

Navigating the hills and voluntary confinement: Magweja and the socio-economic and political negotiation for space in the diamond mining landscape of Chiadzwa in Zimbabwe, 2006-2009

Tinashe Nyamunda

PhD Candidate, University of the Free State

Patience Mukwambo

Centre for Population Studies, University of Zimbabwe

Mark Nyandoro¹

Department of Economic History, University of Zimbabwe

E-mail address: mark.nyandoro@mopipi.ub.bw

Abstract

This article focuses on the socio-economic and political experiences of the artisanal diamond miners and the various communities within the hills of Chiadzwa situated in the Marange area of Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. The diamond rush by *Magweja* which can be traced back to 2006 ended in 2009 with the violent expulsion of *Magweja* in January 2009 under operation “dzokera kumusha”. This phase in the country’s mining history has popularly been characterised by the miners as a “free for all” period. Although there is a lot of emerging literature focusing on different aspects of Chiadzwa and indeed the activities of *magweja*, none has focused on the physical and corporeal dimensions operating within that landscape and how this was informed by shifting political, economic and social conditions. Using at different times, law enforcement, state security and military apparatus, the state increasingly assumed a secure hold over the area as a way of protecting the natural resources of the country from exploitation. The *magweja* felt they were not only being subordinated to a strong and powerful state, but they were being deprived, since the inception of Chiadzwa, of the right to enjoy the wealth that naturally flows from a diamond mining activity located in their district. This is what propelled the miners to devise adaptation and survival strategies which in turn engendered the relationship of conflict between the state and the artisanal mining community in Chiadzwa from 2006 to 2009. The article explores this interaction and its intricacies with particular reference to the material conditions that affected the *magweja* as part of their negotiation for space within the diamondiferous landscape. In

¹ Dr Nyandoro is also a senior Research Associate in the PARSED Research sub-programme: Water -*CuDyWat* group, NWU, Vaal Triangle Campus.

the beginning, entry into this lucrative mining enterprise was relatively easier, but later it became increasingly difficult culminating in the eventual expulsion and exclusion of *magweja* from diamond extraction. In the entire period from 2006 to 2009, *magweja* could not construct any settlement or living structures in this habitat which had become a home for many of them. Ironically, for a place that had vast economic potential for all involved, Chiadzwa came to be identified simply as “musango” (bush or thicket) or “kumunda” (the field) where the artisanal miners sought to eke out a living under the literally open, unsheltered landscape. The article thus characterises *magweja*'s entry into the highly policed and increasingly militarised Chiadzwa fields as acquiescing to voluntary confinement. It also traces the trajectory of individual and collective experiences and memories of *magweja* as a specific and important factor in the early diamond extraction narratives. State involvement is perceived and portrayed as a bane to the economic well-being of the local community.

Keywords: Zimbabwe; State; Police and army; Chiadzwa; Artisanal mining community; *Magweja*; Diamond mining; Water; Health and disease.

Introduction

Using primary sources and oral interviews held mostly with informal diamond miners but also with traders, state security and law enforcement agents as well as residents of Chiadzwa (See Image 4 - Area Map of Chiadzwa in Marange) and its surrounding areas, the article focuses on the experiences of the highly transitory artisanal mining community that emerged and inhabited the hills of Chiadzwa between 2006 and early 2009. Some of the miners were artisanal (*Magweja and magwejelina - colloquial for male and female informal artisanal miners respectively*) in the sense that they employed relatively cheap, easily accessible and rudimentary most common digging tools such as *mugwara* (iron rod). New miners easily learnt its usage and became more efficient with experience. This tool was more appropriate and portable in comparison to a pick given that *Magweja* had to evade law enforcement officers at a moment's notice. The *Magweja* also tended to be highly transient or temporary as their mining activities were increasingly criminalised leading to violent influx-control and authority asserting operations. Aware of impending law enforcement or military operations which often expelled the miners from the area, the traffic to and from Chiadzwa therefore tended to be highly mobile. It must be noted that at times, especially in the early days of the commencement of the diamond rush in 2006, the activities of the miners were tolerated and even encouraged by different arms of the state such as the Ministry of Mines

and the Minerals Marketing Corporation of Zimbabwe (MMCZ)² - one of the role players with overarching influence on the world of the artisanal diamond miners. As Image 1 shows, mining which relied mainly on the use of shovels was carried out in an environment of relative freedom because at this stage the activity was not perceived as illegal.

Image 1: Zimbabwe's Marange Diamond Miners in 2006



Source: P Hunt, "Zimbabwe's 'Conflict Diamonds' Controversy and the Flawed Kimberley Process in Marange Fields", p. 1, *The New York Times*, December 2011.

