be linked, such as 'horses and humans' were grouped together; while those that occurred together but may not have been linked, such as 'human and geometric' were quantified individually. Figure 18 shows how many times each image type has been painted over San rock art at the 26 sites.

These image classes are discussed individually to understand their superimposition in context. However, since there are multiple occurrences in some categories, only a few are included here to illustrate the categories and manner of superimposition.

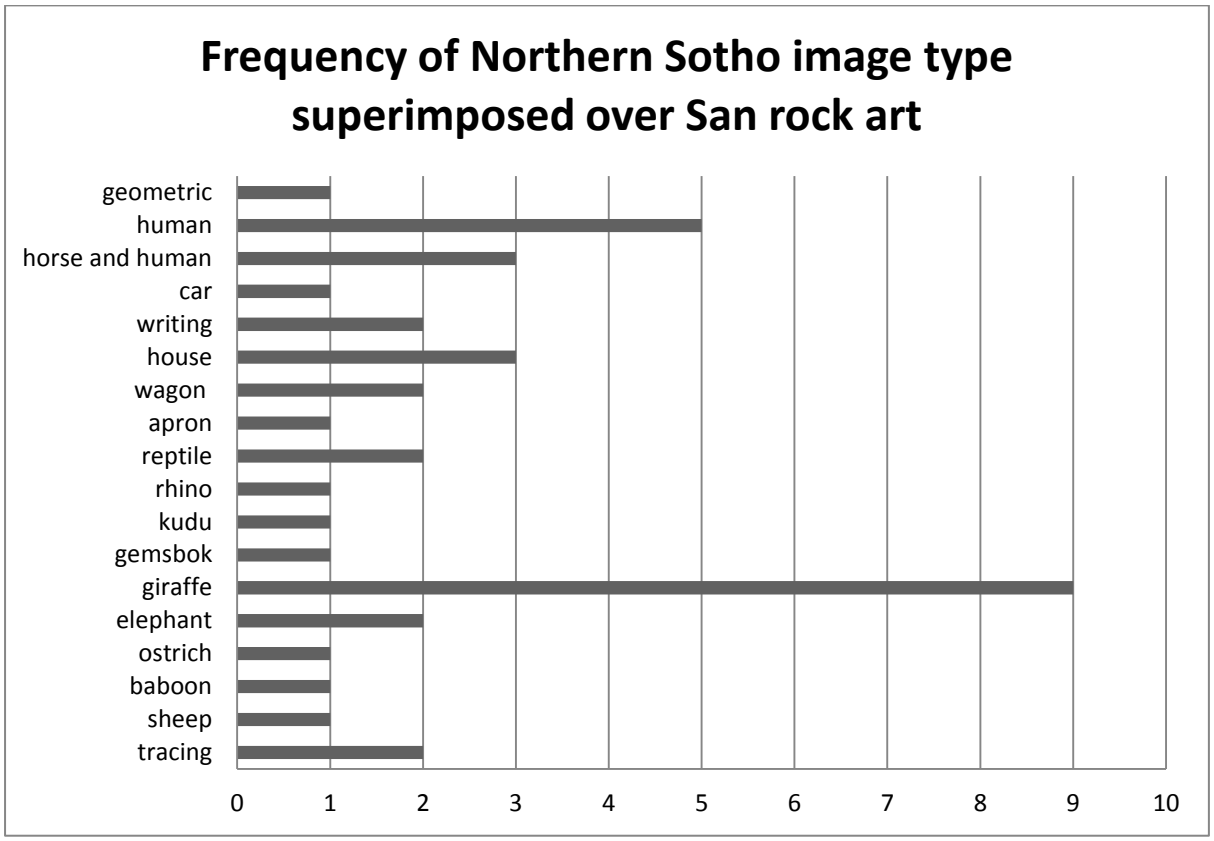


**Figure 18: Northern Sotho image types superimposed over San images**
**Y-Axis indicates Northern Sotho image categories; X-Axis indicates frequency of each Northern Sotho image category superimposed over San rock art**

### *Colonial period imagery*

This category comprises 11 instances of Northern Sotho paintings of horse riders, cars, writing, wagons, houses, and a train, superimposed over San rock art.

At site LB8 Northern Sotho house depictions are painted once over a San human depiction and once over a San animal depiction, while a third Northern Sotho house and alphabetic writing are painted over San depictions of a human and an indeterminate figure. Alphabetic writing is also painted over a human figure at site TL3.

At sites LB8 and LB40, wagons are painted once over a human and animal and once over a human and antelope. Figures 19 and 20 show the images of San human figures beneath the images of wagons. At site TL3 a car (Fig. 21) is depicted over a San human figure.

Three of the studied instances show Northern Sotho depictions of humans with horses. Two are painted over San depictions of humans (LB40, TL11) while one is painted over a San animal depiction (TL11). A Northern Sotho geometric representing a train is painted over San human figures at site TL11 (Figs 22 & 23).

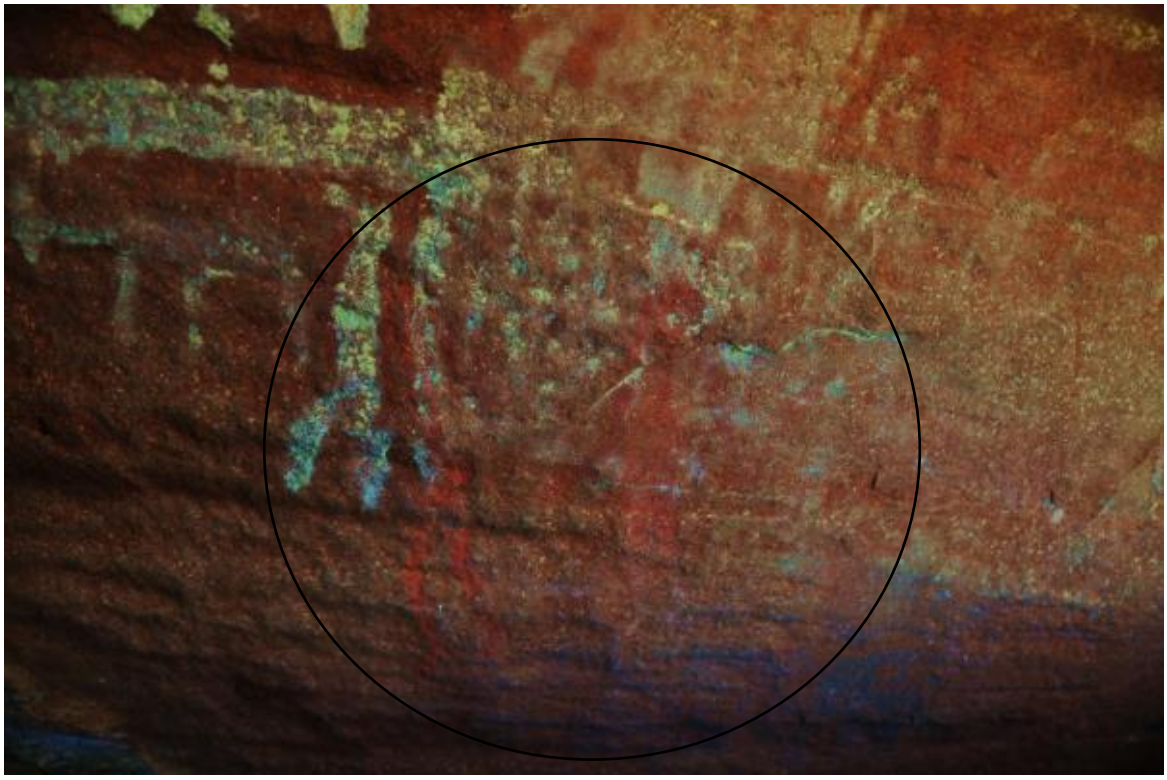

**Figure 19 (LB40): Wagon painted over human figures**

(Louw 2013)



**Figure 20 (LB8): Wagon painted over human figures**

(Louw 2013)



**Figure 21 (TL3): Northern Sotho car over San human figures**

(Louw 2013)




**Figure 22 (TL11): Northern Sotho train motif (1) painted over San depictions of humans (2)**

(Louw 2013)

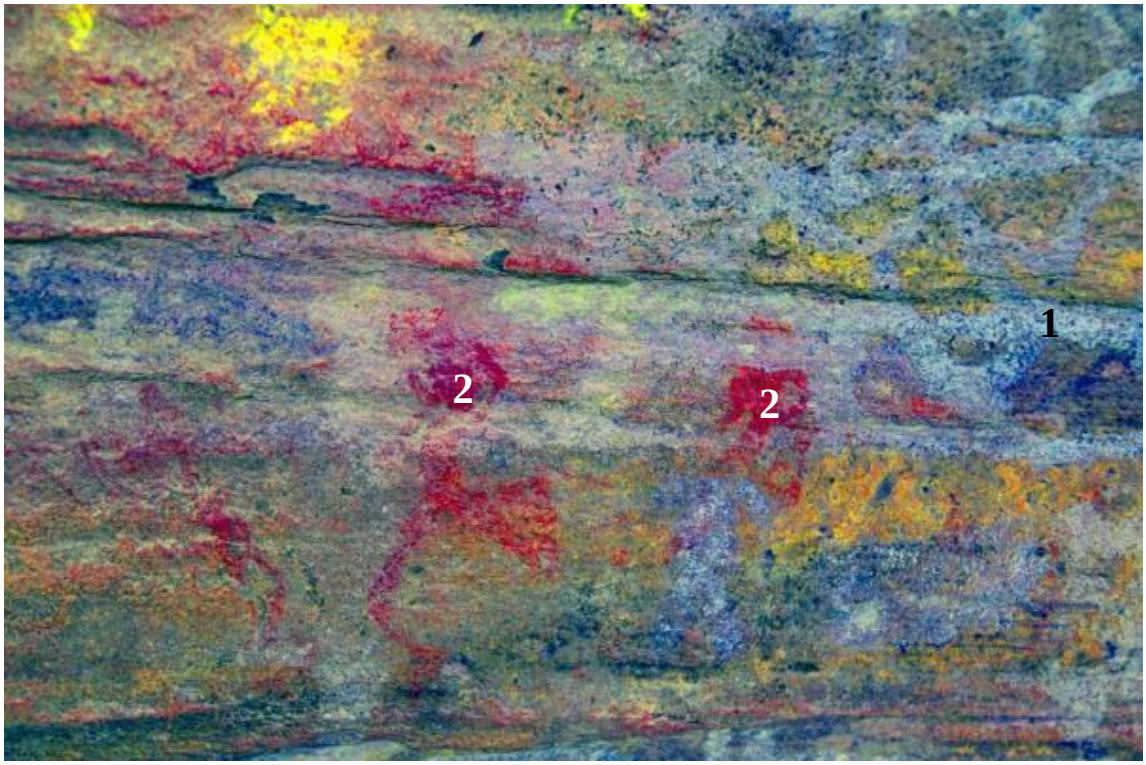


**Figure 23 (TL11): Northern Sotho train motif (1) painted over San depictions of humans (2) [enlarged and processed]**

(Louw 2013)

In seven of the 11 instances (64%) of Northern Sotho colonial rock art superimposed over San rock art, the underlying San depictions are of humans only. In two of the 11 instances (18%) Northern Sotho colonial rock art is painted over San human and animal depictions, while in a further two instances (18%) Northern Sotho rock art is painted only over animals. These ratios are shown in Figure 24. In other words, only 18% of the Northern Sotho colonial rock paintings at the studied sites have not been painted over San human figures, while 82% are painted over humans or both humans and animals.

