

# Uploading Matepe: Online Learning, Sustainability and Repatriation in Northeastern Zimbabwe

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*This article investigates the growth of a small online learning community interested in matepe music, an mbira type traditionally played in Northeastern Zimbabwe and adjacent areas in Mozambique. I demonstrate how informal online learning has led to the development of participatory online spaces where new media and archival resources are shared and discussed. I put these activities in conversation with national arts policy and recent national and multinational online sustainability initiatives in order to highlight some of the advantages and insights that come from operating outside of a top-down framework. I aim to show the necessity of online and offline continuity by touching upon the ways in which online collaborative networks that are based on learning impact on-the-ground efforts of sustainability and repatriation.*

In a 2013 report on the status of the Zimbabwean arts and culture industry, arts activist Paul Brickhill<sup>1</sup> asserts that over 90% of the creative sector economy is made up of “arts practitioners,” or those who operate independently from the government in order to avoid excessive taxes and regulations.<sup>2</sup> In the absence of coordinated state efforts, available resources or an appropriate infrastructure to support the growth of local creative industries, musicians and other artists have learned to cultivate “thousands of small, direct social ‘connections’ into Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, Japan, South Africa and elsewhere, bringing all manner of opportunities for sales, touring, help, loans, gifts, exposure, marketing; through

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1 Paul Roger Brickhill (b.1958 d. 2014) was a much-beloved promoter of arts and culture in Zimbabwe. He was the founder of the world-renowned Book Cafe venue as well as parent NGO Pamberi Trust. Since the 1990s, these organizations have hosted over 10,000 shows and events in the capital city of Harare, and have had a lasting impact on the growth of local music scenes and the careers of numerous musicians.

2 In Eveleigh 2013, 64.

Klisala Harrison (ed.)

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diaspora connections or well-wishers.”<sup>3</sup> Brickhill emphasizes the agency of the artists when he states that Zimbabwean and African arts practitioners in general are “exceptionally gifted at networking in this way.”<sup>4</sup> This strategy has been key to the livelihood of musicians, from afrojazz players to spoken word poets to mbira ensembles, especially in areas of Zimbabwe beyond the capital city of Harare, where there is very little access to state resources as well as coordinated top-down foreign investments through NGOs.

In this article, I focus on how the translocal social connections that Brickhill describes contribute to the sustainability of marginalized music traditions in Zimbabwe that are disconnected from top-down support, primarily functioning outside of national arts and culture policies. I am specifically interested in how social networking raises the awareness and status of particular music traditions of rural Northeastern Zimbabwe that are associated with *matepe*, an instrument that has strong associations to traditional religious practices of ancestral spirit veneration. Since 2008, *matepe*’s emerging presence online has contributed to the formation of networks that engage a small contingent of Zimbabweans, Zimbabweans in diaspora, and other scholars and musicians, myself included, who are specifically interested in learning how to play *matepe* music. Online interest and activity do lead to some economic opportunities for Zimbabwean musicians via the global market,<sup>5</sup> but they also function as a means to learn traditional repertoire, build community through dialogue and resource-sharing, increase the visibility of marginalized cultural groups, and address religious and social stigma associated not just with *matepe*, but with Zimbabwean mbira traditions more generally.

Extending beyond Zimbabwean contexts, this case study provides a valuable contribution to dialogue about evolving approaches to sustaining music cultures and safeguarding cultural heritage that are influenced by UNESCO guidelines. In the foreword to the 2010 volume on *Heritage and Globalisation*, heritage studies specialists William Logan and Laurajane Smith highlight the importance of recognizing more fully that “heritage protection does not depend alone on top-down interventions by governments or the expert actions of heritage industry professionals, but must involve local communities and communities of interest.”<sup>6</sup> These considerations have led to new and evolving strategies of incorporating local communities in safeguarding processes, with an emphasis on the DIY creation of “born digital” media.<sup>7</sup> The 2003 UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* has increasingly manifest in the form of nationally driven

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3 Eveleigh *ibid.*, 69.

4 Eveleigh *ibid.*, 69.

5 To the best of my knowledge, any financial opportunities for Zimbabwean *matepe* players that result from online activity seem to occur “indirectly,” not through online exchanges themselves. For example, *matepe* players may benefit from online visibility and consequently have more requests to purchase instruments, or they may have an increase in students seeking in-person instruction.

6 Logan and Smith 2010, xi–xii.

7 UNESCO 2003a.

digital heritage projects that utilize participatory methodologies to produce online community-generated archives. Although the collaborative approaches of these projects offer promising new directions, the implementation of top-down policy and application of external value systems associated with UNESCO continue to be problematized.<sup>8</sup> An analysis of activities surrounding matepe online therefore offers a much-needed example of related methodologies that operate independently from national agendas and in the absence of safeguarding discourse.

A key element in the “production, consumption and engagement with heritage”<sup>9</sup> related to matepe music is a consistent emphasis on learning how to play. I argue that utilizing digital resources for the purpose of learning uses a mode of engagement that is more participatory than presentational because it requires repeated and attentive listening to recordings and careful study of related text and transcriptions. Ultimately, I hope to show that learning from digital resources is less focused on the digital products themselves, but rather leads to music-making in various contexts outside of the online environment. To demonstrate this, I begin with the growth of matepe online and the ways in which learning from new media has enabled a renewed interest in archival recordings from the International Library of African Music (ILAM) as well as an increase in their accessibility via processes of convergence and narrative connection. I then relate matepe online to emerging born digital heritage projects that are influenced by UNESCO policy in order to offer insight on the implications of not operating as a centralized, policy-based initiative.

