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National Identity Construction in Post-Colonial Africa, case study: Great Zimbabwe

Dawson, Willow

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Figure 1: Tower of the Great Enclosure, Site of Great Zimbabwe (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Great-Zimbabwe>)

National Identity Construction in Post-Colonial Africa, case study: Great Zimbabwe

Bachelor Thesis

Willow Dawson, s2992728

Dr.ir. M.J. Driessen

Leiden University, Faculty of Archaeology

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Preface

The second year of my bachelor I had mostly worked on Caribbean archaeology, something I find remarkably interesting, but I wanted to learn more about other places in the world. My interest in the Caribbean lies within the colonial period and the people that had migrated there forcefully or willing. I find it interesting to see how a new contemporary product of culture has come to be through the course of time. This is partly why I wanted to focus on Africa, to see where certain cultural aspects resonate from. I find it important to understand the bigger picture and the history that comes with it, because of this I thought it was not just interesting, but important to learn about Africa's history and contemporary struggles.

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Introduction

Zimbabwe is located in the south of Africa with Botswana to the west, Mozambique to the east, Zambia to the north and South Africa to the south. It has a long and complicated history, with its independence in 1979 (Keeley, 1986, p. 157). Before 1979, Zimbabwe was called Southern-Rhodesia, a British colony where its history was taken away, replaced, and converged towards a more Eurocentric view. Europe needed a story to excuse themselves for their outrages behaviour, they did so by creating stories related to the great ruins that they found, because through the creation of myths, people could deny that black Africa had built such an exquisitely complex city (Hall, 2006, p. 14). Zimbabwe was taken by the

British in 1890 when they took the country of Mashonaland, which then came under the control of a financier Cecil Rhodes who organised the British South Africa Company (Hall, 2006, p. 15). He was interested in Great Zimbabwe and sponsored the first excavations looking for knowledge and gold. The leading archaeologists who came to work was Theodore Bent, a specialist in Near Eastern, Mediterranean, and Phoenician archaeology. At first, he was not interested in the site as he concluded that it was African and not very ancient. He had found these large stone monoliths with carved birds on top, what he interpreted as classical Mediterranean/Near Eastern, now, he concluded the site to be Arab (Hall, 2006, p. 15), which the journalist Richard N. Hall, described as “the more civilised races of the world” (Hall, 2006, p. 16). Because of the journalist and archaeologists, Great Zimbabwe’s history as an Arab construction became legitimised, which was now known as its official history. In 1905, the archaeologists David Randall MacIver concluded Great Zimbabwe to be African in every detail, but the colonial establishment at the time denied this view and word of this “new” discovery never came out. No one was able to accept that a great civilisation had risen out of black Africa, there were enough myths to fall on and believe in, stories like, ancient Egyptians, shipwrecked Vikings, even the lost civilisation of Atlantis.

As you can see, Zimbabwe’s history has been replaced and taken away, it has only been since recent that Zimbabwe has proudly claimed their history as its own. During my research I try to understand this process of narrative and national identity construction, with an emphasis on the use of archaeological sites, and or archaeology in general. By understanding both the pros and cons of this process, I hope to find out what can be taken and left out for upcoming countries who are developing their narrative. Now, it is important to think about what the idea of national identity is. The consideration to name it something else in my thesis was present, but it would have gotten too philosophical for a bachelor thesis. Still, I would like you as a reader to think about this concept of national identity. Before we had countries, there were people just living, there might have been empires, kingdoms, and states, but what did this really mean to the people that lived there? The

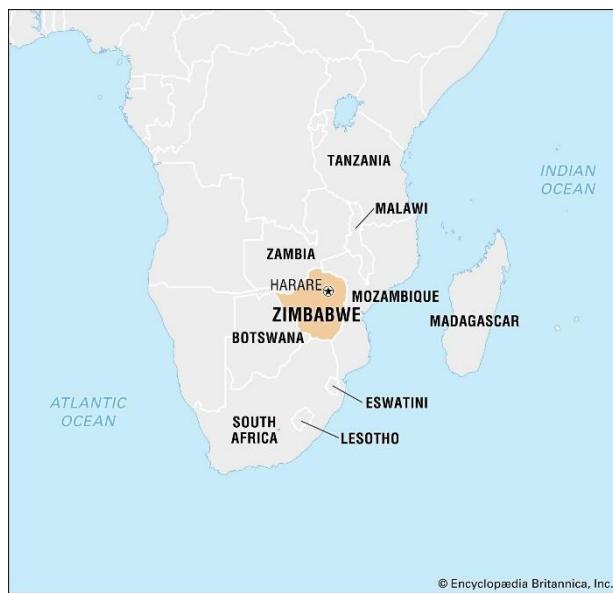


Figure 2: Map of Zimbabwe's location.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Zimbabwe>

kingdom of Great Zimbabwe is a perfect example of this, as the kingdom spread through Botswana till the coast of Zimbabwe, and more ruins in the same architecture are found to the south and north (Huffman, 2009). Zimbabwe has clearly claimed this history/archaeological story as their narrative, but can this also be done for other countries. Or can we let go of the idea of nation states and realise that what might be one's history, can also be the history of another. Maybe the concept of us and them can disintegrate to create a coherent future where we are not different, but the same. Hopefully, archaeology can help to do so.

Furthermore, in the next chapters I will take different examples from different African countries to support my argument, the overarching term used will be Africa as a continent. I want to share this, because a lot of people refer to Africa as a country, which of course is not the case. I will use the word Africa as an overarching concept related to several post-colonial countries, because what has happened in Zimbabwe or any other African country, has happened to every piece of land taken a reshaped by, often a European invader.

Research goals and questions

My research questions are all based on their use and importance to help understand my research goal: Understanding the construction of national identity with the use of archaeology in post-colonial Africa with as reference Great Zimbabwe. I came to this topic as I noticed in previous research that there was a lot of commentary on how archaeology is being conducted in Africa, how African archaeology must be prioritised in future archaeology, and how its history has been stolen, but these are all lose topics in independent articles. I argue that these topics are all connected and that the main problem relating all these topics is, that Africa's history has been taken away during the colonial period. Since its independence, a new national identity and narrative construction has taken place. So, I want to understand what national identity is, how it has been taken away and how its construction has taken place in post-colonial Africa. By understanding our past and acknowledging what it has happened, only then, we will be able to work on the future and present. I will connect these individual topics together in one to support my research. I use Zimbabwe and in particular the site of Great Zimbabwe as a case study to substantiate this.

Main research question: How can we reconstruct a national identity/history with the use of the archaeological site of Great Zimbabwe?

Sub questions:

- We know national identity through the concept of nation states in a western perspective, is this valid or can we learn a new definition of national identity by looking at Great Zimbabwe?
- Why is it needed for people in post-colonial Africa with a stolen history to reconstruct their national identity or communal identity?
- How has the site of Great Zimbabwe helped the people of Zimbabwe to reconstruct their national identity and what are the pros and cons involved in the process?

To answer these questions, I will cover a chapter based on stolen national identity, its importance and reconstruction. Great Zimbabwe is taken as a case study, to show how an attempt at the reconstruction of national identity has taken shape in Zimbabwe. I will analyse both its pros and cons with the use of a SWOT analysis to understand how future nations can use a similar or better techniques to imply in future construction.

Methodology

To answer these questions, I will make use of literature research and a SWOT analysis. Literature research does not only supply us with the information needed, but a lot of reading must be done to understand the bigger picture of the several topics covered so we are able to connect these to each other. SWOT analysis stands for “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats”. SWOT analysis helps to organise internal and external factors inside a certain construction (Phadermrod et al., 2019, p. 2). SWOT analysis has been used since the 1960’s and is highly valued due to its simplicity. The strengths and weaknesses are both internal, controllable factors that help and obstruct organisations to achieve their goals (Phadermrod et al., 2019, p. 3). Opportunities and threats are both external, uncontrollable factors that qualify or disqualify organisations to accomplish their goal. By analysing and acknowledging these factors in the four different fields, organisations can see their core tools for decision making, building strategies and planning. SWOT analysis is often used as a brainstorming tool in the corporate world (Phadermrod et al., 2019, p. 4), I will use this strategic analysis for an archaeological/heritage based research. As the government is a construction or organisation just like a business, I argue that the analysis is suitable for analysing their progress towards a national identity construction or narrative, which is their goal/mission. As case study I will use the site of Great Zimbabwe, it is in my perspective the perfect example of how a government has used their heritage to construct a national identity/narrative, the country is named after the site (Hall, 2006, p. 17). I believe this method is suitable for a heritage-based thesis, because heritage is often used as a corporate tool by institutions to promote their identity and to create a sense of an imagined community.

