The only written account of Great Zimbabwe, a complex of stone-walled structures located in south-central Zimbabwe (20° 16’ 23” S, 30° 56’ 04” E), dating from the early second millennium AD, is by the chronicler João de Barros (Beach 1980; Mudenge 1988; Pikirayi 2001). Many scholars regard this as the only window into Great Zimbabwe’s past, since the site was apparently unknown until its rediscovery by the Europeans in the late nineteenth century (Burke 1969)—a process that would unleash destructive antiquarian investigations (Bent 1893; Hall 1905; Hall and Neal 1902) and settler appropriation of the site.

A reevaluation of Barros’s account opens up Great Zimbabwe to developments associated with recent histories, not only within its immediate landscape but also in the broader context of the expansion of its culture to distant regions of the Zimbabwe plateau. The document mentions a prince called Burrom, ruler of a state called Butua, based at a site identified as Great Zimbabwe. During a survey of Great Zimbabwe’s water resources conducted by a team from the University of Pretoria and local research institutions, we became fascinated by a landform called Boroma by the local communities (Pikirayi et al. 2016).

Furthermore, a historical archaeological study of other cultural landscapes some distance from Great Zimbabwe reveals interesting local dynamics that connect the site with developments in distant parts of the Zimbabwe plateau. Local histories from the Zimuto Communal Lands where the site of Chizhou is located point to Zimbabwe Culture communities migrating into south-central sections of the Zimbabwe plateau from the north. Such histories have remained subaltern due to lack of interrogation of the archaeological record. These, if fully exploited, have considerable potential for understanding cultural
and sociopolitical developments of the last four centuries or so. The histories of Great Zimbabwe are inscribed on the various landscapes of south-central Zimbabwe and beyond, showing how transformations that took place within Zimbabwe Culture after the sixteenth century may have occurred. I present both of the sites, highlighting the alternative histories that they tell about Great Zimbabwe and the spread of its culture on the basis of listening to local histories and traditions.

Zimbabwe in Recent History

This chapter reports work in progress, based on current research investigating the last half millennium of cultural developments following the end of occupation of Great Zimbabwe (Pikirayi 2013). Entitled “Great Zimbabwe in Recent History: Historical Archaeologies of South-Central Zimbabwe,” the project attempts to address the origins of later Karanga and other regional histories that are connected with the last four centuries of Great Zimbabwe’s existence. These histories are not only vital in understanding what could have happened to Great Zimbabwe but also critical in telling the story of its development from much earlier times. Archaeology, in collaboration with other disciplines, plays a useful role in writing the story of Great Zimbabwe and relating it to other transformative global developments of the early modern era, when the site was clearly experiencing decline and loss of complexity. Local histories are extremely useful in understanding sociopolitical dynamics on the Zimbabwe plateau, especially for the most recent periods. However, not many of these have been used to study Great Zimbabwe from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, when the site became known to the European world (Mazarire 2013). Some of these local histories tell stories of decline or collapse of a sociopolitical system once based at Great Zimbabwe, which may not be evident from its stratigraphy or material culture remains (see, e.g., Pikirayi 2013).

The key research question is to characterize developments associated with post-sixteenth-century Great Zimbabwe and the associated human population dynamics in south-central Zimbabwe plateau that account for the abandonment or the processes associated with the people leaving the site and its immediate landscape. The project addresses several specific research questions:

1. What were the characteristics of the landscape in which Great Zimbabwe is located and how did it influence historical developments during the period 1500–1900 AD?
2. What local histories directly relate to the landscapes of south-central Zimbabwe, and what do these say about Great Zimbabwe after the sixteenth century?

3. Great Zimbabwe was not in its prime when Portuguese accounts refer to it in the middle of the sixteenth century and certainly seems to have lost its significance considerably by the late nineteenth century when Europeans first set sight on it (Bent 1893; Burke 1969). How do we explain abandonment and demise in the context of Great Zimbabwe?

4. The repopulation of south-central Zimbabwe since the seventeenth century seems to have targeted particular ecological and related niches. How do we explain this dynamic and the impact on Great Zimbabwe?

5. Only parts of Great Zimbabwe were inhabited when the first European antiquarians commenced investigations on the site. How do we explain this?

The primary objective of this project is to structure a formal approach to investigating the history of Great Zimbabwe (Figure 7.1), whose earlier past is largely known from archaeology. Such an approach would move the focus of in-
vestigation from the core parts of the site to the peripheral settlements and beyond—the immediate granite landscape and territorial hinterland. The broader objective is to interrogate the landscapes of south-central Zimbabwe to provide new and more recent histories of Great Zimbabwe.

