



in the shelter adjacent to
Figure 1. Photograph: Sam Challis

Re-tribe and Resist: The Ethnogenesis of a Creolised Raiding Band in Response to Colonisation

Sam Challis

'Bushmen' are often thought of as smaller in stature and paler of skin than southern African pastoralists and agropastoralists, yet this is a stereotype of the San partly perpetuated by the popular media and partly by the colonial tendency to classify according to appearance. The surviving San of the Kalahari have become the model for San throughout the subcontinent. In the nineteenth century, words such as 'Bushman', 'San', 'BaTwa' and 'BaRoa' were used to denote economy, not only race. If one was perceived to be a hunter-gatherer, one was 'Bushman'. Some 'Bushman' groups designated themselves as such, even though they practised stock-keeping, were from heterogeneous backgrounds and held heterodox beliefs. There were advantages to being 'Bushman' on a destabilised frontier, which meant that peoples of differing cultural backgrounds sometimes banded

together and actively created new 'Bushman' identities that met their needs: cohesion, subsistence and protection – centring on the practice of raiding. In one particular instance this was done in such a way that the group survives in the paintings they made of themselves with horses, cattle, dogs and muskets in the rock shelters from where they raided their neighbours.

An intermittent thorn in the side of the trekboer and colonial administrators of nineteenth-century Natal was the threat of stock theft by 'Bushman' raiders from the Maloti-Drakensberg.¹ Quite who these so-called 'Bushmen' were was not, in general, of particular import to the colonists. A 'Bushman' was a 'Bushman', but by the middle of the century, when several deputations had been sent to both the 'Bushmen' and the African farmers known to have contact with them, it transpired in various hearings that the 'Bushmen' comprised several distinct groups. When I use the term 'distinct', I mean that

1 J. Wright, *Bushman Raiders of the Drakensberg, 1840–1870*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1971; J. Wright, 'Bushman Raiders Revisited' in *Claim to the Country: The Archive of Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek*, edited by P. Skotnes, Johannesburg: Jacana and Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007, pp. 119–29; P. Vinnicombe, *People of the Eland: Rock Paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a Reflection of Their Life and Thought*, Pietermaritzburg: Natal University Press, 1976; S. Challis, 'The Impact of the Horse on the AmaTola "Bushmen": New Identity in the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains of Southern Africa', DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 2008; S. Challis, 'Taking the Reins: The Introduction of the Horse in the Nineteenth-Century Maloti-Drakensberg and the Protective Medicine of Baboons' in *The Eland's People: New Perspectives in the Rock Art of the Maloti-Drakensberg Bushmen; Essays in Memory of Patricia Vinnicombe*, edited by P. Mitchell and B. Smith, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009, pp. 104–7.