Theory

Over the past twenty years the Ubuntu philosophy has become a superior mindset among the people of Zimbabwe and South-Africa. It refers to the way of African life before the colonisation of Africa (Binsbergen, 2001, p. 53). Ubuntu is something that is noticed in rural intimate kinships, and in urban life it is at the centre of the political and economic development. It functions as the preservation/conservation of pre-colonial African ideologies. I argue that the Ubuntu mentality must be taken into consideration when looking at the construction of Zimbabwe's national identity. It is something that has been taken into its political and economic development and that way indirectly and directly shaped the construction of Zimbabwe's narrative. The philosophy's origins cannot be pinned down as it is something that developed with the evolution of the African peoples, it is something that has shaped their cosmology and individual ontology (Murove, 2012, p. 36). The core of the Ubuntu philosophy is the idea of connectedness, we as human beings are all connected and all depend on each other to achieve full happiness (Murove, 2012, p. 37). Ubuntu is a Bantu language (Binsbergen, 2001, p. 54) literally meaning humanness (Murove, 2012, p. 37). It brings the contribution of an understanding how we as humans are connected, and how we as human beings work in relation towards each other. This implies that we as humans are not just connected towards people, but consequently, to the external factors around us. This connects us with everything in the past, present and future, this is at the heart of the Ubuntu philosophy. I will go further into this in my SWOT analysis chapter, this way we can see the connection between the philosophy and the national narrative and hopefully, to get a better understanding of what it really is to be African.

The literature will reflect mostly on the topics needed to understand the concept of nation building. In the theory subchapter "National identity and its replacement in colonial Africa", I will cover how Africa's national identity and historical narrative have been stolen through several moments in time and space. Besides its stealing, I think it is important to understand the concept of imagined communities and collective memory, as the definition of a nation is the imagined political sphere that builds the community (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). Imagined because, often we do not know the people that surround us in a nation, but there is a certain feeling of connectedness that bounds us all. This is the construction that has been built by the political sphere of a nation to tie the community. But keep in mind, a nationalist feel of a nation means no option of reuniting with other humans as one, but a construction to keep us separated from our fellow humans (Anderson, 2006, p. 7). It could be that one feels connected to the place where they were born. For example, I was born in Amsterdam, if I would meet another person from Amsterdam in Rotterdam there is a subconscious connection present since we are both from Amsterdam. This example is at the concept that beats through the imagined community;

- 1) We do not know each other, but still feel a connection.
- 2) It keeps us separated from our fellow humans by disengaging with surrounding peers due to the connection felt with the other.
- 3) It is constructed by the government; they have decided what Amsterdam is with borders and they have decided what represents Amsterdam.

The imagined community is something we always have to keep in mind, because everything we see, hear and feel is shaped by the community. Everything has been constructed and shaped by humans in the past, present and which will continue into the future. This is why I will use this concept in my

theoretical subchapter on “Stolen national identity and its replacement in colonial Africa”, because in Africa the imagined community has been shaped by a colonial past, and the collective memory that was present has been replaced.

First, I will start with a chapter on the historical background of the kingdom of Great Zimbabwe, then, go into the (re)discovery of the site and how current day excavations developed. After, I will be able to apply the SWOT analysis to understand the further notion of nation building. I will also cover an arrangement in ways Great Zimbabwe has been used for the construction of national identity, to understand the SWOT analysis more constructively. Besides the site of Great Zimbabwe and its heritage construction, I have applied the SWOT analysis upon an elementary school booklet to analyse how the state has promoted their past and what the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are. National identity and narrative construction are all techniques used by the state and can be seen as a toolbox, or a methodology, so by analysing this method, I hope to get a better picture of what has happened and why.

National identity and its replacement in colonial Africa

The way Africa is currently being experienced by both outsiders and its residents has been shaped by its past, as we all are, a large factor coming to play in the way we see and recognise Africa is due to colonialism (Mangena et al., 2022, p. 85). Colonialism has made the way for European invaders to replace Africa's epistemologies, ontologies and values with their own (Mangena et al., 2022, p. 86). Consequently, breaking up the national identity and collective memory (Schreiter, 2008) that shapes the imagined community. Besides replacing narratives, norms and values with western systems, the invasion resulted in racial tensions between Africans and Europeans. Africa had been exploited from its sources and peoples for Europe's own growth, bringing poverty, which lead to resistance, and eventually “independence” (Mangena et al., 2022, p. 86). Independence here is put between quotation marks as both the authors of this chapter and I, believe that Africa has never become fully independent, as it is still dominated by western systems keeping them in the state that we now know today. This is what I will highlight in this chapter, how the national identity of several African countries has been taken away, representing the wider array of post-colonial communities, to understand the importance of the construction of national identity and a common narrative.

This replacement of African ways to European ways is most highly noticeable in the study of “stamverwantschap” by Henkes (Henkes, 2018). “Stamverwantschap” is the feeling of connectedness between two different cultures by similarities in certain notions like, mother tongue, religion, names, to confine this in a better term “culture” (Henkes, 2018, p. 175) or imagined communities (Anderson, 2006). In this case, “stamverwantschap” is related to the uprise of nationalism in the 19th century and the mass migration from the Netherlands to South-Africa. By the 19th century, the Boer republic was set up by Dutch settlers to flee the British. When the discovery of diamonds and gold were made in the country, the Dutch tried promoting a mass migration in solidarity with the Boers to fight off the British, By doing so, enhancing the nationalistic feel of “stamverwantschap” and fuelling the idea of a “Greater Netherlands” (Henkes, 2018, p.180). The point I am trying to make here is that there was a motivation and support to replace the African culture with European ways, it shows that the original population was intentionally replaced with Europeans as if the land were their own. The Boer Republic acted as if they were the ones being thrown out of their country by the British, but

what about the original South-African population? I want to refer to this study to emphasise on the connectedness of imagined communities, people were dedicated to mass migrate to an unknown place, with the motivation of helping their country, as was stimulated by the government. It is something that relates to Zimbabwe as well, Southern-Rhodesia was an independent state ruled by its white minority in 1929 (Keeley, 1986, p. 153). It has only been since 1979 that two nationalist Zimbabwean fighters, one being Mugabe, sat around the table with the ruling white to negotiate further plans for the country itself (Keeley, 1986, p. 154). Related to the Dutch concept of “stamverwantschap”, it can be seen how strong the feeling of an imagined community can be, something that the people from Africa were not able to have for a long time, as they were separated, and their community taken away.

Now studies have shown that a community’s history and education have a strong influence on the shared identity of a society (Angier, 2017, p. 156). In the article of Angier, she tries to understand the South-African curriculum to see how young people born after the apartheid system understand “their” own heritage and history. In 2016 protests erupted over the curriculum, as it prevented black children from speaking their mother tongue and wearing their hair in natural styles. No intentional rewriting of the history books had taken place since the abolition of the apartheid system (Angier, 2017, p. 156), instead the syllabus’s were changed to such an extent that the most racist bits of history were taken out. But, in 2003 some changes were made, before, a nationalistic Afrikaner history was taught where the start of South-African history started with its western colonisers. Now, the curriculum has taken a turn towards a history with the motive of a non-racial South-Africa (Angier, 2017, p. 157). Angier has created a study based on several students from different descent and asked them to write an essay on the South-African history, a strong divide between black and white is revealed (Angier, 2017). For most white students the South-African history starts with the human origins (Angier, 2017, p. 161), but ends in 1994 (Angier, 2017, p. 162), the year apartheid ends. For most black students, South-Africa’s history starts in the 20th century (Angier, 2017, p. 161) and ends present day (Angier, 2017, p. 162). One of the students even says “not sure how it was before colonialism” (Angier, 2017, p. 162), it shows the influence of a still standing imperial system. Coming back to Zimbabwe, it is noticeable that still now this is also the case for elementary school children in Zimbabwe. Further on, I will make the use of an elementary school booklet, this booklet being in English, as children are still told that this is the best language to learn as it gives them an advancement in the geopolitical economic system (Dube & Wozniak, 2021, p. 117). It shows how colonial our global system still is.

Now that we are starting to become more aware of our past, an act for repatriation has been called out, but even till this day, this goes unacceptably difficult. During colonial times, a vast number of artefacts had been stolen, looted and bought illegally by Europeans out of Africa (Snowball et al., 2022, p. 514), which is at the core of the repatriation debate. Now, it would seem an easy argument to make, “give back the artefacts for a restoration of national identity”, but for UNESCO and other underlying reasons, (Snowball et al., 2022, p. 514) some people seem to disagree. Matthes has elaborated on three reasons against the act of repatriation (Matthes, 2017):

- 1) It is hard to prove some of the continuation of certain cultures over time, making it hard to trace back to whom the artefacts should be repatriated to (Matthes, 2017, p. 932). Let’s say, Nigeria claims back a statue belonging to a two thousand year old civilisation, but the

country Nigeria itself has only existed for about a century, it would be hard to trace back the artefacts to their original descent (Snowball et al., 2022, p. 514).

- 2) Because it is often unclear how certain artefacts ended up in the invading country, a legal statement cannot be proclaimed (Matthes, 2017, p. 932), as UNESCO's "Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property" has made strict guidelines on the provenance acquisition of an artefact (Snowball et al., 2022, p. 514).
- 3) As a third reason Matthes mentions the question, "should institutions repatriate artefacts at all?", as institutions of knowledge have a mission of education (Matthes, 2017, p. 932). Cultured goods should be seen as a universal ownership as they are part of our global heritage (Snowball et al., 2022, p. 515).