To date, archival research aimed at compiling a local history digital archive of south-central Zimbabwe, to be correlated with the environmental and archaeological record generated from planned future landscape surveys and excavations, has been conducted. Oral history surveys aimed at collecting additional local and regional histories of south-central Zimbabwe that may be linked with Great Zimbabwe have been sampled geographically, following preliminary consultations with traditional and local leaders and some reading of available local histories.

The Conceptual Frame

This chapter focuses on two issues related to the treatment of recent histories of the southern Zimbabwe plateau. First, it provides a response to the anthropological critique by Joost Fontein (2006) on archaeologists and interpretation of Great Zimbabwe. Second, it provides a new critique of the “Refuge” phenomenon, used by earlier archaeologists and historians in characterizing the terminal periods of the Zimbabwe Culture (Pikirayi 1993, 2000, 2001, 2004). I discuss each of these in turn.

An anthropological critique of the archaeology and cultural heritage management of Great Zimbabwe refers to “the silence of unheard voices and untold stories,” “the unrepresented pasts of local communities,” and “the silence of anger—the alienation—and desecration of Great Zimbabwe” (Fontein 2006: 12–13). Fontein sees a lack of representation of local histories, not only in the literature but also in museum displays and in archaeological narratives (Pikirayi 2001), including heritage management reports (Ndoro 2005).

From a scholarly perspective, Great Zimbabwe’s “silence” (Fontein 2006) comes, first, from the interpretation of the site’s chronology, dominated by radiocarbon dating, which presents it essentially as a product of prehistory; second, the failure to understand post-1500 Portuguese accounts, although some of these accounts make references to the site; and third, the meaning of the spread of the Zimbabwe tradition elsewhere on the Zimbabwe plateau.

The second broader context, which is intricately linked to the first, is the contested ownership of Great Zimbabwe, which brings to the fore both community and local histories. Because scholars have presented a monolithic account
of Great Zimbabwe largely based on the interpretation of the site’s stratigraphy and material culture, the dominance of archaeological narratives over other narratives in presenting the story of the site is obvious. Local and regional histories remain marginalized, yet they provide complex stories of human movements and interactions within the broader cultural landscape in which Great Zimbabwe is situated, where alternative and richer histories are located (see, e.g., Fontein 2006; Mazarire 2013; Ndoro 2005). These landscapes tell the story of Great Zimbabwe, which the stone structures and the poor stratigraphic context may no longer be able to reveal.

Our engagement with local communities around Great Zimbabwe required that we listen to their narratives of the places. Listening became an exercise in absorption of cultural meanings, including readings of the landscapes, the stories, narratives, and histories that they tell us. Listening to narratives about water, we realized, has to do with exploring the concept of place, sense of place, spirit of place, place-making, placelessness and nonplace, and almost everything to do with place (see Harvey 1996; Hayden 1988; Relph 1976, 1981).

Given the coincidence between “Burrom” in Portuguese accounts and the Boroma hills adjacent to Great Zimbabwe, I decided to investigate the history behind this term, however vague and patchy it appeared to be. The conclusions presented here are only tentative. Given that clan leaders living nearby have a vested interest in the landscape, they may or may not divulge much, as they sometimes frugally referred to Boroma merely as “one of the hills, alongside Sviba, and Mavazhe” (Simbarashe Munyimo, personal communication March 2016).

This chapter also offers a critique of the characterizations of the period in Zimbabwean history, which normally coincides with the spread of Europeans worldwide and the reporting of local events in Western texts (see Pikirayi 1993). The period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century on the Zimbabwe plateau remains poorly understood, often subsumed under the term “Refuge Period,” in reference to sites connected with nineteenth-century Nguni raids (Huffman 1971, 1974a, 1974b; Summers 1958) or to interethnic fighting, where different groups defended themselves against hostile neighbors. Stone structures, mostly rough in construction and often located on a hilltop, are attributed to this period and interpreted as refuge settlements or fortifications. The conditions generated by these events are often regarded as marking an end to the Zimbabwe Culture. This has become the general archaeological as well as historical characterization of the period in the Zimbabwe plateau since the sixteenth century.

This period is largely covered by detailed oral histories and traditions for
most parts of the Zimbabwe plateau, especially in areas not reported in European accounts (Beach 1980, 1988; Pikirayi 1993, 2004) until the end of the nineteenth century. Despite the rich oral sources, historical narratives are dominated by events connected with Nguni migrations (*mfecane*) from southeastern Africa during the early to mid-nineteenth century. Thus, nineteenth-century European settlers reported on the impoverished state of indigenous Zimbabwe plateau communities, often living in refuge or fortified settlements (see, e.g., Bent 1893), and interpret these as a “decadent” development from the classical Zimbabwe Culture states. This biased view of Zimbabwe’s recent history is largely shaped by European perceptions of how both local and regional developments were perceived as an impediment to the colonial project.