In the last section, I stress the importance of making connections between online and offline contexts. I explore how online learning leads to the creation of “collaborative networks”<sup>10</sup> between academic archives, culture-bearers and online learners in order to address overarching issues of access and agency. I am particularly interested in how online learners are able to bridge the gap between online and on-the-ground activities by connecting with culture-bearers in rural areas who have essentially no means of directly participating in the online environment themselves. These connections provide a measure of continuity between various offline contexts as well, by prompting face-to-face conversations that consider the diverse perspectives of culture-bearers and their strategies of addressing barriers of religious and social stigmas.

My approach to digital ethnography in this case study engages major streams and ideas about matepe music that take place across multiple social media platforms, websites and offline contexts. I do this in part to respond to what heritage studies expert Elisa Giaccardi identifies as a need to understand the broader impact of emerging communications technologies on heritage construction by investigating how individual’s engage with cultural heritage “in the context of their own lives and in association with the unique character of the places and communities in which

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8 e.g., Hennessy 2012, Marschall 2014.

9 Logan and Smith *ibid.*, xii.

10 Seeger 2002a.

heritage comes to matter.”<sup>11</sup> I draw from research in cultural heritage, archiving and ethnomusicology to understand the “complex online-offline dynamics”<sup>12</sup> of strategies pertaining to the sustainability of matepe music. This case study may furthermore provide some ideas on how to investigate the impact of online cultural sustainability and safeguarding initiatives in terms of how they translate to contexts beyond the constructed environment of project webpages and/or platforms.

A critical point in this study is the need to address the roles of culture-bearers who are influenced by a persistent digital divide. Whereas cultural studies specialist Piia Varis suggests that “the lives of people with little or no digital engagement are influenced by the very absence of [Internet or device access] for communication,”<sup>13</sup> I show here that online-offline dynamics must also consider the agency of those individuals with little-to-no Internet access and the ways in which they negotiate their online presence. As online safeguarding and sustainability projects continue to encourage “user-generated” audiovisual recordings to be uploaded and shared online without traditional archival safeguarding mechanisms in place, it becomes increasingly important to consider the intentions of culture-bearers without online access, especially if they are featured in these recordings. My own role and perspective as an applied ethnomusicologist is informed by a decade of playing, performing and teaching marimba and mbira music among the Zimbabwean-music community in the Pacific Northwest United States. The research would not be possible without the community music experiences and connections that initially inspired my interest in ethnomusicology and introduced me to matepe music. This study is based on four years of research surrounding matepe online and a preliminary trip to Zimbabwe in 2014; it will serve as the foundation of my doctoral dissertation research in Zimbabwe during 2016–2017.

## Online Learning

In their 2012 article, “We’re All Archivists Now,” Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp Fargion assert that the digital revolution has shifted archival policies concerning access and dissemination to the point where “archives are no longer for the ‘-ologists’ but for all learners, including the people whose cultures are represented in them wherever they are in the world.”<sup>14</sup> The authors speak to the ways in which digital media and the Internet have increased the relevance of archival materials while also creating new challenges and responsibilities as archives attempt to reach out and respond to diverse global audiences. In this section, I focus on the activities of the “learners” of matepe music, which include community musicians, culture-bearers

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11 Giaccardi 2012, 2.

12 Varis 2016.

13 Varis *ibid.*, 61.

14 Landau and Fargion 2012, 128.

and ethnomusicologists, and how they utilize and reference archival materials in online spaces such as YouTube, Facebook and discussion forums. I demonstrate how online learners transform the social relevance of archival recordings by putting them in conversation with present-day music practices via online dialogue and the creation of newly recorded materials.

Matepe, also known as *madhebe* and/or *hera*, is a mbira type historically played by the Sena-Tonga, Buja and Korekore peoples of Northeastern Zimbabwe and adjacent areas across the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border.<sup>15</sup> Although the family of instruments called *mbira* have come to symbolize the musical cultures of Zimbabwe at a national level, marginalized mbira types such as *mbira dzavaNda* and matepe are relatively unknown around Zimbabwe in comparison to more popular instruments such as *mbira nhare* (also called *mbira dzavadzimu*)<sup>16</sup> and *nyunga nyunga mbira*. The rise in popularity of mbira nhare is discussed at length by Turino, who identifies a bias towards music cultures that were proximal to the capital city of Harare during the development of the nationalist movement, especially those music and dance traditions associated with the Shona-Zezuru ethnicity.<sup>17</sup> Matepe music cultures are associated with Shona ethnic groups based in the rural Northeastern outskirts of the country, including the Korekore and Buja. Matepe is also practiced among ethnic groups such as the Sena-Tonga and Marembe<sup>18</sup> that fall under the fringes of the Shona “supertribal” national umbrella<sup>19</sup> but also have strong ties across the Zimbabwe/Mozambique border. Based on the relative geographic and ethnic marginalization of matepe music, it remains largely outside of the Zimbabwean national imagination and outside of school, church and festival contexts.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, matepe became known to a growing international audience that was interested in Zimbabwean music by way of several brief references in Paul Berliner’s seminal ethnography, *The Soul of Mbira*, which features a matepe song titled, “Kuyadya Hove Kune Mazowe” in the book’s accompanying set of field recordings.<sup>20</sup> Corresponding to music trends within Zimbabwe, both academics and community musicians abroad at this time were primarily interested in playing the increasingly popular mbira nhare, with only a limited awareness of matepe music. In 1999 and again in 2002-2003, musician Chaka Chawasarira provided the first opportunities for many Americans to experience matepe music in a live

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15 Tracey 1970.

