

# CHANGING PLACES, SPACES AND IDENTITY IN THE SHASHE - LIMPOPO REGION OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA



Sunset over the Limpopo River

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, 2005

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work. It has been submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

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(Signature of candidate)

\_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2005

# ABSTRACT

While the Iron Age sequence of the Shashe-Limpopo region of Limpopo Province has been the subject of much research in the past, little is known about the hunter-gatherer sequence of the area. I begin to address this lack through the description of three new hunter-gatherer sites: Tshisiku Shelter, Balerno Main Shelter and Balerno Shelter 2. I examine how hunter-gatherer spaces, places and identity changed with the movement of different groups of farmers (including Zhizo, K2 and Mapungubwe period farmers) into the Shashe-Limpopo region over the last 2000 years. I also investigate how hunter-gatherer / farmer proximity impacted on interaction, and what social structures, boundaries, and constructed identities underlie interaction in the region.

The pre-contact and contact periods are compared in order to determine whether changes in the hunter-gatherer sequence were due to the arrival, and continued presence, of farmers. Ethnographic and archaeological interaction case studies are used to construct a model of interaction for the Shashe-Limpopo.

Based on data from Tshisiku Shelter, Balerno Main Shelter, Balerno Shelters 2 and 3, and Little Muck Shelter, a new sequence is proposed for hunter-gatherer occupation in the Shashe-Limpopo region:

- An early pre-contact phase (11 120 – 10 890 BC; 6000 – 1220 BC)
- A late pre-contact phase (1220 BC - AD 100)
- An early contact phase (AD 100 – AD 900)
- A late contact phase divided into two periods:
  - The Zhizo period (AD 900 – AD 1000 / 1200)
  - The K2 / Mapungubwe period (AD 1000 – AD 1300)

Finally, a late second millennium phase of Late Iron Age farmer utilisation of hunter-gatherer sites occurs in the recent past (AD 1600 – AD 1900).

My research suggests that:

- A hunter-gatherer presence occurs significantly earlier in the region than initially hypothesised.
- Differences in farmer social structure and identity play a role in how farmers interact with hunter-gatherers, and *vice versa*.
- Finally, due to the differences between farmer groups and decreasing space on the landscape, a range of hunter-gatherer reactions to the presence of farmers occurred throughout the last two millennia in the Shashe-Limpopo region.

**For my grandparents**

Elaine Dorothy (Dot) Jeanne Dalgety      &      John (Jack) Stewart Dalgety  
(26 / 4 / 1915 - 29 / 1 / 1985)                      (7 / 9 / 1915 - 12 / 12 / 2002)

and

Johanna (Joop) Christina van Doornum      &      Gerhardt Wilhelm Anton van Doornum  
(7 / 3 / 1912 -      )                                      (19 / 8 / 1909 - 11 / 1 / 1979)

**And in memory of**

My uncle,

John Stewart Dalgety

(2 / 6 / 1941 – 9 / 7 / 2004)

and

My aunt,

Elisabeth (Els) Dowsing (née van Doornum)

(20 / 3 / 1939 – 26 / 2 / 2005).

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