Going into the latter, Matthes emphasises on the fact that if cultural goods are a global ownership as we share the same universal heritage, the distribution of artefacts should be presented more equally, because now to most people, accessibility is lacking (Matthes, 2017, p. 940). I find it extremely hard to accept these accusations made against the act of repatriation, because: Firstly, if it is so hard to prove the continuation of a certain object, then what are the Hunebedden to us as Dutch people? We could then nearly argue that these are not Dutch at all. Secondly, if it is so hard to see where the object came from and it is hard to establish a legal declaration, then indirectly you are denying our history, because we all know that it was stolen from a place outside of Europe. Thirdly, the perception taken by Europeans to assume that all artefacts are human is a very Ubuntu mindset. They say that the artefacts are our global heritage, but we as Europeans were the ones who have enforced our system of ownership and capitalism upon the rest of the world. Yes, we do have a global heritage, in the end, are we not all human. This is at the core of the Ubuntu philosophy that has shaped the national identity construction that has taken place in several African countries, it is a mentality that has existed before the colonial period, but are we then again taking an African mentality to claim it as our own? I wanted to refer to the repatriation act in this chapter and not further on, because it is something that is related heritage displacement in a tangible sense. Our heritage comes in both tangible and intangible forms, mostly I have referred to the intangible world, this relates to imagined communities and national identity. But it is important to emphasise or at least mention the fact, that besides the intangible world of culture, physical shapes have been taken as well. Memory is connected to the physical form and as I will show in the next piece, memory is at the core of the imagined community. This is why I think it is important to mention the act of repatriation in the current debate towards a more equal world.

It becomes clear that Africa's past and heritage has been taken away, stolen, and replaced. By doing so, taking away the collective memory which is crucial to shaping an imagined community (Schreiter, 2008, p. 9). The loss of memory affects the individual, but also the capability of building relations with people that might share the same memory. Memory loss or repression in a society often results in denial of whom one might be. Schreiter gives a good example; if a kid loses his parents at a younger age, but cannot recall the trauma and this memory is never shared with them by surrounding individuals, the kid will often respond with a denial towards its own heritage/personal identity (Schreiter, 2008, p. 9), now imagine this on a societal scale. He continues, the way memory is

erased is a tool used by the offender to push the victim in accepting injustice and by doing so, never confronting its own wrongdoing (Schreiter, 2008, p. 10).

To understand this concept of nation building related to memory better, it might be important to have a look upon our own European past in the eighteenth century. Before the eighteenth century, Europe existed out of loose ethnic groups, which were bundled together into small states (Schreiter, 2008, p. 11). When the formation of countries started, the newborn state had to think of something that would bond these loose ethnic groups together, this is where nationalism was born. There were two paths this construction could take:

- 1) The path connected to our past and heritage, creating a thick memory or traditionalists memory.
- 2) The path of a created ideology that people shared, but what happened before the ideology emerged would be forgotten or denied, this creates a thin memory or constructivist memory.

Both have their pros and cons, both are constructive, but as can be seen in Nazi Germany (traditionalist view) or the USSR (constructivists view), both can be destructive in their own way (Schreiter, 2008, p. 12). The way the imagined communities are built will shape the future. In the chapter memory and forgetting by Anderson, he explains the concepts of imagined communities through the capability of the mind with a reference to the Creoles in the Americas. Where their parallel “superior” would have been the Europeans, a construction had to be made to shape this new identity, in a new place, to counteract the imagined community set up by the pilgrims (Anderson, 2006). He ends the chapter with, “As with modern persons, so it is with nations. Awareness of being embedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of ‘forgetting’ the experience of this continuity — product of the ruptures of the late eighteenth century — engenders the need for a narrative of ‘identity’.” (Anderson, 2006, p. 205), he continues with the difference between a nation and a person, as a person has a clear start and end, birth and death, an identity is constructed with time and place. But a nation state does not have this start and end, the start is wherever the state and the archaeologist want it to be. This develops a complicated entanglement of history, personality, religion, landscape, everything that we see and hear.

I do not say that nationalism is important, nationalism is an extreme form of nation building where the construction of the collective memory is built to be better than the other. I do not believe in being better, I believe in an equal state where we are all treated the same, but by getting to a point of equality we must acknowledge the inequality present. This is why I think nation building or identity construction in African countries is of importance, because everyone seeks their past, and everyone wants to feel connected to their heritage. Not saying that people do not feel this way, but there is a dark patch that we cannot deny and to work towards a more globally equal identity, it is important to shape and create this past.

At the core of this construction of the imagined community in Africa the Ubuntu philosophy plays as a toolbox for the collective memory, a memory before the colonisers invaded the land. This has now shaped the future potential for a reconstruction of the definition national identity. As we can see above, the definition we know as national identity is a European construct that is based on nation states, but is national identity the same as a nation state or is national identity the way you feel in

touch with your heritage? In the next chapter, I will discuss how the Great Zimbabwe project is used for national identity construction, but instead of thinking of the nation state, I would like to focus on the feeling that comes with national identity. It might be that the site is used by the people of Zimbabwe as a sense of pride with their connection to the past. My point being, we have to rethink the concept we know as national identity and nation states, to get a better understanding on how another might take in the world around them. Meaning is defined by every individual depending on their surroundings. We can only understand different perspectives better by learning with an open mind and letting go of the concepts that we know shaped by our habitus.

Historical background

A history of Great Zimbabwe

The site of Great Zimbabwe, literally meaning house of stone, is located in south-central Zimbabwe on the Zimbabwe Plateau, 3000 feet above sea level, this creates a cooler climate and the region is free of the tsetse fly (Hall, 2006, p. 18). The grassy landscape of the plateau was perfect for cattle herding. Minerals and building materials were abundant (Hall, 2006, p. 19). The site exists out of massive stone enclosures and walls (Hall, 2006, p. 18) covering seven hundred hectares of land and has often been interpreted as a kingdom or state (Pikirayi, 2013, p. 26), but to understand the site of Great Zimbabwe we need to have a closer look at its history. About three hundred

kilometres south to the site of Great Zimbabwe, located in the Limpopo Valley, is the site of Mapungubwe (Figure 4) (Pikirayi, 2013, p. 26). Their strategic location gave them access to marine (Pikirayi, 2013, p. 26) and terrestrial trade routes (Hall, 2006, p. 35), they stimulated their wealth through the trade of ivory, gold, animal skin and glass beads (Pikirayi, 2013, p. 26). Mapungubwe had become an important political centre by the end of the thirteenth century where their influence was highly noticeable, the reason for its decline is still unknown. Hall argues that it might have been the

case that the demand for gold began to grow, and ivory being Mapungubwe's main trading ware, they could not keep up with the trade and the economy diminished (Hall, 2006, p. 35). Great Zimbabwe on the other hand, located on the Zimbabwe Plateau has a lot more access to gold. After the fall of Mapungubwe, a chiefdom level society started to shape around the plateau, and new trading routes were created (Pikirayi, 2013, p. 26). With their new wealth the people from the plateau were able to support the construction of what we now know as Great Zimbabwe.

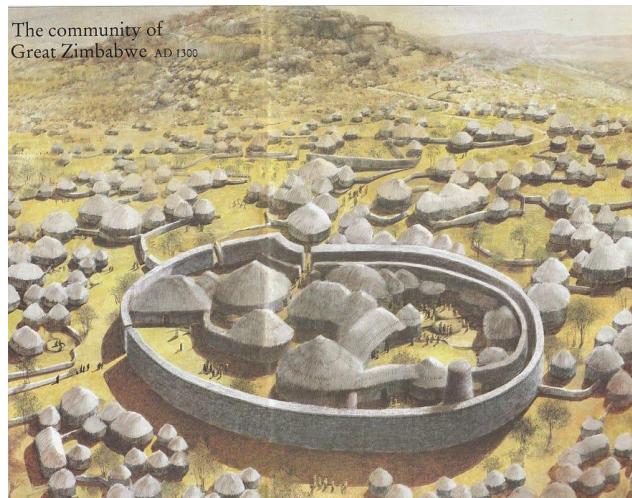


Figure 3: A reconstruction of 13th century Great Zimbabwe.
<https://georgetedmund.medium.com/great-zimbabwe-historical-african-great-city-5d385ccf0d67>