16 Although mbira dzavadzimu or mbira “of the spirits” is the more widely accepted name of the aforementioned instrument in foreign community music and academic contexts, I choose to refer to it here as mbira nhare, a label commonly used by Zimbabwean musicians and academics as well as prominent Zimbabwean NGOs such as Mbira Centre. I adopt this label primarily to emphasize that mbira nhare is not the only mbira used for ancestral spirit veneration, as matepe plays a key role in spirit possession ceremonies as well.

17 Turino 2000.

18 By this comment I mean to reflect the standpoint of the musicians I worked with in Nyamapanda, Zimbabwe, who identify as Marembe, which is also the name of the language they speak.

19 Msindo 2012.

20 Berliner 1978.

setting during the “Soul of Mbira: Mbira Masters of Zimbabwe” tour,<sup>21</sup> followed by his year-long residency as Visiting Artist at the University of Washington School of Music in Seattle. It was not until about five years after Chawasarira had returned to Zimbabwe, that his student, Texas-based musician Joel Laviolette, rekindled an interest in matepe by developing an online forum<sup>22</sup> where participants could learn from videos and transcriptions, share knowledge and resources, and discuss their personal experiences with matepe music.<sup>23</sup>

Within this new online context, several key resources began to make their way into the hands of aspiring matepe players. Andrew Tracey’s article, “The Matepe Mbira Music of Rhodesia,” published in 1970, was posted with Tracey’s permission on Laviolette’s Rattletree forum as a free, accessible resource. The article includes information on how to build and tune a matepe and nearly ten pages of detailed transcriptions of matepe songs, accompanying shaker patterns and vocal lines. Andrew Tracey’s corresponding 1969 matepe recordings from the International Library of African Music’s (ILAM) Sound of Africa Series have become an essential sonic reference that allows online learners to interpret the article’s prescriptive notation. These field recordings fit into a larger, more diverse collection of approximately thirty-five tracks of matepe music from ILAM, recorded by Hugh and Andrew Tracey from the 1930s to the 1970s.

Fargion argues that the value of archival recordings largely depends upon the intentions of the collector in creating a resource for future use rather than simply documenting music for “their own research purposes.”<sup>24</sup> Both Hugh and Andrew Tracey’s intentions to create resources for cultural revitalization are evident in their writing and recording process. Recent director of ILAM Diane Thram writes how “working under the ‘collect and classify’ paradigm of his time, Hugh Tracey was motivated, beyond a ‘salvage’ mission, to document and preserve African music for future generations of Africans.”<sup>25</sup> In response to the rapid loss of cultural diversity in Southern and East Africa during an era of colonial development, forced labor and migration, Hugh Tracey’s vision for the ILAM archival collections was not only intended for later use as scholarly material for “armchair” analysis, but specifically as a means of revitalizing cultural heritage through the learning process itself.<sup>26</sup>

Since 2008, the online environment has helped to create virtual spaces where archival materials of matepe music are used by individuals to learn how to play the instrument. For example, in order to bridge the gap between Andrew Tracy’s

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21 The 1999 US Soul of Mbira Tour was organized by Paul Berliner to feature some of the music that was discussed in his book. The performances highlighted the work of five artists, including Beauler Dyoko, Hakurotwi Mude, Cosmas Magaya, Simon Magaya and Chaka Chawasarira.

22 Rattletree Marimba 2008. References to online sources are accurate as of 23 May 2016

23 Laviolette spearheaded this online dialogue based on his experiences learning from Chawasarira for several years while living in Zimbabwe.

24 Fargion 2009, 86.

25 Thram 2014, 317.

26 Thram *ibid.*, 317.

transcriptions and the corresponding ILAM field recordings, online learners have posted YouTube videos of themselves playing matepe with close-up views of the keys so others can, in turn, learn more easily from these audiovisual recordings. In this way, resource-sharing online has become a means to breathe new life into archival holdings and disseminate learning materials in a more accessible form.

The digitization and dissemination of archival materials has allowed online users to creatively converge song transcriptions as well as reel-to-reel recordings with born digital media content. According to media studies specialist Henry Jenkins, the process of media convergence, or when “old and new media collide,” takes place when consumers “seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content.”<sup>27</sup> Jenkins stresses that although “digitization set the conditions for convergence,” the process should not be viewed as primarily technological, but rather as representative of a cultural shift towards a more participatory culture that stands in contrast to “older notions of passive media spectatorship.”<sup>28</sup> Dagny Stuedahl applies this concept to the field of heritage studies, asserting that convergence allows present-day audiences to interact with heritage content in new ways as well as publicly voice their “expectations about access and interactions” in regard to institutional collections.<sup>29</sup>

Stuedahl argues that digital media, especially in the context of online social networking sites, has allowed the formation of multiple and diverse “narrative connections” between public audiences and cultural heritage collections. Rather than maintaining a focus on the content of these collections, Stuedahl claims that heritage institutions such as museums now focus on “learning and experience as part of new communicative practices”.<sup>30</sup> Although ILAM’s digitized collections have become increasingly accessible to online learners via their website,<sup>31</sup> the narrative component of the matepe recordings take place within social media platforms like YouTube and Facebook, where dialogue and convergence with born digital media can occur. These sites encourage participation based on familiarity and accessibility, as links to videos and conversations can be uncovered easily with one-word Internet searches (e.g., “matepe”) and posts can be embedded and shared in other social media platforms. This online visibility and dialogue outside of the archival domain contributes to increased public awareness and interest in existing archival resources.

