Article

Beyond Colonial Boundaries: Reimagining the Rozvi through Landscapes, Identities and Indigenous Epistemologies

Lesley Hatipone Machiridza [1,2] and Russell Kapumha [3,*]

[1] Alexander Von Humboldt Post-Doctoral Fellow, Institute of African Studies and Egyptology, University of Cologne Albertus-Magnus-Platz, D-50923 Cologne, Germany; lesley.machiridza@gmail or lmachiri@uni-koeln.de

[2] Department of Development Studies, History and Archaeology, Simon Muzenda School of Arts, Culture and Heritage Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo P.O. Box 1235, Zimbabwe

[3] School of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 3AZ, UK

* Correspondence: russell.kapumha@arch.ox.ac.uk

Abstract: The land, 'things'/objects, and memory in the form of narratives and metaphors are intricately bound together. They all constitute the iconography of a shared set of ideas, beliefs, feelings, values, practices, and performances that objectify collective identities. Respectively, these complex entangled tangible and spiritual/invisible indices of identities situated in places deserve special archaeological devotion. However, since African archaeology and history remains trapped in Eurocentric colonial metanarratives, indigenous epistemologies and ontologies have somehow remained on the margins of knowledge production processes. This deliberate erasure and silencing continues to impede archaeology's capacity to explore hidden meanings and values that people imbue to places and landscapes through time. Owing to this setback, multiple precolonial group identities in parts of Zimbabwe, South Africa, Botswana, and Mozambique such as Torwa, Twamamba, Rozvi, Singo, and Venda, among others, remain vague and subjectively tied to the archaeology of Butua/Torwa (AD 1400–1644) and Rozvi (AD 1685–1830) state systems. The failure to read the landscape as both a repository of memory and an agent for collective identities continues to compound our archaeological challenges. Against this background, Rozvi oral narratives and the Insiza cluster Khami-phase sites in southwestern Zimbabwe are subjected to renewed scrutiny. Following a critical review of colonial archives and Rozvi traditions, it turned out that instead of contradicting 'science', oral traditions actually amplify our reading of the archaeological record, only if handled properly.

Keywords: land; landscapes; identities; metaphors; Rozvi; Khami phase

1. Introduction

The Rozvi, a dynamic historical political formation, first rose to prominence in northeastern Zimbabwe around the 1670s before migrating southwestwards to further consolidate their power under a major pre-colonial state system (1685–1830), variably called Rozvi, Vurozvi, Ukalanga, Gore, or Goremukuru [1–3]. This development, coupled with other incessant Rozvi dispersals stirred by internal succession disputes, further entangled their past with a very wide landscape dotted by numerous Khami-phase sites. Through time, extensive Rozvi movements, contact, and integration with other sociopolitical groupings, as well as their adoption and use of several Khami-phase sites, has triggered immense scholarly debate [1,2,4–14]. Their extensive spatial distribution through time has created a complex cultural web that continues to cause archaeological interpretive challenges. At one point, a prominent historian, ref. [1] was prompted to say:

> "...the Rozvi even more than the rest of the Shona have acquired a historiography without a history..."

Perhaps, the greatest challenge bedeviling the Rozvi past stems from the gross mistakes that were perpetuated by antiquarians during the colonial era. These were recklessly

tolerated and reproduced in corpus literature until the Rozvi past was completely submerged in multiple layers of myths [1]. These antiquarian misrepresentations, coupled with the negative influence of Western discourse about Africans, typical of the era of colonialism and imperialism, inflicted long-lasting damage on our ability to understand and interpret this intriguing past. Amidst these colonial ideologies, Rozvi origins were externalized, their cultural ingenuity and complexity denied, and their oral histories dismissed and ignored as myth while their heritage and land were systematically seized and renamed.

Of course, it would be misleading to sorely blame antiquarians and colonial settlers for Rozvi disconnections from their core state, land, and territories. Rather, owing to incessant succession disputes that ravaged their system of governance, numerous Rozvi groups had already started fragmenting from the core state as early as the 1690s [9,11,12]. In addition, the Nguni-inspired incursions in southern Africa of the 1820s to 1860s, known as the *mfecane,* further spurred more Rozvi dispersals before the colonial land seizures finally forced the last remnants from core ancestral lands. Generally, Rozvi territories overlap with numerous Khami-phase sites (see Figures 1–4 below), which are also politically connected with the Torwa/Butua state (1400–1644). As such, the actual role of Rozvi dynasties in the rise and spread of these settlements remains contested. Although there has been significant progress in historicizing the Rozvi, accounting for their archeological footprints within this massive landscape has remained quite problematic [8,10,13–15]. Rozvi identities have largely remained somewhat rhetorical, well encapsulated by Rozvi and Shona descendants, despite their evidently being subjects of scientific enquiry.

To this end, Shona oral traditions are quite emphatic and explicit that all *madzimbahwe* (dry stone-walled monuments) of the Zimbabwe Culture were built and occupied by the Rozvi. In fact, while the Rozvi have always argued that these sites and associated landscapes directly belong to their former ruling ancestors, historians and archaeologists have remained very skeptical of such claims. The archaeological record too, has also been quite stubborn by either revealing very little or actually contradicting the Rozvi oral traditions in certain ways [2]. Perhaps it is high time that we took heed of the advice never to use archaeology as a counter-narrative to indigenous stories [16–21]. Therefore, this article engages a constructive interaction process that is quite sensitive to indigenous metaphors and historical identities. It does so by particularly drawing from Tilley's [21] observation that the invisible aspects of a thing are as essential to its meaning and significance as those that are visible. Thus, Rozvi historical connections to Khami-phase sites and associated landscapes are subjected to renewed scrutiny and interpretation under these premises.
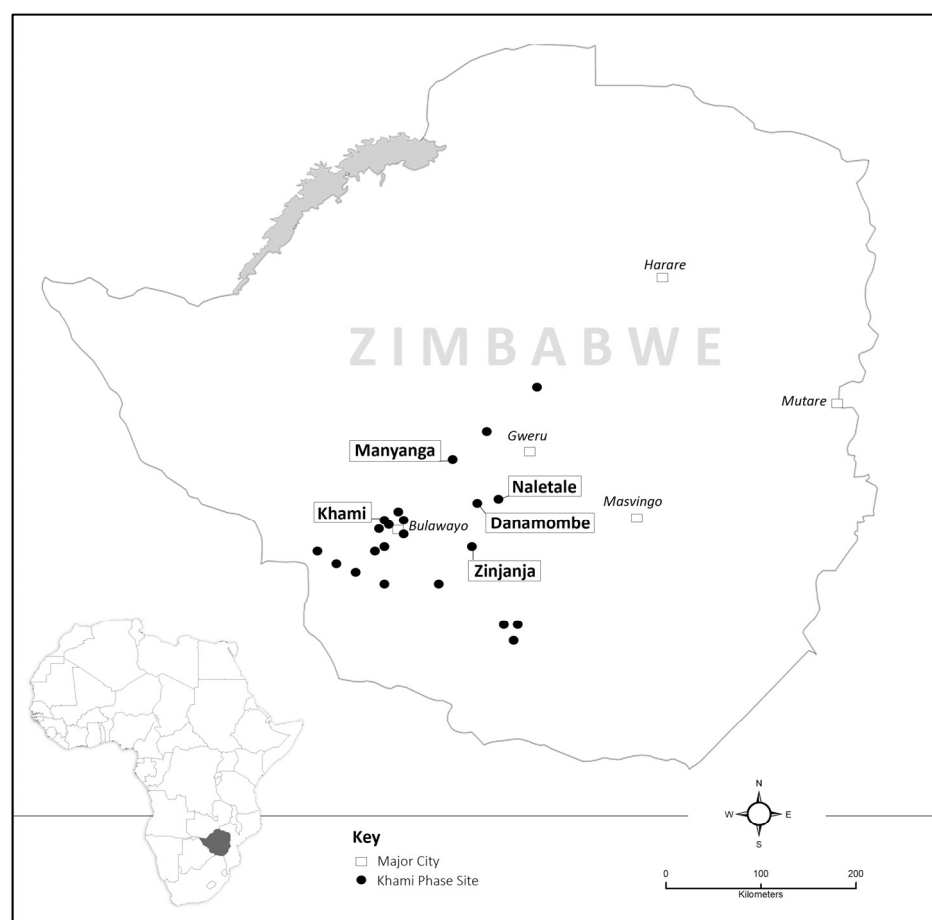
Figure 1. Locational map of Zimbabwe and associated Khami-phase sites.