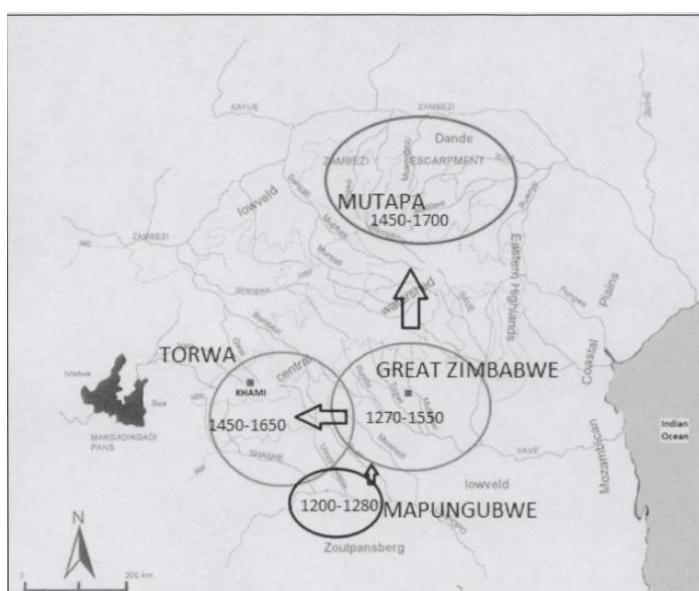


Figure 4: Map of Zimbabwe Plateau. Ancient polities. <https://www-istor-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/stable/43491297?sid=primo>

The site that we know as Great Zimbabwe is only one urban centre in a large complex of thirty till forty regional centres spreading from the Kalahari desert until the Ocean Lowlands in the east (Hall, 2006, p. 35). Each centre shared the same architectural style, economy and culture (Hall, 2006, p. 36). In-between all these centres there were vast number of villages and farmland, most probably all ruled by the leading centre/capital, which we know as the site of Great Zimbabwe, using regional governors. Great Zimbabwe controlled the gold production of the Zimbabwean state in the fourteenth century, which was traded afar through the Swahili trading city of Kilwa (Figure 5). By the second half of the fifteenth century, construction at Great Zimbabwe had ceased (Hall, 2006, p. 37). Several hypothesis have been given for its decline, the gold production had decreased and Great Zimbabwe was losing its importance in the trading network (Hall, 2006, p. 38). Some say that it was the landscape that failed the state, cattle had overgrazed the grasslands, most timber was stripped away, and it could have been that people were hit by several draughts, all in all, it was too much for the people of Great Zimbabwe to handle. After its fall, the Shona people formed two new successor states, Torwa with its capital Khami (Figure 4) and Rozwi which stayed around the area of Great Zimbabwe.

Interpretations of the site and findings



Figure 6: Stone monolith Great Zimbabwe, now seen as national emblem.
<https://www.victoriafalls-guide.net/zimbabwe-bird.html>

phases, the oldest phase has untrimmed stones in irregular patterns dating around thirteen hundred. The second phase is probably from the fourteenth century, and it is the period where the finest walls were produced, using trimmed stones, perfectly fit together to lay in beautiful patterns. During the



Figure 5: Map of East African Coast. Trading cities from the 14th till 16th centuries.
<https://www.worldhistory.org/Kilwa/>

The geological surroundings of Great Zimbabwe exist out of granodiorite hills (Pikirayi et al., 2022, p. 2) which were used to construct the walls and enclosures in the landscape (Hall, 2006, p. 19). Through the process of exfoliation perfect building blocks were created, the people of Great Zimbabwe started to learn how to control this process over time by heating the rock with fire and then cooling it down with cold water. The site has been divided into three sections: the Hill, the Valley, and the Outer City. The first glance you get to see when entering the site is the Hill, with its walls and enclosures. There was never any proof that the enclosures had roofs, instead archaeologists think that they were filled with small thatched roof structures made out of Dhaka, this is a clay like substance mixed with gravel, a common African building material (Hall, 2006, p. 20). Parts of the Hill contained monoliths, some carved as birds, which researchers might think resemble great leaders (Hall, 2006, p. 20). People have interpreted this part of the Hill as a sacred and religious area (Hall, 2006, p. 21). South of the Hill lays the Valley, this land exists out of about a dozen stone enclosers (Hall, 2006, p. 21), with its most well-known one being the Great Enclosure (Hall, 2006, p. 22). Many scientists have used these enclosures to get a better understanding of the site, one of these researchers was the architect Anthony Whitty, who noticed three distinctive styles of construction

third phase around the fifteenth century, its quality declined, as if the stones were forcefully put together, we do not know why this happened. The Great Enclosure is absolutely massive, but its meaning is still speculated, some think it might be a temple, an area for the kings wives or a space for local elites (Hall, 2006, p. 23). Behind the Valley is the outer city, this is where most of Great Zimbabwe's inhabitants lived, now all that is left are just a few Dhaka huts and some enclosures spread over the vast landscape.

Now that we know where the people of Great Zimbabwe lived, all we have to answer is how they lived. There are no written documents left behind by the people of Great Zimbabwe, so archaeologists must rely on artefacts and oral history (Hall, 2006, p. 27). Cattle was the main trading agent and food supply in the economy, the number of cows you owned decided your wealth and status. People with a low income would hunt big game (Hall, 2006, p. 27) to compensate their grain based diet (Hall, 2006, p. 28). What is interesting is that archaeologists have only found the bones of the best cuts of meat in the mwazimbabwes (stone enclosures) of the elites, this could indicate that lower income families had to hand over their cattle to the rich. Ethnographic analysis has told us what the different meanings behind different sorts of pottery might be, the vessels found are similar to those of the Shona people, where they use the smaller vessels as drinking vessels and the larger ones for brewing beer and storing food. A large amount of metal artefacts tell us that the people from Great Zimbabwe practised metallurgy on a grand scale (Hall, 2006, p. 29). Some scientists think that one of their trading products was gold and other metal objects, showing that the city was part of a large trading network (Hall, 2006, p. 30). Some of the greatest finds found were the Great Zimbabwe birds (figure 6), stone monoliths with carved birds on top, each unique with their own pattern, a total of seven and a half were found (Hall, 2006, p. 31).

An archaeological history of Great Zimbabwe

In 1505 twenty two European fleets carrying fifteen hundred soldiers arrived at the east African coast to take over the city of Kilwa (figure 5) (Hall, 2006, p. 8). Only six years before the invasion a Portuguese navigator had visited the tip of Africa and informed his king about the thriving trading hubs along the coast, his name, Vasco da Gama. The Portuguese were interested in the gold production and wondered its origins, as they wanted to take control of the production; myths started to appear (Hall, 2006, p. 10). In 1512, an expedition led by Antonio Fernandes was conducted from Sofola (figure 5) in search for Monomotapa, a rumoured land that produced all the gold. This land was based on Great Zimbabwe, it was said that there was a kingdom rich in gold, where kings lived in stone houses. They never found the kingdom of gold, but some Europeans did come in contact with Mutapa and Torwa (figure 3), two inland states where they mined, produced gold, and constructed stone houses (Hall, 2006, p. 11). By 1609, Joao de Santos was a missionary in Mutapa who had linked the stone sites to old biblical stories based on king Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Mutapa and Torwa were both two rising states on the plateau with one of their cities being Symbaoe, this was Great Zimbabwe (Hall, 2006, p. 12). It was just not as thriving as it used to be, as its most successful time was three hundred years ago, and all its glory had become myth or a "fading rumour". By the nineteenth century Europeans started to move from South-Africa to the Zimbabwe Plateau, this is where a German missionary had referred to the old stone cities as Ophir a biblical reference to Solomon and Sheba. Karl Mauch who was a German geologist took the myth as a reality and seeking for fame and fortune in Africa, in 1871 Mauch set on a quest to find Ophir (Hall, 2006, p. 13). He did find Great Zimbabwe, but no gold, jewellery, or written sources, but he was convinced that it was

Ophir. Not just convinced, he concluded that the site was the former palace of Queen Sheba. Returning to Germany, this is what people thought, that Near Eastern people had built the stone cities in Africa, because “no African man/women could build such complex constructions”, even worse “no savage” (Hall, 2006, p. 14). This of course is racial prejudice, Europeans had to prove that they were superior to the “African race” by taking their land and mass murdering entire communities. An excuse was needed to do so and by connecting Great Zimbabwe to a Near Eastern biblical story, it would have proven no African society could have built Great Zimbabwe, an excuse to show the Europeans “superiority”, an excuse to kill. When Mauch’s word spread, looters plundered and destroyed the site. In 1890 the first scientific excavations took place, Theodore Bent was the designated archaeologists to do so (Hall, 2006, p. 15). At first it was said that the site had nothing interesting to offer, as he concluded that it was in fact African and not too ancient. But when they found the bird carved monoliths, it reminded him of the Mediterranean where he concluded that the site must have been Arab (Hall, 2006, p. 16). Later excavations were forceful and destructive, and archaeologists, once more confirmed the myth that Great Zimbabwe could not have been built by an African population. Near Easterners were the people with the assigned credit, this was in 1904. In 1905, an archaeologist named David Randall MacIver concluded that Great Zimbabwe was of classic African complexity, but the colonial rule denied this conclusion (Hall, 2006, p. 16). Finally, in 1926 a women named Gertrude Thompson conducted detailed excavations and with the use of stratigraphy, she concluded that all the myths created around the site were wrong, she confirmed that the site was in fact of a “native civilisation” (Hall, 2006, p. 17).