However, police action after 2006 increasingly suggested that the operations of the informal miners were illegal. To negotiate their space and navigate the landscape, the communities of miners inhabiting the hills of Chiadzwa, in digging as well as marketing the precious mineral, tended to be cautious in their approach because they were suspicious of the political intentions of the arms of the state that wielded authority in the mining sector.

Drawing on concepts such as anti-structure and anti-society³ as well as focusing on survival strategies adopted to cope with the harsh conditions of

2 The MMCZ was established as the sole marketing and selling agent for all minerals produced in Zimbabwe with the exception of Gold and Silver. However, with the recent economic policy overhaul, the marketing of minerals is no longer restricted to MMCZ only. Any miner can sell their product as they wish.

3 These concepts are borrowed from MAK Halliday, *Language as social semiotic* (Baltimore, University Park Press, 1978) and R Saunders, "Geologies of power: Blood diamonds, security politics and Zimbabwe's troubled transition", M Clarke & C Bassett (eds.), *Legacies of liberation: Post-colonial struggles for a democratic Southern Africa* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2011); S Nyota & F Sibanda, "Digging for diamonds, wielding new words: A linguistic perspective on Zimbabwe's 'Blood Diamonds'", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38(1), March 2012, pp. 129-144.

artisanal mining⁴ the article investigates from a multidisciplinary perspective how the Chiadzwa mining community navigated and interacted with the diamond mining landscape. Anti-society is applied to those communities whose practices are generally regarded by the wider society as not conforming to accepted norms of legal and social codes of conduct. The article also examines the role of the State in facilitating the rush onto Chiadzwa and how it employed systemic violence to control the influx of people and establish boundaries of habitation, movement and operation within the mining fields. In response, the miners employed various tactics such as evasion of police and army officers, bribing authorities, forming syndicates with the police and army officers stationed to guard the boundaries of the fields or locals who knew how to navigate the area. Their tactics also included partnering with powerful and influential politicians to seek protection, as well as other strategies involving circumspect tactics utilised in other artisanal mining activities such as gold panning. These survival strategies which were employed to evade state power illustrate how the miners were able to “organise” and “build” some fortresses in this environment. In affirming their agency, the miners however struggled to constantly contest and negotiate their space in a terrain that attracted so much political attention. Ultimately, the daily operating environment in the field affected the *Magweja* in terms of such issues as hygiene, injury, illness, death and spirituality as well as altering notions of humanity and society for their mobile and transient communities.

The article is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the “discovery” of diamonds (*ngoda*) in Chiadzwa, mineral extraction and analyses how the rush into Chiadzwa produced an artisanal mining community which stimulated some intended and unintended responses from the State. In an article published in 2012, Nyamunda and Mukwambo examine how the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government appealed to the indigenisation discourse to justify their initial support for this informal mining community from which they hoped to gain both political mileage and reap material benefits.⁵ However, the state’s failure to effectively

4 We also borrowed this approach from L Renshaw, “The scientific and affective identification of Republican civilian victims from the Spanish civil war”, *Journal of Material Culture*, 15(4), 2010, pp. 449-463; See also J Fontein, “Between tortured bodies and resurfacing bones: The politics of the dead in Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Material Culture*, 15(4), 2010, pp. 423-448 and C Krmpotich, J Fontein & J Harries, “The substance of bones: The emotive materiality and affective presence of human remains”, *Journal of Material Culture*, 15(4), 2010, pp. 371-384.

5 T Nyamunda and P Mukwambo, “The state and the bloody diamond rush in Chiadzwa: Unpacking the contesting interests in the development of illicit mining and trading, c. 2006-2009”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38(1), March 2012, pp. 145-166.

regulate and extract profits from the country's rich mining sector saw it increasingly shifting towards criminalising mining activities. Its intervention in this nascent community became increasingly characterised by violence. The artisanal miners settled in open spaces where they could not construct any shelter because of the security threat of doing so. They also could not access at least the basic social services to which they were generally accustomed in their places of origin. Exposed to a literally open and rather hostile environment, the emerging community was conceived, in Halliday's conceptualisation, as an "anti-society" because they were forced to adopt new modes of survival and societal interactions dictated by the insecure conditions prevailing in the diamond fields.⁶

The second section evaluates the experiences of this community and its relationship with the Chiadzwa landscape. Although driven by largely economic reasons, the lived experiences of the *Magweja* in Chiadzwa produced very interesting corporeal dynamics - a major justification of this study. Within this community different categories and classes of people emerged as a consequence of the proliferation of the artisanal mining activities. There were buyers, transient artisanal miners hoping for a quick strike and those who regarded themselves as relatively permanent and seasoned *Magweja* (some of them were *makorokoza* - a term used for illegal artisanal gold miners that had also operated in the Kadoma, Chimanimani and other areas) the majority of whom had adopted various means of survival and the "rules" of the "game" in the field.⁷ State security and law enforcement personnel largely determined the *Magweja's* living patterns and operations.

