

Rock Art of the Ghaap, Northern Cape

Go Ghaap! Heritage Route

30 October 2018

David Morris : McGregor Museum & Sol Plaatje University



Wonderwerk Cave – perhaps the best known rock art of the Ghaap.

Finger paintings here are part of a range of forms of rock art in the wider region that includes rock engravings.



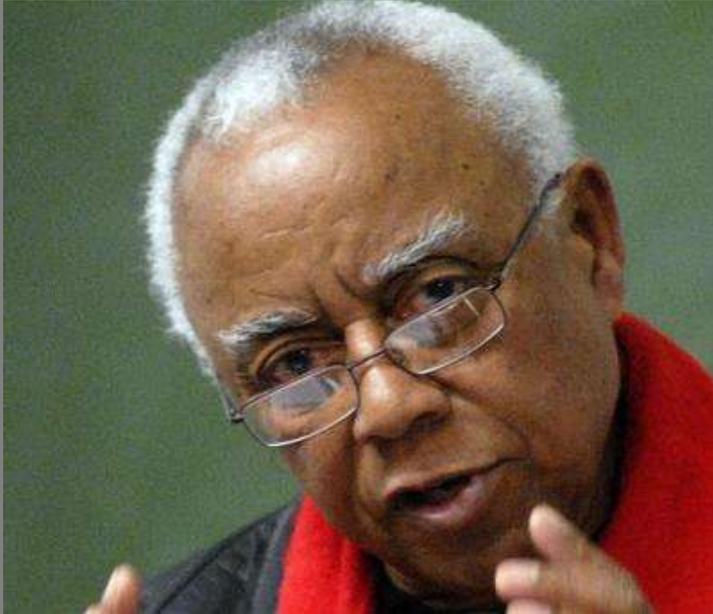
There is variability in technique, 'style', content, landscape setting – also in historical and cultural context.

Who made them?

When?

How?

Why?



I will end with
some thoughts
about culture –
inspired by Neville
Alexander

Dr Neville Alexander

We are not a “rainbow nation” ...

The idea of confluence



Variability in technique, content, age













Meaning?







Driekopseiland near Douglas



In the rainy season
the river rises and
flows over the
engravings.





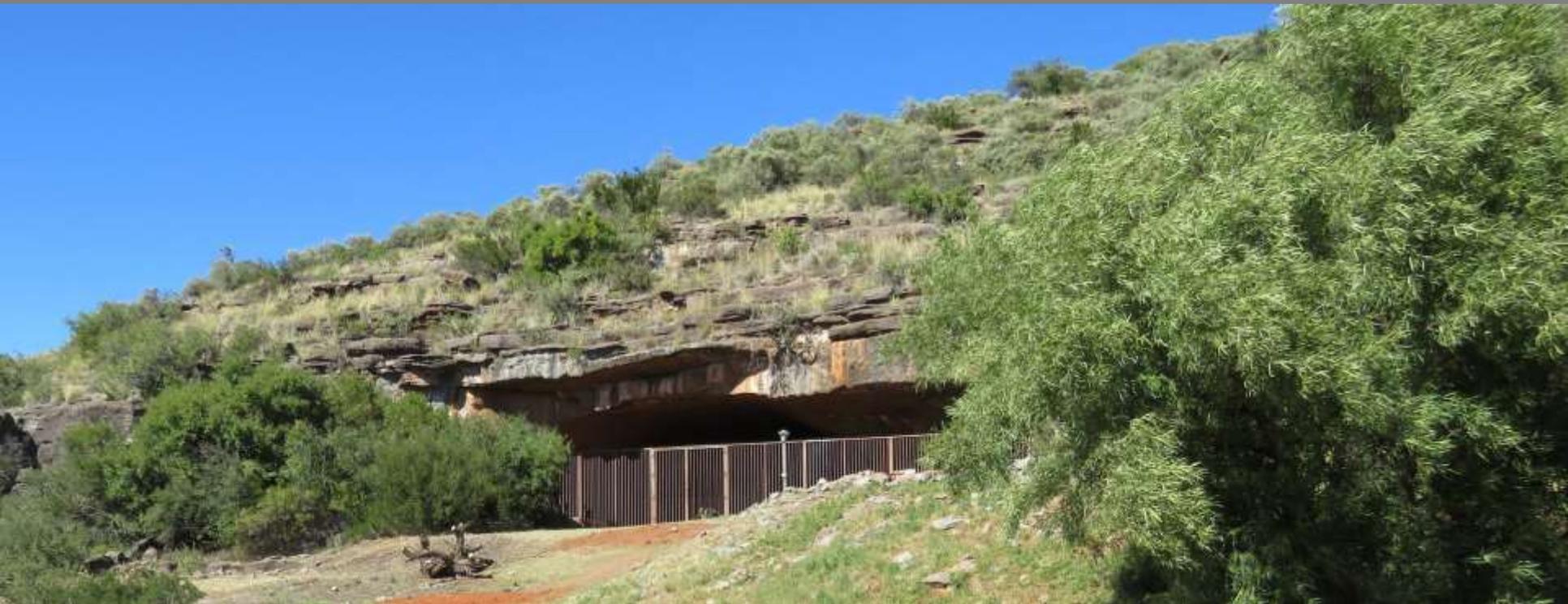
In /Xam Bushman beliefs, the rain is an animal