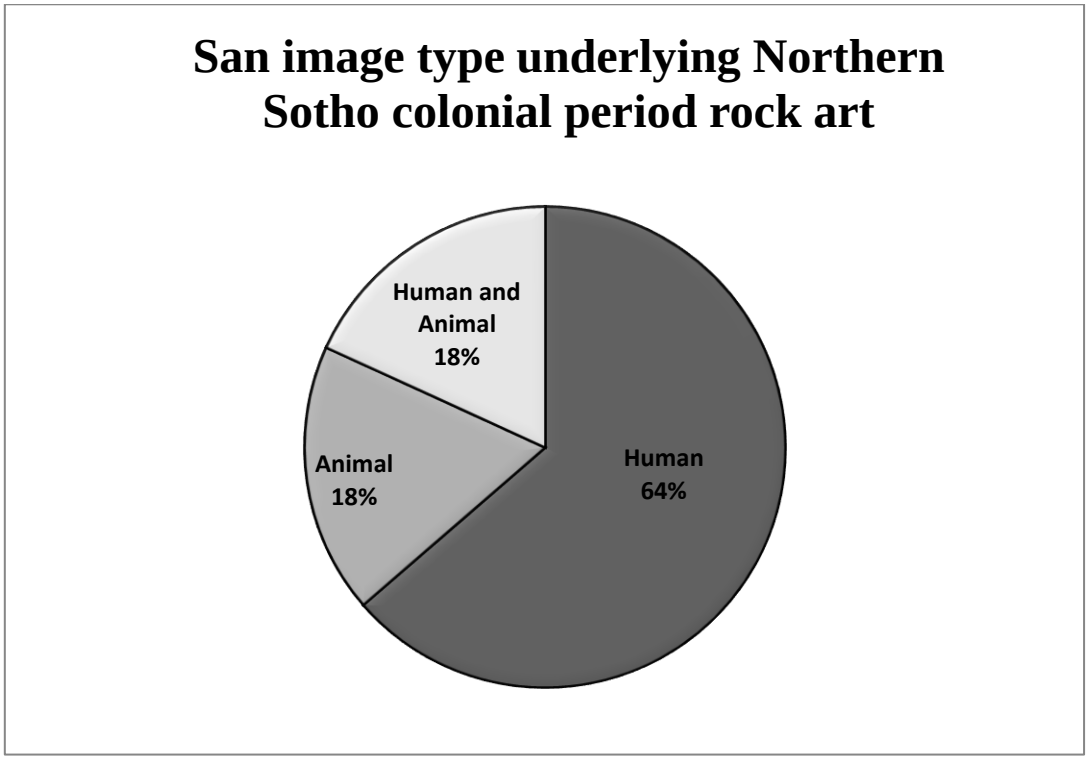


**Figure 24: Percentage of San image types painted over by Northern Sotho colonial imagery**

### *Human figures*

Of the nine Northern Sotho paintings of human figures, three are painted along with horses, and are probably colonially influenced rock art. Human figures without horses are painted over San depictions of humans, animals, geometrics, and indeterminate figures. The humans are depicted in various manners and in various contexts, showing no strict patterns of preference for images over which they are painted.

### *Animals*

Images that appear to be reptilian figures are superimposed over San rock art twice at the site BE2 (Fig. 25). These Northern Sotho rock art reptile shapes are painted over an antelope and

other indeterminate animals. There is only one instance of a kudu, one of a gemsbok and one of a rhinoceros painted over San rock art. At site TL11 (Fig. 26), a kudu is painted over a San antelope depiction; at site BE4 (Fig. 27) a gemsbok is painted over San human and tsessebe depictions; and at site LB13 (Fig. 28) a rhino is painted over Khoekhoe clustered dot rows and a San giraffe.



**Figure 25 (BE2): Northern Sotho reptile**

(Louw 2013)



**Figure 26 (TL11): Northern Sotho kudu over San antelope**

(Louw 2013)



**Figure 27 (BE4): Northern Sotho gemsbok (white) painted over San tsessebe (red) and human (yellow) depictions**

(Louw 2013)

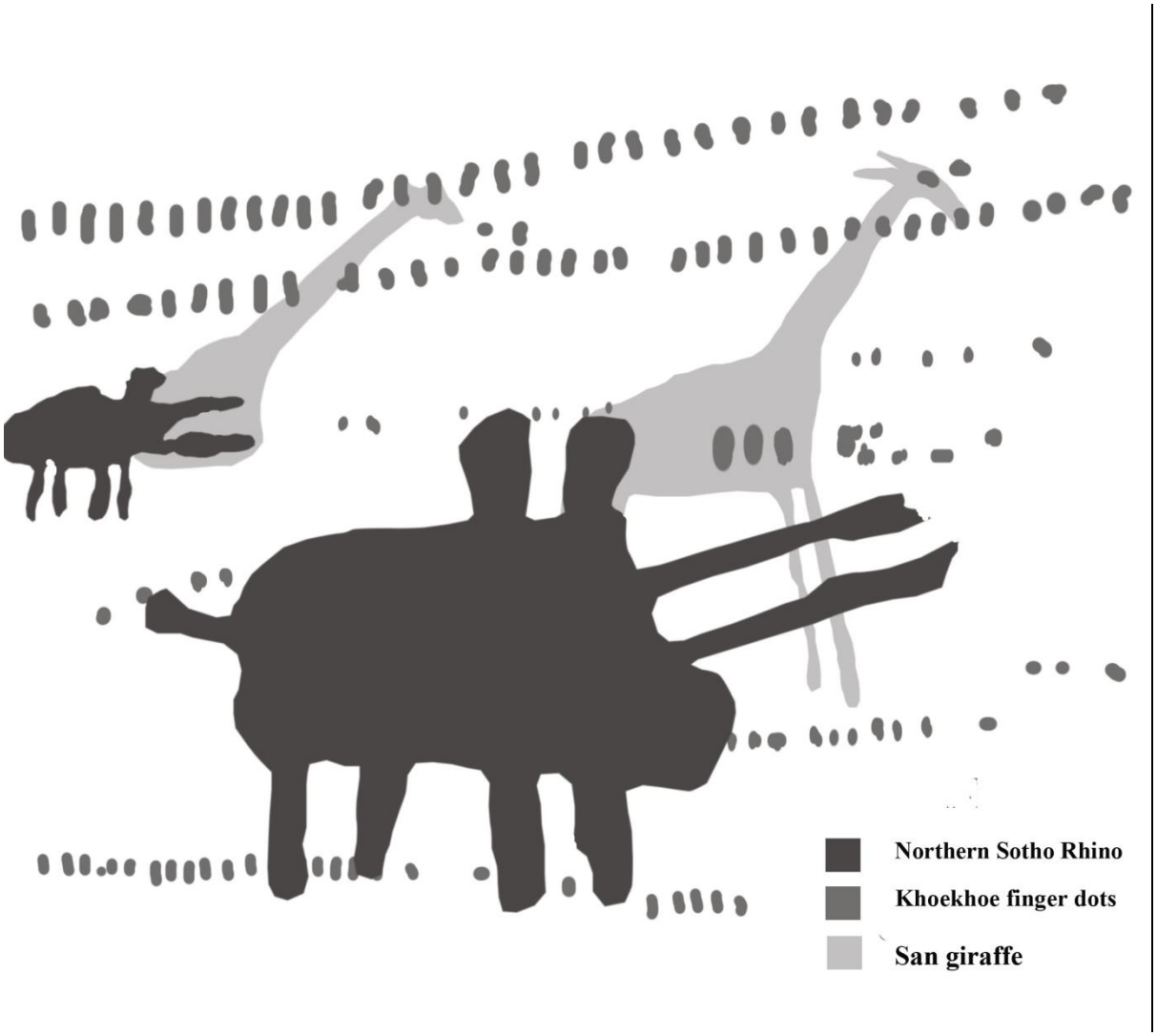


**Figure 28 (LB13): Northern Sotho rhino painted over San giraffe depiction**

(Adapted from RARI 2002)

Elephants are depicted twice in the upper layer, once over an apron at site DR42 and once over a zebra and humans at site GP11 (Fig. 29). A baboon is painted over an indeterminate San image at site BE27 (Fig. 30) and fat-tailed sheep also occur once in the upper layer, painted over an indeterminate image, at site GS8 (Fig. 31).



**Figure 29 (GP11): Northern Sotho elephant over San human figures**

(Louw 2013)



**Figure 30 (BE27): Northern Sotho baboon over indeterminate San image**

(Louw 2013)



**Figure 31 (BE27): Northern Sotho fat-tailed sheep over San animal depiction**

(Louw 2013)

From the 26 sites that were analysed, Northern Sotho giraffe are painted over San rock art ten times, by far the most common animal in the upper layer. Giraffe are painted twice over human figures at sites BE4 and LB40, once over a zebra at site BE2.5, and once over a zebra and a female human figure at site GP11. Giraffe are also painted thrice over antelope at sites BE4 and BE29, once over an indeterminate animal at site BE4, and once over an indeterminate image at site GP11. At site BE4 (Fig. 32) a Northern Sotho giraffe is painted next to a San giraffe, suggesting that the superimposed image choice may have been influenced by underlying and/or adjacent images. At site LB13, a large panel of ten Northern Sotho giraffe images are painted over clustered Khoekhoe dot rows and San giraffe images (Fig. 33). However, one cannot be certain as to whether this relationship pertains to the finger dots, the giraffe, or both.




**Figure 32 (BE4): San giraffe (a) and Northern Sotho giraffe (b)**

(Louw 2013)

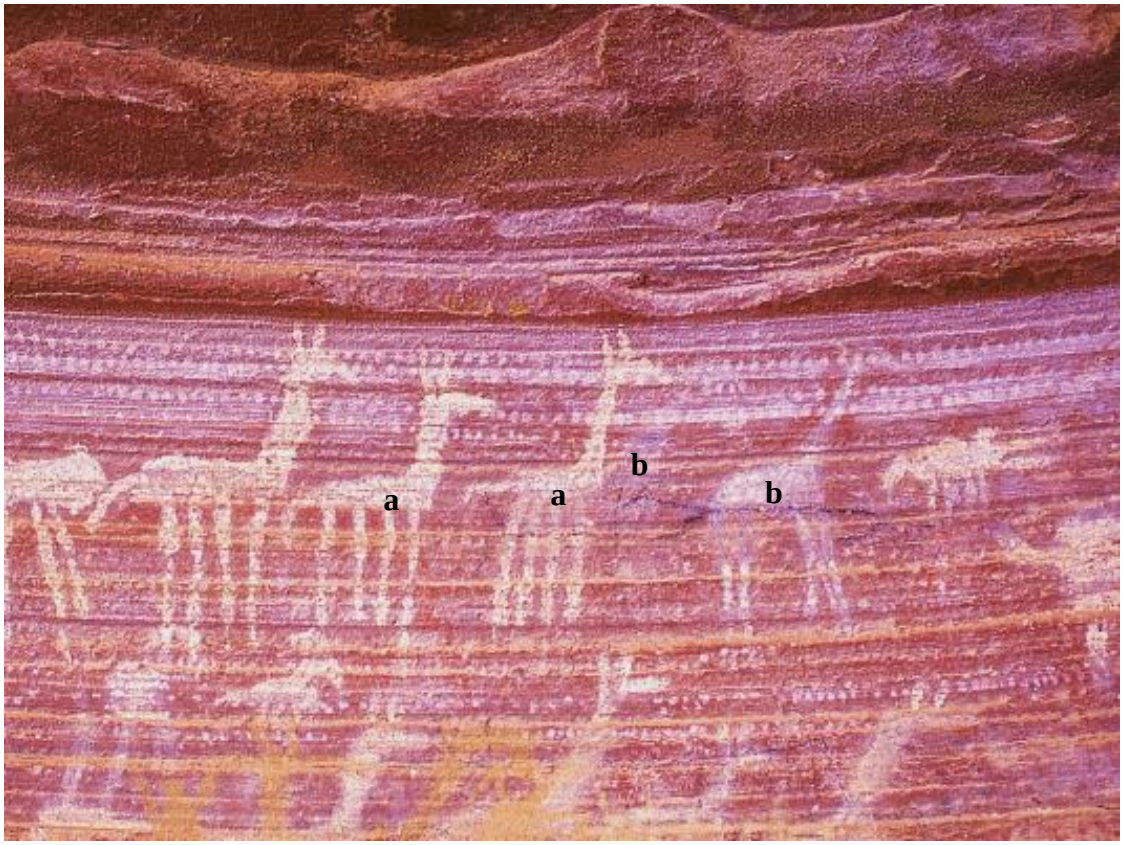


**Figure 33 (LB13): Northern Sotho giraffe (a) over clustered dot rows and San giraffe (b)**

(Adapted from RARI 2002)

An ostrich occurs only once in the upper layer, at site NJ9 (Fig. 34) and is painted over San images of other ostriches. This image is not repeated in the upper layer at any of the other sites, but the co-occurrence of the same animal, from different traditions, suggests a similar relationship as that of the aforementioned giraffe.