The police and army officers were also directly or indirectly responsible for limiting the *Magweja's* access to basic amenities such as clean water, decent food, sanitation, health delivery and other essentials. Because of the cordoning of Chiadzwa, it was difficult for *Magweja* to access the nearby Odzi River for drinking and bathing water because there was often a heavy police presence. As such, they would go for days, even weeks without bathing and sometimes they would have to buy drinking water from informal traders who infiltrated the hills. This forced them to have recourse to whatever was available, for instance, polluted or contaminated water from unprotected shallow wells, "bush" toilets, outdoor camping, smuggled and sometimes stale food brought

6 M Haliday, *Languages as social semiotics* (London, Edward Arnold, 1978).

7 Interview with Musweweshiri, Chakohwa shopping centre, 9 August 2008. NB Musweweshiri is not his real name. All names of respondents interviewed for this article are pseudonyms. *Makorokoza* (plural) and *korokoza* (singular).

in by informal traders or “vendors”.⁸ These conditions compromised their general state of health, especially during the cholera outbreak of 2008-2009.⁹ Within Chiadzwa, where no direct attention was given to amenities provision, the situation was bad. Such experiences took their toll on the community of *Magweja* with long-lasting physical, spiritual and emotive legacies. These experiences reveal, on the one hand, state efforts to interact with the miners and on the other, the artisanal mining community in Chiadzwa’s resilience in coping with an otherwise difficult operating environment. While the central state appeared at times to tolerate and include artisanal mining activities in Chiadzwa, it did so under the conditions it determined. These conditions involved heavy police control and the *Magweja* had to be excluded from normal society to operate in a secluded cordoned area. Although the human boundaries installed through police and army presence were relatively fluid as these state personnel asserted their own agency by sometimes exploiting the *Magweja* through demanding bribes or using their position of authority to demand proceeds from the miners’ successful strikes, they would be forced to comply with their call for duty when operations were announced. For the *Magweja*, the option was to be “voluntarily confined”, in the field while mining and navigating authority as Givemore (a *gweja*) noted, then leave once a strike has been made or after realising that they were not so lucky.

The State, the diamond rush and the emergence of Magweja in Chiadzwa

Before 2006, the existence of diamonds was known by a few individuals that may have included high level state officials. Existing evidence shows that a mining conglomerate known as De Beers¹⁰ (a corporation set up by Cecil John Rhodes for the purpose of exploiting diamond mines in South Africa, and in Zimbabwe during the period of this study) operated in Chiadzwa from 1994 to 2006 under three-four year prospecting licenses. Upon the expiration of the last one in early 2006, another company called the African Consolidated Resources (ACR)¹¹ - an AIM-listed multi-commodity resource

8 Interview with Musweweshiri, Chakohwa shopping centre, 9 August 2008.

9 M Nyandoro, “Historical overview of the cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe (2008-2009)”, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 36(1), 2011, pp. 154-174.

10 The establishment of De Beers consisted as a parallel effort of setting up a cartel with other producers in order to control international prices of diamonds.

11 The ACR utilises its first mover advantage to establish a formidable balance sheet of world class assets at various stages of development. With over 12 key mining projects covering gold, nickel, platinum, copper, phosphate and diamonds, the Company is focussed on developing these important strategic assets for the benefit of all stakeholders.

development company focused on Zimbabwe since 2004 - briefly took over until its operations were disturbed in early 2007 by powerful ZANU-PF politicians who were campaigning for the harmonised elections of 2008. Appealing to empowerment and indigenisation discourses as part of their election strategy, Chris Mushowe and his campaign team accused the ACR of being dominated by British capital and encouraged local villagers to start mining in place of “foreign” mining capital “as long as it benefited the local inhabitants’ families”. This move opened up the diamond landscape to a huge influx of *Magweja*.¹² The period that witnessed the massive influx of *Magweja* and *magwejelina* was generally regarded as the “free for all” phase as depicted in Image 2. These mining activities that were initially sanctioned by the state were however increasingly criminalised by 2007, hence the generic reference to the miners as “illegal”.

Image 2: Artisanal diamond miners (*Magweja* & *magwejelina*), Chiadzwa, Marange



Source: C Hove, “The many diamonds of Chiadzwa”, 25 November 2008 at <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/mines44.19067.html>, Accessed on 14 December 2012.

The diamond rush was in part prompted by the economic crisis that manifested itself through the first hyperinflation of the twenty-first century and one of the worst in global history. It was also compounded by an increasing unemployment rate that reached a peak of about over 94 percent by 2009.¹³ These factors culminated in a political crisis in the post-2000 period whose negative consequences included, among others, violence, displacement and insecurity.¹⁴ The political intolerance of the state was visible through political

12 See T Nyamunda and P Mukwambo, “The state and the bloody rush in Chiadzwa”, p. 7.

13 B Raftopolous, “The crisis in Zimbabwe, 1998-2008”, B Raftopolous & AS Mlambo, *Becoming Zimbabwe* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2009), p. 219.