2. The Colonial Archive: Metanarratives and the Construction of Dominant Memory

The world over, colonialism and imperialism ushered in a broad range of oppressive scientific research practices that denigrated, marginalized, tamed, and silenced Africans and the recognition of their indigenous narratives [22,23]. As a result, literature that was generated back then is awash with layered ideologies, biases, and stereotypes about Africans [24,25]. Additionally, it is imperative to note that most of these colonial distortions were particularly aimed at dispossessing and claiming indigenous lands through misrepresentation, denying and rejecting their cultural ingenuity and complexity. By projecting everything indigenous as backward, inferior, and uncivilized, colonial agents sought to justify imperialism and pave the way for it. As such, the 'colonial library' crafted very subjective portrayals of indigenous histories through the eyes of the West, which is problematic. For instance, Smith [23] argues that, from the perspective of the once-colonized peoples across the world, the word 'research' remains one of the 'dirtiest' terms in their vocabulary because it was inextricably bound with European imperialism and colonialism. In this respect, most colonial archives should be treated with great caution. Although they are products of their time and still form a large corpus of the historical literature today, they must be subjected to critical review in order to avoid recycling inherent biases. Such an approach effectively arms us to minimize those veiled distortions that were deliberately perpetuated by antiquarians and their like-minded colleagues as we strive to objectively reconstruct past realities. To this effect, research became a site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of knowing of the 'Other' [23].

The colonial administration and its associates are also guilty of elevating their own worldview by treating indigenous ways of knowing as unscientific, naïve, contradictory,

illogical, and invalid [22,23,26]. Respectively, it is not surprising that when European explorers toured indigenous lands across the world, they perceived them as undocumented, untamed, available, and devoid of indigenous people's memories and histories [23,27]. This was a deliberate way of denying the physical existence and validity of indigenous people's claims to their ancestral lands. As Dei [28] observes, indigenous or 'heritage' knowledge has always been characterized by the realities of the cosmos and the nexus of nature, society, and culture. Thus, indigenous ways of knowing are holistic and expressed through stories and practices tied to the land. Instead of investing time and effort to fully understand these indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), most colonialists chose to ignore and dismiss these as senseless 'nativist' discourse' [23]. At least, we now know that, as part of attempts to remove and dispossess indigenous people of their land and heritage, colonialists resorted to denying all forms of local memory. Some natives were even labeled as recent immigrants with tenuous claims to their land. According to Russell [27], this 'lack of landscape connection', or rather the lack of memory, or the disruption or deliberate absenting of it was used to distance locals from their heritage. This way, they effectively dispossessed them of their land and legitimized all forms of European land invasions. Similar 'dirty tactics' were progressively used to externalize Rozvi origins and distance their descendants from ancestral lands and heritage sites [2].

Closely aligned to these colonial prejudices was the promotion of binary oppositions, dualisms, and hierarchical orderings of the world. More precisely, back then, Western thought emphasized distinctions between the primitive and civilized, prehistoric and historic, and literate and non-literate societies [24,29]. Schmidt and Pikirayi [30] further note that numerous exclusionary and unnecessary arbitrary boundaries underwrite and amplify colonial experiences. More bluntly, the collective memory of imperialism was premised on the random collection, documentation, classification, and (mis)representation of indigenous people to the West as a bunch of ignorant, lazy, hopeless, and culturally frozen people. Oftentimes, antiquarians and their colonial counterparts expressed personal views, omissions, and commissions as official knowledge, yet these all strived to dehumanize indigenous people through discourses of race and gender [23]. For decades, indigenous people and their histories were under siege, and most of these colonial distortions went unchecked and continue to be accepted as gospel by a wide range of unsuspecting readers/audiences. Once again, we note with deep regret that indigenous histories still continue to be sidelined and ignored. Colonial historians, for example, alienated and denigrated indigenous histories through Eurocentric historiographies, which encapsulated problematic concepts such as prehistory. Today, prehistory continues to be uncritically used, despite the implications for African history [30–32]. This way, African history has extensively suffered because it was unjustly relegated to the margins of knowledge as primitive knowledge that naturally ceased to exist at the onset of native people's contact with European civilization and modernity [23].

There is scholarly evidence that speaks to the view that indigenous communities never lost their history and heritage; rather, they were simply projected in colonial archives as people without a history. Even in historical archaeology, indigenous narratives were never given as much value as documentary evidence [24]. It therefore goes without saying that the bulk of research conducted under the banner of colonial ideology was prejudicial to indigenous people and their cultures and dehumanized them [27,33]. In like manner, Rozvi oral narratives were often ignored and dismissed in historical and archaeological writings as mere myths. Despite numerous claims made by local people living near Khami-phase sites that these settlements were indeed remnants of a glorious Rozvi past, such claims only received piecemeal scholarly attention (Machiridza 2005; [13,34]). Unfortunately, these kinds of publications now constitute the bulk of the academic literature and have kept indigenous views on the Rozvi in perpetual obscurity. This challenge is certainly not unique to the Rozvi past but affects several other indigenous histories in Zimbabwe and further beyond. Thus, Smith [23] laments this 'policing' research practice in the following words:

"Authorities and outside experts are often called to verify, comment upon, and give judgement about the validity of indigenous claims to cultural beliefs, values, ways of knowing and historical accounts...".

Apart from disrespecting and denying indigenous people's claims to ingenuity and complexity, white settlers also sought to portray indigenous people as very recent immigrants. This way associated ancient indigenous cultural heritage was purported to belong to another ancient racial group that was distinctly different from the locals but racially closer to the colonizers. This brazen lie was widely and extensively used to legitimize all forms of colonial ideologies or efforts to repossess their so-called 'lost ancestral inheritance' [16,30,35–37]. Naturally, archaeology and other related scientific disciplines of the Western academy got entangled with these colonial paradigms and epistemologies, which still continue to constrain our full appreciation of the dynamics of space, place, time, being, and materiality in the African context [17,18]. In attempts to systematically counter these hostile colonial practices, the succeeding section delves deep into contested conceptions of the land, landscapes, placemaking, memory, metaphors, and identities.

Any attempt to challenge and eliminate grand colonial ideologies and epistemologies culminates in a number of exciting theoretical and methodological insights often referred to as postcolonial theory, indigenous revisionist models, anti-colonialist practice, decolonization, deconstructionist epistemologies, Afrocentricity, and post-modernist frameworks [17,22]. These theoretical orientations have also inspired pluralistic approaches to envisage the past using alternative historical sources, silenced voices, and the co-creation of knowledge about space and time [18,19]. Closely tied to this are discourses on decolonization that continue to trigger immense scholarly interest and debate. In brief, decolonization is the process of unmasking all forms of colonial exploitation of the 'Other' while systematically re-centering or empowering the once marginalized worldviews, including local ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies [25,28,38]. For example, and as part of this trend and paradigm shift, historical archaeology, and many other historical sub-disciplines, have rapidly blossomed and adopted an amplified sense of history that emphasizes critical reflection upon processes of continuity and change, history, ideology, naming, dwelling, storytelling and identity construction, negotiation, and maintenance. All this is aimed at fully understanding and interpreting how people in the past and present experience landscapes.

