Living site, living values: the Matendera festival as practice in community conservation and presentation

Njabulo Chipangura
Robert T. Nyamushosho
Takudzwa B. Pasipanodya

Living site, living values: the Matendera festival as practice in community conservation and presentation

Njabulo Chipangura, PhD
Wits City Institute of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa and Associate Visiting Fellow, University College London, Qatar

Robert T. Nyamushosho
Department of Archaeology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Takudzwa B. Pasipanodya, MA
Military Museum, National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

The Matendera festival is a ceremony conducted annually to celebrate the intangible heritage of the Shona people of Buhera in eastern Zimbabwe, popularly known as the Vahera, through their native dances, traditional music and cuisine, and a marathon. The ceremony is hosted annually at Matendera, a spectacular dry-stone-walled Iron Age site whose builders are historically connected to the Vahera. Through co-ordinating the efforts of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), the Buhera Rural District Council (BRDC) and other secondary stakeholders, the Vahera community gathers at Matendera to showcase their traditional foods, dances and games as part of their efforts to celebrate and experience Hera history and culture in relation to the tangible aspects of Matendera, a former abode of their ancestors. In this paper, we show how we used archaeological ethnography as a methodology for engaging the communities in conversations about the intangible meanings and importance of this festival. We illustrate how the circulation of knowledge in a festival is different from that in a traditional museum, by presenting aspects of intangible heritage that manifest in the form of traditional dances, foods, songs and social games. Ultimately, the fact that the history and archaeology of Matendera is largely enshrined within its monumental architecture enables the use of archaeological ethnography as a tool for understanding the contemporary social context of the site. Thus, we argue that Matendera cannot be divorced from the intangible practices that are showcased there during the festival.

Keywords

Vahera, archaeological ethnography, Shona, Matendera, conservation, heritage interpretation and presentation, museums, festivals, staged authenticity, Buhera, NMMZ, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Matendera is situated within Buhera District, a semi-arid landscape which forms the middle veld of the Zimbabwe Plateau. This rural district is largely populated by indigenous Shona communities whose livelihood is largely based on subsistence agriculture and livestock rearing (Lindahl and Matenga: 1995). In present day Zimbabwe, the term Shona is generally used to refer to the indigenous Bantu communities that speak a similar language (Beach: 1980; Chimhundu: 1992; Chirikure *et al.*: 2017). However, the Shona language itself is not homogenous because it has different dialects which include Karanga, Kalanga, Kore-kore, Manyika, Zezuru, Ndau, Jindwi and Hwesa. Thus, the name only came into effect in the 19th century as a colonial effort by early missionaries and linguists to unify and subjugate local languages under a single label, Shona, to facilitate the administration of colonies and the colonised (see Doke: 1931). In Buhera, the contemporary Shona communities speak mainly the Karanga and Manyika dialects, and their ancestry is largely associated with a cluster of ancient dry-stone-walled palaces, popularly known to the Shona community as *madzimbahwe* or *madzimbabwe* (houses of stone), and to Africanists as the 'Zimbabwe culture (CE 1000-1900)' (Figure 1), (Caton-Thompson: 1931; Garlake: 1970; Beach: 1980; Lindahl and Matenga: 1995; Huffman: 1996, 2007; Pikirayi: 2001; Chirikure *et al.*: 2012). Matendera is the largest known *dzimbahwe* (singular) within the Buhera cluster (Caton-Thompson: 1931; Lindahl and Matenga: 1995). Its architecture is believed to be the most impressive within the region (Huffman: 1996): it consists of rough dry-stone-walled free-standing enclosures with dentelle and herringbone decoration (Caton-Thompson: 1931). According to Huffman (1996: pp.160-164), as at Great Zimbabwe, the largest known *dzimbabwe* in sub-Saharan Africa, the spatial organisation at Matendera was organised in a layout that accommodated both elites and commoners. Nevertheless, because of royal privilege, elite residences were constructed within the walled areas, whilst the commoners lived outside the walls. Huffman's description aptly gives a bird's eye view of the architectural make-up of the site and its probable use, although the elite/commoner division has been deeply contested as a hegemonic archaeological discourse in the last two decades (i.e. Beach *et al.*: 1997; Chirikure *et al.*: 2018) [Plate 1].

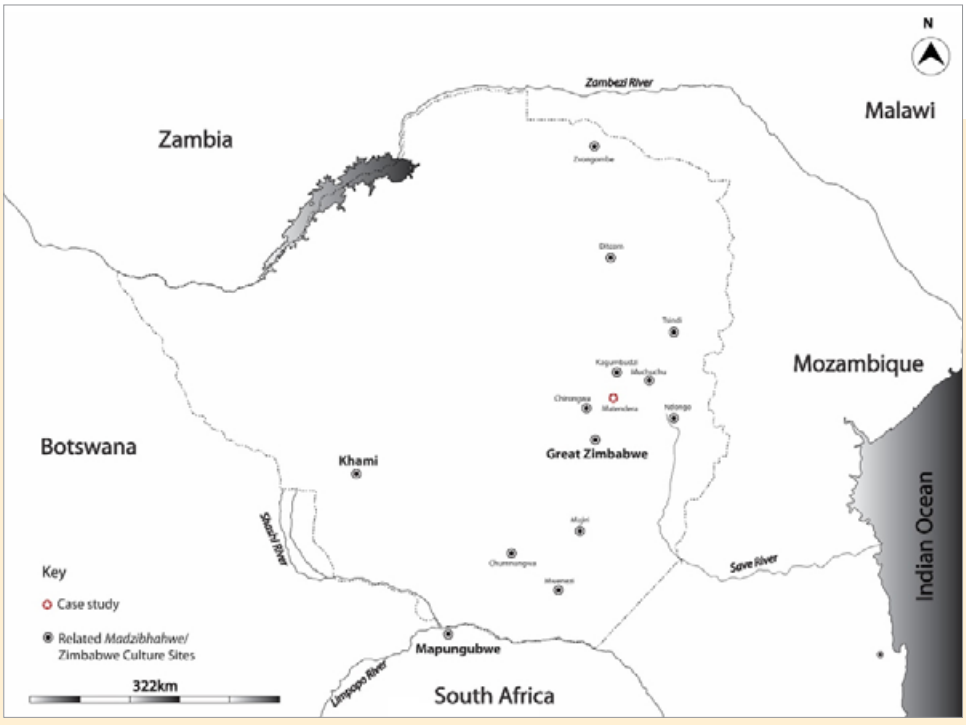

Figure 1
Location of Matendera in relation to other *madzimbahwe*.
Map: Robert T. Nyamushosho, 2019.