To understand the demise of the Zimbabwe Culture, it is necessary to address the nature of transition from Great Zimbabwe to the Refuge Period. Research in northern Zimbabwe (Pikirayi 1993, 2009) has shown that the Zimbabwe Culture and Refuge communities clearly represented mutually exclusive entities, which has implications for other areas of the Zimbabwe plateau (Pikirayi 2004). In this chapter I use local knowledge around Chizhou Hill to reinterrogate the Refuge concept among the Karanga (southern Shona speakers) and attempt to understand the complex nature of the long-neglected historical archaeology of Zimbabwe in relation to recent developments in historical analysis.

The late historian David Beach wrote extensively about Shona history and made considerable use of oral traditions, particularly in areas of the Zimbabwe plateau not covered by Portuguese or English written sources (e.g., Beach 1980, 1983, 1984). A scholarly critique of these traditions suggests that richer historical textures can be realized when investigating sites of the recent past. Carefully treated, oral narratives or local histories can serve much the same purpose as written texts, as useful sources of historical and to a considerable extent archaeological information (e.g., Schmidt 1978, 2006, 2013). While it has long been acknowledged in African history that the major limitations of oral accounts are time depth, loss of memory, and strategic adaptation in the process of transmission, they are extremely useful sources of historical and archaeological information (see, e.g., Andah and Okpoko 1979; Jones and Russell 2012; Schmidt 2006; Vansina 1965, 1985; Whiteley 2002). Critical analysis shows that a much closer symmetry between these oral accounts and archaeology is possible than previously thought. The area in which Chizhou Hill is situated is rich in local histories about Karanga movements since at least the eighteenth century, and there are hilltop sites dated to this period. Moreover, the German traveler
Karl Mauch passed through the area in the early 1870s and made useful observations about the Karanga groups living in the area (Burke 1969, Mazarire 2013).

Case Studies

Two case studies, Boroma hills and Chizhou Hill, both in south-central Zimbabwe and connected in one way or the other with Great Zimbabwe, illustrate how listening to local histories and narratives shed completely different views on post-sixteenth/seventeenth-century developments on the south-central Zimbabwe Plateau.

Boroma Hills

Boroma, a granite batholith some five to six km southeast of Great Zimbabwe, is a place-name and has a history (Figure 7.2). However, it is apparently contested in local narratives (Fontein 2015). Interest in investigating this landform was circumstantial, triggered by our research on the water resources of Great Zimbabwe (Pikirayi et al. 2016). Its proximity to Great Zimbabwe raised considerable interest, given the sixteenth-century Portuguese accounts.

Figure 7.2. Water flowing from the Boroma hills, shown in the background. Photo by author.
The Boroma hills are a sacred landscape, where chiefs of the Duma clans are buried (Fontein 2015). Fontein conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork in 2005/2006 around Lake Mutirikwi and east of Great Zimbabwe and succeeded in highlighting the importance that local clans and communities attach to their ancestral lands. The chiefs in the area, especially those of the Mugabe clan, are buried in caves in Boroma, where sacred *mapa* (ancestral graves) are sited. The hills also lie at the boundary of the Murinye and Mugabe clans and are thus an intensely contested domain, especially in terms of claims to ancestral authority over land, knowledge of the sacred hills, caves, and springs, and particularly graves and burial practices. Around Boroma are other hills and rock shelters that contain numerous much older graves, including the dried remains of pre-Duma chiefs. Some of these remains were disturbed at Sviba Hill, when a cellphone company erected a network booster on its summit.

The Boroma hills are an important source of spring water, which irrigates fields in the eastern part of Great Zimbabwe and is now also used by the town of Nemwana, immediately west of Great Zimbabwe (Pikirayi et al. 2016). According to Fontein (2015:134), citing a traditional leader from the area, in the springs on Boroma hills "mysterious things happen; and 'strange sounds' of 'heavy rain,' or 'raging torrents,' or 'of cattle bellowing' and other animals." All this points toward the existence of water spirits. According to oral historical sources, Boroma was a ruler, a political dynasty, and a ruling house or family with claims to royalty (Beach 1980; Mudenge 1988).