SWOT analysis

In this chapter I will make use of the SWOT analysis to analyse and identify the pros and cons of national identity construction in post-colonial Africa with the use of Great Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has used great Zimbabwe to create a new identity after its independence, the country is named after the site. By analysing how Zimbabwe has used the archaeological heritage site to construct a narrative, I try to find out how other countries could benefit from this process of construction, or how they could do it even better in creating a new narrative. The strengths will show us what has been done and how this has benefited the people of Zimbabwe. Its weaknesses show what has already gone wrong. Opportunities what can be brought into the future with virtue, and threats will discuss what could go wrong in the future. I want to engage towards my thesis with the Ubuntu philosophy in mind, as was mentioned in the theory chapter. The philosophy has taken a great ordeal in the process of nation building. Through the use of a SWOT analysis, we can see that this concept of connectedness with everything attached to the external surroundings keeps coming back.

Strengths

One of Zimbabwe's strengths is that nonetheless their history has been taken away and narrated towards a Eurocentric perspective, they have been able to reclaim their past and make it their own. People want to feel related to their past and using archaeology for a strategy of reconstruction is useful, we all want to feel connected to our past and ancestors, especially with the Ubuntu mindset. In this chapter I will show how Zimbabwe's history has been taken away in the past, but also how they have reconstructed it back to promote their own narrative.

We have seen in the last chapters "Historical Background" and the theoretical subchapter "Stolen National Identity in Colonial Africa", how European colonisers have replaced the history of Zimbabwe, but also other countries. Great Zimbabwe spread across the centre of Africa (Hall, 2006, p. 19), by naming it Arabic, ancient and Mediterranean, it dismisses the history of multiple African countries due to prejudice and biases. Zimbabwe's independence is only recent, but its official date is even still currently debated (Keeley, 1986, p. 157). The earliest starting date for its independence is in 1965 when Rhodesia declares its independence from Great Britain, but Rhodesia is an independent state from Great Britain. It was led by the white minority living in the central south of Africa, so I do not consider 1965 to be an official independence date. In 1979, internal settlement elections were held, and Muzorewa was elected prime minister. So, if we take this as the official year of independence it has only been forty-five years that Zimbabwe has been an independent country. In this time, they have made a significant effort to step away from their colonial background and to create a history uniting the people of Zimbabwe together, they did so with the use of the site of Great Zimbabwe. Great Zimbabwe has offered a connection to the past, with a resilience towards the colonial narratives of the past. Great Zimbabwe was a great kingdom, it was a kingdom that traded afar, a kingdom that was self-sufficient and capable of remarkable things, a picture always disproven by a Eurocentric view. To construct this heritage and promote the "real" story, booklets have been handed out at elementary schools, the site is visible on banknotes and stamps (Garlake, 1991, p. 2) and it has been officially registered as a UNESCO monument in 1986 (Hall, 2006, p. 26).

I have used the SWOT analysis technique on a booklet given to me by my supervisor. These are booklets handed out to elementary school children to promote their history and some things are highly noticeable. Now, Zimbabweans have tried to move away from their colonial history to change it to their own, when reading the booklet, it becomes clear that there is a great emphasis on striving away from their colonial past (Garlake, 1991). The second chapter of the booklet is named “The first farmers” (Garlake, 1991, p. 3) and it starts with this sentence, “Those who doubt the ingenuity, energy and resourcefulness of the African peoples have always said that change in Africa only came about because foreigners invaded the country and conquered the people. They have drawn elaborate maps of the migrations of such people and argued over the differences between them. Very few such theories stand up to close examination. The migrations that they took as historical examples of the process, like that of the Ndebele, were caused by colonial pressures” (Garlake, 1991, p. 3). Immediately, it becomes clear that it is because of the colonists that some parts of their history are incorrect, and that through the colonial pressure felt, migration was forced. They do not run from their past, instead they emphasise and acknowledge their past to show that Zimbabweans can make a change, it nearly sounds resentful, but really can we blame them? Maybe it is time for us to acknowledge our past, because only through acknowledging, we can work towards the future.

Besides the emphasis on their colonial past and the incorrect interpretations created by European invaders, a lot of native words are used in the booklet, to name just a few: “Dhaga”, “Mwazimbabwe”, and “Mutopo” (Garlake, 1991). Honestly, I do not know what language this is, I can assume it is Shona as a majority of the population consists out of Shona people, but I cannot say this for sure. I can conclude that the use of these words as a normalised concept in between the colonial lingua franca, where no explanation to understand the words is needed, indicates an act of repatriation towards the Shona language, a way to claim back their heritage. Language is important to heritage and as certain cultures are losing theirs, it is important to claim it back when identity is lost.

Furthermore, in the chapter on “Gold Mining” (Garlake, 1991, p. 11) there is an emphasis on the little gold production at Great Zimbabwe, as was seen above a lot of Europeans came looking for gold when looking for Great Zimbabwe. I think this is the reason why they try to move away from this theory of gold, to show that there was a lot more present at Great Zimbabwe than just gold production, and that it was not because of the gold production that they flourished, but because of the complicated state that arose out of its greatness. We can take some doubt in these assumptions, several archaeologists/articles cover the gold production at Great Zimbabwe. It is even hypothesised that Great Zimbabwe’s decline might have been because of the decline in its gold production, but this is also something that the booklet denies. It is hard to know what the truth is or not, but that is something we can always question.

It is important that we move away from the colonial past and start something new, but the question that always lingers is “how does one construct the imagined community of a country?”. With such a long-standing colonial history, your heritage being replaced and misshaped, I understand you would do anything in your power to change these paths of the past.

Besides the turn from its colonial history towards a history based on a new narrative, it is astonishing how well the site is preserved. Since its official registration as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1986 due to its exquisite archaeological and historical value (Hall, 2006, p. 26), it has fallen under the act

of protection and management as mentioned on the UNESCO site. Besides the legislation protecting the site, it is still used by the local people as a religious rite (Hall, 2006, p. 40), which motivates conservation. I think that due to its location in a non-urbanised space it has had the chance to stand and not be taken down or ruined. In the article by Pikirayi it can be seen how much of the site is still visible with the use of Airborne Laser Scanning (ALS). He mentions how the local people still use similar sustainable technologies (Pikirayi et al., 2022, p. 2) as the people that lived at Great Zimbabwe did, which again causes it to be a sustainable way of conservation. When looking at pictures of Great Zimbabwe it is possible to see its unique state due to its management and conservation.

There are a lot of positive strengths that can be considered when looking at the site and its use towards national identity construction, as can be seen in the theoretical chapter the Ubuntu philosophy can be considered as a core tool towards this construction. Through the Ubuntu philosophy there is a strong connection towards the past and its ancestors, we are all connected. I can imagine that besides claiming back a colonial history as your own, it is also a construction that makes you feel close to the strong ancestors that build a nation, a society one can be proud of. And if the past is the present and the present the past, then connecting the now to such a strong nation, there might be a glimmer of hope that this strength of the ancestors is taken by the present into the future.



Figure 7: Great Zimbabwe, 21st Century.
<https://smarthistory.org/great-zimbabwe/>

Weaknesses

One of the weaknesses experienced with the promotion of Great Zimbabwe towards a national narrative, is the exclusion of several ethnic groups and languages. We must keep in mind that Africa's borders have been defined by Europeans in the time of colonisation. In Zimbabwe alone there are eighteen different languages (Dube & Wozniak, 2021, p. 117), where two of them are national, namely, Shona and Ndebele, and where English is the lingua franca. Zimbabwe decided to keep English as the lingua franca, because they felt that English would give them the opportunity to "economic rewards". This shows the colonial implementation that Europe/Britain still have on the geopolitical status of our globe. But if these are the languages spoken, what about the other fifteen languages? The Kalanga are a perfect example of this, the Kalanga are an ethnic group whom live in both modern day Botswana and Zimbabwe (Dube & Wozniak, 2021, p. 114). The border was defined in 1895 to cease fire between two colonial protectorates now known as Botswana and Zimbabwe (Dube & Wozniak, 2021, p. 114), this led to the disintegration between families as the transborder relations are hard to maintain (Dube & Wozniak, 2021, p. 113). In 1929 Southern-Rhodesia (modern day Zimbabwe) activated a linguistic specialist to distinguish and classify all the different languages in Zimbabwe. Missionaries had difficulties translating the bible and understanding the number of

different languages, so the government felt that a common language would reunite all. It would make it easier to work with different ethnic groups, if they would all speak a second language next their own (Dube & Wozniak, 2021, p. 114). In the report “The Unification of the Shona Dialects” (Doke, 1931) created by the European linguistic specialist, Kalanga is classified as a Shona dialect, but this is inaccurate. Kalanga is a language on its own and because of the marginalisation of the language, no literature or classes were ever produced in the language, even after its independence. I took this example to show that there is still an imperial system and that there are ethnic groups being marginalised due to the construction of nations and borders, as can be seen with the segregation of family groups in Botswana and Zimbabwe.