Plate 1
Free standing dry-stone-walling at Matendera, and the crown of the *kopje* from which the granite used to build the monument was sourced.
Photo: Njabulo Chipangura, November, 2018.

An annual festival is held by the community, working together with the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), the Buhera Rural District Council (BRDC) and other stakeholders, to celebrate Matendera as community heritage. Thus, it is an inclusive discourse underpinned by multiple voices, multiple intersections and a nexus of cultural and stakeholder communities. In this paper, the word 'community' will be used to define individuals, families and groups living in a particular place, with common goals and interests, including the conservation and presentation of their own heritage, comprising both tangible and intangible components. A community brings with it a sense of 'belonging' to those who are part of it, and through such associations individuals conceptualise identity (Watson: 2007). However, communities are not discrete because people can belong to more than one at any given time (Jameson and Baugher: 2007; Witcomb: 2007).

The NMMZ is a government institution which is responsible for the conservation and management of national heritage sites, including Matendera and related sites such as Great Zimbabwe and Khami. Likewise, the BRDC contributes to this event since it is the local authority for the area where the Matendera site is located, whereas the other stakeholders are drawn from nearby schools, village heads, and various NGOs. In light of this background, we engaged various communities who attended the annual festivals (2010–2014) in conversations about the intangible meanings and importance of the Matendera festival, using an archaeological/ethnographical model that consisted of standard interactive discussions, conversations and participant observations. Archaeological ethnography has been described by Hollowell and Mortensen (2009, p.7), as *the implications of archaeologised places, pasts, and ideas for others, and how people make these things their own*. In essence, we argue that the festival is about relational and procedural intangible social activities that work towards a state of equilibrium by bringing people into direct contact with their heritage. At the same time, it is also about understanding and practising shared authority in heritage conservation and presentation. Meanwhile, archaeological ethnography has also been defined by Hamilakis, Anagnostopoulos and Ifantidis (2009, p.284) as *...a transdisciplinary, transcultural space for critical engagement and dialogue which enables an understanding of local unofficial contemporary discourses and practices to do with archaeological sites*. Thus, using data drawn from interviews and participant observations, we argue that Matendera as an archaeological site cannot be divorced from the intangible socio-cultural forms that are still being practiced there such as traditional dances,

music, poetry and the preparation and consumption of traditional cuisines during the festival. Consequently, we reveal the reality that the Matendera community does not privilege the grand or the material in their day-to-day use of the site as may be implied by archaeologists and historians, but rather brings a range of intangible associations with diachronic values (Smith, 2006).

Decolonising the hegemonic discourse

According to the information gathered from interviewees drawn from the heritage community during our research, the name Matendera is derived from the Shona word *tenderera* which denotes the circular shape of the monument. However, apart from the name that the community easily identifies itself with, the hegemonic discourse about the site encompasses all the grand narratives presented and derived from expert knowledge (i.e. Caton-Thompson: 1931; Huffman: 1996; Pikirayi: 2001) as is exhibited in guided tours and the ethics of technical conservation. As such, this discourse is embedded in aspects of monumentality and aesthetics at the expense of intangible socio-cultural processes, as well as the ideas that led to the construction of the site (Smith: 2014). Basically, the discourse is underwritten by archaeological evidence which has been interpreted to show that the site was constructed between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. According to conventional wisdom, the archaeological site of Matendera was built on a low domed *kopje* of smooth granite as a royal palace (Caton-Thompson: 1931; Huffman: 1996). The stones that were used are believed to have been extracted from the *kopje* on which the stone enclosure was erected (Thompson: 1971). There is one major entrance at Matendera, and the other three entrances are blocked. There is no obvious explanation for the blocked entrances, but the construction pattern seems to have been designed to allow for the later blocking of those entrances.

Conventional wisdom also posits that Matendera constitutes part of what is called the 'Buhera cluster' of zimbabwe sites (Hall: 1987; Huffman: 1996; Pikirayi: 2001). The other sites in this cluster are: Chiona, Kagumbudzi and Muchuchu National monuments. Within the popularised narrative, it is argued that the same people who built Great Zimbabwe were involved in the construction of Matendera (Huffman: 1996). Similarity in the construction techniques and the dressing of the walls with decorations such as herringbone and dentelle provides the basis for this argument. Extrapolation of this hegemonic discourse is also seen in a 'one size fits all approach' in which restorations are carried out at the site guided by specific scientific principles that are deployed in the service of authenticity and a respect for the historicity of all Zimbabwe cultural monuments in southern Africa (see Chirikure *et al.*: 2015). One such restoration exercise was undertaken in September 2014 in preparation for the festival and the World Tourism Day commemorations.

However, we present the argument that the idea of carrying out a festival is an attempt by the heritage community to decolonise the popular archaeological narratives by offering their own alternative story of the past through song, dance, poetry and traditional cuisine. In a way, this fits into what Meskell (2009, p.3) describes as 'cosmopolitan archaeologies' in which experts no longer have the licence to tell people their past, or to adjudicate on the correct way of protecting or using heritage. Thus, most communities in post-colonial nations are challenging centralised state-led heritage management initiatives and unifying narratives that exclude their own needs and versions of the past (Harrison and Hughes: 2010). The Matendera festival started off as a community project, and can be regarded as a response to authorised official narratives. This festival confers an alternative dimension to conventional archaeology and heritage management by empowering the local community. According to Atalay (2012, p.5), *community based participatory research provides a method for a community and an archaeologist to work together to pursue a research design that benefits them as equal partners*. Using this method, there is continuous engagement in which archaeologists and community members collaboratively define the questions, methods and outcomes of a given project (Colwell: 2016, p.116).