**Figure 34 (NJ19): Northern Sotho ostrich (a) over San ostriches (b)**

(Louw 2013)

### *Apron*

At site GP47 there are over 90 San images and approximately 40 Northern Sotho images, yet the only superimposition at the site is of one Northern Sotho apron image painted over indeterminate San images (Fig. 35). It is probable that the apron was intentionally superimposed.



**Figure 35 (GP47): Superimposition of Northern Sotho apron over indeterminate San image**

(Louw 2013)

### *Tracing*

Another category of Northern Sotho superimposition over San rock art is the outlining or tracing of San images with white pigment. This form of superimposition occurs at two of the 26 sites: BE2 and DR42. At site BE2, depictions of San antelope and another animal in red pigment are traced over in Northern Sotho white pigment (Fig. 36). At site BE2, the image to the left (marked 'a') is outlined and crossed with four vertical strokes. This image, which may or may not have originally been a giraffe, has had its neck elongated with white Northern Sotho pigment. The second image to the right (marked 'b') seems to have been a San antelope image, also painted in red pigment. It has been outlined with white pigment and crossed by four vertical lines as well as two lines that extend from the front leg to the shoulder line. The tracing conforms to the outline of the original image except for where the lines extend from the neck across the head of the antelope.

At site DR42 (Fig. 37), a San antelope depiction is outlined in Northern Sotho white pigment. The body of the antelope shows seven superimposed vertical strokes and a horizontal stroke crosses its face. The ears of the antelope have been rounded and exaggerated.




**Figure 36 (BE2): Northern Sotho tracing over San rock art**

(Louw 2013)



**Figure 37 (DR42): Northern Sotho tracing over San rock art**

(Louw 2013)

**Northern Sotho and Khoekhoe**

The superimposition of Northern Sotho rock art over Khoekhoe rock art comprises the lowest frequency rate within the 26 sites. In three instances, Northern Sotho rock art is painted over Khoekhoe finger dots and San rock art. Instances of this occurrence at sites LB40 and LB13 probably indicate that the Northern Sotho superimposition over San rock art was intentional, regardless of Khoekhoe superimposition, or that multiple layers of painting may have been important to the Northern Sotho people. At sites LB13 (Fig. 38) and MB53 (Fig. 39) however, Northern Sotho animals are painted only over Khoekhoe finger dots.



**Figure 38 (LB13): Northern Sotho animals painted over Khoekhoe dots**

(Adapted from RARI 2002)

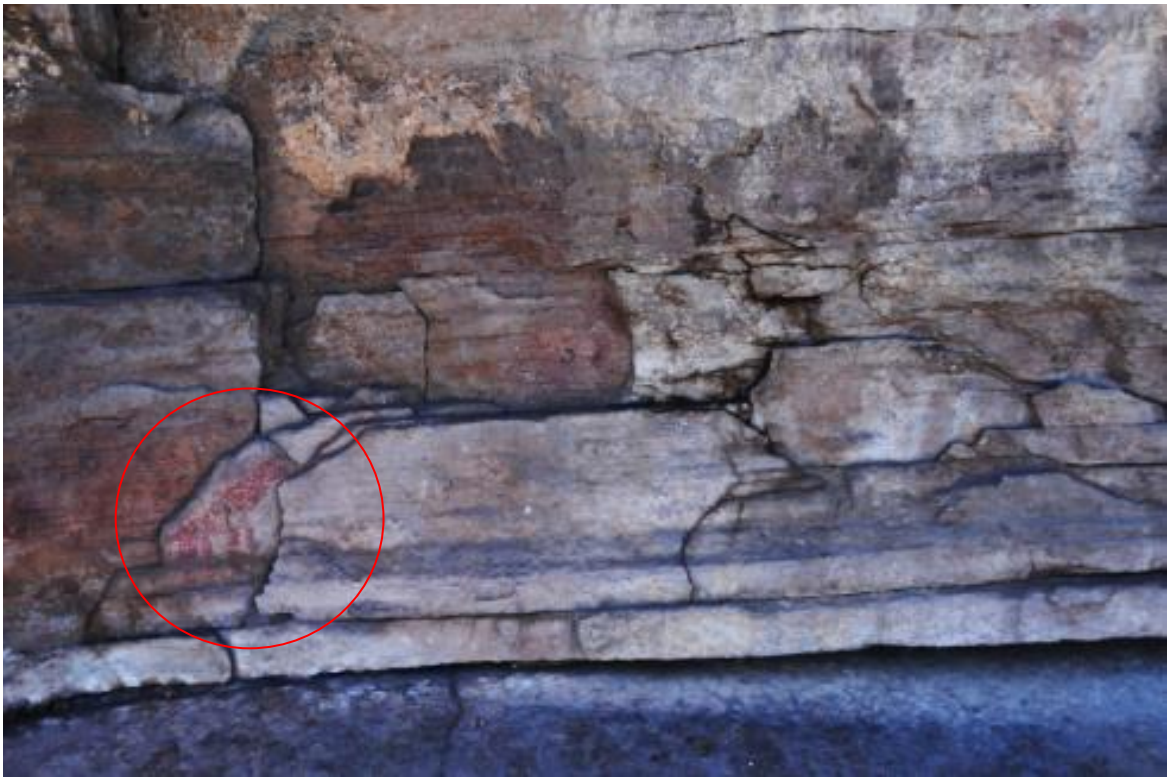

**Figure 39 (MB53): Red Northern Sotho animal painted over white finger dots**

(Louw 2013)

At site TL11 a Northern Sotho depiction of a kudu (Fig. 40) is painted over Khoekhoe dotted lines and at site DR42, a Northern Sotho comb-like figure is also painted over Khoekhoe dotted lines (Fig. 41).



**Figure 40 (TL11): Northern Sotho kudu over Khoekhoe dot line**

(Louw 2013)

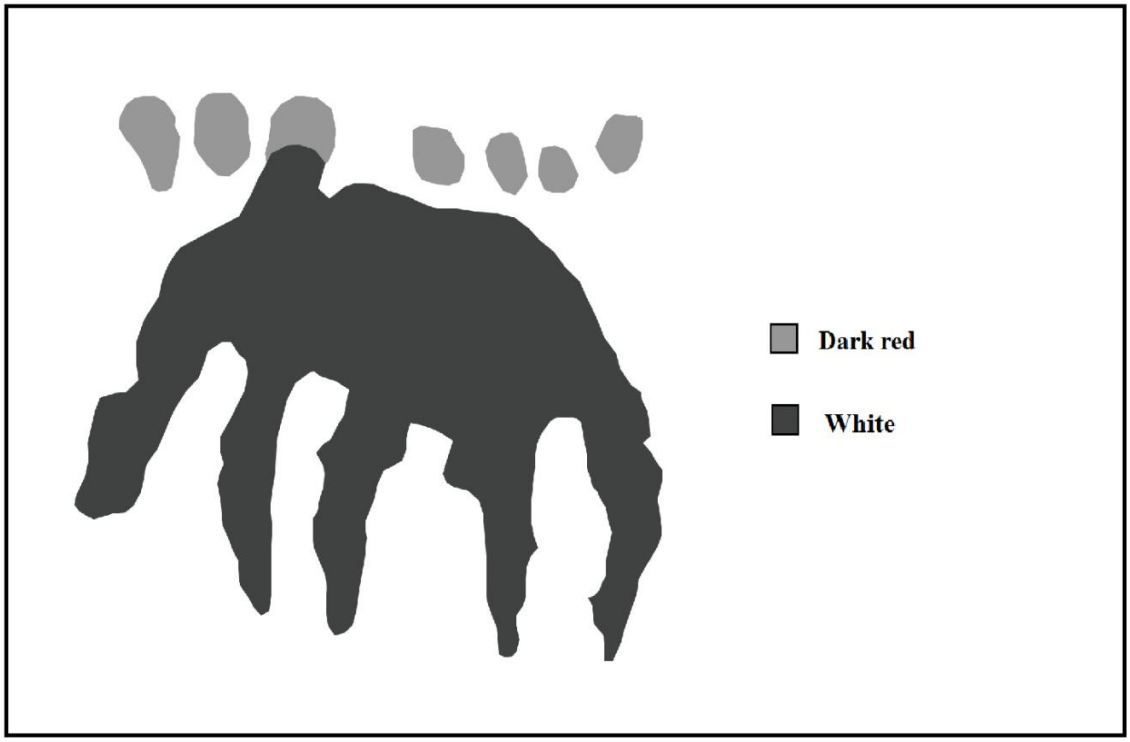


**Figure 41 (DR42): Northern Sotho comb motif over Khoekhoe dot line**

(Louw 2013)

There is only one instance of Northern Sotho painting over a Khoekhoe rayed concentric circle, at site GS8 (Fig. 42). At this site, the rayed concentric circle is partially superimposed with a white indeterminate Northern Sotho image.



**Figure 42 (GS8): White Northern Sotho painting over orange rayed concentric circle**

(RARI 2002)

## Discussion

The superimposition of one painting tradition over another differs in terms of the situation and the traditions involved. The manner and purpose of these instances of superimposition are relative to each case but certain patterns can be seen within the co-occurrence of the traditions. Among the instances where Khoekhoe rock art is painted over San rock art, a variation appears in the extent to which the underlying painting is visually dominated by the overlying painting. This variation, furthermore, presents itself in the manner in which rows of finger dots are aligned, clustered, and spaced.

In terms of the superimposition of Northern Sotho rock art over San rock art, image types seem to play an important role, creating specific relationships between the subject matter in the upper and lower layers. There also appear to be different types of superimposition, such

as different image types painted over one another, the borrowing and repetition of image types from the underlying layer, and the outlining or tracing of the underlying subject matter.

The superimposition of Northern Sotho rock art over that of the Khoekhoen makes up the smallest section of the collected data, and in three of the eight instances the Northern Sotho rock art is painted over San rock art as well as Khoekhoe rock art. The sparse representation of these traditions' superimposition over one another and the poorly understood relationships between these painting traditions leaves much room for speculation.

In the next chapter the instances and types of superimposition are discussed in more depth by threading theory, ethnography, historical context, and data together like a cable (Wylie 1989). By tacking back and forth between these threads, the meanings constructed by superimposition will be interpreted, thereby bringing the intentions of the painters to light and uncovering the relationships between the people who painted over each other's rock art.

# 4. INTERPRETING SUPERIMPOSITION

Superimposition as a form of consumption is contextual and cannot be considered as a homogeneous activity with no variation in purpose; hence broad-stroke interpretations cannot be applied with any degree of certainty. However, by drawing on concepts of commodity flow to specialised "arenas of power and identity" (Hall & Smith 2000: 40) within the larger context of value, superimposition can be better understood as a socio-political 'multi-tool' used in a specific manner to achieve particular goals. Interpreting superimposition in this project will therefore entail the application of the theoretical framework set out in Chapter 3, and will be based on the categories of rock art formulated in Chapter 4, including what is known about the history of the Makgabeng region and its inhabitants.

## Khoekhoe and San rock art

No clear patterns in the subject matter emerged from an analysis of the selected sites, since the categories set out for Khoekhoe rock art superimposed on San rock art depend on the variation in visual dominance of the Khoekhoe geometrics. In Category 1, Khoekhoe rock art completely covers the underlying San images. In Category 2, San art is partially superimposed by Khoekhoe images. These categories are not strictly delimited boxes into which rock art images can be placed without exception; rather they serve as broad conceptual divisions between the varying degrees to which San rock art is visually dominated or overlain by Khoekhoe images. Given that San rock art images are often relegated to visual obscurity, it is difficult to consider the underlying *thing* by itself. Hence, superimposition will be discussed here in terms of what is known about the shifting social climate in the Makgabeng and the larger Limpopo area. Although the rock art is undated, it can be assumed that the earliest Khoekhoe paintings date back to the arrival of herders in the area about 2000 years ago (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 59) while the latest of these paintings may be attributed to Khoekhoen remnants in the area during the early 20$^{th}$ century (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 45-47).