The first references to Boroma relate to the Torwa or Butua state during the sixteenth century. According to secondhand Portuguese written accounts, Boroma is the only Torwa ruler we know by name ruling at Great Zimbabwe during that time (Beach 1980:200). According to these accounts, he was a subruler of the Monomotapa or Mutapa state, which we know was based in northern Zimbabwe and was a successor to Great Zimbabwe (Pikirayi 1993).

Another Boroma is mentioned as a subruler in Rozvi oral traditions dating to 1800, west of the upper Tugwi River, in south-central Zimbabwe. The Rozvi, who established a state in this region dating from the mid-seventeenth century and succeeded the Torwa, are reported to have defeated him. There are suggestions that this Boroma was linked to the one mentioned by the Portuguese in connection with Great Zimbabwe. Ndarikure, a stone-walled site located in the upper Shashe, is mentioned in connection with the Rozvi. The site resembles Great Zimbabwe in terms of architectural style. It has not been investigated archaeologically, so it is probable that it may even date earlier
than the seventeenth century, coinciding with the expansion of the Zimbabwe culture northward.

In northern Zimbabwe, Boroma is mentioned in connection with a ruling house of the Mutapa State, between 1704 and 1868. This house contested for the throne with another house, Nyamhandu. According to Mudenge (1988), the Mutapa state was a confederacy during that period and had lost control of the Zimbabwe plateau. Using oral traditions and Portuguese written sources, Beach (1980:144, 146) locates the state in the Zambezi lowlands, farther north. What is interesting is that the name “Boroma” is imprinted not only around Great Zimbabwe but also within the region(s) dominated by the culture once based at Great Zimbabwe. It is therefore not just a place-name but a name whose significance resonates around the site and landscape of Great Zimbabwe and apparently beyond it.

**Chizhou Hill**

Located in south-central Zimbabwe, some 80 km north of Great Zimbabwe in the Zimuto Communal Lands, Chizhou Hill is an example of a site that can be used to interrogate narratives about local responses to Karanga and other group expansion in the region in the period leading to the nineteenth century (Figure 7.3).

![Figure 7.3. View of Chizhou Hill. Photo by author.](image)
In early 2000 preliminary archaeological surveys were conducted around and on the hill to determine the nature of settlement and the cultural identity of the site (Pikirayi 2004). Associated oral information and local histories were collected from the nearby Gurajena village. Ceramic typology tentatively dates Chizhou from the eighteenth century onward. Literally meaning “small elephant,” Chizhou is linked to the Nemarundwi dynasty, which claims origin from the Mount Fura region, in northern Zimbabwe. This region is part of Mukaranga, the heartland of the Mutapa state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Beach 1980). The Mutapa state represents the northern expansion of the culture once based at Great Zimbabwe, in the southern portions of the Zimbabwe plateau (Beach 1980; Mudenge 1988). The Nemarundwi dynasty’s links with Chizhou and claims of northern origins suggest migrations connected with the demise of the Mutapa state since the seventeenth century (Pikirayi 1993). So far this is the only known hill in south-central Zimbabwe with oral accounts claiming direct connections with a state entity.

Archaeological remains are concentrated in three areas: the base of the hill to the west, the hill summit, and the hilltop area on the north-facing side. The foot of the hill features a scatter of potsherds and lumps of house plaster (dhaka), stretching more than 100 m along the hill and more or less the same distance from the hill. Once thickly covered by acacia trees, this area has been cleared for modern settlements and cultivation. The extent of archaeological remains suggests that this was a village, stretching up the hill slope toward the summit.

The settlement on the hilltop is on the northern end, just off the summit, easily accessible from the western side. Some open space, about 80 m² in size, is demarcated in the south, east, and north by massive boulders in a roughly circular to oval formation. Poorly coursed and largely collapsed stone walling, about 1 m high and 1 m thick, blocks spaces between the boulders, leaving only an opening to the north. This probably served as an entrance, where poorly coursed, freestanding, short lengths of walling lean onto the boulders on either side (Figure 7.4). There are at least four house mounds inside, each about 1.5 m across, as well as another stone wall, about 3 m long and apparently coursed in Great Zimbabwe architectural style (Pikirayi 2004). This was clearly a residential area.