3. A Landscape Approach

It is imperative, at this juncture, to examine the basic constituents of a landscape approach, which includes notions of the land, space, place, memory, identity, and metaphors. Although several analyses of land, space, place, and time exist, there remains relative confusion on their specific meanings and differences. Some scholars even go so far as using these terms interchangeably. This is problematic. To start with, land is the physical backdrop of all human action, it is the common base upon which people inscribe meanings so that, in a way, it is the equivalent of space. According to Henry [39], space is generally conceived of as the continuous extension in length, breadth, and width that can be mapped by the three-dimensional coordinate system of rational geometry. While relevant and acceptable, the challenge with this definition is that it overlaps with our understanding of place and sites. Smith [23] robustly argues that space is often viewed as empty, static, or divorced from time; it is something that can be well-defined, fixed, and devoid of politics. A key takeaway from this definition is the idea of space as land devoid of politics. Anschuetz et al. [40] also argues that space only gains importance through attachment of economic values and its strategic use by actors. This profoundly implies that when land is devoid of people and related sociocultural meanings, it remains as space. Thus, space only exists as an empty expanse that transforms into something else when given meaning by human beings. Again, this explains why imperialists and colonialists were bent on describing indigenous or native land as untamed and undocumented space, meaning it was readily available for their possession [23,27]. In this way, colonial agents notoriously justified colonialism, invasion, and control of native lands by claiming that these were once open spaces

devoid of indigenous people, memory, and history, which of course was not true. Once in charge, they began to imbue their own meanings into these so-called spaces, thereby transforming them into colonial places, which takes us to 'place', yet another complex term worth unpacking.

Unlike space, place, which in essence is a 'space of meeting' is always in a state of becoming, it is never bound, fixed, grounded, and stable [21]. This implies that place is more abstract than space. It is best conceptualized as a spatial site, position, or social unit that is either consciously or politically produced by people. In layman's terms, when land is politically charged or made to belong to a particular group of people, it becomes place. For instance, Relph [41] proffers an interesting conceptualization of place in the following manner:

> "Each place is a territory of significance, distinguished from larger or smaller areas by its name, by its particular environmental qualities, by the stories and shared memories connected to it, and by the intensity of meanings people give to or derive from it...".

It therefore follows that when land is imbued with a diverse range of meanings by a particular group of people through various sociocultural processes in time, it transforms into place. Once imbued with meanings, space becomes an active and powerful agent of enforcing collective identities as a place. When this happens, the place itself may not even change physically; rather, what alters are the attached social meanings, imaginations, and invisible and spiritual attachments. In view of this, it is worth reiterating that at times material forms may only offer us a brief snapshot into past realities; otherwise, much deeper meanings always extend much further into the invisible realms/dimensions [21,42]. Sinamai [18] further cements this reasoning by arguing that archaeologists should now wake up from their prolonged slumber by turning away from their sole obsession with materiality/things and beginning to also pay much closer attention to attached intangible meanings. This clarion call brings us to yet another interesting and complex concept that is often confused with place, which is the landscape.

Just like place, landscape is a culturally fashioned creation that is imbued with diverse meanings, hotly contested, and variably characterized as 'text, artefact, and language' itself [21,43]. In attempts to clarify the conceptual difference between place and landscape, Tilley [21] avers that people in places, moving within and between these places, constitute landscapes. He further adds that landscape is not defined by spaces but by places: it sits within places, implying a network of places constitute landscape(s). On a related note, Anschuetz et al. [40] adds that a combination of the physical environment, the character of the people at a particular time, and associated meanings yields landscapes. This definition is broad enough to draw our attention to the tangible/scientific dimensions as well as the social/spiritual dimensions of landscapes. Owing to colonial ideologies and their projected monopoly over science and the benefits it brought forth by ignoring and distancing the 'Other' from their science and lands, the historical approach to landscapes suffered great neglect, particularly within Africa. In this regard, the politics of colonial research silenced indigenous communities by invalidating their spiritual ways of interacting with landscape. It is therefore crucial to note that through a diverse range of cultural processes, landscapes became extensions of group identities. As different agents participated in place-making through traditional practices and performances, naming processes, storytelling, and dwelling, they activated landscapes as metaphors of cultural meaning [18,21,23,27,39].

Tilley [21] stresses that places and landscapes anchor memories because we do not remember in a disembodied and placeless manner. Memory is hereby conceptualized as a personal activity that is subject to biases, quirks, and rhythms of the individual mind; it is a temporal matter of the past but its spatialization transforms it into something more stable and durable [21,39,42]. When this happens, especially among indigenous communities, memory becomes part of their history, but this is often misunderstood. Henry [39] further explains the distinction between memory and history by stipulating that history is conceptualized as a factual record of a given past, an objectively recorded account of past realities;

hence, it is often given authority over memory. Vansina [44] further informs us that remembering differs from memory in the sense that remembering is action and its mechanisms of cueing and scanning are meant to recall specific memories. This implies that among indigenous communities that still rely on memory as part of recalling history, remembering is often enhanced by attaching a cue to every item memorialized. This way, music, objects, and landscapes then function as cues, labels, or mnemotechnic devises that help recall specific memories (Vansina [44]). It is also interesting to note that what Jan Vansina calls cues are in fact metaphors that manifest in multiple forms culturally. In this case, metaphors are highly complex forms of communication that are used by people to achieve meaning through association, analogy, and allegory (Sinamai [18]). Principally, metaphors usually feature as part of language, naming patterns, stories, narratives, folklores, places, and nature, just as long as they express some form of cultural communication.

On the whole, places and landscapes are pivotal in the creation and consolidation of memories that foster identity sentiments. In fact, as people store their memories in places, those places also become part of people's memory [39]. Thus, as part of identity politics, the land was systematically imbibed with a network of memories as an active sociopolitical archive. Through repeated works termed placemaking, the social construction of space or the development of sense of place, the land became an active extension of people's identities. Hence, there cannot be identity without the land because the land and identities are inextricably bound [18,21,27,39]. Tilley [21] further argues that ideas and feelings about identities are located in the specificities of places and landscapes. However, most of such 'specificities' are metaphoric and invisible to archaeologists who largely rely on what they can actually see, touch, measure, and verify. For this reason, tracing identities and agency through the archaeological record alone has remained quite difficult and problematic [2,6,8,18,42]. Consequently, it is high time that we adopted a landscape approach that harmonizes both the spiritual and scientific dimensions of past realities. Since the Rozvi were a product of complex historical processes, their identities were self-proclaimed, imagined, worked/re-worked through time and subjectively linked to a diverse range of ancestral and historical landscape symbols. All ideas, feelings, and values that shaped and still shape Rozvi identities were situationally objectified through strategic material references to the past. Thus, all fluid and spiritual indices of Rozvi identities were systematically objectified through the landscape, including selected Khami-phase sites, which are briefly and closely explored below.