### Category 1

In Category 1, Khoekhoe rock art is superimposed completely over the underlying San rock art as evidenced at sites GP35, MB53 and NJ19 (see Fig. 17). This superimposition may be equated to terminal consumption of the obscured, underlying art. Khoekhoen artists may have

sought to take control of San rock art and shift it from a state of potential commodity to a phase that no longer allowed it agency. This was a deliberate, strategic action to disengage the compound totality of a site. Khoekhoen herders appropriated San places of power and used them to negotiate their own status within the landscape (Hall & Smith 2000: 43). In addition, the herders may have superimposed their paintings over San rock art due to fears that such places could "allow dangerous things to escape out from the San spirit world into the shelter" (Hall & Smith 2000: 42).

At site GP35 the rock art of the San is visually dominated by handprints. Judging by the size of these handprints (120 – 140mm in length), they are believed to have been made either by Khoekhoen boys aged between 12 and 14 years, or Khoekhoen girls between the ages of 14 and 16 (Eastwood & Tlouamma 2004a: 77). Handprints are also believed to be associated with initiation rites (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 67), which fits well with the estimated ages of their authors. The handprints at site GP35 are all in white pigment, a colour suggested as falling into a later category of Khoekhoe rock art in the CLB; more commonly associated with ground-level shelters that feature San and Northern Sotho rock art, as opposed to the earlier geometric tradition, which generally occurs on the summits or sides of hills or in shelters on cliff faces (Eastwood & Smith 2005: 71; Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 61). Eastwood and Smith (2005: 74) argue that the use of white pigment in Khoekhoe rock art reflects a gradual influence of the so-called 'late white' Northern Sotho tradition. The handprints at site GP35 are located in a ground level shelter that contains both San and Northern Sotho rock art. If Sotho-Tswana groups began to settle in the Makgabeng by 1530 AD (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 39-40) it is likely that the Northern Sotho influence on Khoekhoe rock art followed this period as farmer presence gradually began to grow in the region. This may explain the hostile approach to San rock art, as the strengthening of farmer presence increased the competition for natural resources, placing stress on San-Khoekhoen contact relations.

In the rock art of site MB53 a San painting of an antelope is covered by a mass of clustered Khoekhoe finger dots, leaving only part of the hindquarters of the antelope visible. The site comprises approximately 1500 finger dots split into two sets, visually dominating the entire shelter. The species of antelope is unclear due to the extensive covering of finger dots. While the significance of clustered finger dots is poorly understood, the white pigment used indicates that they too probably fall into the later period of Khoekhoe rock art and may, as

with the handprints at site GP35, represent a purposeful attempt to terminally consume the underlying San art.

A third example of visual dominance can be seen at site NJ19, where large Khoekhoe aprons cover a series of San human and animal figures. The aprons are again painted in white pigment and could be assumed to fall into the later period of Khoekhoe rock art. The apron motif was first identified and associated with geometric rock art at the Tsodilo Hills in Botswana and later related to paintings in the Shashe-Limpopo Basin (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 65). The motifs at site NJ19 display qualities that correlate with the descriptions of women's front aprons, a motif that makes up more than a tenth of Khoekhoe imagery (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 65). It is known that such aprons were given to Khoekhoen initiates during girls' puberty rites and it is suggested that the aprons symbolised fertility and the transition from girlhood to womanhood (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 65).

The superimposition at site MB53 fits well with the idea of blocking out San imagery. If, however, the handprints were indeed made by Khoekhoen children, the rock art at sites GP35 and NJ19 pose questions as to how initiation art functioned as a political tool through which the San landscape was manipulated and controlled. It also raises the issue of how children during social transition were active agents in these arenas of value and socio-politics. If the initiation art was painted by the initiates, the rock art abducts specific agency from these young painters. It is unclear whether the painters chose the manner and positioning of the paintings themselves, or whether they were guided by elders who may have had a greater understanding of the social structures in the region. It is possible to propose two likely explanations.

It is known from ethnography that the Nama Khoekhoen attached special significance to the moon, which was associated with rain and possibly with female puberty rites (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 65). Korana girls' puberty ceremonies also involved the initiate being secluded in a section of her parents' grass hut, rubbed with the 'mist' of a sheep's entrails, and perfumed with powders and red ochre (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 65). These rite of passage were highly ritualised and the initiates passed through a phase of intense spiritual and cultural significance. One can therefore argue that Khoekhoe rock art abducts some of the potency attached to the initiates during this state of transition, acting as a secondary agent directly bound to the power of an initiate. While rock art served a function during initiation, it also served a secondary function as a culturally and spiritually powerful mechanism,

strategically placed in order to remove San rock art from visibility. In such cases the initiates would have been guided by community members with a greater understanding of the social and political conditions, as it would have been unusual for children, who were unlikely to have been actively involved in trade relations, to act independently as agents possessed of both the requisite knowledge and incentive to manipulate the San social landscape. If this was the case, one could consider such attempts, at least on a micro scale, to have been successful; as the Khoekhoe imagery is visually dominant and clearly controls the space. It has, furthermore, succeeded in its attempt to remove the specific San imagery from its phase of potential commodity, as there were no further superimpositions made over these images by farmers.

Alternatively, it could be that the underlying San images were deliberately painted over for fear of what dangerous supernatural beings their existence might have invited into the shelter. Such motivation requires less strategic skill and knowledge of current intercultural affairs. Such decisions may therefore have been taken either by the overseeing community members or by the initiates themselves who, with limited knowledge, could recognise the danger and take action to alter the immediate circumstances by neutralising the imminent threat of the potent San images.

At sites LB13 and BE25 the underlying San rock art is superimposed by a series of white and red parallel finger dots respectively while an unfilled oval is also superimposed over the San rock art at site BE25. These instances of Khoekhoe superimposition visually dominate the rock art beneath, but the spaces between the dots allow the underlying images to remain partly visible. Compared to the finger dots at site MB53, which have amalgamated as a continuous mass of white paint, the finger dots at sites LB13 and BE25 are neatly spaced, creating a clear layer of Khoekhoe rock art over a visible set of San motifs. Although these finger dots visually dominate the rock shelter, they neither completely cover the underlying images nor, such as at site LB13, prohibit further superimposition by farmer rock art. It is therefore suggested that San rock art was superimposed either as a barrier to the spirit world or as a marker of herder presence in the landscape.

The subtle and intricate meanings underlying finger-dot clusters are difficult to interpret, and understanding the significance of other more representational motifs is limited by insufficient ethnography. However, there is a probable correlation between the later white-pigmented geometric tradition and the extensive covering of underlying San rock art. Another category

of Khoekhoe superimposition, less invasive than Category 1, may represent a form of contact that differs from the cases discussed above.

**Category 2**

In the remaining four instances of superimposition, Khoekhoe rock art partially overlays San rock art. At sites GP47 and DR42, single lines of red or orange finger dots trail across the edges of underlying San images, while at site BE13, white aprons are slanted so as just to touch the underlying San imagery.

At site GP47 a single line of orange finger dots crosses over the top quarter of a meandering red brush-painted line as well as over a San antelope image. These finger dots are neat, simple, and do not visually dominate the shelter. The faded orange pigment of these finger dots suggests that they were painted in the earlier phase of Khoekhoe rock art (Eastwood & Smith 2005: 71; Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 61). The San antelope depiction is faded, making it difficult to identify the specific species. The brush-painted, undulating line is believed to represent a 'rope to god' or a thread of light (Lewis-Williams *et al.* 2000). The line culminates in a crack in the rock face, beyond which the spirit world was believed to lie (Eastwood & Tlouamma 2004: 86). Both the meandering line and the orange Khoekhoe finger dots track horizontally across the rock face, but the finger dots do not follow the same trajectory; nor do they go into the crack. This pattern of image placement is not a form of terminal consumption that disengages San rock art; rather, the finger dots appear to flow in the same general direction as the red San line, complementing or perhaps even strengthening it. In this case the finger dots do not alter San rock art as a potential commodity, nor do they drastically divert it from its intended path. These dots are indicative of a probable knowledge gap, where Khoekhoe painters were not aware of the significance of the meandering line or of the crack. If these finger dots were painted at a time when San and Khoekhoen had not yet shared the landscape for very long, shared understanding would have been limited and social boundaries only partially permeated. Alternatively, the Khoekhoen may have understood the significance of the motif but did not share interpretations of this imagery with the San. Nonetheless, the red line and finger dots form a new composite image that does not negate or drastically divert the San rock art from its intended purpose.

At site DR42 a line of red finger dots is painted horizontally over the hooves of a San red antelope. The finger dots do not visually dominate the rock face. Rather, they create the impression of a platform on which the antelope stands. Such superimposition is only mildly

invasive and does not block the San images from view. A similar argument could be made for the nearby site LB13 or site BE25, discussed earlier, even though the superimposition at these sites are significantly more visually dominant.

If the red and orange finger-dot lines from sites GP47 and DR42 are contemporary with the earlier geometric tradition, it may be that they predate the farmer intensification that accompanied Sotho-Tswana settlement after 1530 AD (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 39-40). If this is the case it could be that trade and contact relationships at the time were not as competitive and that the Khoekhoen had hardly any reason to fear San art. In addition, they may not have been as compelled to disengage San influence over the landscape or actively and aggressively establish their own status in the Makgabeng. It is unclear what the intentions of the Khoekhoen were when they chose to superimpose their art on San rock art in this manner, but it appears to have been complementary rather than disengaging. One could therefore argue that the Khoekhoen sought to contribute to what they perceived the San rock art to represent, rather than wishing to block it out as they did in the instances discussed in the first category.

An anomaly among the studied sites is evident at site BE13, where two white Khoekhoe aprons are superimposed over a San tree depiction (probably *Ficus sur*), a gemsbok, and another smaller indeterminate antelope. One apron is depicted at an angle of about 20º and covers a small section of the tree branch, with its upper left corner, as well as a small segment of the gemsbok's rear, covered by the bottom right corner. The second apron, to the right, is tilted at about the same angle and completely covers the smaller antelope. These aprons therefore represent a combination of methods: Khoekhoe rock art is superimposed in a manner that clearly avoids blocking the San rock art out, alongside an instance of terminal consumption. The images that were avoided, a bi-chrome gemsbok and a finely painted tree, are particularly detailed, whereas the covered antelope is smaller and less detailed. Both aprons are also painted at the same angle. It may be that angle of the apron on the right-hand side was influenced by the angle of the apron to the left, which was tilted to avoid covering the underlying art, and that its relative positioning took priority over the avoidance of the smaller depiction. It may be, on the other hand, that the decision to superimpose the one image but avoid the other two was based on the technique demonstrated in the painting of the underlying images. There are no patterns in the data collected from the other 25 sites that suggest the Khoekhoen superimposed over imagery based on the subject matter. There are, however, also no cases among these sites where bi-chrome paintings were superimposed, but

this does not account conclusively for the avoidance of the *Ficus sur*. There is not enough evidence at this point to formulate a reasonable hypothesis as to why these aprons were superimposed in this manner.

At site LB40 a purple finger-dot line crosses a San antelope depiction but upon closer inspection the San pigment can be seen to overly that of the Khoekhoen. A San human image is painted on the same line to the right of the antelope, giving the impression that the human is standing on the line. This is the only instance among the studied sites where San rock art is superimposed over any rock art other than that of the San. The colour use in the finger-dot line suggests that it falls into the older category of Khoekhoe rock art.

There is a striking resemblance between this instance and the one at site DR42 in terms of the pigment colour and style of the Khoekhoe dot line, as well as in the placement of the San images. In both cases a single horizontal dot line is painted in a dark pigment; both intersect the San rock art in such a way that they create the illusion of a platform on which the San rock art stands. At site LB40, however, the San rock art is painted over that of the Khoekhoen. This instance provides the opportunity to, firstly, explore the reassertion of San presence over the landscape. The back and forth superimposition between San and Khoekhoen shows that the San rock art was not exclusively superimposed by newcomers in the Makgabeng, but that the San too were actively involved in the process of appropriating other painting traditions. Secondly, the San rock art is no more visually dominant than that of the Khoekhoen at site DR42. This may speak to the passive nature of San appropriation; or perhaps rather reveals a San-Khoekhoen relationship that is more passive and likely predates Sotho-Tswana settlement in the area. The San rock art at site LB40 does not terminally consume the Khoekhoe rock art leaves it open to further superimposition by a Northern Sotho indeterminate rock art image.