Archaeological remains from the summit of the hill are indicative of functions related to defense. The summit, located immediately to the south, contains massive interlocking boulders with a cave-tunnel underneath. Rough, collapsed stone walling blocks the western entrance to the cave. The cave-tunnel, more
than 20 m long and over 2 m wide in places, opens again in the east, where it was once blocked around the entrance by untrimmed stones, now collapsed. Its roof is at least 1.5 m high. Archaeological remains inside and outside the cave are insubstantial. The potsherds and iron slag found in the interior and immediately outside both entrances suggest limited use of the site. Two short lengths of stone walls running north-south and abutting boulders on either side seem to have blocked access to the uppermost part of the hill, where there is a circular dhaka feature about 1 m in diameter—possibly a lookout point. Elders from the nearby Gurajena village say that the area was used as a refuge during the nineteenth century. Associated pottery described in Pikirayi (2004) is very variable, with the type closest to the Zimbabwe Culture displaying a reddish brown exterior and grayish black interior, decorated on the neck region with alternate triangular panels of red ochre and graphite burnish.

Several hills in the vicinity of Chizhou have roughly coursed stone walls, associated with defensive settlements or refuges used during the nineteenth...
century. These are the more substantial Mazambara Hills, about 15–20 km southwest of Chizhou, traditionally associated with the Zimuto dynasty. The Zimuto people are reported to have lived in these hills during the turbulent times connected with the Ndebele raids in the nineteenth century (Mr Jacob Matikiti, personal communication, February 28, 2000).

Interpretation and Discussion

Oral accounts collected by Beach (1980) suggest the settlement at Chizhou Hill dates from 1760. The open area immediately north of the summit offered less defensive advantages than the summit itself. It contained substantial housing in an enclosure-like formation with some of the walls neatly coursed, which would suggest the presence of an important person and his or her family. Although this area can be accessed fairly easily from the western side, stone walling on the southern side serves as a barrier, limiting access to two narrow passages. Its location also took into account security considerations. The summit, which is difficult to access, undoubtedly served defensive functions, including the blocking walls, the limited artifactual evidence, and the presence of large ceramic vessels in one of the caves, which would be ideal utensils for storage under conditions of siege. While caves are sometimes used for religious and other ritual activities such as rainmaking and ancestral veneration, the location of these structures and features makes such functions less likely.

While the use of hilltops in southern African goes back to the late first millennium (see, e.g., Huffman 1986), it is necessary to determine the nature of transformations that occurred after 1500 AD among the Karanga that generated conditions characteristic of the Refuge Period (Summers 1958), as not all these sites are products of Nguni migrations or more specifically Ndebele raids during the nineteenth century.

The situation in northern Zimbabwe after 1600 AD shows a clear break from the earlier Zimbabwe Culture and the local Mahonje tradition, associated with political instability in the Mutapa state during the seventeenth century (Pikirayi 1993:70). On the contrary, while an apparent break with the pasts exists in southern Zimbabwe, there is also evidence of cultural continuity to the present, based on similarities in material culture and, in some contexts, continuation of stone-building traditions. However, when the historical experiences of recent Karanga in south-central Zimbabwe are considered, we also notice some subtle changes within the Zimbabwe Culture that eventually led to its demise. The
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links with the Mutapa state in northern Zimbabwe are of particular interest. These are to be found in local dynastic histories and oral traditions.

Local Histories and Group Origins

Three Karanga dynasties—the Gurajena, Nemarundwi, and Zimuto—arrived in the Zimuto area in the middle of the eighteenth century (Beach 1980; Pikirayi 2004). Prior to their arrival, this area was occupied and controlled by the Rozvi, whose remnants are identified as the Chademana people (Beach 1980:274). Beach (1980:300) provides a detailed treatment of the oral histories, suggesting that the Gurajena people initially settled in the southern part, near the Mazambara Hills, when they arrived. This would soon change with the subsequent arrival of the Zimuto and Nemarundwi, triggering group dispersal. Beach (1980:291, 1994a:145, 168, 1994b) dates these developments to the second half of the eighteenth century.

The dynastic histories of these groups point to initial intergroup fighting, which means that some of their early settlements could have been used as refuges. There is also a link between some dynasties and certain hills; for example, the Zimuto people are said to have lived within and around the Mazambara Hills. According to the traditions collected by Beach (1980, 1994a, 1994b), as well oral accounts that I collected in the late 1990s and during the current fieldwork, the Nemarundwi people are said to have arrived from the northern Zimbabwe plateau. Informants mention Mount Fura, some 500 km to the north, suggesting a migration from an area occupied by the Mutapa state (Pikirayi 1993), a successor to Great Zimbabwe. The Nemarundwi are said to have lived on and around the Chizhou Hill, in south-central Zimbabwe. They were soon joined by the Gurajena people from the east, who intermarried with them and were given a place to settle near the hill (Isaac Makombe, personal communication, March 1988).