Before the construction of borders, there were groups of people who all lived on the land, the land was their own and it was free (Garlake, 1991, p. 28). This is why, when looking at the enclosures of Great Zimbabwe there was no need for a roof or closed space, because the people were free in the land (Garlake, 1991, p. 18). There was no need for defence or city walls because there was no war, there was peace (Garlake, 1991, p. 27). The source that I have used here is a booklet from Garlake handed out to Zimbabwean elementary school children to promote their history, but some things are noticeable related to the exclusion of ethnic groups when reading the magazine. Already in the first chapter, a sentence related to the Shona and Kalanga occurs “All the objects found in the ruins prove it was built by local Shona-speaking people. Documents written soon afterwards show that they were a ‘Kalanga’ community. But we do not really know what ‘Kalanga’ meant so long ago, for communities change in customs and membership over the centuries. So Great Zimbabwe is rightly property and pride of all Zimbabweans.” (Garlake, 1991, p. 2). This quote starts off with saying that what was found at the site of Great Zimbabwe indicates it is Shona, but we do not really know if the Shona people were an already existing ethnic group at the time of Great Zimbabwe. The Shona have been used as an ethnographic comparison for the interpretations of the artefacts at the site (Hall, 2006, p. 31), but there is no prove validating that what has been found is actually Shona. Secondly, documents written by the Portuguese mention a Kalanga speaking community, but this is unsanctioned with the statement that communities change over time, it is also contradicting with what is said about the Shona. Lastly, the quote closes with the statement that Great Zimbabwe is property and pride of all Zimbabweans, but reading what is said before, it does not feel like it. This is contradicting with the Ubuntu philosophy where people are all one. The booklet mentions that the land was free, and the land was from no one, what is exactly what the philosophy is about. It is interesting to see, that this is what they try to teach the school children, an old philosophy of the past taken into the future. But I believe that because of the construction of nations, borders and ownership implemented by a colonial state, the philosophy is still diminished to function in a geopolitical role.

Furthermore, in the last chapter of the booklet it says “Here we can bring our own knowledge of Shona society, culture and traditions to bear upon the work of the experts and help to advance it” (Garlake, 1991, p. 31), again it states a Shona society. Besides the Shona, the largest ethnic group present is the Ndebele (Dube & Wozniak, 2021, p. 116), and what about all the other ethnic groups present in Zimbabwe. To me this is a weakness, the promotion of Great Zimbabwe provokes a history that is not all inclusive. As was mentioned above in the historical background, the Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe was large and reached from the Kalahari Desert until the Ocean Lowlands in the east (Hall,

2006, p. 35), that covers over four different countries, so was Great Zimbabwe really just a Shona state, or is it the ethnic group that the people of Zimbabwe try to promote based on a majority?

Opportunities

In 2022, the pan-African archaeological congress took place in Zanzibar with the presence of Peter R. Schmidt (Schmidt, 2023, p. 823), where he wrote down the challenges he sees towards a sustainable and resilient African archaeology. To me it is important to understand these challenges, as by understanding the confrontations faced in a rising field, we can try speed up the process towards a common field. He mentions the following challenges:

- 1) Methodological orthodoxy surrounding the field of African archaeology denying its ontologies and epistemologies to keep the field in a western barrier. This restriction is enhanced by western students whom are scared of their authority being undercut by a different perspective (Stump, 2013). We as westerners have been taught that our way of research is the way to go, because of this, we restrict not just the African academics, but academics on a global scale (Schmidt, 2023, p. 823).
- 2) The rise of the sciences in the field of archaeology at the expense of local histories (Schmidt, 2023, p. 824). Not that the sciences are wrong, they have offered wonderful opportunities to enhance the narratives that we try to find using material culture, but by focussing abundantly on the sciences, often from a western perspective, there is a chance of obscuring the African narratives that we are trying to unravel.

Schmidt mentions that “The notion that African ontologies pollute history denies how African history is constructed by diverse cultures” (Schmidt, 2023, p. 823). The opportunity this offers, is to instead of supporting the notion that African ontologies pollute history, we should try to understand these diverse cultures. By standing close and working together, we can reconstruct a story hopefully closer to the truth.

In 1996 a forum was set up with the name “The Future of African Archaeology.”, to think about new ways the African field of archaeology could be heightened (Ellison et al., 1996, p. 5). Now in 2023, a new forum took place to celebrate the end of a forty year review, but instead of thinking about what could be improved, this forum addressed the topic of the fields potential (Ogundiran & Gokee, 2023, p. 1). For this forum, authors wrote sixteen essays related to sixteen different topics. Some of the topics discussed at the forum were:

- “The Future of Heritage Management and Development in Africa.”
- “African Epistemologies and Ontologies: Building a Pathway that Elevates African Ways of Constructing the World as Part of a Future African Archaeology.”

The opportunities that these forums and research offer is the acknowledgement of what is going wrong, why, and what we can do about it with further research. It supports the new direction of focussing on African epistemologies and ontologies, for future research we can now focus on

different voices, instead of just western ones. The opportunity that this gives us, is not just new information due to an unfamiliar perspective, but it gives us the opportunity to make our field of work more equal and inclusive, something that is not always present.

Contemporary archaeology at Great Zimbabwe

Before, most archaeology conducted at Great Zimbabwe was related to architecture, material culture distribution, and the use of space and patterns (Pikirayi et al., 2022, p. 2). Now, in 2022 an article was published on the use of Dhaka pits at Great Zimbabwe related to climate change and resource management (Pikirayi et al., 2022), fieldwork was conducted from 2014 till 2019 (Pikirayi et al., 2022, p. 2). The rise and construction of Great Zimbabwe, fall within in two major wetter and dryer climate phenomena, namely, the Medieval Climatic Anomaly (950 – 1250 CE) and the Little Ice Age (1300 – 1850 CE). The research strategy uses Airborne Laser Scanning (ALS) combined with ethnographic surveys, to understand the landscape features outside and within the main settlement complexes related to the hydrological systems. Great Zimbabwe is surrounded by granodiorite hills, which produces micro catchments of water. A natural water catchment system the people of Great Zimbabwe used at the site, a method still currently used, a method that could support agriculture in even drier conditions than today. This research tries to find out where the ancient people of Great Zimbabwe got their water from and how they sustained agriculture in these harsh climatic conditions. Great Zimbabwe's climate exists out of a hot and dry season, a hot and wet season, and a hot and warm winter season, similar to the conditions in the sixteenth and seventeenth century (Pikirayi et al., 2022, p. 3). Ethnographic surveys were conducted to understand how contemporary communities interact with water, to understand its socioeconomic value and to see how longstanding traditions might have shaped and have been similar to actions in the past. ALS was used to develop a digital terrain model; this makes small landscape features visible. Because of this, there is a better understanding of how Great Zimbabwe's hydrological system was used within the landscape (Pikirayi et al., 2022, p. 4). Dhaka pits are circular depressions that have been interpreted as quarries used for clay abstraction (Pikirayi et al., 2022, p. 5). Some Dhaka pits have noticeable hydrological constructions surrounding and connecting these pits. Using soil analysis in the pits themselves, it can be seen that there are episodes of water level rising related to its surrounding geology. ALS has shown several closed up pits not seen before, the distribution and concentration is quite formidable (Pikirayi et al., 2022, p. 7). Several factors indicate an anthropogenic origin, clearly built to maximise water collection. Most pits are located within the core of the site, with all measurements added up, we can make an estimation of the scale that this hydrological system might have reached, which is about 18 4000 m³. Now, we see that the Dhaka pits are not just used for clay retraction, but also water collecting and distributing (Pikirayi et al., 2022, p. 8). The hydrological system being on regional scale indicates intense cultivation and settlement construction. With the use of these hydrological features, future archaeologists might be able to find more past settlements, as Dhaka pits are easily detectable compared to cultivation patterns and stone wall enclosures. With current day climate change, water capture, conservation and distribution are key to understating how we might be able to work on future solutions, by looking at the past we might be able to find an ecological sustainable way to work on the future.

As you can see Pikirayi has conducted important research that can help us to understand our past and implement it on the now. Great Zimbabwe's future is not yet over, because there is still so much to learn, and this goes for a lot of African sites and African archaeology. Zimbabwe has been able to claim back their past, it has given us as archaeologists the opportunity to work with this still to be discovered information. Only by investing time and interest into the past, future possibilities open. This is why the forum of 2022 has taken place, to focus on African archaeology and its importance to not just justify future perspectives, but to gain new information, and to produce a field where we can work together, and where all information is valid and equal.