Beliefs linked with girls' coming of age rites (hokmeisie)

The Rain's Magic Power

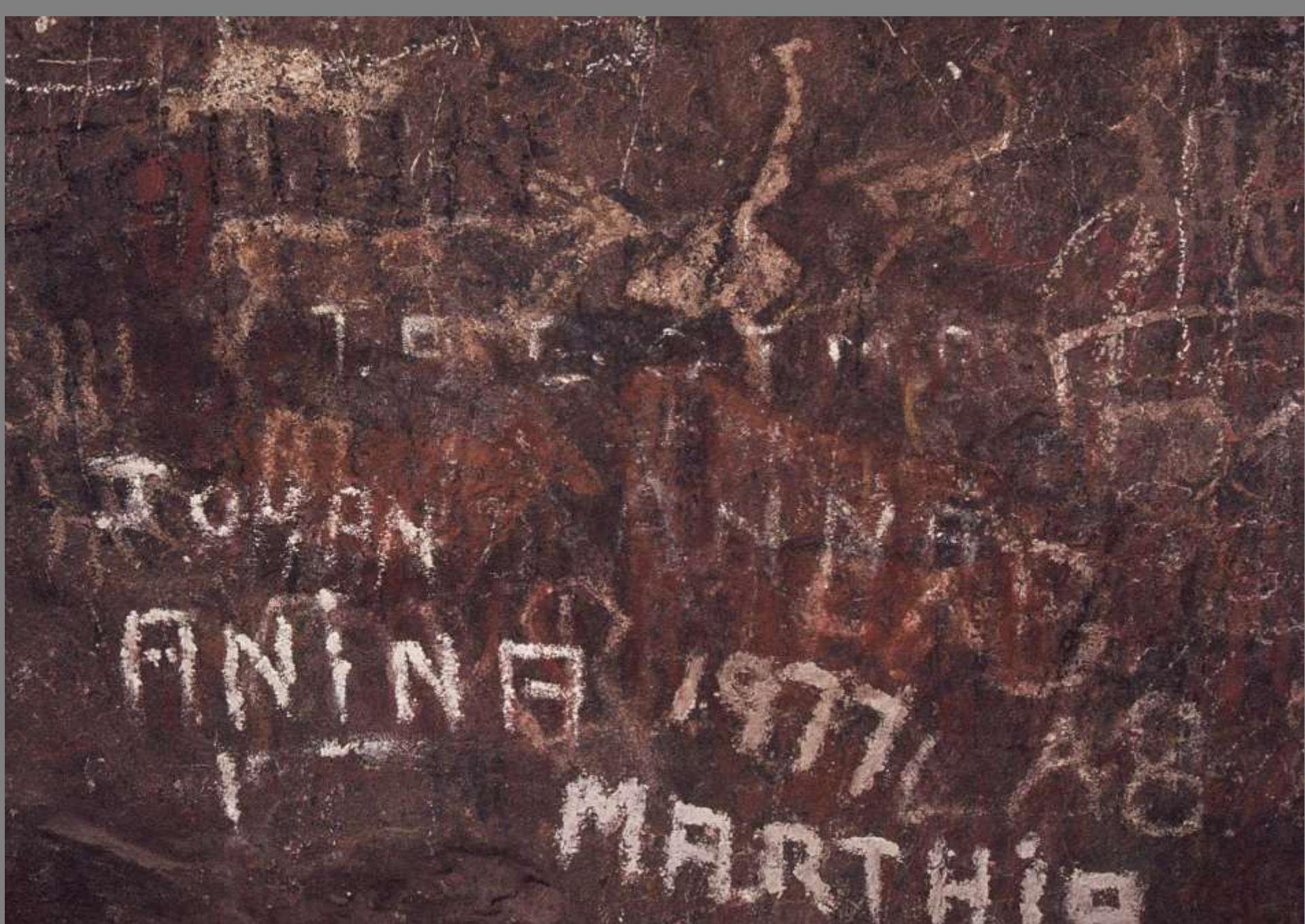


Driekopseiland may have been a place associated with the ritual *stapdans* connected with female puberty rites (Hokmeisie).



Placement of the art in the **landscape**, and the way landscape itself has meaning and power (**agency**), may be of key significance.