In 1872 Karl Mauch passed through the area “between N and NNE to Maku-rudsena [Gurajena], rather to one of his small kraals nestling close to a granite kopje, which has a white appearance when seen from a distance” (Burke 1969:207). The only hill in the area with such prominence is Chizhou. The remains associated with nineteenth-century Gurajena villages, located by traditional elders about 1 km southwest of Chizhou Hill, are not easy to identify: grain bins are continuously built and rebuilt on these surfaces to such an extent that it is difficult to isolate modern sherds and house structures from earlier
structures and other cultural material. The present location of the village is less than a kilometer away, on the upper edges of a small stream flowing south and on the western side of a smaller range (Biravira/Musosi). This range also has traces of potsherds in places, suggesting the existence of past settlement. Thus, by 1890 small villages in the Zimuto area were sited on hilltops and hill slopes (see Beach 1980:picture opposite 210). Although the Ndebele, one of the Nguni groups who migrated from Zululand and settled on the Zimbabwe plateau, were raiding the area south of Great Zimbabwe in 1872 (see Burke 1969:211 ff.), the Gurajena people were worried about a different problem. In 1871 their settlements were destroyed and their cattle were driven off by the Bengulu (Burke 1969:208). This generally explains why traditions of Ndebele raiding are rather uncommon in the area and why settlements are not exclusively located on hilltops.

The Broader Context

Although there is close similarity between the archaeology from Chizhou and other contemporary sites in the region, site variability is explicitly brought out by the historical contexts, which are particular to each site. The historical evidence suggests that we are looking at shifting settlement systems in response to political and security considerations. It is in this milieu that we must understand the demise of the Zimbabwe Culture after the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese refer to Great Zimbabwe and the prince Burrom.

From available evidence, it appears that the transformation of the Zimbabwe Culture since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries AD was a gradual process. It is possible to interpret the relevant archaeological evidence with the assistance of historical sources, especially written records and oral traditions. Some historical events may provide clues such as changes in the nature and form of material culture items and aspects connected to the use of space at some archaeological sites. Following the demise of the Mutapa and Torwa states (which represented the Zimbabwe Culture in both material culture and settlement pattern), the Zimbabwe plateau witnessed the emergence of comparatively smaller polities defined along totemic lines (Beach 1980). These nucleated around the ruling dynasty and controlled small territories. A territory always belonged to the dominant totem. The demise of the Mutapa and Rozvi states resulted in small to major migrations of population, from the areas formerly under their control to the southern and the northern edges of the Zimbabwe plateau. Very few of these migrating groups would claim to have found the land that they eventually occupied.
empty. The more powerful groups often displaced smaller, weaker ones, who in turn, moved some distance away. Other groups were simply absorbed through marriage or allowed to settle nearby. This movement is a complex process that has only been documented on a very general scale (Beach 1980:279–317).

How and when did the elite stone buildings decline and what replaced them? Why do most settlements appear to have been located on the hilltops during this time? What happened to the typical Great Zimbabwe–style pottery? The decline of the Zimbabwe Culture is initially inferred from the disappearance of the tradition of building neat stone walling. In the area of the Mutapa state this occurred during the sixteenth century. However, Great Zimbabwe material culture is seen there in contexts from the seventeenth century and later, suggesting that the stone-building tradition might have been replaced by new forms of settlement construction (Pikirayi 1993). With the decline of state authority, capital and provincial centers may have declined accordingly, as they lost some of their administrative and political functions. In fact, it was no longer necessary for people to generate the wealth required to build such centers once central authority had declined.

This decline might have been accelerated by a decrease in population, especially in the heart of the Mutapa state, during the seventeenth century. This also meant a loss of territory and a reduction in the court size of the Mutapa rulers. With the movement of Zimbabwe Culture communities away from the core of the state, political organization may have assumed a three-level form, such as petty chief (small territorial chief), village head, and family head. This is difficult to see archaeologically, however, as these levels are represented by settlements that are generally of the same size (Huffman 1986:295). The founding of new settlements elsewhere reflects a sociopolitical organization that was not synonymous with a state-level organization. Political control was probably based on the family unit. Thus, in terms of the internal arrangement of such settlements, a ruler’s residence was situated close to those of his immediate relatives (wives and sisters). The ruler’s residence was surrounded by commoner habitation, constituting a village, usually based around an extended family and incorporating members of the same totem. Political control was vested in the families who had previously been connected to the ruling houses and who, because of leadership and seniority, had led the dynasty or group away from the core of the state. This movement was necessitated either by defeat in a conflict over leadership or by the desire to settle in new peaceful lands. The Nema-rundwi dynasty discussed above is a case in point.
The preferences for settlement location of such migrants are difficult to judge, given the limited studies connected with historical period sites, but one would expect a continued association between the elite and hilltops and the commoners and the base or foot of hills. This symbolic link between hills/mountains and rulers was still regarded as important during the more recent historical period, but it is important to bear in mind other factors.