4. Contextualizing the Archaeology and Metanarratives: The Khami Phase

Historically, the Khami phase encompasses the Torwa/Butua and Rozvi state systems as well as several other chiefdoms that occupied the northern fringes of South Africa [2,45,46]. The archaeological term Khami-phase dating (1400–1830) derives from the main site of Khami, a precolonial Torwa/Butua state capital situated in southwestern Zimbabwe. Thus, all related sites with terraced monumental architecture, some of which accommodated massive elite *dhaka* huts on top, decorated dry stone walls with checker, herringbone, dentelle, cord, and chevron patterns, and ceramic wares with polychrome and graphite burnishing designs typically belong to this phase. Unlike their Zimbabwe tradition counterparts, elites at Khami-phase sites publicly displayed their wealth by exposing their massive huts at the apex of massive artificial platforms. Some scholars deliberately overlooked these cultural differences in order to advance the failed argument that it was dynastic migrations from either Great Zimbabwe or the Mutapa state that directly led to Khami-phase site origins [2,8]. Recent empirical data is increasingly pointing towards the independent development of the Khami phase [2,47]. Despite these research advances, we however remain uncertain about the actual relationship between the Khami-phase sites and earlier Leopard's Kopje/Woolandale tradition sites [2]. Nonetheless, without digressing much from the core research area, it suffices to briefly examine the broader context of cultural complexity processes in southern Africa.

Accordingly, the Khami phase is best understood and appreciated as a mere extension of long-established processes of complexity development that were happening across southern Africa [8,45,48]. In fact, the development of complexity in southern Africa goes as far back as AD 800 and presents an unbroken cultural sequence right into the historical period, generally accepted as the last 500 years. Although the broader southwestern regions are hot, dry, and barren, certain localities within offered immense opportunities for cultural progression. Typical examples include the Shashe-Limpopo confluence, the northeastern Tati area of Botswana and the central watershed regions of Zimbabwe, territories coinciding with the Butua/Guruuswa regions [2,14,48]. At certain times, associated strategic mineral resources, fertile soils, and floral and faunal species in these localities immensely attracted diverse communities. Spasms of favorable climatic conditions also brought forth immense economic and sociocultural benefits. It was through such sporadic and spasmodic processes that the Shashe-Limpopo basin eventually emerged as the first epicenter of precolonial power in southern Africa. The earliest Zimbabwe Culture state systems of Mapela and Mapungubwe evolved therein. In particular, these polities directly evolved from numerous competing Leopard's Kopje chiefdoms that systematically capitalized on the ideology of sacred leadership and exploited long-distance trade networks and associated local economic opportunities [47,48].

By taking full advantage of the ideology of sacred leadership, tribute and taxation, hunting, local industries and crafts manufacture, iron, copper, and gold mining, crop and livestock (particularly cattle) production, local and long-distance trade networks, and numerous chiefdoms and states gradually evolved through time. The term Zimbabwe Culture was thus adopted to broadly refer to numerous precolonial Shona states (900–1900) that exhibit evidence of class distinction through prestigious dry stone walls, massive *dhaka* huts, craft specialization, external trade, intensive cattle herding, and nucleation of activities around elite centers [2,5,14,46,49]. Against this background, the first phase of the Zimbabwe Culture comprises the competing polities of Mapela (1055–1400) and Mapungubwe (1220–2290). This was followed by the Zimbabwe phase constituting Great Zimbabwe (1300–1550) and the Mutapa state (1450–1900). Typically, Zimbabwe tradition sites are characterized by both plain and decorated free-standing dry stone-walled enclosures that secluded elites inside. These sites are widely spread across the Zimbabwean plateau and adjacent regions where they significantly overlap with the Khami-phase sites (see Figure 2 below). The extensive distribution of the Zimbabwe tradition sites and their overlap with both the first and third phases of the Zimbabwe Culture has constantly attracted immense scholarly attention. However, divergent theoretical orientations and emerging field data is increasingly pointing towards a multilinear development trajectory.
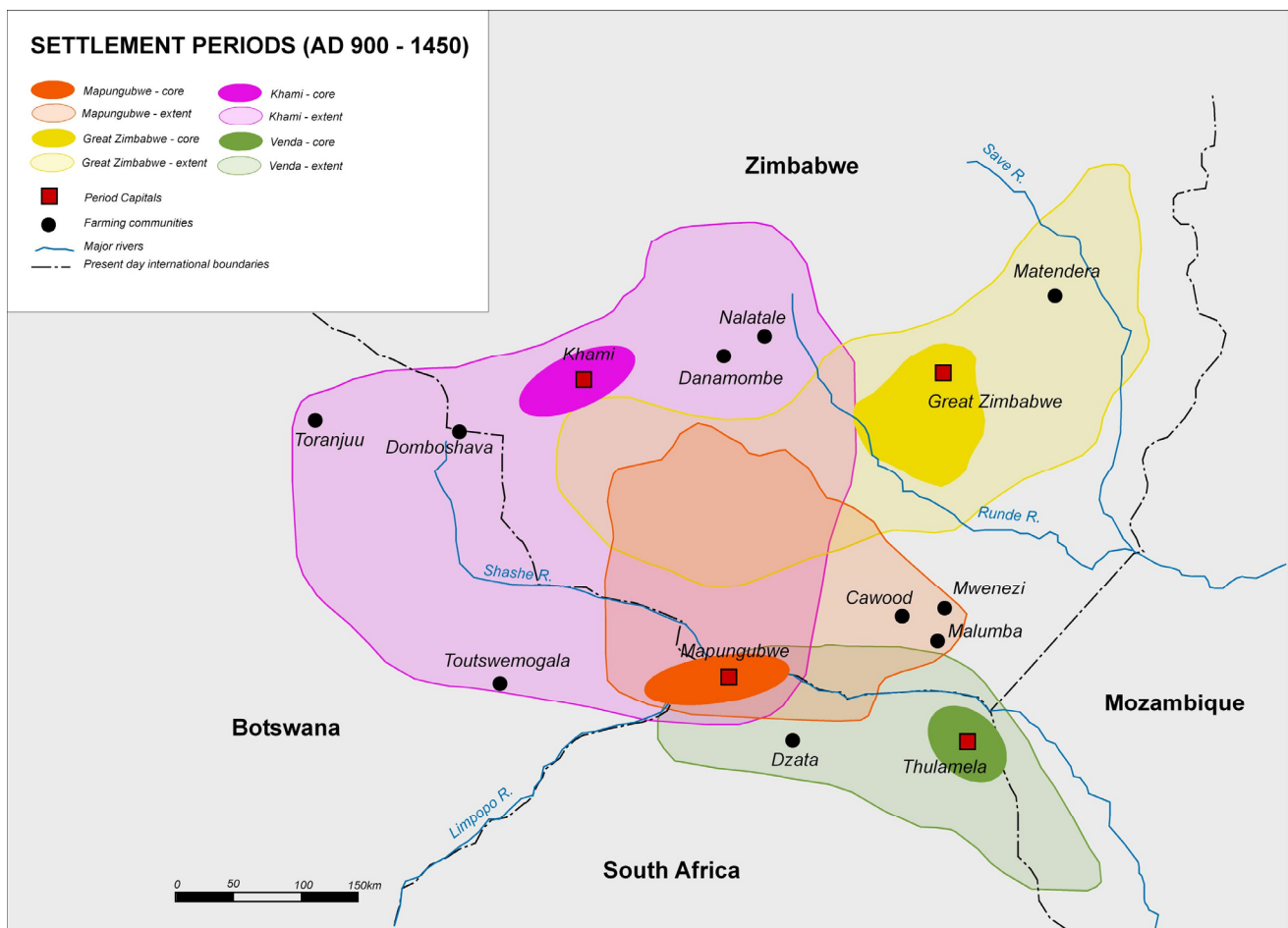
Figure 2. Geographical distribution of the Mapungubwe, Great Zimbabwe, and Khami phases [49].