Archives are adapting to changing relationships between people and place, as they must respond to the growing number of culture-bearers who no longer reside in areas that neatly correspond to geographically based archive catalogues. The online learning environment has been a means to spark dialogue with culture-

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27 Jenkins 2006, 3.

28 Jenkins *ibid.*, 3–11.

29 Stuedahl 2009, 5.

30 Stuedahl *ibid.*, 5.

31 International Library of African Music 2012.

bearers in the diaspora, including UK-based Rattletree user “Ndikiye,” who posted on the Rattletree forum in 2009 about his concern over the declining number of culture-bearers who have first-hand knowledge of matepe music traditions. Based on the lack of available teachers, he asserts the importance of online accessibility in revitalizing the music practices of such a challenging instrument, stating that “more players will be able to play it only if they have access to the resources,” including the ones featured on the Rattletree website.<sup>32</sup>

Ndikiye’s words add a narrative layer to the online matepe media, as he draws from his personal experiences to emphasize the necessity of accessible learning resources as a step towards the continuation of matepe music both within and beyond Zimbabwe’s borders. After four years of researching matepe, I know of less than ten master musicians in Zimbabwe who play the instrument. I would estimate that there are upwards of thirty or forty players worldwide who are utilizing online resources to learn matepe, with still more who are actively engaged in watching and discussing video postings. On Laviolette’s Rattletree forum, for example, although there are only about a dozen users who have directly contributed to the dialogue, over 22,000 views appear on some of the discussion threads about matepe. Participants continue to read these conversations even though the website is no longer open for any further postings as of 2012, when the dialogue shifted more exclusively into the form of Facebook and YouTube comments. This shift occurred primarily in response to the YouTube posts of Japanese anthropologist and musician Yuji Matsuhira, who initially uploaded two videos in December 2011 of the Zonke-Tsonga family of Nyamapanda, Zimbabwe playing matepe. Matsuhira’s posts, along with a full-length album of the musicians, provided the first published recordings of matepe in a community music setting since forty years prior. These videos have not only re-focused the content of some online materials to feature culture-bearers, but have also sparked further interest from Zimbabweans online.

## **Sustainability and Safeguarding Online**

The growth of accessible and collaborative online spaces focused on matepe music parallels much broader trends in heritage studies, archiving and ethnomusicology that seek to “participate, to partner and to engender trust for mutual benefit.”<sup>33</sup> Online platforms for digital resource sharing in particular have become popular as collaborative tools for repatriation, cultural revitalization and large-scale safeguarding and sustainability projects that involve partnerships between various government and academic organizations, community groups and NGOs. My aim is to situate the case study of matepe music within a larger context of UNESCO-influenced Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) management

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<sup>32</sup> Discussion thread on Rattletree Marimba 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Landau and Fargion 2012, 137.



initiatives. The approaches I discuss are shaped by the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*<sup>34</sup> as well as the UNESCO *Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage*<sup>35</sup> that support an increasingly practitioner-centric model of heritage management through the use of online digital technology.

The 5-year, multi-million dollar project *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures*, for example, launched the soundfutures.org website<sup>36</sup> to encourage dialogue between culture-bearers globally so they are empowered to “forge musical futures on their own terms.”<sup>37</sup> A number of national policy initiatives that operate under the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm have also begun to embrace a grassroots, participatory approach towards inventorying ICH through the creation of digital heritage archives. For instance, emerging online ICH initiatives such as Korea’s ichpedia.org<sup>38</sup> and the South African eNanda project found at enanda.co.za<sup>39</sup> emphasize the value of user-generated media as means to prioritize the contributions of culture-bearers.<sup>40</sup> Park describes the development of Korea’s Ichpedia project as a “web-based ICH encyclopedia and archive” that is part of a “new paradigm of safeguarding methods” that uses recording technology and interactive digital platforms in order to demonstrate the dynamic nature of cultural heritage.<sup>41</sup> Through direct access to the online system along with technical support, Korean ICH communities are able to create and upload material that they deem significant. The Ichpedia design therefore encourages culture-bearers to become leaders and collaborators in the endeavor.<sup>42</sup>

Project developers involved in national ICH initiatives report that in addition to various practical barriers such as limited user participation and ongoing needs of website maintenance, there are persistent concerns regarding the local impact of an external value system that is based on UNESCO’s conceptualization of heritage and its subsequent strategies of heritage management. Heritage studies expert Chiara Bortolotto has written at length about this issue, explaining that “while UNESCO celebrates the diversity of content (the elements of heritage to be safeguarded), it enforces common codes, categories and values because it operates through a common scheme.”<sup>43</sup> Despite new developments in collaborative methodologies outlined in the 2003 convention, Bortolotto argues that “the concrete

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34 UNESCO 2003b.

35 UNESCO 2003a.

36 Sound Futures 2014.

37 Schippers 2010, 159.

38 Ichpedia 2015.

39 eNanda Online 2016.

40 e.g., Park 2014, Marschall 2014.