Hills also served additional functional roles as refuges, especially in times of war. Prominent hills could be used for ordinary settlements or for defensive purposes. Intergroup fighting during this time surely dictated that some settlements be sited on hilltops rather than on low ground. In addition, hills were often associated with rainmaking and other religious activities.

Another problem is what happened to Great Zimbabwe–tradition material culture, as exemplified by its pottery, with well-burnished/painted designs. One would expect remnants of this style among the smaller groups that were once part of the tradition. However, this is not the case. The reasons for this absence may be because pottery has been associated with a high level of sociopolitical and economic organization since the twelfth century, so its appearance was synonymous with state-level organization. Loss of sociopolitical and economic authority probably meant that some of the pottery no longer served the same functions. The late historical period pottery might therefore be expected to be much simpler, reflecting only the basic traits inherited from earlier periods.

Beach appropriately summarizes some of the major issues discussed here:

The migrations in the centre and south of the plateau do indeed show a movement towards a less complex way of life than had been offered by the states. Nevertheless, this was not a new development, nor were these small unities a debased or fragmented form of the state. On the contrary, they were in the same tradition not only of those small territories that had co-existed with the states in their heyday, but . . . with the original Shona settlements in the beginning of the Later Iron Age, or even with the political formations of the Early Iron Age. Seen in this light, therefore, the new settlers were reverting to the mainstream of Shona politics and society from which the state forming period had been a diversion. (Beach 1984:50)

The availability of oral historical data presents a platform to ask more meaningful questions pertaining to a particular archaeological site than a prehistoric site would allow. It is inappropriate to categorize sites like Chizhou as simply Refuge Period settlements, as they served for more than defensive functions.
The historical archaeologies connected with more recent events are less implicit, especially in the absence of written texts. However, this apparent constraint can be minimized by careful handling of the oral texts, some of which refer to archaeological data. If Chizhou Hill represents the processes of settlement connected with the movements of the Karanga from the Mutapa state to south-central Zimbabwe and in the process leading to the reestablishment of the Zimbabwe Culture, what do the Boroma hills tell us about Great Zimbabwe? In my view, there is too much coincidence between the Boroma hills and Boroma the ruler based at Great Zimbabwe and thus a strong possibility that a connection exists between these two.

Fontein’s (2015) central theme is immanence of the past and materiality of belonging. He identified remains of pottery, stone walling, and pre-Duma graves when he visited the sacred hills of Boroma in 2006. This points to not only the immanence of many pasts in the materialities of place but also to the continuation in meaning, practice, and rule that these can engender and make possible. The study of Boroma is about place-making and community identity (see, e.g., Hayden 1988 on suppressed cultural histories of ethnic minorities and women in Los Angeles). Places make memories cohere in complex ways. Further, according to Relph (1976), memories also make places cohere: the formal recognition of these places through restoration and preservation can be a powerful way to reinforce community identity. According to Jones and Russell (2012), memory is a transient product of the activities of remembering and reminiscing, which take place in the context of social interaction and interactions between people and their environments (see also Halbwachs 1992; Mills and Walker 2008). Furthermore, the extent to which social memory is mediated by mnemonic devices such as images, objects, oral histories, stories, folklore, myths, events, and places or sites depends to some degree on how far removed people are from direct experience of the events, people, and places concerned (Jones and Russell 2012).

From the mid-1990s onward, scholars have increasingly paid attention to the complex relationship of people to places following acute global conditions of exile, displacement, tight immigration controls, and struggles by indigenous peoples and cultural minorities for ancestral homelands, land rights, and retention of sacred places. However, not much work has been done on the ethnography and archaeology of place to understand how people actually live in, perceive, and invest with meaning the places they identify as home. Feld and Basso (1996) demonstrate the ways in which people experience, express, imag-
ine, and know the places in which they live. When we refer to intergroup fighting or conflicts in precolonial African history, we often talk about movement to another place as one of the outcomes but always forget about the negative impact of such displacement. This also produces memory in relation to specific forms of experience, such as war, trauma, political oppression, loss of places, and so on (see, e.g., Schmidt 2010).