Ghaap Escarpment near Ulco











Small rock shelter in Kuruman Hills south west of Kuruman







On the rocky floor of a vlei near Danielskuil









Limeacres – threatened by urban encroachment





Near Danielskuil





In the bed of a stream near Kuruman



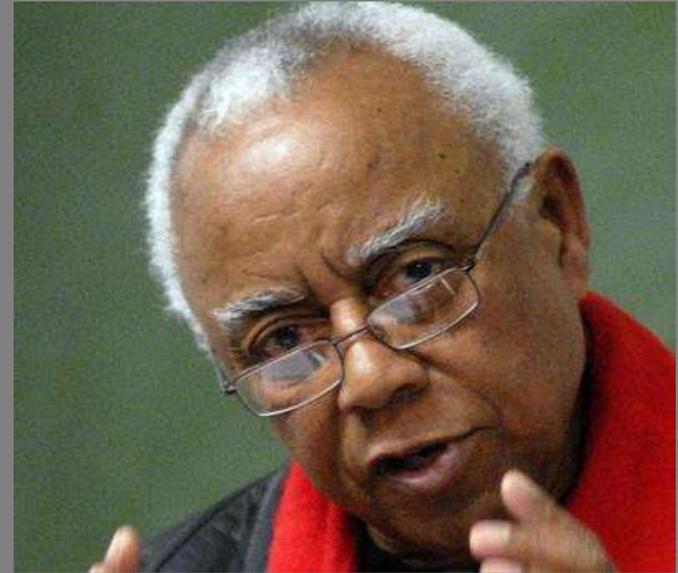
Alexander's "Groot Gariep metaphor"

South Africa is better symbolised as a **confluence** of different tributaries.

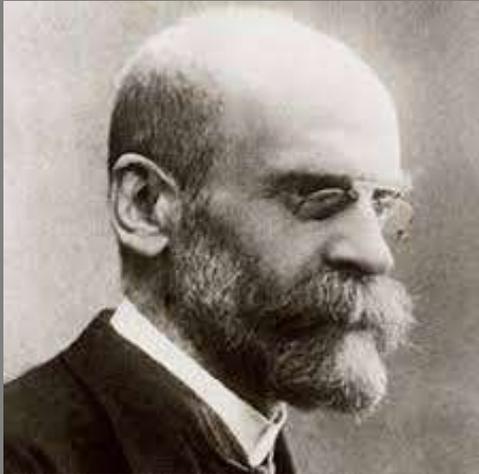
Cultural practices and beliefs flow from different histories.

"...influences have impacted on our religions, languages, music, dancing, sport and even dietary preferences."

We are "in the process of being formed through the convergence of all present and future tributaries."

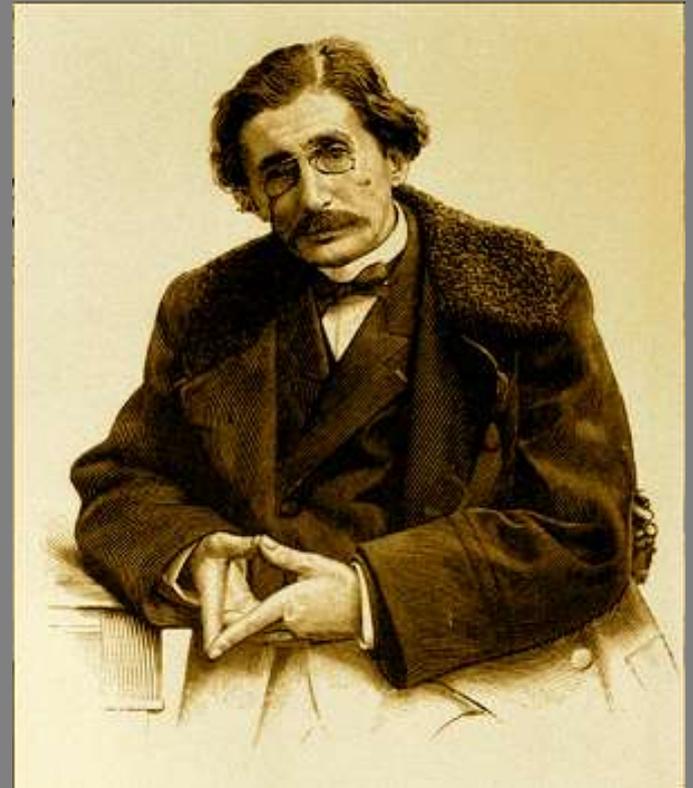


Gabriel Tarde (below) had similar idea: individuals have many parts and are **in process**. We are not isolated autonomous beings and not like cogs in a cohesive system but rather, as he said it, points of “intersection or interference”.