The dangers and advantages of indigenous water systems

We can see the improvement that the use of local Indigenous knowledge offers. Instead of just positive outcomes there is a negative side, which can be seen when looking at the water management systems in Japan and the dangers that linger when the government gets too involved. After World War Two the Japanese government started building tall dikes around the rivers in certain villages in Japan (Rajib Shaw & Danai Thaitakoo, 2010, p. 18). This did not just seclude the people from the water but left them unprepared for erupt disasters. Due to the dikes, the water got filthy and small floods were left unnoticed. This left the population disconnected from the river, and their tradition related to water management was forgotten, because these small floods were stopped by the dikes, when a larger flood did take place, the people were unprepared. But, in the town of Gujo-Hachiman a water management construction from the fifteenth century is still being used today (Rajib Shaw & Danai Thaitakoo, 2010, p. 24). This system was used for agricultural irrigation, but now, the water system has shaped the classical Japanese landscape in the area which attracts sightseers to support the local community (Rajib Shaw & Danai Thaitakoo, 2010, p. 25). As we can see, a local water management helps the people, it is not just sustainable, but it also brings people together (Rajib Shaw & Danai Thaitakoo, 2010, p. 22). In Mexico they have a research plan to investigate soil erosion, and a program to see how the local community can provide aid to fight this problem (Reyes-Hernández et al., 2022). Through the involvement of the local community, there is an empowerment of marginalised voices, this strengthens their identity, gives them control over their own resources and diminishes their dependence on political and material dominion (Reyes-Hernández et al., 2022, p. 617), environmental management is a socio-political tool. Besides the social factors of indigenous water management, the environment plays a second important role, cover change due to anthropomorphic factors results in rain forest being turned into grassland/cropland (Reyes-Hernández et al., 2022, p. 18). Through soil erosion, landslides take place which do not just minimise crop production, but contamination of clean drinking water and the release of greenhouse gasses are an increasing threat. Overall, these consequences are most noticeable with the impoverished in Mexico keeping them marginalised. So, water management is not just benefitable for the people, but also the environment. When looking at Pikirayi's research he has taken the first step towards understanding an ancient, indigenous hydrological system that can now, hopefully be applied in future techniques to work towards a more environmentally sustainable landscape.

LiDAR

Pikirayi uses ALS, but modern technology has developed to a point where a myriad of opportunities has opened for future archaeologists. LiDAR has been used by Chase at Caracol, Belize to uncover a large extend of the Maya landscape (Chase et al., 2011). The Maya landscape is located in a densely

vegetated jungle ecology, this has caused most architecture to be swallowed by the canopy (Chase et al., 2011, p. 1). Because of this, it is still debated how the Maya spread across the landscape and how they sustained such a large population. Consequently, it resulted in discussions on the nature and composition of the Maya social structure, its political organisation and the reason of its decline. Most research conducted has focussed on its large, monumental complexes as individuals, leading to a short-sighted view. Caracol, Belize is one of the largest sites in the southern Maya landscape, spreading across nearly 200 sq km. By using LiDAR it was possible to uncover the distribution of these complexes and irrigation systems, something that had not yet been achieved in the past twenty five years (Chase et al., 2011, p. 2). Now, LiDAR is not just being used for densely vegetated areas, it has also been used in other areas as is the case here in the Netherlands (Verschoof-van der Vaart et al., 2020). It is a non-destructive method that scans a large amount of land in just a few hours. As was mentioned in the section strengths, Great Zimbabwe is very well preserved and to keep it that way, we have to use the technology now available to learn, preserve and gain knowledge still unknown.

Redefining national identity

Finally, an opportunity to reshape and redefine the word national identity comes to be. We know that there have been multiple sites in the same architecture found in South-Africa, Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe (Huffman, 2009), instead of just focussing on one country, it might be an idea to redefine the word by trying to understand how people from the past understood national identity, or was this non-existent? The old kingdom of Great Zimbabwe spread far, there were no clear boundaries, people were, and they lived. This is something that reflects back in the Ubuntu philosophy, Ubuntu is the philosophy of connectiveness between you, the land, others and the ancestors, everything is connected (Binsbergen, 2001, p. 53). So, if everything is everyone and everyone is everything, the land is not owned by anyone, the land is free and so are you. Terra Nullius, is Latin for the land that belongs to nobody (Mkhize, 2021, p. 422), a Roman word that has defined the European continent. In the Ubuntu philosophy the land is from everyone, no ownership is present to define the land. In a European mindset the land always has an owner and without it, it is there to be taken. Now coming back to national identity, if in the Ubuntu philosophy there is no land, one would assume that this mindset was also what governed the people of Great Zimbabwe. When the Europeans invaded Africa and took the land, they created the borders we now know today, the land was split up and families torn apart all because of some lines on a sheet. From here on, the African people, depending on their colonial history, had to reshape and construct a narrative for a country, a country imagined by Europeans and related to the ownership of land. Africa had to play the game of global politics, again defined by the west. So, what can we learn from the Ubuntu philosophy and its definition of the word land and ownership, we must keep in mind that everything we know and see is a prejudice of our nurture, but we can imagine something new, something unknown, at least to us. When looking at Great Zimbabwe we can redefine the word national identity to a new scale, because it is not just a history of Zimbabwe, it is a history of all. And, if all these countries would claim this history as their own to construct a narrative still needed in our colonial geopolitics, it would become clear that, even when playing the game people can bring change, because if all would claim this narrative as their own, it is not just their own, it is one for everyone. This does not just go for the people from Africa, but to the entire world.

Threats

To understand the threat that Great Zimbabwe might offer, it is important to compare its situation to another, this is why I will go further into a case study of how archaeology has been used in Ireland to support the idea of nationalism. Ireland, being a former colony, is a perfect European example of what an independent country might go through while constructing their national identity and historical narrative. Irish nationalists have used their Celtic past as an archaeological age to construct their national identity (Popa & Ó Ríagáin, 2012, p. 54). It had to be a historical age where there was an independent Ireland before the English colonisation, to create a truly independent society, to see themselves separated from the rest of the world and to gain pride in that (Popa & Ó Ríagáin, 2012, p. 55). The colonial period had to be seen as a minor setback in Irish history. It is said that, people that feel politically threatened or deprived of their rights, develop the strongest nationalist movements, and that these societies have a tendency of taking a period in their history that is related to great civilisations (Popa & Ó Ríagáin, 2012, p. 52). I argue that the same has been done in Zimbabwe with the site of Great Zimbabwe. They have taken a part of their history created by a great civilisation to construct their own narrative, something to be proud of and to set Zimbabweans apart from the rest of the world, but is Great Zimbabwe really just Zimbabwean?

When looking at Mapungubwes (figure 4) cultural landscape, predecessors of Great Zimbabwe, it becomes clear that the important sites related to the kingdom were not just located in Zimbabwe (Huffman, 2009). Several sites can be seen in Botswana, South-Africa and Mozambique (Huffman, 2009, p. 38), but less is known about these sites. Zimbabwe promotes “their” history and especially Shona history, which is highly noticeable when looking at the elementary school booklet. Already in the first chapter it mentions how Great Zimbabwe’s architecture is unique (Garlake, 1991, p. 2), something only found there, but this is not true. Khami (figure 4) of the Torwa state, is just as fascinating as Great Zimbabwe with similar architecture and major significance (Hall, 2006, p. 38). Besides the sites located in Zimbabwe, Botswana counts over a hundred sites in the same architectural style, but little attention has been paid to these sites (Huffman & Main, 2022, p. 361). The kingdom spread vast and wide, but why is it then that only Zimbabwe profits from this history?

Since Zimbabwe’s independence, politicians had to shape a narrative to construct their national identity, the country Zimbabwe is literally named after the site of Great Zimbabwe (Hall, 2006, p. 17). Not that other countries did not have to go through this process of construction, but Zimbabwe has chosen to focus on this site in particular. This has been a conscious political choice, as can be seen above in the case of Ireland, this history has been used to define Zimbabwe’s national identity, but what if we let go of the idea of borders and nations? The Tonga people are a Bantu culture (Mphande, 2014, p. 53) located in central Africa (Mphande, 2014, p. 12), their history is dominated by change and migration (Mphande, 2014, p. 53). Consequently, one of their strongest skillsets are, learning how to adapt to different environments and modifying their culture depending on where they are. Some had settled in Tongaland, but history shows that they have always spread and migrated outside of

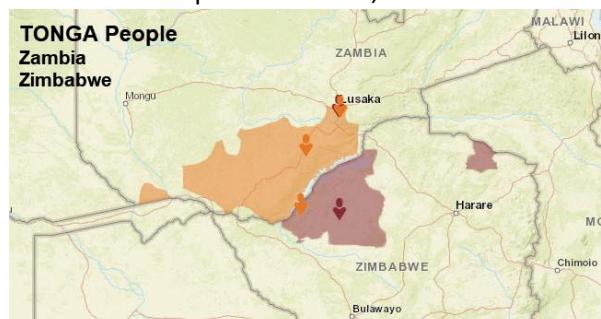


Figure 8: Tonga territory. Crosses both Zambia and Zimbabwe.

<https://www.101lasttribes.com/tribes/tonga.html>

these boundaries (Mphande, 2014, p. 54). In my opinion, because the definition of borders was non-existent. As we can see the Tonga being from Bantu heritage related to the Ubuntu philosophy, their culture is defined by migration, moving outside borders, borders defined by people. In their philosophy and culture there are no boundaries or countries, the land is free and from everyone. This makes us question what we see as national identity, because with this Ubuntu mindset you can imagine that all there is to identity is your clan and history. Not just that, but the Tonga people being from and living in Zimbabwe (figure 8), but not defining their boundaries, shows that not everyone in the Zimbabwean population agrees with the concept of nations and borders. Great Zimbabwe has been used to define Zimbabwe, but if the land is from everyone, so is the site of Great Zimbabwe, a real pan-African view. Politics here is a threat to the commune idea of identity, something that had to be changed into national identity, an identity to define a country, stand out and to be better than the other. I argue that this is only because they had to play the western game forced upon them by the European colonisation, or our western capitalism, there is a reason why English is still the lingua franca in Zimbabwe (Dube & Wozniak, 2021, p. 114).