41 Park *ibid.*, 71.

42 Park *ibid.*, 71.

43 Bortolotto 2012, 266.

empowerment of grassroots communities, as put forth by the bottom-up ICH approach” is “considerably weakened” because the UNESCO system continues to operate through top-down mechanisms of heritage recognition.<sup>44</sup>

Sabine Marschall, professor in cultural and heritage tourism, builds on Bortolotto’s ideas to demonstrate how UNESCO guidelines and national policy manifest in the context of eNanda, a collaborative heritage website directed towards safeguarding ICH in Inanda, South Africa.<sup>45</sup> Marschall argues that despite a number of benefits that residents gain from participating in the digital heritage project, it nevertheless “facilitates the ‘heritagisation’ of lived local culture,” in the process, which occurs when people begin to think about their own lived culture as a form of heritage that needs to be preserved.<sup>46</sup> She contends that safeguarding can therefore have a potentially negative influence on ICH communities by altering local views about change and innovation in living traditions and how they relate to the past.<sup>47</sup>

The *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures* project departs from UNESCO’s safeguarding paradigm by applying a more holistic strategy that focuses on the sustainability of musical ecosystems.<sup>48</sup> Although the initiative is informed by UNESCO guidelines, it is not limited to discussions of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Rather, Sustainable Futures diversifies the discourse on ICH by considering a number of contributing factors to the sustainability of music genres, including the impact of ethnomusicologists, media and the Internet, ways of learning, diaspora and cross-cultural connections, the role of archives, etc.<sup>49</sup> This shift in ideology draws heavily from theoretical considerations in ethnomusicology that frame music cultures as adaptive living systems that are continuously changing through processes of innovation rather than rooted primarily in their “past glory.”<sup>50</sup> Although I support the direction of these ideas in relationship to notions of safeguarding heritage and adopt the concept of sustainability in order to discuss the status of matepe music, it is significant to note that this essay will likely be the first online resource that describes matepe music in these terms.

In the absence of a concrete framework enforced by a centralized project, top-down policy or external funding, matepe online is largely devoid of terminology such as preservation, safeguarding or sustainability. Although dialogue and resources are scattered around the Internet rather than housed in a designated website directed towards sustainability or safeguarding, discussions about cultural loss, systems of learning and strategies for revitalization do take place. I argue that the multipurpose and familiar space of popular social networking sites facilitates the inclusion of

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44 Bortolotto *ibid.*, 98.

45 Marschall 2014.

46 Marschall *ibid.*, 121.

47 Marschall *ibid.*, 121.

48 Schippers 2015.

49 Schippers *ibid.*, 141.

50 Titon 2010, 710.

diverse viewpoints from participants that are able to contribute in a manner of their own choosing without conforming to a predetermined framework. This has allowed a distinct theme of music learning to emerge from the conversations and videos featuring matepe music. I do not mean to say that a model of music learning works across the board for other contexts, but rather that we need to consider diverse approaches to sustainability that are not driven by top-down initiatives.

While dialogue and resource sharing on social networking sites may provide more visibility and a flexible platform for participation, an underlying issue with all of the projects I have described involves issues of access to these online spaces. Indeed the attention to learning matepe music through videos, recordings and transcriptions suggests that many online users are not situated in communities where they have in-person access to experienced musicians and teachers. Marschall problematizes online collaborative inventorying projects of ICH in rural African contexts, as she claims that these are often the places where residents have very limited access to computers and the Internet.<sup>51</sup> She asserts that “digital technology and the storage and sharing of data through the Internet are often associated with inclusiveness and the democratisation of knowledge, but these technologies are also associated with exclusion and limitations of access in their own right, especially in developing world contexts.”<sup>52</sup>

Whereas online safeguarding and sustainability initiatives are built on the premise that Internet access worldwide continues to increase, especially via developments in affordable cell-phone technology, it is nevertheless important to discuss present-day levels of access. YouTube analytics<sup>53</sup> suggest that the majority of YouTube viewers accessing matepe videos are located in the US, Japan, the UK and South Africa, respectively, which—with the exception of Japan—are all regions that correspond to large diasporic populations of Zimbabweans. Culture-bearers who reside in urban Zimbabwean areas also emphasize the importance of these videos. For example, Harare-based musician Kuda Nyaruwabvu, who is originally from Mutoko, explained that he uses the videos to show his co-workers about the rural Northeast because “very few in the country know about the culture of this place.”<sup>54</sup> In my experiences, the rural Northeastern areas where matepe music cultures are based currently have little to no access to online social networking sites. Internet browsing is only accessible in Nyamapanda using devices that can connect to 3G services. This method of access is expensive and many residents in the area do not yet own the type of phone necessary to stream YouTube videos or access Facebook online.

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51 Marschall *ibid.*

52 Marschall *ibid.*, 127.

53 These statistics are based primarily on a YouTube channel that was created by Google+ user Zack Moon and includes both “learning progress” videos as well as videos of the Zonke-Tsonga family. The statistics are supported by the YouTube channel analytics of users Matsuhira Yuji and Rattletree based on conversations with Yuji Matsuhira and Joel Laviolette in 2014.