Sharing power with indigenous communities in heritage conservation and presentation is a new methodology that should be used to pluralise, democratise and decolonise relations (Schmidt: 2009; Onciul: 2015). To 'decolonise' heritage practice simply means a proper representation of people spoken about rather than listened to. Community engagement has become a popular decolonialising strategy that is being used at many heritage sites in Africa. On the whole, decolonised methodologies can be applied

to heritage practice by embracing the so-called 'unofficial narratives' of non-experts and promoting an understanding of how to listen and pay attention to subaltern voices (Bugarin: 2009; Harrison: 2009; Meskell: 2007; Ndlovu: 2009; Segobye: 2009; Schmidt: 2009). Today, across the global networks of heritage sites, museums, and galleries, the importance of communities to the interpretation and preservation of heritage is increasingly being recognised (Watson: 2007).

An inclusive community-driven heritage festival

A festival is not a static museum display because it is dynamic, innovative and participative (Flint: 2006). Whereas in museums, the focus is on displaying material objects, the ambience and dynamism of festivals makes them more participatory, oriented towards action and performance (Bauman and Sawin: 1991) [Plate 2]. As such, the Matendera festival is a celebration of the multiple forms of intangible heritage of the Vahera expressed through their traditional dances such as *mhande*, traditional music and the preparation of traditional dishes (Chipangura: 2014). The festival strives to open the space for the community to participate in the conservation and presentation of their intangible cultural heritage. In so many ways, a festival of this nature devolves power from authorised institutions to the local population, with emphasis placed on community ownership of heritage resources. In this festival, power and authority are concentrated in the hands of the community in which the agency of the participants themselves is recognised. Therefore, with the inception of this festival, the Matendera community was given an opportunity for self-representation through a working partnership with NMMZ and BRDC. Collaborative activities of this sort are not only beneficial to the community, but to NMMZ, because they mitigate conflicts about heritage. Thus, decolonising archaeological practice requires greater attention to such collaborative and community-defined research, education and heritage projects (Pyburn: 2003; Smith and Jackson: 2008; Zimmerman: 2005).

Elsewhere, conflicts about the conservation of heritage have been underscored by what Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) have termed as 'dissonant heritage'. Dissonant heritage entails a lack of agreement on the use of heritage sites between communities and the authorities responsible for them. For example, at Domboshava rock art site, located 27km north of Harare, the exclusion of the community from management schemes resulted in unprecedented levels of vandalism. This site was declared a national monument in 1936 based on the aesthetic significance of the magnificent

Plate 2
Traditional performances during the Matendera festival.
Photo: Njabulo Chipangura, November, 2018.

rock paintings. However, the site had for many years been used by the locals to communicate with their ancestors during rain-making ceremonies (Pwiti and Mvenge: 1996). After independence, NMMZ failed to recognise the intangible values associated with the site and continued with colonial heritage management practices at the expense of the local community (Chirikure and Pwiti: 2008). The community vandalised the site in retaliation to this exclusion, burning down a curio shop and splashing oil paint on the rock paintings (Taruvinga and Ndoro: 2003). According to Chirikure and Pwiti (2008, p.470), *these events precipitated a policy change by the NMMZ which began an active programme of community archaeology, including local values, traditions and belief systems*.

However, instead of creating a dichotomy between communities and authorities, the Matendera festival can be regarded as a typical example of a shared authority platform. The festival offers alternative narratives of the past through song, dance, poetry and the preparation and consumption of traditional dishes [Plate 3]. Representing their ways of life in an open festival setting also gives the community an opportunity to conserve and transmit their intangible cultural heritage to future generations. Heritage conservation is a multifaceted concept which involves looking after both tangible and intangible aspects of a cultural landscape by highlighting the attachments which individuals and groups of people have to them (Chipangura, Chiripanhura and Nyamagodo: 2018). Smith (2006) posits that heritage is a ...*cultural practice involving the construction and regulation of a range of values and understandings*. Such values and understandings are relative to different groups of people, and fundamentally determine the ways in which heritage is conserved and managed.

During the festival, the communities take full control of representing their intangible cultural practices. Witz (2003) argues that the euphoria associated with a festival usually generates alternative modes of interpretation which are different from official authorised discourses. Dance, and the rhythms of the past through belting out traditional music, are imparted or transmitted to future generations only if they are constantly recited and performed - hence the festival provides a platform for such continuity. This festival has a social dimension in which parts of the community are brought into contact with each other in various activities. Lavenda (1992, p.81), also argues that *because many festival events are undemanding, it is easy for a wide range of people to attend and enjoy them and come away with the feeling that they are part of an organic, harmonious community*. As a result, it increases the chances for people to develop mutual empathy and understandings

Plate 3
Preparation of traditional foods.
Photo: Njabulo Chipangura, November, 2018.

which reduce conflicts about heritage. In general, the Matendera festival also contributes towards the conservation and sustainable management of cultural resources through the protection of local heritage, and a revitalisation of indigenous culture, arts and crafts.

The inaugural Matendera festival was held in October 2010 as a community initiative, with localised celebrations taking place at the site led by the village heads. Anchored in wholesome and inclusive community participation, it managed to improve the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural and historical traditions. Furthermore, it allowed for engagement and active community participation which is markedly different from the conservation tropes of the authorised heritage discourse. Compared to the hegemonic discourses driven by 'expert' knowledge, festivals tell stories that ignore universalising themes in that they often speak to the cultural experiences of marginalised groups (Karp and Kratz: 1991). Therefore festivals, by their very nature, leave room for the community to ascribe multiple meanings to their heritage, taken from their own diverse points of understanding. Festivals also place an emphasis on the idea of oneness and collaboration, rather than distinction, as members of a particular community tend to share a world view during the celebrations (Witz: 2003).