Earlier on, the evolutionary model was widely popularized, thereby giving the impression that there was a neat linear succession of state systems (Main and Huffman [48]). Implicitly, when Mapungubwe was the center of power, all contemporary Zimbabwe Culture settlements of varying sizes and distance from this center were perceived as mere supporting administrative units [5,48,49]. This model further argues that the same structure was systematically repeated when Great Zimbabwe, Torwa/Butua, and Mutapa states later rose to prominence. However, in recent years this model has come under fire, particularly owing to the lack of fit with new or emerging field evidence [2,14,47,49]. In line with this, van Waarden [14] has also argued that before the fall of Mapungubwe, a Gumanye chiefdom was already on the rise at Great Zimbabwe. Further afield, around the Tati cluster of Botswana, numerous Zimbabwe tradition sites dating between the 10th and 11th centuries were also thriving independently as polities [14]. This therefore implies that individual agency was a key factor in the spontaneous development of multiple contemporaneous and overlapping complex societies that extensively scarred landscapes coinciding with the broader Guruuswa/Butua (see Figure 3) regions [2,49]. As already indicated above, the Khami phase was already developing by the turn of the 15th century, but who exactly was historically responsible for this extensive and complex cultural development?
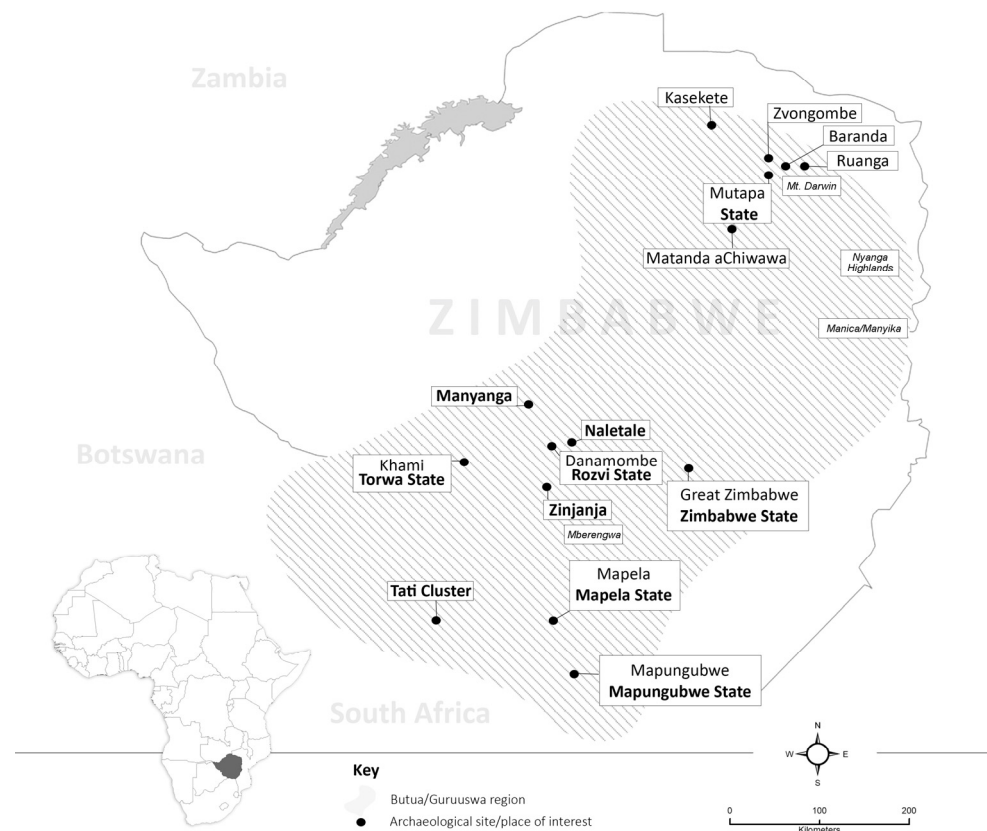
Figure 3. The highveld Butua/Guruuswa regions and associated Zimbabwe Culture states.

5. Early Dynastic History Mysteries' and the Khami Phase

Although there is a shared belief that the Torwa were the first dynasties to emerge and govern from Khami-phase sites, it remains quite difficult to tell whether they were also the sole founders of these settlements. Until now, the Torwa origin and historical identity remains a scholarly mystery [2,8]. More so, attributing all Khami-phase sites in southern Africa to Torwa dynasties would be farfetched, especially considering the extensive distribution of these sites. Respectively, the argument once advanced to challenge the predominance of Mapungubwe during the 13th century also comes to the fore here [49]. It would have been very difficult if not impossible for a few ruling elites based at the Khami capital to control such vast territories. Moreover, most of these Khami-phase sites are yet to be fully investigated, so claims that rulers from the Torwa state capital presided over the rest of the region are problematic. Be that as it may, one thing remains certain: before the Rozvi migrated into southwestern Zimbabwe, the Torwa were the ones in charge. As Randles [3] puts it, in 1512 Gaspar Veloso wrote a letter to the King of Portugal stating the following:

"... between the land of the Monomotapa and Sofala all kings bore allegiance to the Monomotapa, but further inland (still on the plateau, of course) there was another king who had risen in revolt and with whom he was at war: the king of Butua. The latter was as powerful as the Monomotapa and his country held great reserves of gold".

In a different but related Portuguese account written by João de Barros in 1552, the Torwa regions were further described as follows:

"They have other mines in a region named Toroa, also called the Kingdom of Butua, ruled by a prince [chief] named Burrom, a vassal of Benomotapa" [3].

These accounts constitute the earliest documentary references to southwestern Zimbabwe but they somehow mixed up the facts. Firstly, when the Portuguese arrived in southern Africa, they were not really interested in local historical details but economic trading opportunities. Hence, their references to local historical affairs should be considered as merely coincidental. Secondly, upon their arrival, they largely settled along the Indian Ocean coast, using Swahili traders as middlemen before venturing closer to their sources of ivory and gold around 1512 [1,3,50]. Therefore, their tendency to link everything internal with the Mutapa state should be appreciated in the context of their vested economic interests there. While it is true that the Butua state was a rival of the Mutapa state, it is not necessarily correct that it directly evolved from that state. In fact, von Sicard (1948:13) buttresses this point as follows:

> They must have been connected in one way or another not only with the first known Shangamire of the 15th century, but also with the south-western Butwa Kingdom under Boroma, heard of by Fernandes in 1513 and mentioned again by de Barros, in 1552. They were firmly established in Butwa Torwa long before Mutapa conquered the Dema or Limi tribes in the north-east... When at the beginning of the 18th century the great Shangamire conquered Butwa Torwa, most of the Twamamba still moved further south, and about half a century later they were more disintegrated by the advancing "Venda".

Still describing the same regions and people, he further comments:

> "There remains a last consideration with regards to the stone structures in the Twamamba country, including Great Zimbabwe. It must be remembered that Butwa Torwa is older than Monomotapa Kingdom in the north. Consequently, it existed before 1460... There is no reason why we should combine the Mutapa overthrow with the settlement of the Twamamba and kindred tribes in the southern parts of Butwa Torwa. On the other side there are indications that the Twamamba had occupied at least parts of it a long time before Mutapa established his rule north of the Zambezi. It seems, therefore, advisable to re-examine the whole question of the origin of our Rhodesian ruins... The material at my disposal is not sufficient to arrive at any definite conclusions as to the Twamamba building activities. But I should like to point out one special feature at several ruins, where it is most probable that the Twamamba have been at work ... probably a great number of our ruins are of Twamamba origin, since they are not built by the 18th century Rozwi..." [51].