54 Email, K. Nyaruwabvu, 30 April 2014.

Even though many master matepe players are not able to access the Internet directly, online learners have helped to fuel the connections between online and offline contexts, as they seek to play matepe music with others. This is despite the fact that matepe is especially well-suited for playing alone. The instrument's extremely low bass notes and prominent overtones produce such a full sound that players often report how "one matepe is enough".<sup>55</sup> One instrument, rather than two or more, can produce the hocketing effect that is characteristic of Zimbabwean mbira music.<sup>56</sup> Andrew Tracey describes how "the volume and richness of sound coming out of three or four matepe," in comparison, however, is "incomparable" to other mbira based on the range and depth of matepe's distinct sound.<sup>57</sup>

When I asked Andrew Tracey to respond to online learning of matepe, he said, "I think it's good, but [...] one has a responsibility to the people whose music it is and I think just making the sound of their music is not enough, you have to go there and [get] the full experience."<sup>58</sup> This perspective is echoed among aspiring matepe players such as American musician Jeff Brahe who expressed how learning the music online is not really learning the music to its fullest, but rather playing "out of context" and in some ways, preparing to play with musicians who have grown up with this music.<sup>59</sup> In 2011, when Yuji Matsuhira posted videos of the Zonke-Tsonga family, he provided online learners with much more than just another learning resource, as the videos include contact information that invites the viewer to travel to a specific place, meet specific musicians and experience the music first hand. Since that time, individuals such as my husband, Zack Moon,<sup>60</sup> and I, have travelled specifically to Nyamapanda to learn matepe from the Zonke-Tsonga family.

## Collaborative Networks On-the-ground

A four hour *kombi* ride from the capital city of Harare to the rural Northeastern corner of Zimbabwe will take you as far as the Nyamapanda border region where several matepe players of the Zonke-Tsonga family reside. The rural landscape, brick huts

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55 Tracey 1970, 49.

56 Paul Berliner notes that matepe's characteristically full sound is thought to have resulted from the desire for a single performer to play "all the different parts of a ngororombe panpipe ensemble" (1978, 23), which is a music tradition occurring in regions where matepe is played. One can hear how the matepe sounds like an "ensemble" based on the prominent overtones of the instrument as well as the three keys (typically) that comprise an additional upper left-hand register on the instrument. Consequently, players use four fingers (two thumbs and two index fingers) rather than three as is used in mbira nhare. This adds a significant level of difficulty to the playing technique.

57 Tracey *ibid.*, 49.

58 Tracey 2014.

59 Brahe 2014.

60 Zack Moon continues to play a central role in this project, as he was the first one to introduce me to matepe music from his own perspective as an online learner. He stands as my research partner in this endeavor, offering insight based on his many years of experience participating in Zimbabwean-music communities of the Pacific Northwest of the USA as well as 10+ years of experience as an mbira nhare player.

and striking silhouettes of the baobab trees provide a feeling of remoteness relative to the high-density suburbs of the capital. Nonetheless, connections to the political, economic and cultural center of the state are inscribed prominently in the scene. These include a strong police presence in and around the shops that line the main road leading up to Zimbabwe's second largest border post, and the road itself, which is situated on a widely traveled route between Malawi and South Africa. The sounds of the country's latest zimdancehall, urban grooves and Christian gospel hits are also carried over the main road by kombi sound-systems and along the dirt footpaths through young residents' personal MP3 players.

The Nyamapanda shops are configured as a truck stop rather than a tourist destination, with little indication of the rich dance, drumming and mbira traditions that characterize this region. Ethnomusicologist Jennifer Kyker argues that music and dance traditions from rural Northeastern Zimbabwe in particular are "largely invisible in recordings, archives, and scholarly and popular writings."<sup>61</sup> The music traditions of Nyamapanda, located within the greater Tsonga Village area in Mudzi district, are no exception. National media sources focus on the Nyamapanda border-crossing as a dangerous outpost that struggles with ongoing issues associated with prostitution, drug smuggling and human trafficking, with very little attention paid to the Sena-Tonga ethnic groups who live in the surrounding rural areas. The online visibility that has developed in social networking sites, however limited, therefore provides an important means of cultivating a widespread awareness of the matepe music cultures of Northeastern Zimbabwe.

While online learners outside of Northeastern Zimbabwe mainly access and utilize these resources on social networking sites, it is significant to discuss how YouTube videos and discussion forums impact the musicians who are featured in many of these videos. In this section, I specifically focus on my experiences learning from the Zonke-Tsonga family in Nyamapanda in order to demonstrate how activity in the online environment can facilitate networking, informal music making and the repatriation of archival recordings.

In 2008, ILAM undertook a massive digitization project to help preserve and distribute their collections by making them available through a searchable online catalogue. Diane Thram argues that "ILAM's mission goes far beyond making its holdings accessible to Internet users. Getting its historically rich field recordings out of the archive and back to communities where they were originally collected and to the general public through outreach, education and repatriation initiatives is an essential endeavour as crucial to its mission as primary research and further expansion of its holdings."<sup>62</sup> In addition to the ongoing work of distributing the Sound of Africa Series and other relevant recordings to African academic institutions, Thram has dedicated much of the last several years to coordinating smaller, more direct repatriation projects to villages, families and individuals who are connected

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61 Kyker 2011, 50–51.

62 Thram *ibid.*, 318.

to specific recording sessions. She sees this as a vital part of the repatriation process, since repatriating field recordings to academic institutions “doesn’t get them back out into the villages where Hugh Tracey made the recordings in the first place,” unless universities facilitate opportunities for students to engage in projects within local communities.<sup>63</sup>

In the case of matepe music, the Zonke-Tsonga family was able to facilitate the repatriation of ILAM’s matepe recordings even though they have no direct connections to the institution or access to its online site. My husband Zack and I were fortunate to be able to provide the family with the field recordings primarily because it was requested of us to do so. Joel Laviolette, who made a trip to Nyamapanda in January 2014, relayed to us that the family was interested in obtaining the archival materials because Anthony Zonke and his mother, then 89-year-old Sinati Nyamande, may have been present during one of the field recording sessions. Consequently, we decided to spend a week at ILAM in Grahamstown, South Africa in order to obtain a comprehensive collection of the Hugh and Andrew Tracey matepe recordings. This process was much more involved than we had imagined, and it took a collective effort of many hours, sifting through digital records, listing and locating the individual tracks in the database, and listening for matepe’s characteristic deep sound. We were motivated to reach back into the collection and obtain even the earliest tracks from the 1930s because they were recorded within the lifespan of Ambuya Sinati Nyamande and may be of great significance to her.