## Northern Sotho and San rock art

In the superimposition of San imagery, the approach to Northern Sotho rock art differs from that of Khoekhoe rock art in terms of preferred image type and manner of superimposition. Northern Sotho rock art contains more identifiable images than that of the Khoekhoe tradition and shows a stronger correlation with the specific images over which it is superimposed. Judging by the frequency of images covering those in the lower layer, in addition to what we know about the relationships between these two traditions, visual dominance and obliteration of imagery are not of relevance to this section. Rather, it is proposed that these images shift

the San rock art from its intended path, into a composite state in which the underlying San images enter into bonded relationships with the overlying Northern Sotho art.

Northern Sotho rock art will be divided into categories so as to avoid making generalised references to what is not an entirely homogeneous practice. Taking cognisance of the three image classes, namely colonial imagery, boys' initiation rock art, and the rock art of girls and women, differentiation will thereafter be based on image type and stylistic variations.

**Colonial imagery**

This category is characterised by depictions of colonial artefacts, human figures with hands akimbo, horses with riders, wagons, and battle scenes. It is suggested that some of the images were painted during the time when the Hananwa people sought refuge in the Makgabeng, during the Maleboho war between 1894 and 1908 (Van Schalkwyk & Smith 2004: 342). It is also argued that this rock art served as a form of protest and a mechanism for coping with the hardships of the war. Furthermore, it is posited that depictions of the akimbo postures probably point to European influences and practices, and are intended as a parody of the intruding colonialists as well as serving as a form of catharsis, or a mechanism by means of which the Hananwa could rebuild their society according to the cultural values and practices of their past (Van Schalkwyk & Smith 2004; Smith & Van Schalkwyk 2002). Why then, was such imagery superimposed over San rock art, and how did the relationship between these different rock art traditions serve the purpose of the overlain images?

Examples of rock art depicting the influence of the colonialists include wagons at sites LB8 and LB40, a house at site LB8, and a vehicle at site TL3. The wagon motifs at both sites are painted over San human figures. At site LB8 the wagon is painted in a manner that allows the underlying San images to remain visible between the vertical bars of the wagon, as if boxed in by these lines, while the wagons at site LB40 are painted so as to cover the top half of the human figures with the front wheels of the wagons. In these cases the wagons are also painted over animals but due to the faded red pigment, it is difficult to discern more than that the animal from site LB40 may be an antelope. In both cases the San images are not only left visible but are painted over and around in a manner that allows them to become part of the overlying images, as if the wagons are imprisoning or trampling them. If this was the intention, one could say that the San images were shifted from their intended path into a phase of composite imagery that uses the underlying subjects as components in a new, superimposed scene. Using San human images, instead of painting new human images, may

suggest that the artists either wanted to evoke the agency embedded in the underlying imagery, or that they identified with the San as people who had also been marginalised by intruding powers.

Regarding Salt Pan shelter in the Soutpansberg, Hall and Smith (2000) suggest that although farmers appropriated San painting practices when these were widely perceived to have value, in post farmer-forager contact art, borrowed practices become less important as the perception of the power of San practices began to fade. Hall and Smith (2000) argue that perception of San power was derived from its association with the memory of the San people, and thus dissipated due to San marginalisation. It is therefore proposed that large gaps in the knowledge of production and consumption may have resulted as the legacy of the San began to fade. This would suggest a temporal phase shift in the social life of the underlying San art, as the superimposing artists were unlikely to have had first-hand knowledge of what these underlying images represented in the San cosmology, or of the role they played in their original context.

The image from site TL3 is a vehicle, probably a bus or truck. The rear segment of the vehicle's roof disects the waists of finely-painted San human figures. If this is regarded as a composite image like the wagons discussed previously, it is possible that these San human figures are meant to be viewed as standing aboard the vehicle. In addition to the car and wagons, a third mode of transport that seems to have San figures 'on board' is a set of geometrics, strongly resembling a train on tracks, with steam emerging from the chimney. This geometric motif is superimposed over red San human figures, leaving them visible through the cross-lines of the train's body. The manner in which these images are superimposed bears a stiking resemblance to the wagon motif at site LB8. During the late 1900s many young men were indentured in the mines, thus dividing Northern Sotho society (Smith & Van Schalkwyk 2002). Another interpretation of the geometric image is the train representing the mythical monster *Kholumolum*, "the swallower and disgorger of humanity", a common motif in Sotho myths throughout southern Africa (Eastwood & Tlouamma 2006a: 57). Northern Sotho rock art associated with 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ century colonial contact can also be said to refer to the migrant labour system as part of men's shared experience (Eastwood & Tlouamma 2006: 69). As with the wagon motifs, these San images were used as characters in a scene far removed from the original or intended purpose of their creation, and yet they form an integral part of the new motifs and symbolism.

Depictions of houses at site LB8 are painted as unfilled outlines from a frontal view. The first house is painted so that the floor of the house runs across the back of a San animal image while the second house crosses a single San image on the top left corner, just above the window of the house. Both these depictions could have been painted a few centimetres out of the way and avoided superimposition but were specifically painted so that the lines are in direct contact with the underlying images. This form of superimposition could be interpreted as having been selected so that the animal appears to be supporting the house on its back or so that the human seems to be exiting the house via the window, but this is unclear. It is however conceivable that these were also intended to be composite images. A third house is painted at the same site and appears to have been superimposed over a human and animal, but the high degree of fading in the lower layer leaves room for interpretation as to what exactly is being portrayed.

Another image class that is associated with the colonial period, specifically in contexts of war, is that of humans with horses. A human figure leading a horse at site TL11 is superimposed over San imagery. The horse is painted in almost the same place as a San animal, as if to replace it. A second depiction at this site, of a man astride a horse, is painted so that the back of the horse crosses over the waistline of an underlying San human figure, but the pigment is faded and the relationship is unclear. At site LB40 a set of at least two riders astride horses are depicted across the waistline of a row of much larger San human figures.

Among the colonial art of sites LB8 and TL3 there are also alphabetic letters. The letters at site LB8 are unclear but seem to have been painted in the same pigment as the house motif, suggesting that they are contemporary with the colonial contact period and not an example of later graffiti. Unidentified letters belonging to a word starting with ‘M’ are painted over San human figures. At site TL3 the letters ‘Ad. IGYONG’ are finger painted in slurry white pigment, with the ‘A’ crossing over the legs of a large San human figure. This may be initials and a surname painted by someone who could read and write or at least duplicate the letters of his/her name. As this does not represent components of a scene, as is the case in other colonial imagery, it is difficult to consider this as a composite image in the same way as the cases discussed above.

With the exception of the one house motif and one horse motif, all these images were painted over human figures. This suggests that the Northern Sotho painters specifically identified

with the San people or sought to tap into the agency embedded in these figures. If there was indeed a large gap between the knowledge of production and the knowledge of consumption in these later stages, in terms of farmers' perception of San imagery at a time when the San had become marginalised, it can be assumed that these human figures were taken at face value and used simply as characters in the new scenes. This would have occurred under the pretext of mythologies and perceptions created by the Northern Sotho, in line with the circumstances of the time, and applied to the San imagery. It is possible but unlikely that these images were perceived as depictions of the San spirit world; even if they were, their incorporation into the new imagery suggests a phase shift that serves the intentions of the Northern Sotho community, not those of the San painters. One can therefore infer that, at this time, the concerns and cosmologies of the marginalised San communities were not central to the Northern Sotho painters' intentions, but that the San paintings were still regarded as important secondary agents that possessed some power or potential commodity, thus making them desirable for consumption.

**Animals**

The image classes representing animals are far more difficult to date but may be argued to fall into an earlier category of Northern Sotho art. The identifiable animals at the selected sites include rhino, kudu, gemsbok, giraffe, elephant, ostrich, baboon, fat-tailed sheep, and reptiles. These depictions are superimposed over different images in various ways and will be discussed individually within the contexts of the contingent rock art categories. The simple, single layer superimpositions will be discussed first, while the more complex ones and larger patterns will be addressed as the discussion progresses.

***Baboon***

A single baboon image from the site BE27 is depicted over an indeterminate San image. Baboons are distinguished from animals painted with similar body types by a kink in the tail (Smith & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 240) and are the animal totem of the Hananwa chief's family (Van Schalkwyk & Smith 2004). The baboon appears in colonial art depicting war (Van Schalkwyk & Smith 2004: 344), as well as in boys' initiation art (Namono 2004: 24). There are no images at site BE27 to suggest reliably whether this baboon was painted as a result of colonial contact or in an initiation context. When one also considers the difficulty in identifying the underlying San imagery, one can conclude nothing more than that the baboon was seen as a powerful and significant animal that was superimposed over San rock art.

***Gemsbok***

A gemsbok at site BE4 is painted over the legs of a San tsessebe antelope (or possibly hartebeest) depiction. The gemsbok is also painted over what is either an elongated San human figure, or two human figures painted one over the other, but this is difficult to discern due to the blending of the similar pigments. Site BE4 contains Northern Sotho colonial contact imagery, a variety of animals, geometric motifs, an apron, and two *kōma*, suggesting multiple uses for the site. The gemsbok is painted over two image types but does not completely cover either of them. This suggests an act of appropriation rather than one of destruction.

Considering the San image of the tsessebe alone allows it to be seen as a thing, a potential commodity. Another depiction of a tsessebe in the Makgabeng is bristled with numerous arrows, rather than just the one or two arrows needed to incapacitate or kill an animal. This depiction suggests that the rock art does not represent an actual hunt but rather portrays a hunt for supernatural power, clearly marking the tsessebe as an important animal to the San, filled with spiritual potency (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 105). There are, however, no clear accounts of tsessebe painted by the Northern Sotho in the Makgabeng and it may be that they only recognised the tsessebe as a powerful San symbol. Similarly, an elongated human figure is associated with San altered states of consciousness and not with Northern Sotho cosmology. The extent to which they understood the San significance of the elongated human and the tsessebe is unclear, but the direct superimposition implies that they did recognise these images as important or powerful.

The gemsbok is a recurring image in Northern Sotho rock art and is one of the depictions associated with boys' initiation sites (Eastwood & Tlouamma 2006a: 57). There is no strict correlation between the gemsbok as a motif in boys' initiation rites and the San hunting of spiritual potency or feeling 'elongated' during altered states of consciousness. Rather, it is probable that the Northern Sotho sought to appropriate these motifs as powerful images that were closely connected to the potent agency of the San painter. San rock art is therefore shifted from its initial path of San spirituality to a phase wherein its secondary agency acts as a value-adding component in Northern Sotho boys' initiation rites.

***Kudu***

A Northern Sotho kudu motif and an image depicting an indeterminate animal with a long tail are painted over a single San antelope image. The specific species of the underlying antelope is difficult to determine as there are no clear diagnostic features visible. The body of the kudu is painted along the legs of the underlying antelope while the tail of the second Northern Sotho animal depiction touches on the rear and spine of the underlying animal. The white Northern Sotho painting does not erase the antelope, covering only its legs and a portion of its body. The long-tailed animal resembles a mongoose but due to the possibility that it is another species, it will not be discussed in detail.

Kudu paintings are also associated with boys' initiation sites (Eastwood & Tlouamma 2006a: 57) and the large spiralling horns further suggest a male-orientated significance. The underlying antelope has no horns and can therefore be assumed to be female. Though not much can be discerned from the underlying image, the juxtaposition of gender may be significant especially in the context of boys' initiation rites. The kudu further represents a natural gender anomaly, as female kudu sometimes possess horns (Smithers 1983: 666), a feature that would not have gone unnoticed by people who had advanced knowledge of the natural environment.

***Reptiles***

The two reptilian figures at BE2 are painted in profile, with four stubby legs and long tails, unlike the regular *kōma* motifs or those described as 'spread-eagle' designs, found elsewhere in the Makgabeng (Namono 2004; Moodley 2008). They are both painted as if facing down. The first reptile's tail crosses over an animal that resembles a zebra and its body completely covers a San painting resembling an antelope. The second reptilian figure crosses only slightly over two San paintings, which have both been traced over with white slurry farmer paint. The underlying images will not be discussed in detail as their identifications are not certain, but the tracings and the zebra's significance will be discussed later.