These extracts clearly show the current confusion surrounding the historical identity of the Khami phase, especially when it comes to Torwa, Twamamba, Singo, and Rozvi identities. While others credit the Torwa as the first builders, von Sicard [51] gives credit to the Twamamba and disregards the Rozvi completely. However, Sicard [51] does not clearly qualify the relationship between the Torwa, Twamamba, and Singo dynasties. This prompts us to ask, were these the same people and, if not, how exactly were they different? Perhaps we may never fully get to the bottom of all this, however, we take solace in the fact that the Torwa/Butua state was quite peaceful right until AD 1644 when a civil war broke out following a succession dispute between two brothers aspiring for the same throne. Although this war did not mark the final end of the Torwa/Butua state, it severely weakened it right until AD 1685 when the Rozvi eventually usurped power. Portuguese meddling in the internal affairs of precolonial African states also continued right until the Rozvi finally put an end to all this between AD 1684 and 1693 [2]. Therefore, the next section shifts attention towards Rozvi origins and how they systematically naturalized their association with Khami-phase sites in southwestern Zimbabwe and broader landscapes.

6. The Power of Landscape Grammar: Rozvi Origins and Ethnicity

In terms of Rozvi origins, Mudenge [10] makes the following interesting comments:

"In short there is no evidence from Portuguese sources that the Rozvi as a nation bearing the name 'Rozvi' existed before the advent of Dombo. Previous writers have at times unfortunately used eighteenth-century Portuguese documents clearly referring to Dombo (1684–95) as if they refer to the Changamire of c.1480–c.1492. It is partly this error which has given the impression that there are Portuguese documents which show the existence of the designation Rozvi prior to Dombo's advent. At present, however, we simply do not know of the existence of such sources".

Respectively, prior to Portuguese arrivals and the political turmoil that later ensued within the Mutapa state from the 1650s to 1684, the name Rozvi and the people bearing that name were simply non-existent. The earliest known and majority highveld plateau inhabitants were simply called Karanga and Kalanga speakers, while other diverse minority ethnic groupings were confined to the lowveld margins of the Zimbabwean plateau [1,2,12]. Thus, it was only after a series of historical events, particularly the Portuguese *prazo* system (farmland grabbing in the Mutapa state), *kuruva* tax collection (meant to force Africans into Portuguese farms and gold mines), and the numerous Portuguese political interferences in African states that the Rozvi identity eventually emerged [2,8,52]. However, these Portuguese interferences severely weakened the Mutapa state and inspired the rise of numerous land barons that aggressively exploited the traditional *Nyai* clientele system in order to build power [9]. As early as the 1670s, a wealthy provincial Mutapa cattle baron called Changamire Dombolakonachimwango or Dombo for short was on the rise. By the 1680s, he was well advanced, so he first rebelled against the Mutapa state in 1684 before launching other aggressive military campaigns between 1684 and 1693 [2,52]. His impressive record at the battlefront eventually earned him and his immediate Karanga followers the nickname *Varozvi,* which literary translates to 'the destroyers' [7].

Through space and time, the nickname *Varozvi* was systematically negotiated and transformed from its military connotations into a ruling elite and fluid 'imagined community' simply identified as 'Rozvi' [2,7,33]. In this respect, naming was strategically weaponized to produce and promote an ethnic community that resonated well with both past and emerging networks of memory. Therefore, Changamire Dombo successfully maximized on naming patterns to create a strong sense of belonging and cultural continuity, which challenged and changed old lines of memory and identity. Once the name Rozvi was fully established, it extensively fluctuated in meaning through space and time [2,7,8]. For some, Rozvi was just a name for Changamire Dombo and his immediate military followers, while for others it meant anyone historically, politically, and territorially connected to this Changamire and his state. Thus, Dionizio de Mello e Castro and Antonio Pinto de Miranda had this to say:

While in charge of King Mucombue's herds, Changamire was instructed to drive them into the land of Orobze [Mello e Castro; Orobu in Pinto de Miranda]; there he rose in rebellion against the king having gathered together a great army; in consequence he is today the most powerful, the most dreaded and the most respected of all the chiefs who refuse to obey the emperors of Monomotapa, whom he has on several occasions defeated and routed in pitched battle. He is the absolute ruler over Abutua... [3].

Randles [3] further cites another Portuguese source that describes this Changamire rebel and his associated lands as follows:

"... Urobze lies a long way from Manica, it would take a month to reach it, it is said to be nearer the Cape of Correntes. The Africans call it Goromucuro; it lies to the west of Manica. The Kingdom abounds in the rolling veld plains [campinas vistozas planices]. There are huge herds... There are many birds called 'emas'

[ostriches]. There are also very few trees, if at all, and firewood is replaced by cow-dung dried in the sun…".

Despite the variable spelling errors of Rozvi as Orobze, Orobu and Urobze, the Portuguese still reasonably managed to trace Rozvi origins, territories and shifts in name meanings. Most importantly, through the cultural practice of naming, Rozvi elites gradually imbued their constructed or invented identities on all former Torwa territories until they completely submerged them.

Therefore, Changamire Dombo and his immediate followers should be credited for their wisdom to exploit ordinary names as metaphors for their new identity and to claim space. Soon after their northeastern military campaigns around the Mutapa state, the Rozvi quickly retreated southwestwards into Torwa territories, also called Abutua, Goromucuro/Guruuswa, or Butua. The actual dates for their arrival and political takeover are contested but they generally fall between AD 1685 and 1696 [1,2,52]. At least these dates provide us rough estimates of the time period that Khami-phase sites became entangled with the Rozvi. As shown in the Portuguese extracts highlighted above, once the Rozvi overpowered the Torwa dynasties, everything associated with the former gradually became Rozvi. In fact, whenever dominant groups choose to use their own toponyms as part of new land claims, the histories of associated subordinate groups ultimately suffer. This is because toponyms are notorious for melding history with geography and conflating place with dominant group identity [53,54]. Thus, names are not just passive 'artefacts'; rather, they are active forces that shape processes of claiming and constructing landscape around specific ideological versions of the past [53]. Yi [55] further elaborates that naming entails taking possession, in fact, it is a cultural method of remapping indigenous geography. Therefore, just by renaming themselves and associated places as 'Rozvi', their identities simultaneously became part of the landscape. A detailed appreciation of this critical political strategy enables us to meaningfully explain how Khami-phase sites suddenly became Rozvi symbols even though the sites clearly predate and partly overlap with this historical group's political formation.

Apart from exploiting naming patterns to objectify their emerging identities, Rozvi elites also simply chose to inherit and settle on the most prominent former Torwa capitals as part of placemaking. This was a simple, wise, and powerful political strategy to historically and materially transform Torwa places into Rozvi places. This strategic move has also been theoretically termed Dasein, meaning (in the context of human beings as 'there-beings') 'intense inhabitation', while others simply call it 'dwelling' [21,39,43,56,57]. Through the practice of building or merely caring for, cherishing, and even occupying dwellings already built by others, the identities of the dominant newcomers are often easily imbued into usurped places and landscapes. Henry [39] takes pains to clarify the complexity of this powerful cultural practice by arguing:

> "… we make space significant by 'dwelling', by building, by investing time in it, so that it ceases to be space. Space is transformed into place by dwelling. Yet what does dwelling entail? How do we dwell? I stress that dwelling can be nothing but human social engagement, and as much as it evokes notions of 'caring' and 'heeding', such engagement or being-in-the-world inevitably generates situations of social conflict in which tensions and contradictions of identity politics come to the fore".

Even Tilley [21] echoes similar sentiments by stipulating that domestic dwellings are the material media through which relations between self and society are both objectified and negotiated. A detailed appreciation of this logic or 'invisible bonding with place' certainly goes a long way in resolving the perennial challenge to archaeologically detecting Rozvi signatures from related Khami-phase sites in southwestern Zimbabwe. Despite having multiple forms of oral traditions and historical text affirming that Khami-phase sites, especially those in the Insiza district, are part of the Rozvi past, it has been quite difficult to articulate how the historical Rozvi actually relate to and claim ownership

of these ancient monuments [1,8,10,13–15]. This is the same challenge that prompted the renewed excavation of three former Rozvi capitals, namely, Danamombe (Figure 4), Naletale (Figure 5), and Zinjanja (Figure 6), illustrated on Figure 1 above.