On our trip to see the Zonke-Tsonga family in August 2014, Zack and I were joined by Kuda Nyaruwabvu who we first “met” online in the comments section of one of the Nyamapanda videos. He wrote: “IM FROM MUTOKO,” which is an area in Northeastern Zimbabwe on the way to Nyamapanda. He went on to say that “My Father used to play this same type of Mbira. I tried to lure him to teach me but he just doesn’t want to.”<sup>64</sup> Nyaruwabvu’s comment alludes to deeper issues that are tied to the sustainability of matepe music, namely the barriers between the instrument’s role in traditional religious practices of ancestral spirit veneration and the predominantly Christian contexts that characterize much of Zimbabwe today. Travelling to meet the Zonke family was therefore an opportunity for Nyaruwabvu to experience matepe music in secular contexts where the religious barriers of the instrument are not as rigidly defined.

When we arrived in Nyamapanda, Anthony Zonke hooked up a solar-powered battery to a large radio that had a space for the thumbdrive we had brought. They listened to the tracks for over an hour—during the first listening session of many—with a constant stream of comments in English, Shona and their local language, Marembe, which is more closely related to languages in nearby Mozambique than to Shona. The younger members of the family were unfamiliar with some of the

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63 Thram 2015.

64 YouTube video comment by Kuda Nyaru (username) on Matsuhira Yuji (username) 2012, original emphasis.

songs and language that was heard, which prompted 65-year-old Anthony Zonke to play short snippets of each song along with the recordings and explain where they came from, who the musicians were, and what they were saying. Similarly, Zack and I attempted to play the songs we had learned, via transcriptions, on the Zonke's instruments. This proved difficult due to differences in tuning, mode, size and even key arrangement of their instruments in comparison to the ones we had learned on.<sup>65</sup> After several minutes of stumbling over the keys, Zack was able to overcome these barriers (as he had practiced this music for hundreds of hours back in our Seattle apartment) and Anthony Zonke recognized and joined in with every song, making Andrew Tracey's transcriptions relevant and transferable to present-day practices. In conjunction with the sound recordings, this act of playing transcriptions can also be seen as a form of repatriation.

Over the next week-and-a-half, Zack and I spent all day playing matepe in this context. The main players consisted of Anthony Zonke, Kenneth Zonke and Boyi Nyamande on matepe, along with Sinati Nyamande's soaring vocal lines, Chrispen Zonke's intricate and varied *hoshho* patterns, and a whole group of other participants who joined in with hand claps, singing and sporadic dancing. We were able to learn a song called "Washora Mambo," but that was a difficult and time-consuming process despite many years of experience playing and learning other types of mbira. Since the scale/mode was very different than the instruments we had used in Seattle, I was unfamiliar with the way the notes corresponded to the sound and therefore had to rely more on visual rather than auditory cues when learning the patterns. There was no slowing down, break-down of phrases, or explanation of how to learn, but rather just "playing along" and trying the best I could to keep up with just two thumbs while Anthony Zonke played with all four fingers, including high lines and left hand variations at confusing speeds. Needless to say, without the chance to listen repeatedly and learn a number of songs beforehand, it would have been extremely difficult to pick up the music solely in this way, as it was much easier to make adjustments in tempo and, in some cases, beat placement for the songs we had already learned.

Nyaruwabvu, who joined us for the first two days of the trip, had not been able to fully utilize the online resources that were accessible in Harare, namely because he did not have a means to play them. Although his family had matepe instruments that were his if he desired, they were essentially off-limits from his perspective because of their close associations with ancestral spirit possession. As a Methodist, Nyaruwabvu is actively involved in searching for ways to "de-mystify" matepe so it can be appreciated and embraced as a secular music practice that is an expression of his own Buja cultural identity.<sup>66</sup> He was able to begin learning a song from Kenneth Zonke, but much discussion ensued about the boundaries

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65 The matepe instruments we own were made by Chaka Chawasarira. The differences described are partly explained by regional variations between Sena-Tonga matepe traditions and Korekore hera traditions, although there are certainly regional differences within those groups as well.

66 K. Nyaruwabvu, email, Aug. 2014.

between sacred and secular, and if it was even possible for a Christian to pursue learning this music, especially certain songs that have strong spiritual associations. Anthony Zonke spoke to Nyaruwabvu at length about the strong secular role of matepe music apart from traditional religious contexts. He asserted that “this is beautiful music for entertainment!” implying that it can be appreciated by people who do not support its role in spirit possession ceremonies.