During this festival, Vahera people commemorate their cultural diversity in relation to the tangible aspects of Matendera monument. Thus, unlike the authorised heritage discourse which is preoccupied by materiality, innate significance and expert judgement - this festival does not dichotomise tangible and intangible heritage, but rather looks at both of them as mutually constitutive (Smith: 2006). Intangible heritage as a concept invokes a sense of inclusion and the recognition of living heritage and carries with it the meanings ascribed to material sites by non-professionals. According to UNESCO, *intangible cultural heritage does not only represent inherited traditions from the past but also contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part* (Lixinski: 2018, p.76). Thus the Matendera festival can be regarded as a contemporary form of ICH typified by socio-cultural practices that are still being undertaken, in the form of traditional dances, music, poetry, the preparation of traditional foods and social games such as *nhodo* (a game where children fork out objects from a small hole and return these objects one at a time) *pada* (similar to hopscotch) and *tsoro* (a game similar to draughts) (Chipangura: 2018; Liveson: 2014).

Traditional ritual songs and dances

Intangible heritage can be regarded as a group of cultural traditions and practices that are transmitted from one generation to another with a view to giving communities a sense of continuity (Vadi: 2018; Lixinski: 2018). Since intangible heritage is dynamic, we have to conserve the cultural significance of the practices and their impact on the community, rather than protecting a given form of cultural expression or practice *per se* (Vadi: 2018, p.401). A festival is a public event which is usually accepted by the community in which it is carried out (Lavenda: 1991). At the same time, we suggest that it is a form of living intangible cultural heritage that destabilises the philosophical underpinnings of the authorised heritage discourse. Therefore, in the case of Matendera, there are certain traditional dances and rituals that are uniquely associated with the Vahera people which are performed and demonstrated during the festival. For example, *mhande* is an indigenous song/dance which is performed during the annual festival and is accompanied by the sound of a unique drum beat. According to the Headman, Zvavahera, the *mhande* repertoire consists of distinctive songs and rhythms used for communicating with the *majukwa* (rain spirits). He explained that the rain spirits in turn communicate with God (*Mwari*), the provider of rain on behalf of the people. During the festival, the *mhande* display involves singing, drum playing, clapping, dancing and ululation. The importance of this traditional dance is derived from the Vahera's belief that religion is a medium through which the complex problems of this earth, especially our understanding of life after death or life beyond the grave, can be addressed (see Bourdillon: 1976). Their social structure is based on religious beliefs and the understanding that *Nyadenga* or *Musikavanhu* (God), the creator and spiritual being, is responsible for everyone's destiny [Plate 4].

Since traditional Shona religion is monotheistic and revolves around *Musikavanhu*, he cannot be accessed directly by an ordinary man, but rather through intermediaries known as ancestors or *vadzimu/ midzimu* (plural) (singular: *mudzimu*), who can be family, clan or *mhondoro*. Thus, the Vahera believe that when a person dies, his/her spirit wanders about

Plate 4
Traditional dances performed by school children from nearby schools.
Photo: Njabulo Chipangura, November, 2018.

until it is given permission by the ancestors to come back and protect its children. Ceremonies are held which give the wandering spirits permission to come back. Only a fully-grown person who has children can become an effective spirit medium once they die. These ancestral spirits help and guide their families in their day-to-day lives. The spirits of the dead are believed to convey messages from the living to God, and as such are central to the religion and belief of the Vahera. Such well-structured religious beliefs strongly refute colonial misconceptions and ideas about the animistic nature of African cultural beliefs, as well as their theories about ancestor worship. Thus, by displaying this traditional rite during the festival, Vahera people are trying to preserve their indigenous knowledge systems and practices, as well as transmitting them for future consumption by younger generations.

Against this backdrop, we used archaeological ethnography as a methodology to shed light on questions concerning the material culture and rituals of the Vahera people, and how they were enacted during the festival. Here, we posit that unlike conventional archaeological concepts of linear and sequential structuralist perspectives, Vahera people view the past and the present as coexisting entities. This is because their cultural objects are able to re-enact multiple temporalities that coexist and may be reactivated through human sensuous and sensory practices (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos: 2009). Thus we also observed that traditional drums used during the festival are similar to those found in museum exhibitions. Vahera traditional drums *(ngoma/mutumba)* are cylindrical in shape, open, and narrower at the bottom than the top. The *ngoma* is made from hardwood and has its top covered by animal skin secured on both sides with wooden pegs (Ellert: 1984).

Chikandira is another type of *ngoma* used by the Vahera during the festival. It is semi-circular with a skin stretched over the opening and also secured by wooden pegs (Ellert: 1984). During the conversation with Headman Zvavahera, he alluded to the fact that apart from the *mukwerera* (rain-asking) festivities, some of the *ngoma* were used during funerals. The other instruments used during the festival included *mbira* (thumb pianos), *marimba* (xylophones), *magavhu* (leg rattles), *hosho* (hand rattles) and *mutoriro* (flutes) which gave rhythm to the songs as people danced to the drum beat. By and large, the *mhande* dance display during the festival is viewed as a way in which the Vahera community tries to bridge the gap between static objects displayed in museums and similar objects that they still use in their traditional ceremonies.

The growth of the festival through embracing other activities

Apart from the *mhande* dance described above, the Matendera festival is also celebrated with ball games, a marathon, and singing and cooking competitions. Usually three months prior to the festival, which is held in September each year, an organising committee comprising village heads, school headmasters, the district administrator, representatives of local NGOs, NMMZ and BRDC convenes fortnightly. The coming together of different stakeholders in the organisation of this festival facilitates multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary dialogue about the safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage (Galla: 2016). In addition, standing sub-committees are formed in which different stakeholders are assigned tasks. Site clearing and guided tours on the day of the festival is assigned to NMMZ, whereas BRDC is mandated with transport services and road maintenance.