Figure 4. Site of Danamombe (Source: Authors).

Figure 5. Site of Naletale (Source: Authors).

Figure 6. Site of Zinjanja (Source: Authors).

In brief, excavations conducted around these settlements [2,8], particularly sought to retrieve well-stratified radiocarbon dates and material culture that could be used to glean information on both Torwa and Rozvi cultural strata. Although certain radiocarbon dates retrieved from the selected research sites closely coincided with the Rozvi era of governance, AD 1685–1830 (see Tables S1 and S2), it was quite difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint other symbolic Rozvi 'finds/things' because the associated archaeological record largely remained homogenous [8,15]. However, excavation data clearly indicated that all the three research site foundations significantly predated Rozvi origins, meaning the initial builders were certainly not Rozvi by identity. Since the material record largely remained unchanged, the noted slight material culture variations are better explained in terms of shifts in trade and other design preferences. However, considering the power of dwelling as part of placemaking processes, we might as well confidently account for Rozvi ethnicity in this manner. Mere site dwelling was powerful enough for Rozvi elites to politically lay claim to all prestigious monumental architecture, thereby conflating their identities with these places. The Rozvi further consolidated their territorial influence by exploiting the power of storytelling, which significantly asserted their identities in public spaces, places, and memory.

As Palone [43] observes, since there is more than one dimension to storytelling, any failure to critically read, write, and understand all stories of the land is suicidal on our part. Through storytelling involving the use of diverse narratives, allegories, tales, folklores, legends, myths, and taboos, among others, the Rozvi systematically managed to inscribe their identities on the landscape. Hodza and Fortune [58] highlights some of the prominent Rozvi tales:

"The Rozvi, like many other groups, say that they came from a land called Guruuswa and from a place in that land called Manyanga... Their traditions tell us that they were accompanied on their travels by a voice which they called Tovela which led them on their way, keeping them safe from dangerous places. The voice could speak from any object it chose and we are told that it spoke through grass or trees or through a little child, unable as yet to speak for itself. The voice of a presence whom some say was that of the first Rozvi ever created, the founding father of the clan. Others say he was the first person ever to be created and that after his death his spirit accompanied the different groups from Guruuswa to the countries they chose. Tovela not only protected his people on their travels but gave them food as well. When they clapped in homage and supplication to him at a tree, portions of porridge, pots of milk, and combs of honey would come out of the ground. He also gave them medicines to become

invincible but not inaudible to their foes and to be long-lived. Tovela came to be called by other names by different groups such as Mwari. . .".

These narratives vividly connected their past with the broad Guruuswa landscape, the natural environment, and associated monumental settlements. Interestingly, the last Rozvi state king, called Chirisamhuru, ruled from the Khami-phase site of Manyanga, which is widely cited in numerous Rozvi oral traditions. Even today, a few spiritual Rozvi descendants still stay at Manyanga while others frequently visit it for their sacred rituals. Most importantly, several Zimbabwe Culture sites, (*madzimbahwe*) including Great Zimbabwe, sacred landscapes such as the Matobo hills, and various other mountains scattered across the Zimbabwean plateau are widely remembered in oral traditions and histories as Rozvi places [2,6]. Thus, through mere storytelling, the Rozvi managed to extensively claim much wider landscapes and places across the Zimbabwean plateau and beyond (see Figure 7 below). Hodza and Fortune [58] also highlight other oral histories that were collected from several Rozvi chiefs in the following manner:

"...When the Rozvi reached this country, they found Munhumutapa ruling it. They attacked him and drove him away. This was the first fight in which they had ever engaged. After Munhumutapa's flight, they subdued all the chiefs who had been subject to him. They are said first to have gone north, to Pfura, then east, to Nyanga, then south to Manyika and Bikita, and finally west to Mberengwa (Belingwe). Tradition explains that the name Rozvi was given to them because they disturbed the lives of everyone, man and beast alike. All this is said to have happened under the rule of the first chief whom they remember, called Changamire. . .".

Another tradition collected from Mbava, a Rozvi chief well advanced in age goes as follows:

"The Warozwi came with a great army and conquered all the country. King Chiduku of the Warozwi ruled over the country of the Mawungwe, the Manyika, the Mabocha, the Wanyashanu, the Makombe and the Mazezuru. After this the Warozwi were the over-lords of the whole country, and chose all the new chiefs. If any chief died, his successor had to be confirmed by the Warozwi. If the people chose a new chief without consulting their over-lord, it was said in common parlance that they had no chief, but the one selected or approved by the Warozwi was considered to be a true chief. . . When a chief died the people went and announced it to the Warozwi, and the Warozwi sent heralds with black and white calico and the skin of a sheep. When the heralds arrived, they anointed the new chief, probably the one chosen by the people. They anointed him with oil and clothed him with the black and white calico. . . I remembered that when Mbava was born the Portuguese had been in the country for a long time, and so the king of the Warozwi used to send his servants with elephants' tusks to buy calico for the robing of new chiefs. . . The place called Zimbabgwe is a holy place. Mbava says that in the old days only chosen people were allowed to enter it and they only entered once to offer sacrifice. All the common people stayed at the foot of the mount. . . sacrifice of three or four black hornless cattle and elephants' tusks and gold and black and white calico" [59].

Such stories asserted complex Rozvi identity construction processes by emphasizing their spiritual dexterity, power over the landscape and its people, prolonged governance, and supreme control over all chiefs through space and time. Stories highlight what communities value in the landscape, they project the intimate relationship between people and places, and above all help generations to remember their ancestral places and landscapes. Hence, Palone [43] draws our attention to the fact that placeless stories lack power and meaning, leaving readers with little space to imagine themselves. In this respect, place and landscape act as some kind of historical text or grids upon which narrative memories are anchored, they help people to remember and they foster in people a deep sense of

identification with and belonging to a group [21,39]. Above all, and for purposes of this paper, stories particularly help us to find that which we cannot find through conventional methods in archaeology [18]. Put differently, stories constitute the invisible bond between people, places, and landscapes; they cement or capture the landscape in a much more robust and intimate manner. Henceforth, indigenous stories, the land, material culture, and people are always bound; any isolated approach towards any of these social and physical elements is tragically destined to fail, become frustrating, misleading, and totally confusing [21,43,54,55].
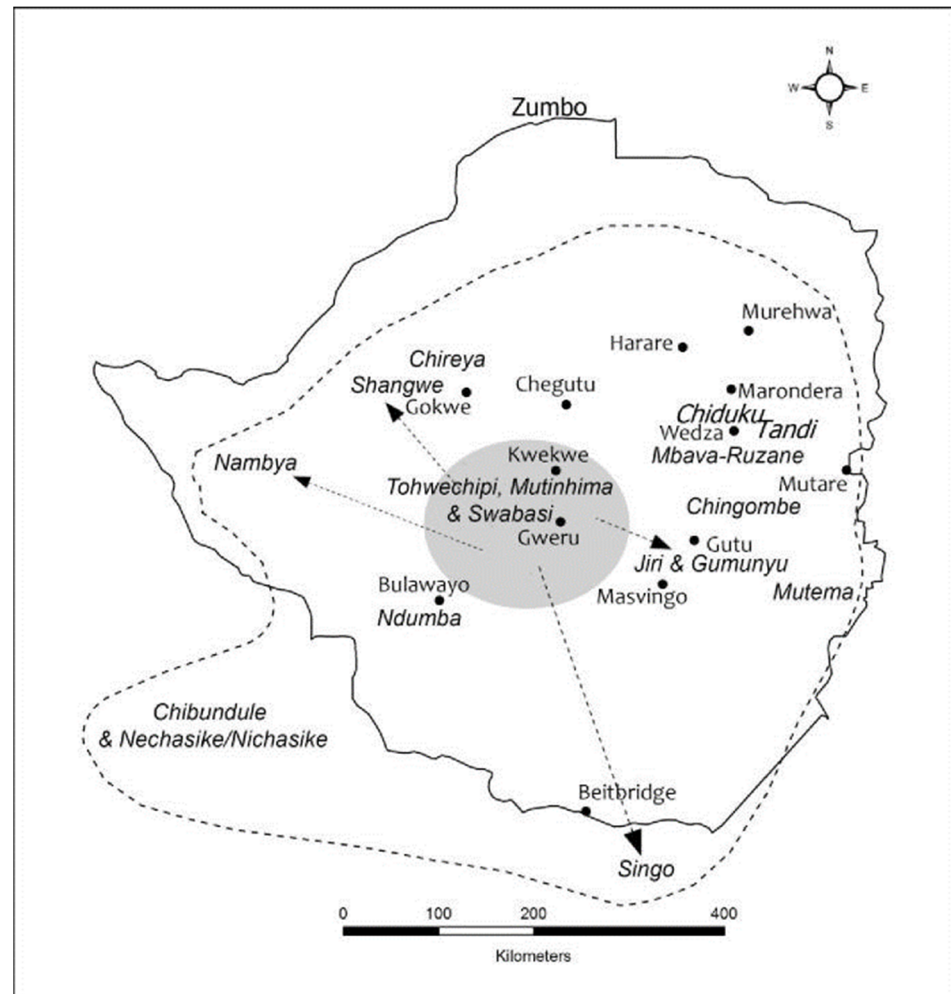
Figure 7. Map showing the core and broader landscapes associated with Rozvi identities.