Huib Schippers and Catherine Grant argue for the importance of recontextualization as an “asset rather than a weakness” that contributes to the adaptability of a music genre.<sup>67</sup> Addressing religious stigma associated with matepe and other types of mbira therefore warrants an investigation of individual and community strategies for promoting mbira instruments in diverse secular and religious contexts. For example, Chaka Chawasarira has managed to incorporate his own 19-key *karimba* into Catholic Church services in Harare by composing masses for the church that feature the instrument. He claims that this strategy, which utilizes an mbira type not associated with spirit possession ceremonies, helps to pave the way for karimba players to become interested in learning other styles of mbira that are not presently accepted in church contexts.<sup>68</sup> Social networking sites also offer secular spaces where digital media of matepe performances can be broadcast online. The contents of the videos are significant in that they feature only staged secular performances intended for uploading to social media sites. Kuda Nyaruwabvu underscores this point, as he stresses the potential impact that translocal perspectives on matepe music cultures, i.e., online videos of foreigners playing matepe, may serve as one means of contributing to a de-stigmatization of the music in Zimbabwean contexts.

The online interest in matepe has grown most significantly from posts of Zimbabweans playing matepe, rather than the ‘learning progress’ videos that feature several US players. Interestingly, only one of the videos that features culture-bearers is self-posted by the person in the recording.<sup>69</sup> A major question in the circulation of matepe videos online is therefore the issue of agency that these players have in the online environment. Zack and I, who were able to learn directly from close-up videos of Anthony Zonke and Boyi Nyamande’s hands on YouTube, were intent on trying to understand their perspective on the matter. Ethnomusicologist Claire Jones commented, “if they are not participating in this digital world, they need to know ... get an inkling of what happens as soon as something gets recorded.”<sup>70</sup> Although we approached the topic with much skepticism, within the first day of being in Nyamapanda, questions along the lines of, “Are you recording?” turned into requests in the form of, “*Why* aren’t you recording?” as the musicians inquired

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67 Schippers and Grant forthcoming, 453.

68 Rattletree School of Marimba (username) 2015. Chaka Chawasarira tells his personal story as a matepe musician in this YouTube video, recorded and uploaded by Joel Laviolette and Rakefet Avramovitz of Rattletree Marimba.

69 Andidenha (username) 2008.

70 Jones 2014.



about the possibilities of creating videos and photographs that others could see, while also obtaining copies of the resources for their own use. In this way, the family was not only actively invested in obtaining existing archival recordings, but they were also invested in the process of creating new ones.

Anthony Seeger asserts that “recordings are not just commodities,” but they are also “parts of networks of social relations and they can be one of the ways such networks are created and maintained.”<sup>71</sup> The accessibility of the Nyamapanda YouTube videos continues to create connections between Northeastern Zimbabwe and online learners like Joel Laviolette, Yuji Matsuhira, Kuda Nyaruwabvu, and Zack and I, who are then able to engage with the Zonke-Tsonga family at a local level within a vibrant community music scene. Differing levels of accessibility between online and on-the-ground contexts have generated an ethical responsibility on the part of the online learner to share archival resources with culture-bearers in these areas; a responsibility that was made known by the requests of the culture-bearers themselves.

These repatriation activities are not singular events, but are rather fueled by the desire to find something deeper and more meaningful than learning from transcriptions and recordings online. As such, these activities represent one outcome of creating and maintaining ongoing connections between Zimbabwean culture-bearers and online learners. In his 2010 article “Music and Sustainability: An Ecological Viewpoint,” Jeff Todd Titon highlights the benefits of collaborative, community-focused approaches to cultural heritage management. He advocates for increased “local, grassroots, participatory, often amateur, music-making directly inside musical communities” as an important component of this strategy that contributes to cultural revitalization.<sup>72</sup> By stressing the value of born digital and archival recordings as learning resources, online activity, at least in the case of matepe music, has directly contributed to informal music-making in community music contexts. This has allowed attention to shift away from the recordings themselves as digital objects to be preserved and towards the importance of recordings as a means to share perspectives and experiences.

## Conclusion

In the age of social media and user-generated content, heritage organizations and practitioners are increasingly expected to pursue projects that enable users to play a central role in “activities of collection, preservation and interpretation” of digital and digitized heritage content.<sup>73</sup> The influence of UNESCO policy in particular has led to a number of ICH safeguarding initiatives that rely on digital communication

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71 Seeger 2002b, 6.

72 Titon 2010, 704.

73 Giaccardi *ibid.*, 2.

technologies in order to implement a “practitioner-centric model” with the intentions of prioritizing the needs and aims of culture-bearers. In this article, I focused on online social networks and strategies of cultural sustainability that are not driven by top-down initiatives. I did this to illuminate some of the constraints that prevail in the practitioner-centric model and to stress the need for long-term research that investigates the everyday impact of participatory online archive projects.

Considering the growing presence of online user-generated heritage content, little attention has been paid to the ways in which the tools of social media act to blur “the boundaries between official and unofficial heritage.”<sup>74</sup> Online projects that are framed by heritage, safeguarding and/or sustainability discourse may limit the flexibility needed to foster diverse “grassroots understandings and manifestations of heritage practice.”<sup>75</sup> As I have shown, this inquiry requires an exploration of how individuals are currently using digital media and social networking to address issues of sustainability, even if the uses are not expressed in such terms.

I emphasize the role of the applied ethnomusicologist in these online endeavors as positioned to be ever mindful of limits to Internet access and a persistent digital divide. Cultivating long-term trusting relationships to music communities offers opportunities for ethnomusicologists to navigate the digital divide and provides a measure of continuity between online and offline access to resources and ideas. This can be accomplished by repatriating archival resources, as I have discussed, but should further include the sharing of born digital media as well as comments and conversations taking place in the online space.

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75 Giaccardi *ibid.*, 4

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