Meanwhile, village and school heads coordinate various social events within their communities. These preparations are carried out at the nearest local primary and secondary schools. Village heads, working with their respective communities, also arrange for traditional foods to be prepared during the festival. Some of the commonly cooked foods include goat meat, okra, stiff sorghum and rapoko porridge, black jack, dried cow bean leaves and pumpkin leaves with peanut butter, amongst a host of other traditional dishes [Plate 5]. A traditional brew is also prepared, mostly by village elders – the process of fermenting the sorghum which is an essential ingredient of this brew takes up to seven days. Imbibing the traditional beer is a popular activity during the festival, with drinking strictly reserved for persons over the age of 18. NGOs that operate in Buhera, such as CARE Zimbabwe, OXFAM and the Red Cross assist in providing prize money and other gifts that are given to the winning teams in the ball games and the marathon.

Each of the six villages that surround the Matendera site assembles a soccer team to compete in the knock-out stages of the Matendera Trophy. Similarly, the Matendera 10km open marathon is another activity which is popular amongst villagers during the festival. The most important thing to note is that although these two sporting activities are marked by some form of competition, people join in for fun, and everything is marked by a celebratory mood of unity. Therefore, the festival itself promotes social interaction by bringing together people in one setting as they also share their life stories. Some might have lost contact over time and the festival acts as a platform for reconnecting. Thus, according to Lavenda (1991), festivals provide a focal point for scheduling reunions and family get-togethers.

Plate 5
Participants showing traditional dishes they have prepared for the cooking competition.
Photo: Njabulo Chipangura, November, 2018.

Being in a rural setting, the Matendera festival also helps to reveal any sporting talents that villagers possess, and in some cases, budding stars are identified during both the soccer match and the marathon. Other big attractions during the festival are the women's singing and cooking competitions. Like the soccer tournament, each village assembles a team to participate in both sets of competitions. The cooking competition is based on a selected traditional dish, and the judges are drawn from elderly members of the community. For the singing competition, teams are given a traditional song one month before the festival for them to practise. The theme song is selected by village heads working together with the organising committee.

In 2014, this festival experienced unprecedented growth when the Matendera site hosted the national celebrations for World Tourism Day on the theme 'Tourism and Community Development'. The national festival was attended by top government officials, including the Minister of Tourism and Hospitality, who was the guest of honour. An interactive discussion was also opened in which the Matendera community shared their historical connections with the site with the various stakeholders in attendance. In this regard, Tanen (1991, p.368), argues that a festival brings together many elements and concentrates them in given communities to tell something about their past, present and future. However, although a festival is an ideal platform for promoting local intangible culture, there has been growing criticism that in some festivals the carnival atmosphere is exaggerated, and thus the occasion ends up losing its aura of being genuine and historic (Witz: 2003; Karp and Kratz: 1991). In such cases, the festival can inadvertently signal a 'staged authenticity' made up of choreographed performances for consumption by the audience. Festivals of this nature tend to exaggerate and magnify events to achieve historical authenticity (Witz: 2003; Karp and Kratz: 1991; Flint: 2006; Chipangura: 2015). This somehow fits into what MacCannell, (1973), describes as 'staged authenticity' which entails a careful preparation of activities within cultural sites which do not at all reflect the historical narratives of such places. Furthermore, in some cases the intangible heritage, in the form of cultural performances, is vulnerable to manipulation through recreations which do not necessarily tally with the historical aspects of the site. The 1988 Dias festival in South Africa was one such example of 'staged authenticity'. This festival sought to commemorate and celebrate the arrival of the Portuguese sailor, Bartolomeu Dias, at the Cape in 1488. However, the festival was not authentic in any way: it was rather an eventless history, staged by inserting racialised and ethnicised groups into an international world view (Witz: 2003).

De-centring the archaeological practice using the festival and the exhibition

Archaeological ethnography is an intellectual discipline that involves taking a topic, together with a set of field situations, and excavating its diverse meanings in the present (Meskell: 2005, p.82). Archaeological ethnography was used as the methodology in carrying out this research during the Matendera festival. In using this methodology, we agree with Zager and Pluckhahn (2013, p.48), who argue that *archaeologists have increasingly turned to ethnography as a tool for understanding the contemporary social context of material culture, archaeological practice, and de-colonising archaeology*. As a result, during the conversations and engagements with the community, it emerged that by carrying out this annual festival, the community gains a true sense of connection with their archaeological site. The other collaborative aspect that was brought out during the festival was the installation of an exhibition in the 'culture hut' at the site. In creating this exhibition, consultations were carried out with the community through group discussions on how they wanted the archaeological history of the site to be represented. During the designing of the exhibition, emphasis was placed on co-authorship which replaced the anonymous institutional voice with multiple voices telling the community's version of the past (Tilden: 1957; Veverka: 2003; Haplin: 2007; *Ename Charter*: 2008). The planning, presentation and interpretive methods used in this exhibition thus enabled the community to become actively involved in the representation of their own culture. In this way, community members and museum staff came together to develop the themes, temporal parameters and content of the exhibition. In this context, Yerkovich (2016, p.243) argues that community members must be allowed to mount their own exhibitions, determining what would be on display and how it would be presented. The main aim of installing this exhibition was to uphold Vahera traditional cultural practices which were in danger of extinction due to globalisation.

According to Hooper-Greenhill (2007, p.82), knowledge can no longer be considered to be unified and monolithic, but rather is fragmented and multi-vocal, and in which a cacophony of voices may be heard. This assertion aptly resonates with the Matendera festival and the setting up of the exhibition. The exhibition was opened during the inaugural festival in 2010 with pictorial displays chronicling the archaeological history of the site. Archaeological objects that were excavated from the site (see Caton-Thompson: 1931), including a collection of glass beads which had been kept at the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences in Harare, were exhibited, much to the delight of the community members in attendance. Thus, knowledge production from this exhibition emerged as a shared responsibility between NMMZ and the community members whose narratives were incorporated into the main storyline. Seemingly agreeing with this perspective, Simpson (2001, p.51) argues that *exhibitions organised in consultation with the community represented can provide a means of counteracting many of the problematic aspects of exhibitions which have drawn criticism in the past*.