In archaeological contexts, place-making is about the context of built form and environment and the production of architecture and settlement. The interest was in the generative forces and purposes of ordinary building activity in abandoned settlements in Cappadocia in Turkey and of the Anasazi in New Mexico (see Stea and Turan 1993). It is also a process that has meaning and sociopolitical and economic implications. It involves creating permanences that are nevertheless always subject to change, dissolution, and replacement. Because they are made and remade, they do not have fixed identities (see Harvey 1996). This is perhaps what we are missing in understanding the recent histories of Great Zimbabwe and the landscape immediately around it.

I have considered both the archaeological and historical evidence from Great Zimbabwe and discussed the site in the context of both local and regional histories on the Zimbabwe plateau. It is the dynamics of these histories that tell of Great Zimbabwe's declining regional role and its eventual demise as a center of considerable political and economic power. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the story of Great Zimbabwe can only be gleaned by examining external written accounts and by extracting historical information from datable ceramics and glass beads found there. From this perspective, the work of Randall-MacIver (1906) is significant, especially his “Medieval Period” dating of Great Zimbabwe (which should be contrasted with Hall 1909, primarily a futile rejection of Randall-MacIver's groundbreaking work on the site). There is also a need to consider seriously post-fifteenth-century migrations by the Karanga and other groups, reported from oral sources as a process of expansion from south-central Zimbabwe northward toward the Zambezi basin (Beach 1980). However, during the seventeenth century the Karanga are reported in both oral traditions (Beach 1980) and Portuguese written accounts (Pikirayi 1993) as migrating southward, leaving much of northern Zimbabwe under a Mutapa state but increasingly under siege from the Portuguese. While these traditions show a reversal of earlier expansion or migration and a subsequent reconnection with the landscape of Great Zimbabwe, the events also underline how Great Zimbabwe lost its significance in relation to other centers in the region.
Conclusion

In studying Great Zimbabwe, I have been listening to the anthropological critique, foregrounding “the silence of unheard voices and untold stories” (Fontein 2006:12–13). Listening also to local people and their own historians, I hear the toponyms of Great Zimbabwe’s immediate and broader cultural and natural landscape. Hydronyms and oronyms locate the still marginalized local and regional histories that provide complex stories of human movements and interactions within the broader landscape in which Great Zimbabwe is situated. These histories not only tell us about the dynamics within Great Zimbabwe’s immediate landscape but also provide a broader context for the expansion of the site’s culture and influence to distant regions of the Zimbabwe Plateau. Although the stone-built monumental structures of Great Zimbabwe excited Europeans’ interest, they are only a point in the system of mountains and rivers that marked and nourished the state. These landscapes tell the story of Great Zimbabwe, which the stone structures and the poor stratigraphic context may no longer provide.

Understanding the demise of Great Zimbabwe after the sixteenth century not only requires examining the processes of leaving the settlement (see Pikirayi 2006, 2013), but also the subsequent return (Pikirayi 2004). Local histories from the Zimuto Communal Lands illustrate complex group movements, while material culture from the site of Chizhou suggests how these groups adjusted to less complex, less monumental ways of living.

Notes

1. The account reads:

   There are other mines in a district called Toroa, which by another name is known as the kingdom of Butua, which is ruled by a prince called Burrom, a vassal of Benomotapa, which land adjoins the aforesaid consisting of vast plains, and these mines are the most ancient known in the country, and they are all in the plain, in the midst of which there is a square fortress of masonry within and without, built of stones of marvellous size, and there appears to be no mortar joining them. The wall is more than twenty-five spans in width, and the height is not so great considering the width. This edifice is almost surrounded by hills, upon which are others resembling it in the fashioning of the stone and the absence of mortar, and one of them is a tower more than twelve fathoms high.

   The natives of the country call these edifices Symbaoe, which according to their language signifies court, for every place where Benomotapa may be is so called; and they say that being royal; property all the king’s other dwellings have this
name. . . When and by whom these edifices were raised, as the people of the land are ignorant of the art of writing, there is no record, but they say they are the work of the devil, for in comparison to their power and knowledge it does not seem possible to them that they should be the work of men. . . . The distance of this edifice from Sofala in a direct line to the west is a hundred and seventy leagues, or thereabouts and it is between 20° and 21° south latitude . . .

In the opinion of the Moors who saw it, it is very ancient, and was built there to keep possessions of the mines, which are very old, and no gold has been extracted from them for years, because of the wars . . .

It is guarded by a nobleman, who has charge of it after the manner of a chief alcaide, and they call this officer Symbacayo, as we should say keeper of the Symbaœ, and there are always some of Benomotapa’s wives therein, of whom this Symbacayo takes care. (Theal 1898–1903:6:267–268)

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