Reptilian figures are prominent in the Northern Sotho cosmology and rock art. Prins and Hall (1994) refer to these images as saurian motifs. They suggest that these reptilian figures are a combination of lizards and crocodiles and are instrumental in rain-making rituals in the Makgabeng. A Northern Sotho group sacrificed monitor lizards to encourage rain, while in other cases monitor lizards were drawn in the sand to the same end. Since it is known that

San rock art sites were often used by the Sotho and Venda peoples for the purpose of manipulating the weather (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002) it is possible that the San images were important and added potency to the rock art of the Northern Sotho people, allowing the San painter's agency to be incorporated into their rituals via rock art. Due to the uncertainty of the animal species in the underlying art it is difficult to establish their original customary paths, and comparisons with the intentions of the farmer painter can therefore not be drawn. The unusual nature of the lizard paintings suggests a tenuous relation to rain control or boys' initiation rites, both of which are potentially valid interpretations. Thus far, there has not been any rock art in the Makgabeng associated with rain-making; however, the contingent animal and human images at this site suggest that the motifs may be older Northern Sotho rock art.

***Sheep***

At site GS8 a set of fat-tailed sheep are painted in the white slurry pigment associated with farmer finger painting, and at least one of them is superimposed over a San image. This sheep is painted so that only its hooves touch on the back of a San animal that can be identified as an antelope by the hump on its back. The head of the underlying image is faded, making it impossible to identify the species with any certainty. Fat-tailed sheep are strongly associated with the Khoekhoen herders and though they did not paint sheep themselves, the San often did (Hall & Smith 2000). Northern Sotho depictions of fat-tailed sheep are a rare occurrence; it is probable that depicting them here equates to an act of appropriating the symbolism from the Khoekhoen, while exploiting the image for their own purposes (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2002: 65).

The Northern Sotho in the Makgabeng, although dominant, recognised the ritual power of the San (Hall & Smith 2000) and of the Khoekhoen. All these groups actively appropriated imagery and manipulated rock art sites for their own benefit. The image type at GS8 is, however, directly associated with herders but superimposed so as to draw from the agency of the San. The unclear identity of the San motif makes comparative analysis difficult, but the foreign nature of San rock art and Khoekhoe symbolism suggests that both subject matter and underlying rock art were sought out to evoke some form of potency. At this site both Khoekhoe and San ritual elements have been simultaneously appropriated for the benefit of the Northern Sotho.

***Elephant***

At site DR42 a single elephant is finger painted in orange pigment over a complex San front apron with interior grid patterning and tassels along the outside. Eastwood and Tlouamma (2003: 111) note that these tassels were in fact painted around the San apron by Khoekhoen herders. The elephant is painted so that its back crosses over the lower right quadrant of the apron, leaving both images clearly visible. The elephant plays a significant role in Northern Sotho boys' initiation rites. Before each initiation school begins, the initiation masters cut down the trunk of a specific thorn tree known as *mokgwana* and replant it at the initiation ground. The newly planted tree is no longer called *mokgwana* but is then referred to as *tlau,* the word for elephant. The initiates then gather around this tree singing a song that translates as "the elephant is ourselves", and when circumcision ritual is complete the elders push the tree over, symbolising that the 'elephant' is overcome by the initiates (Eastwood 2002a: 39). The symbolism is obscure and closely guarded, but it is suggested that the rock art serves a didactic function, acting as a mechanism through which the most important symbolism in Northern Sotho belief is illustrated as a reminder of what the initiates have learned and must internalise (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 44).

The apron motif is a prominent cross-cultural image that appears in the rock art of the farmers, herders, and foragers of the Makgabeng (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006). This image class is suggested to be a diagnostic marker of the central San rock art because it is only painted in significant numbers in central San areas such as the Tsodilo Hills and CLB, and engraved at sites along the southern fringe of the Kalahari; while its origins are thought to be proto-Khoekhoen (Eastwood & Smith 2005: 74). For the San, women's aprons are linked to supernatural potency as well as to sexuality and hunting. Men wear loincloths and women wear aprons but in certain ritual contexts the gender and identity aspects of clothing are played upon and manipulated, as in the account of a *!Kung* shaman, *Cgunta /kace*, who always wears a woman's apron when dancing (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 154). Though this account is of a back apron it demonstrates both the supernatural power invested in aprons as well as the gender versatility of such clothing. A story pertaining to front aprons notes that the apron covering the woman's genitals is a symbol of female sexuality, and that the hunter may not speak the word for front apron loudly as it will cause the meat of the animal he has killed to rot. If he touches such an apron it will make him lazy and unable to hunt, behaviour deemed unacceptable for men of hunting age (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 156). Among the

Khoekhoe, aprons were given to girl initiates during puberty rites (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 157) and might therefore have symbolised status change to the Northern Sotho.

We therefore have an elephant image that is strongly associated with Northern Sotho boys' initiation, superimposed upon a highly spiritual image of San female sexual potency and Khoekhoe female social transition. Even if the intricate details and significance of aprons in each tradition may not have been known to the painters from each culture, the apron motif is a cross-cultural symbol and the superimposing painter would have been well aware of its connection to sacred female rites. In the case of the Khoekhoe tassels added to the San apron it may be that the herders sought to appropriate and 'Khoekhoenise' the image, shifting it from the world of the forager to the world of the herder. Since the Khoekhoen were aware of but reluctant to recognise the power of the San (Hall & Smith 2000) it is unlikely that the Khoekhoen were too lazy to paint their own apron; rather they sought to take the already potent San image and manipulate it into becoming an image that was infused with the powerful agency of the San but which also functioned as a Khoekhoe symbol.

Furthermore, a boys' initiation image has been painted over a blatantly female symbol. It is unclear whether they perceived the apron as Khoekhoen or San in authorship, but the gap in knowledge of production and knowledge of consumption could not have been so great in cross-cultural imagery that they overlooked its connection to women. They may have regarded the compounded San-Khoekhoe image as being an even more potent female image.

At site GP11 a large white elephant is finger-painted over several San human figures of indeterminate gender, and the trunk of the elephant is painted so that its tip is superimposed over the face of a San zebra image. The human images are faded and difficult to see. There is one human figure whose torso is sticking out from behind the back of the elephant, one beneath its front leg, and three smaller figures around the tusks and trunk. It is unclear what the significance of the humans is in this instance but the face-to-face confrontation between the elephant and the zebra suggests an important relationship.

The zebra is a prominent symbol in San cosmology and mythology. The zebra is regarded as a figure of great beauty and *!Kung* girls decorated their thighs and cheekbones with ash and ochre or scarified their foreheads in imitation of zebra stripes for this reason (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 100). Zebra are also associated with girls' puberty rites and with rain (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 143). In Northern Sotho boys' initiation rites, 'zebra' may be used to refer to male genitals, while girls undergoing initiation are also called *pitsi*, meaning

zebra (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 43). Animals such as giraffe and leopard are also associated with initiation as their contrasting markings represent spiritual 'hotness' and 'coldness' in farmer colour symbolism (Nettleton 2002).

Zebra are therefore strongly associated with women in the San community, but can be seen to be prominent to the Northern Sotho in both the male and female realms. If the San zebra depiction is regarded by the boy initiates, who painted the elephant as a symbol for the male genitals, one can regard the new relationship between the images as being harmonious from a Northern Sotho perspective. In such a case the San rock art is appropriated and shifted from a phase of female importance into the realm of Northern Sotho men. Alternatively, as with the case of the apron at site DR42, the zebra could have been recognised as a female symbol and the image thus intended as a juxtaposition of gender. These opposite realms of gender would therefore not necessarily indicate a large gap between knowledge of production and knowledge of consumption but rather a knowledgeable and insightful manipulation of San rock art that served the purposes of the Northern Sotho. Had this been an isolated case of opposing gender symbolism it may have been argued that the zebra, associated with San female cosmology, was ironically incorrectly appropriated purely on the basis of its Northern Sotho association with male genitalia. When taking into account the aforementioned case of the elephant and apron, however, it becomes probable that the zebra was sought out specifically for its female associations in San cosmology.

***Ostrich***

At site NJ9 a single, white, finger-painted ostrich is found over two San ostrich images. The body of the finger-painted ostrich covers the lower half of one underlying San ostrich and its beak touches on the neck of the second San ostrich. The ostrich was viewed by the Hietshware as the king of the beasts in the "First Order of Existence" and is said to have ordered the lion to kill for him and cut the meat up as he had no teeth, and thus only ate the kidneys. The lion was afraid of the ostrich's roar but when he found the ostrich sleeping with its mouth open the lion noticed that the ostrich had no teeth and no longer feared it. After this incident the lion became the king of the animals (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 108). Other San myths relate the ostrich to the acquisition of fire or to the female protagonist called */Osê,* whose call is dangerous to children but who can only be seen by shamans. According to the linguist Wilhelm Bleek, the ostrich and the moon are the only things that can come back from the dead (*ibid*). To the Northern Sotho the ostrich is a powerful, but secret, symbol in boys'

initiation rites (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 180). Eastwood (2002a) notes that Hananwa and Venda sources have confirmed the importance of the ostrich to initiation but that the significance of the bird is a closely guarded secret.

Though some of the associated San mythology refers to women, the ostriches at NJ9 have black plumage and are therefore clearly male. The most relevant mythology in this case is that of the Hietshware, which refers mainly to the importance of the ostrich and its subsequent subjugation by the lion. The closely guarded significance of the imagery may have made the cultural permeation of knowledge as difficult at the time of superimposition as it was at the time when Eastwood conducted his research. The direct copying of imagery further suggests that the ostrich may have been regarded as an important San figure, but that it was more likely chosen for its importance in the Northern Sotho boys' initiation rites. If the San ostriches were appropriated for gender-related purposes it may have been because of the colouration of the ostriches that clearly labels them as male.

***Giraffe and rhino***

The giraffe is by far the most frequently superimposed image type across the studied sites and is painted over San rock art a total of ten times. Due to the large number of giraffe in the upper layer, these instances will be discussed according to site, starting with instances of giraffe painted over indeterminate San imagery and building the discussion towards sites where the underlying art is more identifiable.

The giraffe serves as a symbol for both Northern Sotho boys' and girls' initiation rites (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 43) but the painting thereof is considered a component of the category of Northern Sotho art associated with boys' initiation specifically (Namono 2004; Eastwood & Tlouamma 2006a). The tree that is cut down for boys' initiation rites by the initiation masters, discussed above, is known as *mokgwana thittwa*, 'the giraffe', before it is replanted to become *tlau,* 'the elephant' (Eastwood 2002a: 40). Considering the numerous times that it is painted, one can assume that it of great significance to the Northern Sotho, yet there is very little information available about its meaning and symbolism in an initiation context (Prins & Hall 1994).

A single giraffe at site BE29 is painted over the head and neck of an indeterminate San antelope. The shelter is densely painted and comprises an extensive range of Northern Sotho

animal depictions, a *kōma*, as well as colonial imagery. Surprisingly, this was the only noticeable case of multi-traditional superimposition at the site.

At BE4 there are four instances of giraffe painted over San rock art. In the first case a single giraffe is painted partially over two unidentifiable antelope. What is striking about this instance is that the giraffe is painted only a few centimetres to the right of a finely-painted, white San giraffe figure facing the same way. Though the two paintings do not touch it is likely that the positioning of the Northern Sotho giraffe was influenced by the San giraffe more than it was by the San antelope. A second giraffe at this site is painted so that its head covers the head of an underlying San antelope. As the bi-chrome antelope's head was painted in white, which has faded and is also covered by the superimposition, neither species nor gender can be determined. In a third instance a giraffe and an indeterminate animal are superimposed over another indeterminate animal, while a fourth giraffe's neck bisects a San depiction of a human's legs. A giraffe's legs are also painted over human figures at site LB40. None of the figures superimposed by giraffe at these sites are diagnostic, but they do demonstrate that giraffe are painted over both animal and human image classes. There are altogether 19 giraffe painted at site BE4, of which only four are superimposed over San rock art. Though the prevalence of giraffe at this site might make it seem as though much of the superimposition is coincidental, the second giraffe is painted so that its head falls very specifically over the head of the antelope, as if to replace it. This indicates a certain degree of strategic and deliberate image positioning.