Prior to this collaborative exhibition at Matendera, the main narrative had been based on conventional academic scholarship as presented through the lens of NMMZ tour guides and curators. Consequently, the transmission of knowledge at Matendera was overridden by hegemonic archaeological narratives such as those from Caton-Thompson (1931) and Huffman (1996). However, the new developments made sure that during the festival and the making of the exhibition there was no prioritisation of the so-called 'expert's' views, because emphasis was placed on non-hegemonic knowledge (Haber, 2016; Lillios, 2011). As a result, the festival complemented by the exhibition, managed to tell the subaltern story of the heritage community. During the festival and the exhibition, community members became the primary agents in determining the content presented. Archaeological ethnography thus came into focus as a concept and as a hybrid fieldwork method that investigated the multiple ways of creating knowledge at Matendera site. This, as we have illustrated, was achieved by working creatively with contemporary communities to decipher the micro-politics of archaeological practice (Meskell: 2009). In many ways, archaeological ethnography became a liberal platform for historical and cultural representation in which the community actively participated and showcased their varied cultural activities. One of the interviewees, a respected village head, said this during the inaugural festival:

> *Matendera is our heritage, the site belongs to us because it was constructed by our ancestors. This festival is a welcome development in this village because it allows us to tell our stories about this site, using music, dance, poetry, and thereby we can be recognised as the rightful custodians of the site. Even in the past our forefathers used to carry out these activities at the site so I don't see the reason why we should be limited to use the site on festivals only.* (Headman Zvavahera, August 16th 2010, Matendera).

Reflections

From this account given by Headman Zvavahera, it can thus be argued that numerous perspectives and values can be brought together to enhance a shared understanding of the past (Colwell: 2016, Davis: 2007; Ververka: 2003; *Ename Charter*: 2008). In a way, therefore, archaeological ethnography de-centralises archaeological interests by focusing on building relationships from local narratives that do not always have to revolve around the official story. These narratives present contemporary local stories on an equal footing with established archaeological narratives (Stroulia and Sutton: 2009). Archaeological ethnography can be regarded as an assemblage of approaches which are informed by ethnographic engagements at heritage sites (Samuels: 2011; Harrison: 2016; Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos: 2009; Zager and Pluckhahn: 2013). During our research, it was deployed at Matendera as a holistic form of anthropology which was improvisational, context-dependent and as a decolonised methodology that embraced the so-called unofficial narratives from non-experts (Meskell: 2007; Castaneda: 2008; Colwell: 2016; Haber: 2016; Hamilakis: 2016). Headman Zvavahera's narrative clearly shows that community perceptions do not necessarily need to be authenticated by archaeological knowledge; rather, they are based on intangible oral narratives that have been passed down from generation to generation. Drawing again from the conversation with Headman Zvavahera, he opined that: *This is a living site with living values that survive outside the stone walls that you see here and we must use it every day.* (Headman Zvavahera, August 16th 2010,

Matendera), it can be argued that community members are active knowledge agents possessing their own epistemic understandings and readings of hegemonic discourses.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have used the Matendera festival as a form of intangible cultural heritage practice in order to illustrate how communities can be engaged to produce insightful narratives around sites which were previously thought to be the exclusive domains of heritage experts. This festival is an annual event conducted at Matendera - an archaeological site located in Eastern Zimbabwe. Activities discussed in this paper that constitute intangible expressions by the community and are anchored in the festival, include traditional dances, music, poetry, social games, a marathon and the preparation of traditional dishes. By partaking in these activities at the site, we discovered that the community was endowed with a sense of belonging and shared entitlement in the production of heritage knowledge – previously kept away from them by the hegemonic discourse. Therefore, the festival, together with the exhibition, allowed them to speak and write their own narratives drawn from their local understanding of the site, and underwritten by intangible practices which have been passed from generation to generation. To get to this point, we used archaeological ethnography as both a concept and a method in which we projected the festival as a liberal space in which the heritage community freely participated. In a way, archaeological ethnography was used in this discussion as a space for thinking, engagement, dialogue, collaboration and intervention, rather than as a scholarly practice at the interface of archaeology and anthropology (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos: 2009; Hamilakis: 2011, 2016).