When looking at the Caribbean this dynamic of precolonial/colonial history becomes clear, pre-colonial Caribbean was an interconnected and dynamic landscape due to its maritime connection (Hofman et al., 2010, p. 2), which started large regional trading networks. The sea functioned as a highway for the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Only through maintaining these social contacts with both their neighbouring islands and the South American mainland they were able to survive these new landscapes, climate hazards and gene pool deduction. There were no individual lands with borders and nations, but a social community where reciprocity was of importance, but when the Europeans arrived in 1492 this system changed. The Europeans started the sugar cane monoculture in the Caribbean, this is where we see the agent that drove the spread of capitalism and globalisation, after all, these two concepts are more of a Eurocentric mindset (Ahlman et al., 2019, p. 1). Now, geopolitically speaking, the Caribbean is divided in nations, commonwealths, overseas departments and territories (Siegel et al., 2013, p. 376), something only defined after 1492 with the spread of capitalism and western globalisation.

The end of my SWOT analysis chapter concludes with the threat of nationalistic uprising, but in reality, is this the actual threat, or is it the idea of nation states and national identity as defined by a western Eurocentric view? History and archaeology have shown us that through space and time different realities are possible, but when we invaded the world and enforced our regime, the world was set back, they had to play the western game of capitalism, with ownership at its core. I want to end with the idea of what national identity really is and if it can be different, because if Great Zimbabwe is used for the Zimbabwean narrative, can we not assume that it is a story for all Africans, if not for all people. Because in the end, do we not all come from the same place, and are we not all made of flesh and blood, but this of course is an ideology. First, we have to acknowledge our past, work on our past to strive towards an ideology and make it become reality.

Conclusion

Main research question: How can we reconstruct a national identity/history with the use of the archaeological site of Great Zimbabwe?

Zimbabwe has constructed their narrative based on Great Zimbabwe, with both its down and up sides. What has been done is the promotion of a history that was independent from its colonisers and pure African at heart. Through the theoretical chapter on the replacement of national identity, it becomes clear that the imagined community is a strong concept needed to shape a national identity (Anderson, 2006). As can be seen in the case of Ireland, they have taken a Celtic past to support the construction of their national identity after the British colonisation, to build the imagined community related to their nation (Popa & Ó Ríagáin, 2012). The same has been done for Zimbabwe with the use of Great Zimbabwe. They have not just named the country after the site (Hall, 2006, p. 17), but through the promotion of Great Zimbabwe's artefacts on banknotes and stamps (Garlake, 1991, p. 2), Great Zimbabwe's legacy can be seen everywhere. Just like the Irish, Zimbabweans have chosen a period in time where their history was great, and where they were independent and self-sufficient. The Ubuntu philosophy has been at the core of the remodification of Zimbabwe's narrative. This is a mindset that has developed with the African people before the period of colonisation (Murove, 2012, p. 36). I think that this is why Zimbabwe has chosen Great Zimbabwe for the reconstruction of their national identity. It is a mentality that probably dominated the mindset of the people of Great Zimbabwe and by promoting this mindset, they are promoting an archaeological period. An archaeological period that connects them to their ancestors, because in the Ubuntu philosophy everything is connected, the past to the present and the present to the past.

We know national identity through the concept of nation states in a western perspective, is this valid or can we learn a new definition of national identity by looking at Great Zimbabwe?

The idea of ownership of land and material is a European concept already constructed in Roman times (Mkhize, 2021, p. 422). The Ubuntu philosophy of pre-colonial Africa has shown us that there is a different configuration possible when it comes to the idea of national identity. The different ethnic groups in Zimbabwe have shown us that borders and nations are of no need, but the land is there for everyone and everything. Great Zimbabwe was just one capital of a kingdom that spread through four different countries (Hall, 2006, p. 35). Yes, Zimbabwe has chosen to take this history for the reconstruction of their national identity, but it is an identity that belongs to a lot of people. When Africa was colonised and the idea of nation states and borders were implied, this was the system that stood. The now new created countries in Africa had to play the geopolitical game after its independence and because of this, they had to create a national identity, but this was a concept unfamiliar before. The Ubuntu philosophy has taught us that, everything is connected both externally and internally through time and space (Murove, 2012). This means that the land is from everyone and anything, there is no ownership. So, at this point we can ask ourselves if the concept that we know as national identity, is national or just identity, because the national part is a word associated with nation states. On the other hand, what is national if we are all from the same place and the same earth because then, national is international, and international is national. I think that in the end, when referring to a certain word we can always redefine and change by learning from one another, and by letting go of our prejudice, something new becomes to be.

Why is it needed for people in post-colonial Africa with a stolen history to reconstruct their national identity or communal identity?

The sense of forgetting who one is due to the replacement of a collective memory by the enforcer, changes not just the individual, but society as a whole (Schreiter, 2008, p. 9). One denies its identity to such an extent that the abuser is excused (Schreiter, 2008, p. 10). We as humans have the need to belong, we need a part of us that is connected to another. The Ubuntu philosophy is an excellent force stimulating its peoples to drive towards this mentality, but it is not enough. Without the idea of “national” identity, or communal identity, we do not belong, and everyone wants to belong. Besides belonging, forgetting who one is, tends to drive a person mad and makes them forget the oppression and abuse that has lasted for generations (Schreiter, 2008). Besides the sense of belonging and remembering, several African countries have been forced to play the geopolitical game of capitalism. As can be seen in the case of the Caribbean, when Europeans colonised the islands, they were used as a driving force to spread capitalism on a global scale (Ahlm et al., 2019, p. 1). Capitalism in the sense that we know it is a European concept. This is the system that we now know and see everywhere today, but just imagine if, we never enforced this regime. What if, people developed their own systems through the course of time and space? Now the Caribbean has been divided in nation states, commonwealth's, territories, etc (Siegel et al., 2013, p. 376), something that never used to exist. This is partly why a national identity was needed, because when we decided that there was an ownership of land, we developed countries, and through the process of colonisation, we introduced this concept and forced people to do the same. So, African countries had to develop a national identity, because of a dark patch in history.

How has the site of Great Zimbabwe helped the people of Zimbabwe to reconstruct their national identity and what are the pros and cons involved in the process?

Now we have seen through my thesis that there is a replacement of the collective memory that has made it hard to develop an imagined community. Through the colonial impact it was hard to strive for a narrative that was fully Zimbabwe's own, but still, they achieved. Through my SWOT analysis we got to see the pros and cons that lie in the past and future when constructing a narrative. What has been achieved is a step away from their colonial past and a great degree of conservation, but this did not come without excluding several ethnic groups and cultures. For future generations, there is a threat of nationalistic uprising, but besides the threat, there is so much still left to learn, especially with the use of new technologies. Climate change is threatening our planet and Great Zimbabwe offers an opportunity to work towards a new ecological sustainable future. The idea of national identity can also be changed, we have seen that the idea of nations and borders is something that has been developed by the west. The Ubuntu philosophy and its sense of connectedness towards its peoples both past and present, provides us with the communal sense of identity, maybe national identity should be changed to communal identity. This rephrasing of identity changes our concept of nations and borders, because even nationally or internationally, there is a sense of community. In the end, this is the feeling that connects us all no matter when or where, community.

There are many connections and conclusions I was able to make with the use of a SWOT analysis, our strengths being: a strive away from a colonial history and the great conservation present at Great Zimbabwe. Weaknesses: exclusion of several ethnic groups and cultures. Opportunities: new

technologies, new information on an ecological sustainable future, the rise of African archaeology and the potential to redefine the concept of national identity. Threats; nationalistic uprising due to the dominated geopolitics through the west. For future narratives it will be hard to construct, find, or know who and what we are. There is an invisible hand driving the economy and politics, but through the use of a SWOT analysis on the past, present and future, I hope to provide a suggestion that can help the next generations construct. Things can be different, we can be different, national identity can be different. Great Zimbabwe and its story offer the opportunity to analyse these constructions and to hopefully help both present and future people.

Abstract

National identity construction is a concept that is defined by certain historical factors. Africa, just coming out of a colonial period has had to reconstruct a narrative of their own. With the use of a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, I try to find out what both the pros and cons, internally and externally are. I will apply this SWOT analysis on the case study of Great Zimbabwe, an archaeological site located in Zimbabwe. Through the analysis of this site, I will analyse how Zimbabwe has used their archaeological heritage to construct a national identity in post-colonial times. Through the analysis I hope to find out what other countries can learn from this process and what they can do better or avoid. Furthermore, I try to find out how Africa's national identity has been taken away and replaced and why it is important to have a "national" identity. I will make the use of the two term imagined communities and the Ubuntu philosophy to understand the two core concepts behind national identity and the reconstruction of national identity in Zimbabwe.

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Figures:

- Figure 1 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Great-Zimbabwe>
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