At site GP11 a slurry white giraffe is painted over an indeterminate San antelope so that the giraffe's hind section and legs fall directly over the hind section and legs of the antelope. A second giraffe from the same site is painted in the same manner over a zebra but its front legs are also painted over a San woman, who can be identified by the breasts protruding from beneath her bent arms. The zebra forms part of the same procession as the zebra superimposed by the Northern Sotho elephant motif discussed above, and its connection to the San domain of women is further confirmed by the painting of the woman. Even if the San female and zebra paintings are not contemporaneous, they were likely to have been perceived by the Northern Sotho as being conceptually linked, as they are both painted in white pigment, appear to be in direct contact with one another, and are superimposed by a single Northern Sotho motif. The zebra's masculine attributes in the Northern Sotho cosmology become a less likely motive for superimposition when it is found in the same context as a female figure. It is, however, possible that the gender ambiguity of zebra and giraffe in the

Northern Sotho cosmology allows these species to act as a bridging symbol between the realm of boys' initiation, for which they were painted, and the realm of women. At site BE2.5 a single Northern Sotho giraffe is painted over a San zebra motif. These are the only two paintings in the entire shelter, suggesting that the San zebra was very specifically sought out to be superimposed by a Northern Sotho giraffe. The recurrence of the boys' initiation rock art, specifically giraffe paintings superimposed over zebra paintings, further suggests a conscious and skilful appropriation of this San image class for purposes relating to gender and social transition.

Finally at site LB13 a large procession of ten Northern Sotho giraffe and two stylised rhinoceroses are painted over a series of Khoekhoe finger dots, which are, in turn, painted over 12 white San giraffe depictions. The giraffe and rhino are discussed together here as they occur in the same context.

Giraffe are among the most frequently painted subjects in the San art of the CLB. A shaman, Old *K'xau,* was said to have related a story in which the giraffe acted as his guide, ally, and guardian when he was moving under the water on his journey to God's village in the sky. Some cloud patterns are also said to resemble giraffe while other patterns invoke the markings on their hide (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 100). The giraffe is therefore associated with water, altered states of consciousness and the weather in San cosmology. San giraffe superimposed over Khoekhoe aprons in the Makgabeng and elsewhere in the northern parts of the Limpopo province suggest an association with female power (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 184) while giraffe often being depicted with young supports the notion of 'femaleness' and maternal protection (Eastwood & Eastwood 2006: 99).

As is the case where giraffe are painted over zebra, the rock art at site LB13 demonstrates an example of a Northern Sotho boys' initiation motif painted over a San motif that is firstly ambiguous in Northern Sotho cosmology, and is secondly associated with supernatural potency and female power in San cosmology. A parallel can also be drawn to the instance of the ostriches at site NJ19, as the image types are directly borrowed from the underlying San rock art. One would not suppose that the underlying rock art is radically shifted from its intended state when superimposed by the same image class, yet the superimposed images are painted in a different tradition and style, clearly marking the site as appropriated. The overlying art, furthermore, is imbued with values, ideas, and contexts that contradict those of the underlying art. If the San giraffe figures were perceived only through the lens of Northern

Sotho cosmology there would be a large gap between knowledge of production and knowledge of consumption, indicating a limited cultural permeability. In such a case the San agency would have been evoked purely on account of its autochthonous value, and appropriated so as to comply with the perception of giraffe in Northern Sotho initiation rock art. If, on the other hand, the Northern Sotho painters were aware of the subtleties in meaning embedded in the San rock art, it would indicate that the juxtaposition of ideas held meaning in terms of the Northern Sotho boys' initiation rites, and the implied reduction in the knowledge gap may suggest a greater permeability of social boundaries.

The rhinoceros is listed as another one of the animals painted in Northern Sotho boys' initiation rock art (Eastwood & Tlouamma 2006a). It is also at the centre of a Northern Sotho boys' initiation poem, wherein the rhino is said to have become stuck and is bleeding after piercing a piece of wood with its horn. The meaning of this poem is cloaked in figurative language so as not to divulge initiation secrets during the first phase of initiation (Mojalefa 2002). Toward the end of this phase of initiation, called *bodika* (Mönnig 1967), various wooden figurines are carved, the most important of which is that of a rhino. The boys would sit around a fire in the centre of the circumcision lodge while the rhino figurine was "drawn slowly past them on the ground," at which point they stabbed at it with miniature spears and called out their new manhood names and the feats they intended to perform as fully incorporated members of the chiefdom (Boeyens & Van der Ryst 2014: 37-38). The rhino is therefore also strongly associated with boys' initiation and holds huge symbolic value for the initiates. This evidence, combined with its shared superimposed context with the giraffe, suggests that they served similar purposes in appropriating the San imagery. As giraffe and rhino are used in the same painted context one can further infer that this manner of superimposition also goes beyond the mere copying of images from the underlying layer.

**Tracing**

The word 'tracing' is used here to describe the outlining and modification of San imagery seen at sites BE2 and DR42. In both cases red San animal figures, of which one, if not both, appear to be female antelope, have been outlined with white slurry paint, and their bodies have been crossed with vertical stripes. At site BE2 the antelope's body is crossed with 6 vertical strokes and the head is schematically modified. Due to the nature of the modification to the antelope's head it is uncertain what the motive for this was. What is apparent is that a female antelope motif was appropriated by the Northern Sotho in the context of images

associated with boys' initiation. This same image is further superimposed by one of the saurian motifs discussed above.

At site DR42 the San animal is also outlined and crossed with seven vertical stripes, but the modifications are much more specific. The ears of the animal are deliberately rounded and resemble the way in which hyena ears are depicted by the Northern Sotho (see Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2000: 53). In Northern Sotho boys' initiation, when breaking a rule, the initiate is told to 'hyena', meaning that he has to stand on one leg and point at the ground as punishment (Eastwood 2002a: 39). Conical stone structures built during initiation are also called *phiri,* meaning hyena (Moodley 2008: 121). The underlying image has been obscured by the superimposition, but it has no horns and would therefore also depict a female of the species if it is an antelope. The meaning of this type of superimposition is not certain but it shows a direct appropriation of San imagery. The San imagery is therefore shifted from its intended phase of being by means of transformation rather than contextual assimilation.

### Apron

At site GP47 a Northern Sotho apron motif is superimposed so that it only touches the underlying indeterminate San rock art. Northern Sotho aprons, like those of the San and Khoekhoen, are associated with the realm of women and painted in the context of the older type of farmer art that relates to female rites (Namono 2004; Eastwood & Eastwood 2006). The faded condition of the underlying image does not leave much room for interpretation but illustrates that Northern Sotho female imagery also occurs in instances of superimposition.

## Northern Sotho and Khoekhoe rock art

The superimposition of Northern Sotho rock art over the rock art of the Khoekhoen is sparsely represented among the sites that were studied. The interpretation of this type of superimposition is further complicated by the difficulty involved in identifying imagery and thereby relating ethnography to it. Attention will therefore only be given to instances where image type or context can shed light on the discernible subtleties of interaction.

### Multi-layered superimposition

At site LB13 Northern Sotho giraffe, rhino, and indeterminate animals have been painted over multiple rows of white finger dots, which in turn have been painted over San giraffe figures. The direct copying of giraffe from the San layer and other possible juxtapositions in

gender symbolism may indicate that the Northern Sotho images bare a stronger relationship to San imagery than to the Khoekhoe finger dots. It is however possible that these images were given preference over other San giraffe paintings because of the multiple layers, allowing the Northern Sotho people to engage with the abducted agency of both San and Khoekhoen painters. Though it has been argued earlier in this chapter that the Khoekhoen sought to block out the underlying imagery or neutralise the dangers thereof, this does not always remove it from a state of potential commodity. On the contrary, if these images were chosen by the Northern Sotho specifically because Khoekhoe art had already been painted over San art, the Khoekhoen may have inadvertently augmented the value of San rock art. The extent to which the San art is covered by the finger dots, coupled with what we know about the relationship between the Khoekhoen and San during times of farmer intensification, suggests that the Khoekhoen did not intend to add value to the San rock art. Allowing the underlying art to remain visible, however, suggests either that they were not entirely committed to removing it from a phase of potential commodity or that they were more set on merely blocking the implied dangers, or simply appropriating it for their own purposes.

The second instance of this type of multi-layered superimposition is seen at site LB40 and comprises indeterminate white smears painted over a San antelope that is painted over single lines of Khoekhoe finger dots. The white Northern Sotho pigment is superimposed over the imagery of both painting traditions where they intersect as well as where they do not. It is possible that the Northern Sotho recognised this as a San-Khoekhoe composite image and therefore wished to appropriate the secondary agents of both painting traditions. It is equally plausible that they could not distinguish between the two and saw only an antelope walking along a line and wished to appropriate it as such, with no concern for the political or spiritual intricacies of the relationship between the dots and the antelope.

The older, less invasive finger dots, as well as the more recent, extensive, white finger dots, were both appropriated by the Northern Sotho. Though such sites do not provide evidence to suggest that the different types of dots were selected for specific purposes, one can infer that they were appropriated either as things relating to the Khoekhoen or as images of composite value.

Northern Sotho rock art is also painted over Khoekhoe rock art that does not overlie San images. At sites LB40 and DR42 one indeterminate and one comb image are painted over dotted lines respectively, while at site TL11 a Northern Sotho kudu image is painted over a

single dotted line. The kudu appears among the rock art associated with boys' initiation (Namono 2004) and the large horns of the kudu further speak to the male orientation of the image. The kudu's back is painted just beneath the dotted line and its horns cross over the dots. At site MB53 a red Northern Sotho image is painted over an extensive set of white Khoekhoe finger dots.

### The things and their people

The matter of determining the relationships between people of different painting traditions by looking at the relationships between their things is by no means a simple one. It does, however, become clear that the social lives of people are tightly bound together with the social lives of things, and that their relationships with and perceptions of others are reflected in superimposition to varying degrees.

## Discussion

### A matter of time

The consumption of rock art was not a static or uniform practice. The diverting of things from their intended paths is unique within each situation and each painting tradition. Certain patterns in the practice of superimposition, however, suggest that the relationships among these different traditions also shifted according to the social climates in the landscape and that, over time, economic intensification and the fading of knowledge caused the methods of superimposition to change.

The different pigment colours used for the different degrees of visual dominance in San rock art by the Khoekhoen suggest that the change in manner of consumption was likely linked to different time periods. Shifts in the nature of the relationships between groups in the social landscape are therefore reflected in the relationships between the rock paintings with which they are entangled. San rock art is terminally consumed by the Khoekhoen during later times, when white Khoekhoe rock art visually dominates the rock shelters. Hall and Smith (2000: 43-44) attribute this behaviour to a negotiation for power, where the Khoekhoen did not want to give the San the upper hand in contact relationships and feared the power of San rock art. Older Khoekhoe rock art painted in red pigment does not conform to this form of superimposition and is even superimposed by San rock art. This may suggest that earlier times did not create such a desperate need for the upper hand in contact relationships, as

fewer resources were controlled by farming communities and trade relations with the Northern Sotho had not yet put as much pressure on the relationships between the smaller San and Khoekhoen groups (Hall & Smith 2000: 44). The entanglement of things and people therefore results in a shift in the manner in which the rock art is consumed, just as a shift occurs in the manner in which the secondary agency of the artist is regarded by people from another painting tradition.

A shift in the perspective of such secondary agencies is also observed among the superimpositions of Northern Sotho rock art over the rock art of the San. In the earlier forms of Northern Sotho rock art, largely associated with initiation, there appears to be a stronger relationship with the meaning of the underlying San rock art, where animal depictions were superimposed by depictions of the same animals or other animals that may have been connected in meaning. San images appear to have been sought out by Northern Sotho initiates either for what the image types represented to the San, or for what they represented in the mythologies of the initiates. During later stages, however, colonial contact imagery was predominantly painted over San depictions of humans. These depictions of humans were, furthermore, used as actors in the scenes of Northern Sotho protest art. This suggests a strong connection to the San people and their autochthonous powers rather than to the meaning of the subjects depicted in either San or Northern Sotho mythologies. It is uncertain whether they sought to draw from the spiritual power of these images to enhance that of their own rock art or whether they identified with the marginalised San people, but the manner of superimposition is distinctly different from earlier stages. This, once again, reflects two different types of relationships between two painting traditions as the result of a change in intention on the part of the superimposing painters, and in their perceptions of the art over which they painted.

Superimposition therefore not only sheds light on the nature of the relationships between the different painting traditions but illustrates shifts in these relationships over time. When the cultural biographies of objects are altered in similar ways during a certain period, a social history is created for these things that are bound by the intentions of those who alter these courses. As the intentions and perceptions of those who engage with these things change, their manners of divergence also change and different types of social histories are developed. By relating these changes to pigment colours or subject matter, one can determine relative dates and establish whether or not such differences reflect periodic shifts in the relationships between peoples.