REFERENCES

- Atalay S.. 2006. 'Indigenous archaeology as decolonising practice' in *American Indian Quarterly*. (30): pp. 280-310.
- Beach, D.N.. 1980. *The Shona and Zimbabwe 900-1850*. London: Heinemann.
- Bauman, R. and Sawin, D.. 1991. 'The Politics of participation in Folk life festivals' in Karp, I and Lavine, S.D. (eds) *Exhibiting Cultures*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press: pp. 288-313.
- Bourdillon, M.F.C.. 1976. *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona with Special Reference to their Religion*, Mambo Press: Gweru.
- Bugarin, F.T.. 2009. 'Embracing many voices as keepers of the past' in Schmidt, P.R. (ed) *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa*. New Mexico: School for Advanced Research Press: pp. 193-210.
- Caton-Thompson, G.. 1931. *The Zimbabwe Culture: Ruins and Reactions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Castaneda, Q.E.. 2008. 'Ethnography and the Social Construction of Archaeology' in Castaneda Q.E. and Matthews, C.N. (eds) *Ethnographic Archaeological Practices*. Lanham (MD): Altamira: pp. 1-23.
- Chipangura, N.. 2015. 'Representation, reproduction and transmission of public culture in Zimbabwean museums, commemorations and festivals' in Mawere, M., Chiwaura, H. and Thondhlana, T.P. (eds) *African Museums in the Making: Reflections on the politics of Material and Public Culture in Zimbabwe*. Bamenda: Langaa Publications: pp. 68-83.
- Chipangura, N., Chiripanhura, P and Nyamagodo S.. 2018. 'Policy formulation and collaborative management: The Case of Ziwa Site, Eastern Zimbabwe' in *Museum International* 69: 3-4, pp.118-127, DOI: 10.1111/ muse.12177
- Chipangura, N.. 2018. 'Cultural heritage sites and contemporary uses; finding a balance between monumentality and intangibility in Eastern Zimbabwe' in Waelde, Charlotte *et al*. (eds) *Research Handbook on Contemporary Intangible Cultural Heritage Law and Heritage*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing: pp.379-398
- Chimhundu, H..1992. 'Early missionaries and the ethnolinguistic factor during the "invention of tribalism" in Zimbabwe' in *Journal of African History* 33(1): pp.87-109.
- Chirikure, S., Nyamushosho, R.T., Chimhundu, H.H., Dandara, C., Pamburai, H.H. and Manyanga, M.. 2017a. 'Concept and knowledge revision in the post-colony: mukwerera, the practice of asking for rain amongst the Shona of southern Africa' in Manyanga, Munyaradzi and Chirikure, Shadreck (eds) *Archives, Objects and Landscapes. Multidisciplinary Approaches to Decolonised Zimbabwean Pasts*. Bamenda: Langaa Publishers: pp 34-49.
- Chirikure S., Nyamushosho, R., Bandama, F. and Dandara, C.. 2018. 'Elites and commoners at Great Zimbabwe: archaeological and ethnographic insights on social power' in *Antiquity* 92: pp.1056–1075.
- Chirikure, S., Manyanga, M. and Pollard, A. M.. 2012. 'When science alone is not enough: Radiocarbon timescales, history, ethnography and elite settlements in southern Africa' in *Journal of Social Archaeology* 12(3): pp.356–379.
- Chirikure *et al*.. 2014. 'Zimbabwe Culture before Mapungubwe: New Evidence from Mapela Hill, South – Western Zimbabwe' in *PLOS* 9(10): pp.1-18.
- Chirikure, S. and Pwiti, G.. 2008. 'Community Involvement in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Management: An assessment from Case Studies in Southern Africa and Elsewhere' in *Current Anthropology Journal*, Vol 49, No 3: pp 467- 489.
- Colwell, C.. 2016. 'Collaborative Archaeologies and Descendant Communities' in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45: pp.113-127.
- Davis, P.. 2007. 'Place Exploration: museums, identity, community' in Watson, S. (ed) *Museums and their communities*. London: Routledge: pp. 53-76.
- Doke, C.M.. 1931. *Report on the Unification of the Shona Dialects*. London: Hertford.
- Ellert, H.. 1984. *The Material Culture of Zimbabwe*, Harare: Longman.

· Flint, L.. 2006. 'Contradictions and Challenges in Representing the Past: the Kuomboka Festival of Western Zambia' in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32 (4): pp.701-717
· Galla, A.. 2016. 'In search of the Inclusive Museum' in Murphy, B.L. (ed) *Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage*. London and New York: Routledge: pp 304-316.
· Garlake, P.S.. 1970. 'Rhodesian ruins - preliminary assessment of their styles and chronology' in *Journal of African History* 11(4): pp.495–513.
· Haber, A.. 2016. 'Decolonising Archaeological Thought in South America' in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45: pp.469-85.
· Hall, M. 1987. *The Changing Past: farmers, kings and traders in southern Africa 200-1860*. Cape Town: David Phillip.
· Hamilakis, Y.. 2011. 'Archaeological Ethnography: A multi-temporal meeting ground for archaeology and anthropology' in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40: pp.399-414.
· Hamilakis, Y.. 2016. 'Decolonial archaeologies: from ethno-archaeology to archaeological ethnography' in *World Archaeology* 48 (5): pp. 1-5.
· Hamilakis, Y. and Anagnostopoulos, A.. 2009. 'What is Archaeological Ethnography?' in *Public Archaeology: Archaeological Ethnographies* 8 (2-3): pp.65-87.
· Hamilakis, Y., Anagnostopoulos, A. and Ifantidis, F.. 2009. 'Postcards from the edge of Time: Archaeology, Photography, Archaeological Ethnography [A Photo-Essay]' in *Public Archaeology: Archaeological Ethnographies* 8 (2-3): pp.283-309.
· Haplin, M.M.. 2007. ''Play it again, Sam': reflections on a new museology' in Watson, S. (ed) *Museums and their communities*. London: Routledge: pp. 47-53.
· Harrison, R.. 2016. 'Archaeologies of emergent presents and futures' in *Historical Archaeology* 50 (3): pp.165-180.
· Harrison, F.V.. 2009. 'Reworking African(ist) Archaeology in the Postcolonial Period: a Sociocultural Anthropologist's Perspective' in Schmidt, P.R. (ed) *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa*. New Mexico: School for Advanced Research Press: pp. 231-242.
· Harrison, R and Hughes, L.. 2010. *Understanding the Politics of Heritage: Global Heritage Perspective*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
· Hooper-Greenhill, E.. 2007. 'Interpretive communities, strategies and repertoires' in Watson, S. (ed) *Museums and their communities*. London: Routledge: pp. 76-95.
· Hollowell, J. and Mortensen, L.. 2009. 'Introduction: Ethnographies and Archaeologies' in Mortensen L. and Hollowell, J. (eds) *Ethnographies and Archaeologies: Iterations of the Past*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida: pp. 1-17.
· Huffman, T.N.. 2007. *Handbook to the Iron Age: the Archaeology of Pre-colonial Farming Societies in Southern Africa*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
· ——— 1996. *Snakes and crocodiles: power and symbolism in ancient Zimbabwe*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
· Jameson, J.H and Baugher, S.. 2007. 'Public Interpretation, Outreach and Partnering: An Introduction' in Jameson J.H. and Baugher, S. (eds) *Past meets Present: Archaeologists partnering with museum curators, teachers, and community groups*. New York: Springer: pp 3-19.
· Karp, I.. 1991. 'Festivals' in Karp, I. and Lavine, S.D. (eds) *Exhibiting Cultures; the Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press: pp. 28-58.
· Lavenda, R.H.. 1992. 'Festivals and Public Culture' in Karp, I., Kreamer, C.M. and Lavine, S.D. (eds) *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press: pp. 76-104.
· Lillios, K.. 2011. 'Archaeological Ethnographies by Yannis Hamilakis and Aris Anagnostopoulos, editors' in *Ethnoarchaeology* 3 (1): pp.107-110
· Lindahl, A. and Matenga, M.. 1995. 'Present and past: ceramics and homesteads: an ethno-archaeological study in the Buhera district, Zimbabwe' in *Studies in African Archaeology* 11, Department of Archaeology Uppsala: Uppsala University.