7. Conclusions

As the post-colonial mindset and methodologies continue to shape archaeological thinking today, novel frameworks to free and untangle African historiography from colonial rhetoric are increasingly emerging and gaining momentum. For instance, calls to re-imagine precolonial sociopolitical landscapes in Africa using indigenous epistemic perspectives are a welcome development. While colonialism undoubtedly denigrated and perpetuated calculated racial scholarship and biases against colonized societies, it is important to also acknowledge it. It is worth noting that aligning with post-colonial or indigenous paradigm shifts is not to take away from the efforts of earlier scholars. They were children of their times, informed by the dominant theoretical and methodological environments existing then. Though disagreeing with our present sensibilities, some of the colonial perspectives explored above were indeed the prevailing academic norms less than a century ago.

Therefore, despite the initial 'aggressive tone' set out in this article, we acknowledge that not all aspects of Western colonial scholarship were mischievous, disrespectful, and hateful to African people and their histories. On the contrary, and again using archaeological science as a lens, scientific insights into the past have enabled us to examine ancient African societies that would have otherwise remained inaccessible or nearly impossible to explore beyond contemporary memory. Given the myriad biases and distortions typical of oral traditions, we cannot dare imagine how complicated it would have been for historians and archaeologists alike to comprehend diverse and conflicting narratives emanating from adamant indigenous communities seeking to legitimize their biased claims for land, identity, power, and cultural achievements among other things. With that in mind, we however remain unapologetic about the urgent need to push some of our 'prehistory archaeology' colleagues out of their false comfort zones so as to draw them much closer to indigenous communities' past realities. Material culture, even when put under advanced microscopes, is not enough to inform us about dynamic processes in the past. Hence, there is need for us to reinvest more towards exploring the invisible, spiritual, and intangible dimensions of past societies.

This paper underscores the need for archaeologists to closely engage with indigenous epistemologies and ontologies when examining processes from the past that situationally produced identities, objects, and landscapes. No matter how rigorous archaeological scientific methods become, our reading of material culture and landscapes is never complete without alternative histories that provide invaluable contextual meanings. In fact, a strict 'scientific' or material-based approach to the past largely obscures ideological meanings that relate to those 'things' we see, touch, and verify [18,21,42]. This growing realization is prompting the prioritization of metaphors as part of attempts to centralize 'people' instead of 'objects/things' as well as the 'how?' instead of the 'what?' questions [18,20,21]. Metaphors particularly open up new ways of thinking and talking about 'things' (material culture] and they help us explore those processes and practices that ultimately produced the stable entities at our disposal. More precisely, metaphors significantly enrich our accounts of the past by bringing to light those processes and historical contexts that produced fluid identities, societies, landscapes, and meanings of material culture [20]. This approach also helps us move away from the traditional inherited frameworks that encourage essentialism and a static view of the past towards social memory, identities, and agency [16,19,60]. In this context, the social and ideological dimensions of landscapes come to the fore as landscapes become 'houses' of myths, legends, folklores, narratives, tales, and local stories [17,18]. For too long, these crucial and complex indigenous discourses have been marginalized, dismissed, and ignored in archaeological knowledge production processes, yet they provide some of the deepest and best insights into the intimate relationship between people, places, and landscapes.

This submission has also advocated for the prioritization of vernacular languages and associated meanings in archaeological and heritage research endeavors [18–20,47]. Firstly, this paves way for multivocality by giving space to the once-silenced voices whose past we seek to study and understand. Secondly, indigenous community views enable us to systematically counter the colonial library by creating alternative lines of thinking. Last but not least, indigenous language proficiency always gives external researchers direct access to 'closely guarded community secrets' often embedded in complex myths, legends, proverbs, and riddles. As Shennan [61] observes, who we are affects how we perceive the world, so once we are able to unlock indigenous language barriers, we gain access into the 'Other's worldview', which naturally refreshes our traditional professional biases. Smith [23] further adds that indigenous languages are central to research inquiries because they carry a lot of complex meanings, realities, and histories of people, places, and events through cultural systems such as naming patterns. In support, Palone [43] argues that interactions between culture, language, and landscape naturally form the basis of all human stories. Since we are particularly keen on gathering and generating new stories, it is key to always bear in mind that our reading and understanding of the landscape is never complete enough

without a full appreciation of the associated indigenous community perceptions of the same landscape. This is the kind of thinking that should now guide our interrogation and interpretation of landscapes, including the Rozvi archaeological past in southwestern Zimbabwe. An approach of this nature will certainly go a long way in addressing the notorious absence of fit between oral traditions and the archaeological record.

To crown it all, contested meanings such as Rozvi claims to all *madzimbabwe* (archaeological monuments) and the disparities noted between their origins and related site chronologies can now be meaningfully explained. By considering the Rozvi as a very fluid, dynamic, and imagined community, rather than a static, frozen, and bound social entity in which to root essentialized identities, we create room to informatively account for their complex archaeological past. Thus, through simply exploiting the power of naming, storytelling, and dwelling as part of their ethnic identity construction and placemaking processes, the Rozvi systematically and ideologically laid claim to vast territories and associated prestigious material culture. Their intimate connection with objects, places, and landscapes was premised on a wealth of IKS that are 'archaeologically invisible' but 'epistemologically accessible'. Therefore, in order to effectively denote Rozvi archaeological signatures, one needs to closely engage an interdisciplinary framework such as historical archaeology. Fortunately, historical archaeology has already made its mark by becoming sensitive to local needs, sensibilities, and structures. Most importantly, it recognizes that oral histories can sometimes differ from archaeological narratives, which is quite positive and realistic [17,18,62]. Tilley [21] further reinforces that while imaginations of identities constantly change, associated material symbolism may remain fixed through time. Hence, symbols of identities such as the land, objects, monuments, and landscapes, among other things, may remain fixed, while related ideas, beliefs, emotions, values, and memories constantly change. Simply put, objects, monuments, the land, and landscapes are active agents of identities, but they also double-up as ever-evolving indigenous archives, repositories of social memory, and mnemonic devices [21,43,44,55].

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