**Terminal superimposition**

One of the most noticeable qualities of any instance of superimposition is the extent to which the rock art is covered. In the case of the later Khoekhoe superimposition of San rock art the underlying paintings are completely covered and removed from any state of potential commodity. This suggests a confrontational attitude towards the underlying art as well as towards the secondary agency of the San artists. Although this is shown in only three instances among the studied sites, it coincides with the theories put forward by Hall and Smith (2000).

This was not merely an act of destruction, as the Khoekhoen would have had the means to simply hack the San rock art off the rock face. Rather it served as a visible display of appropriation, which announced the superimposing artist as the dominant force in the landscape. While they may have believed in the dangers posed by the San rock art, they were confident in their own ability to overcome these forces by means of their own paintings. These actions reveal that they regarded the San as having great power and that the San posed a threat to the intruding Khoekhoen. Such superimposition is therefore simultaneously an arrogant display of disregard for the San rock art and a confirmation of the insecurity they felt as intruders in a landscape where the San had held an important and potentially threatening position (Hall & Smith 2000: 42). In all the aforementioned cases of white Khoekhoe rock art overlying San rock art, with the exception of sites LB13 and BE25, a deliberate attempt was made to disengage the San rock art and remove it from states of potential commodity. Such attempts can be regarded as having been successful, since there is no evidence of further interaction with the underlying art by either San or Northern Sotho artists.

The success of these appropriations further speaks to the manner in which the San regarded the Khoekhoen, as such spaces were not reclaimed by the original artists. There is one case among the studied sites in which San rock art superimposes Khoekhoe rock art, but the Khoekhoe rock art in this instance is regarded as falling into the older category and likely predates farmer intensification. Sites that had been more forcefully claimed by the Khoekhoen, however, remained unchallenged. It may be that the terminal nature of the consumption resonated even among the San, or that by this time the San no longer held the power needed to contest the loss of their rock art.

Less invasive superimposition, such as the earlier Khoekhoe and Northern Sotho rock art painted over San rock art, suggests less hostile relationships among the painting traditions.

Appropriation in any case is still a divergence from the intended path of the rock art and is ultimately an invasive act, but as the underlying rock art is left visible and in some cases is tied in to a larger theme, it seems as though the superimposition was executed with regard for the underlying painting rather than simply to suppress it. Since there is little ethnography that accounts for the meaning of finger dots in Khoekhoe rock art, one can only infer that the San rock art held some importance and that in earlier times the Khoekhoen sought to engage and draw from a power that they respectfully acknowledged. The same may hold true for San rock art painted over Khoekhoe finger-dot lines. By the time the Northern Sotho had established themselves in the landscape there was no longer any danger in acknowledging the erstwhile power of the San. While the herders' negotiation for power often drove them to act against San beliefs and practices, the farmer painters appropriated these (Hall & Smith 2000: 42).

**Appropriating power**

The number of instances of Northern Sotho rock art superimposed over San rock art coupled with representational qualities of the painting traditions allow for a more intricate understanding of this form of appropriation. However, in some instances the upper or lower layers prove difficult to interpret due to ambiguous ethnographies, faded pigment, or connections and understandings that simply are not known to outsiders. This can be seen in examples such as that of the Northern Sotho gemsbok painted over a San tsessebe. What can be deduced from the quality of painting and attributes of other tsessebe depictions in the Makgabeng is that the tsessebe was a very significant animal in the San cosmology, while there does not seem to be evidence for the significance of the tsessebe in Northern Sotho mythology or rock art. What holds true for all instances of appropriation, especially in this case, is that San art was regarded as powerful and desirable. What remains to be discerned, however, is whether the tsessebe was appropriated for the quality and detail of the painting or whether the Northern Sotho people had a deeper insight into the cosmology of their neighbours. In a landscape where the farmers and foragers would have often come into contact with one another or come across other traditions of rock art, it is conceivable that the Northern Sotho would have obtained some insight into the San cosmology. If the tsessebe was appropriated for a Northern Sotho boys' initiation context based on the importance it held to the San, it would suggest a relationship that allowed for the social permeability of

knowledge. Other instances of boys' initiation rock art superimposed over San rock art, however, show a more complex pattern of relationships between the upper and lower layers.

Kudu, elephant, giraffe, and rhino are painted over female animal images that are predominantly associated with the realm of women in San beliefs and practices. Each of the animals painted by the Northern Sotho is strongly associated with boys' initiation and is present in their poetry and initiation rites, or is representative of masculine features. Even if the rock art were to be regarded from purely the Northern Sotho worldview, all the animals that were painted over are either directly related to the realm of women or are ambiguous in the sense that they are relevant to both boys' and girls' initiations. This reveals the Northern Sotho desire to appropriate San rock art in order to draw from the autochthonous power inherent in the secondary agency, as well as a desire to incorporate a female component into their initiation rock art. Due to the underlying gender ambiguity in the Northern Sotho art, mythology and practices, it is difficult to determine whether the initiates sought to engage with the San knowledge systems embedded in the rock art or with their own knowledge systems projected upon the images. In both cases the similarities in gender association are striking and suggest social permeability or even borrowed perceptions. The divergences in the social trajectories of the San rock art therefore reflect an appropriation of power and a manipulation through juxtaposition, in order to serve an obscure purpose in boys' initiation rites. Unfortunately the closely guarded nature of these rites and the full significance of these animals mean that a greater understanding of such practices is difficult to achieve.

Only one instance among the selected sites was found of Northern Sotho girls' rock art superimposed over San rock art. The poor preservation of the site and lack of comparative data makes it difficult to infer anything about this occurrence, but it does show that not only boys' art was superimposed over the rock art of others. Furthermore, the superimposition of Northern Sotho rock art over the rock art of the Khoekhoen is poorly represented in the sample, and extensive fading coupled with the difficulty involved in relating the non-representational geometrics to ethnography make it difficult to deduce the intentions of the painters. It is most likely that the Northern Sotho recognised the Khoekhoe rock art as being imbued with spiritual power in the same way as the San rock art and sought to draw on this power to enhance the superimposed rock art.

**Image copying**

In some cases imagery is borrowed directly from the underlying layer and superimposed over the same subject matter. This is seen where Northern Sotho giraffe are painted over San giraffe and where Northern Sotho ostriches are painted over San ostriches. In the instance of giraffe painted over giraffe it is possible that the meaning lies in an initiation context and in gender juxtaposition, as has been discussed above. This should not, however, negate the significance of image copying, which was an important practice. The Northern Sotho ostriches are painted over San ostrich depictions that are clearly identifiable as males by their black plumage. They may therefore have sought to engage with other qualities associated with ostriches, such as those in the San myth about the former king of the beasts, or perhaps a hidden Northern Sotho association. The direct copying from the underlying art may be symbolic of the borrowing of customs or a way of bridging the gap between the foreign San rock art and their own experiences, but it is difficult to discern which with limited information.

Another very peculiar form of superimposition is seen where the Northern Sotho painters have traced the outlines of San animal depictions with white paint so as to paint a similar animal exactly on top of the existing animal. Slight modifications were made by means of altering the shape of the animal's ears or crossing the body with lines. In this regard it seems as though the Northern Sotho intention was to directly appropriate and modify the San rock art. Whether this was a metaphor for transition or an evocation of power is uncertain. These occurrences are poorly understood and more data should be collected before sound interpretations can be proposed.

**Superimposing superimposition**

There are two instances among the studied sites where Northern Sotho rock art was painted over Khoekhoe-San composite imagery. In the one instance the finger dots are in single lines that are superimposed only slightly by San imagery, while in the other instance the Khoekhoe finger dots completely cover the underlying rock art but allow for it to remain visible through the spaces between the dots. The superimposition over the completely covered San rock art suggests that if the intention of the Khoekhoen was to consume the San rock art terminally, it was not successful. Rather, they may have unintentionally added value to the San rock art by making it more desirable as a San-Khoekhoe composite image. It is, however, possible that

the underlying San or Khoekhoe imagery was desired by the Northern Sotho regardless of superimposition.

In the case of the less invasive San-Khoekhoe or Khoekhoe-San superimposition, the Northern Sotho rock art is painted over the intersection of San and Khoekhoe rock art as well as over Khoekhoe finger dots that are not superimposed by the San rock art, suggesting that not only one tradition of rock art was deemed to be desirable. Since the San antelope depiction is not visually dominant it is unlikely that the intention of the San was to suppress or terminally consume the Khoekhoe rock art. It is, however, possible in both cases that the Khoekhoe or San superimposition marked the underlying rock art as a cynosure, as with the engravings discussed by Ouzman (2001). In such an instance the Northern Sotho painter could engage the secondary agency of both the Khoekhoen and the San. The lack of consideration for the political intricacies between the Khoekhoe and San rock art suggests that the Northern Sotho people may have had a similar disregard for both groups while recognising the potential power that could abducted from both images; thus appropriating the rock art of both painting traditions and manipulating the composite trajectories for their own gain.

Another way in which the Northern Sotho succeeded in appropriating elements from both the San and the Khoekhoen was by painting fat-tailed sheep, an iconic marker of Khoekhoe identity, over San rock art. In this instance the subject matter is adapted from the Khoekhoen so that the potency and power associated with it is appropriated for and incorporated in the Northern Sotho rock art. This appropriation of power is further enhanced by superimposing the image over San rock art. The reason for and context of such painting is uncertain, but it does support the claim for the Northern Sotho people's capacity to appropriate what they desired without the need to fear repercussions. This suggests a relationship of dominance over the Khoekhoe and San alike, but simultaneously shows that the Northern Sotho recognised powerful aspects in both traditions, automatically shifting their rock art and symbolism into states of potential commodity.

## From superimposition to the painters

Superimposition is a complex, multifaceted, and specialised form of appropriation. In some cases it covers or disengages the underlying layer, while in other cases it draws from or even incorporates the underlying rock art in order to augment the overlying images. Though there are differences in the methods and degree of superimposition over time and in each situation,

these differences are as important as the similarities in terms of exploring the relationships between the painting traditions. The relationship between superimposed images is a subject of great interest that not only reveals aspects of the nature of interactions among the different painting traditions, but can uncover intricacies in the desires, strategies, and fears embedded therein. In some cases, such as with the terminal consumption of San rock art by the Khoekhoe, superimposition even betrays aspects of the relationship that the Khoekhoen may have been reluctant to admit.

Though this study has shed much light on the relationships between the painting traditions in the Makgabeng, there are some factors that require further research to ground these findings. This research will benefit greatly from the excavation of the rock shelters that have been discussed. Such excavations would provide contingent evidence for the extent and period of occupation of these shelters. Further research would also need to be conducted into the ethnography concerning initiation and other ritual practices in the Makgabeng, in order to understand the significance of the image types that were used. This would lead to a better understanding of the motives behind some of the more obscure types of superimposition, such as tracing, and would also allow for a better understanding of the conceptual links between underlying and overlying images. Finally, more research needs to be conducted outside the scope of multitraditional superimposition. A study on multitraditional superimposition provides an opportunity for comparison with single tradition superimposition, in which one can determine differences in strategies of consumption within and outside of the painters' own traditions. The percentages of unsuperimposed rock art in each tradition can also shed light on the degree to which each painting tradition employs strategies of appropriation and negotiation of presence in the landscape.

The relationships between rock art images are immensely informative in cases of superimposition as well as in cases of juxtaposition and copying of adjacent depictions. I believe that a refining of these techniques, in combination with more contingent evidence from excavations and ethnography, has the potential to greatly enhance our understanding of the relationships between people from different painting traditions in the Makgabeng region, and elsewhere in southern Africa.

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**Appendix 1- List of farm name abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| Gallashiels | GS |
| Mont Blanc | MB |
| Nieuwe Jerusalem | NJ |
| De La Roche | DR |
| Bonne Esperance | BE |
| Too Late | TL |
| Langbryde | LB |
| Groenpunt | GP |
| Disseldorp | DS |

**Appendix 2- List of other abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| Early Stone Age | ESA |
| Middle Stone Age | MSA |
| Later Stone Age | LSA |
| Early Iron Age | EIA |
| Later Iron Age | LIA |
| Central Limpopo Basin | CLP |
| Limpopo Shashe Confluence Area | LSCA |