Emile Durkheim

We should not start by assuming (as Durkheim did) the prior existence of a ‘society’, a ‘culture’, a ‘nation’. Tarde was interested in the level of individual interaction and the way people *form* groups and *innovate* in ways that are forever dynamic, changing.



Gabriel Tarde

What is special or unique about a place, and the particular histories of people there, influenced the way rock art was made.



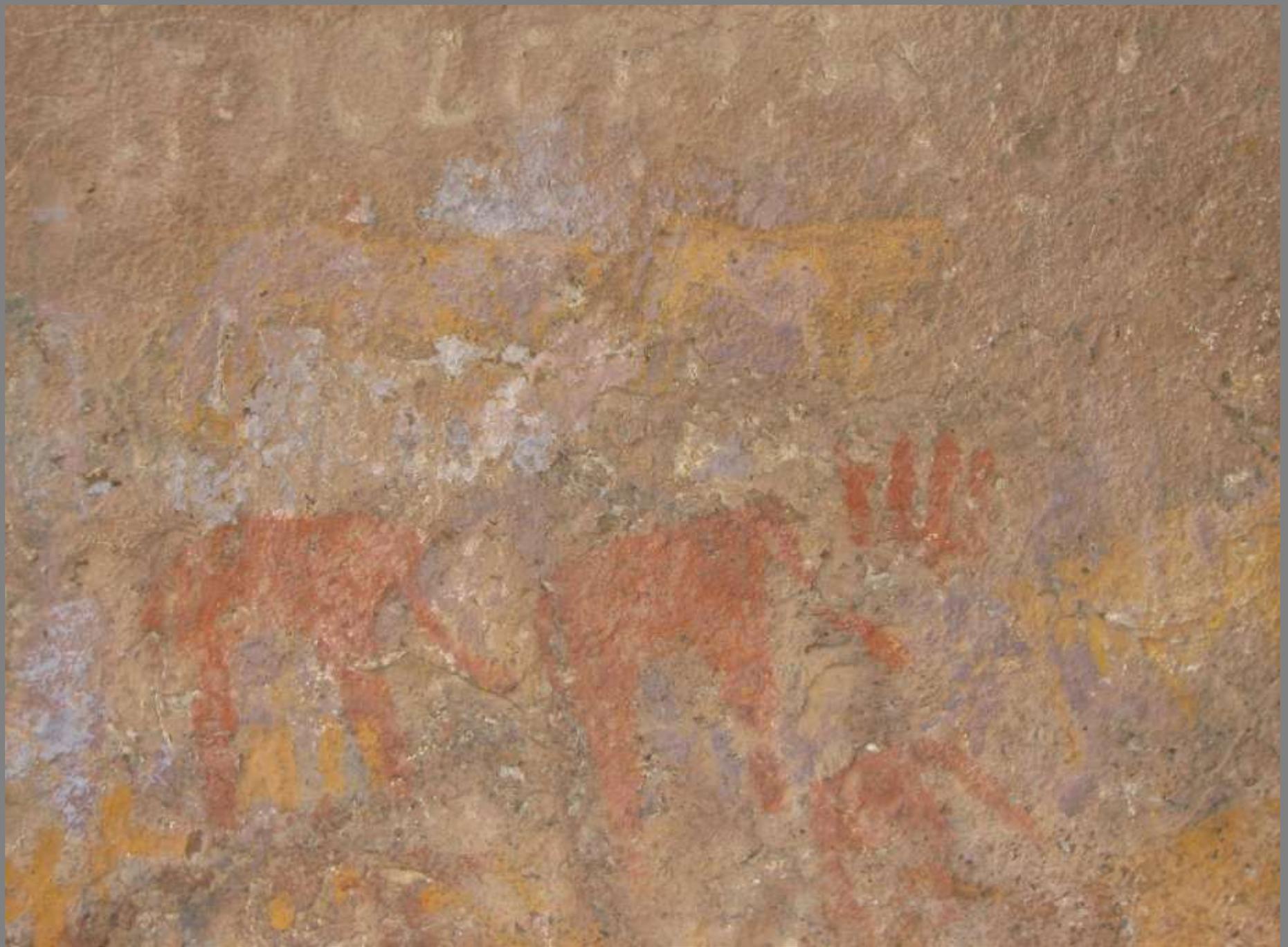
How people live and do things – including rock art – is not a passive reflection of a ‘culture’. People have agency.

Culture is on-going process; is what people do; is reformed as people interact in places, mingling old and new ways.

Culture is confluence.























‘Hok meisie’ dance re-enactment



Hok meisie – decoration on face

Engravings in ritual space - animism

At Driekopseiland the glacially smoothed basement rock, aligned with the flow of the river, 'bulges' and 'dips', almost like a giant snake, above or below the water according to the season.



Placement of art in **landscape**, and the way landscape itself has meaning and **agency** in an **animist ontology**, could be significant.