· Liverson, T. 2014. 'Traditional Games of Shona Children' in *Journal of Pan African Studies* 7 (4): pp 8-15
· Lixinski, L.. 2018. 'Regional and international treaties on intangible cultural heritage: between tradition and contemporary culture' in Waelde, Charlotte *et al* (eds) *Research Handbook on Contemporary Intangible Cultural Heritage Law and Heritage*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing: pp.15-34.
· MacCannell, D.. 1973. 'Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings' in *The American Journal of Sociology* 79 (3): pp.589-603.
· Macdonald, S. and Basu, P.. 2007. 'Introduction: Experiments in Exhibition, Ethnography, Art and Science' in Macdonald, S. and Basu, P. (eds) *Exhibition Experiments*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
· Meskell, L.. 2005. 'Archaeological Ethnography: Conversations around Kruger National Park' in *Archaeologies* 1 (1): pp.81-100.
· ——— 2007. 'Falling Walls and Mending Fences: Archaeological Ethnography in the Limpopo' in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33 (2): pp.383- 400.
· ——— 2009. 'Introduction' in Meskell, L. (ed) *Cosmopolitan Archaeologies*. Durham: Duke University Press: pp.1-28.
· Ndlovu, N.. 2009. 'Decolonising the Mind-Set: South African Archaeology in a Postcolonial, Post-Apartheid Era' in Schmidt, P.R. (ed) *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa*. New Mexico: School for Advanced Research Press: pp 177-192.
· Onciul, B.. 2015. *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice: Decolonising Engagement*. London: Routledge
· Pyburn, K.A.. 2003. 'Archaeology for a New Millennium: the Rules of Engagement' in Derry, L. and Malloy, M. (eds) *Archaeologists and Local Communities: Partners in Exploring the Past*. Washington, DC: Society for American Archaeology: pp. 167 -184.
· Pikirayi, I.. 2001. *The Zimbabwe Culture: Origins and decline of southern Zambezian states*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira.
· Pwiti, G. and Mvenge, G.. 1996. 'Archaeologists, tourists, and rainmakers: Problems in the management of rock art sites in Zimbabwe, a case study of Domboshava national monument' in Pwiti, G. and Soper, R. (eds), *Aspects of African archaeology: Papers from the 10th Congress of the Pan- African Association for Prehistory and Related Studies*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications: pp 817 -24.
· Schmidt, P.R.. 2009. 'What is Postcolonial about archaeologies in Africa?' in Schmidt, P.R. (ed) *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa*. New Mexico: School for Advanced Research Press: pp 1-20
· Segobye, A.K.. 2009. 'Between Indigene and Citizen: Locating the Politics of the Past in Postcolonial Southern Africa' in Schmidt, P.R. (ed) *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa*. New Mexico: School for Advanced Research Press: pp 163-176.
· Simpson, M.G.. 2001. *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era*. London and New York: Routledge.
· Smith, L. J.. 2006. *Uses of Heritage*. London and New York: Routledge.
· Smith, C. and Jackson, G.. 2008. 'The Ethics of Collaboration: Whose Culture? Whose Intellectual Property? Who Benefits?' in Colwell-Chanthaphonh, C. and Ferguson, T.J. (eds) *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice: Engaging Descendant Communities*. Lanham, Maryland: Altamira Press: pp.171-202.
· Tanen, M.G.. 1991. 'Festivals and Diplomacy' in Karp, I. and Lavine, S.D. (eds) *Exhibiting Cultures*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press: pp. 366-371.
· Taruvinga, P and Ndoro, W.. 2003. 'The vandalism of the Domboshava rock painting site, Zimbabwe: Some reflections on approaches to heritage management' in *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 6 (1): pp.3-10
· Thompson, G.C. 1971. *The Zimbabwe culture: ruins and reactions*. London: Routledge.
· Tunbridge, D. and Ashworth, G.. 1996. *Dissonant Heritage*. Chichester, John Wiley and Sons.
· Watson. S.. 2007. 'Museums and their Communities' in Watson, S. (ed) *Museums and their communities*. London: Routledge: pp. 1-25.

· Witcomb. A.. 2007. ''A Place for All of Us'? Museums and Communities' in Watson, S. (ed) *Museums and their communities*. London: Routledge: pp. 133-157.
· Witz, L.. 2003. *Apartheid's Festival: Contesting South African National Pasts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
· Vadi, V.. 2018. 'Intangible cultural heritage and trade' in Waelde, Charlotte *et al.* (eds) *Research Handbook on Contemporary Intangible Cultural Heritage Law and Heritage*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing: pp.398-417.
· Veverka, J. A.. 2003. *Tips and Concepts for Planning Truly Interpretive Exhibits*. Retrieved from www.heritageinterp.com. Accessed 0n 201/01/19
· Yerkovich, S.. 2016. 'Ethics in a changing social landscape' in Murphy, B.L. (ed) *Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage*. London and New York: Routledge: pp 242-250.
· Zager, R.K. and Pluckhahn, T.J.. 2013. 'Assessing Methodologies in Archaeological Ethnography: a Case for Incorporating Ethnographic Training in Graduate Archaeology Curricula' in *Public Archaeology*, 12 (1): pp.48-63.
· Zimmerman, L.J.. 2005. 'First, Be Humble: Working with Indigenous People and Other Descendant Communities' in Smith, C. and Wobst, H.M. (eds) *Indigenous Archaeologies: Decolonizing Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge: pp. 301-314..