14 D Potts, “Internal migration in Zimbabwe: The impact of livelihood destruction in rural and urban areas”, J

persecution, a good example being operation *Murambatsvina*¹⁵ (clean the filth) of 2005 as well as the growing food insecurity in the rural areas. Given the worsening circumstances, some people found Chiadzwa to be an attractive economic alternative.

Some of the local people involved in mining supported the government of Zimbabwe's black empowerment for various reasons. These included some support, but not dominant support for ZANU-PF for personal aggrandizement and for others, an alternative opportunity to earn a living. One supporter of the policy who was also a *gweja* indicated how "the government favored us [Black Zimbabweans] to mine" instead of the ACR which was perceived to be a foreign mining corporation - a claim the ACR officially denied.¹⁶ However, some villagers viewed this as populist rhetoric and others like one of our interview respondents, Morgan, who was skeptical about the policy as "just politicking which we had to exploit as long as it lasted".¹⁷ Morgan was aware that they had to be involved in *chigweja* (the process of informal mining) because the ZANU-PF government sometimes sympathised with the activity. In the ensuing election, Mushowe nonetheless lost to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) representative.¹⁸ Notwithstanding the electoral defeat, the political populism of the Mushowe campaign team partly resulted in a frenzied diamond rush which led to new "communities" of artisanal miners and dealers being forged at Chiadzwa.¹⁹

In response to the sudden rush onto Chiadzwa, different arms of the state, particularly the law enforcement agencies, were deployed to monitor and sometimes flush out some *Magweja*. Whilst some sections of the state appeared to support the *Magweja*, others apparently feared the transformation of this group into an organised and autonomous mining force. These different approaches to Chiadzwa point to the fragmentary nature of the state. The politics surrounding Chiadzwa was partly summarised by Saunders as literally

Crush & D Tevera (eds.), *Zimbabwe's exodus crisis, migration, survival* (Cape Town, Unity Press, 2010).

15 Operation *Murambatsvina* literally meant "clean the filth" or as it was known in official circles, "operation restore order". Apparently it was meant to displace the growing mass of urban opposition to prevent them from voicing their discontent and also to reduce their capacity and access to vote. It has also been argued that the operation was also meant to conceal the deteriorating housing situation and social service provision in the city. For detail on *Murambatsvina* see F Musoni, "Operation Murambatsvina and the politics of street vendors in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36(2), 2010.

16 Interview with Robert, Chaseyama, Chimanimani, 10 February 2007. See also T Nyamunda and P Mukwambo, "The State and the bloody rush in Chiadzwa".

17 Interview with Morgan, Nyanyadzi, 10 February 2007.

18 T Nyamunda and P Mukwambo, "The State and the bloody diamond rush in Chiadzwa", p. 7.

19 S Nyota and F Sibanda, "Digging for diamonds, wielding new words", p. 2.

depicting “geologies of power” in reference to the centrality of Chiadzwa diamond deposits to the national political-economic discourse from 2006.²⁰ ZANU-PF intended to ensure that the proceeds of diamonds were gradually under the control of powerful members of their establishment in case of any political power shift following the elections of 2008. The Party managed to secure the diamond fields in early 2009, just before the creation of the Government of National Unity (GNU). As such, media reports indicated how the very miniscule proceeds from the sale of diamonds contributed to the fiscus. It is assumed that only a few powerful politicians, clients of the companies that were eventually granted control of the fields such as Canadile Holdings and Mbada Diamonds, benefitted directly from the mineral exploitation. Although different arms of the state, notably the MMCZ, the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation (ZMDC) - a state enterprise created to exploit any mining opportunities that may arise - law enforcement agents and security forces, among others, expressed contesting interests at different levels, official policy was expressed through the initial ambivalence of the central state whose concern for Chiadzwa only increased after the March 2008 elections. Nonetheless, whatever the shifting position of the state, the one constant thing from 2006 was the relative confinement of *Magweja* and their interaction with other groups in the field. *Magweja* activities were to some degree monitored and influenced by the occasional use of state violence as a control measure. The community of informal miners and traders that had been allowed to thrive was eventually violently jettisoned with the tenacity only comparable to operation *Murambatsvina* when ZANU-PF decided to effectively harness the fields for their own purposes.

Certainly, negotiating with different arms of the state as well as shifting policies of the central state defined the boundaries of the transitory community. Some *Magweja* were very aware of this situation. One Peter, of Chasesyama village, observed that:²¹

The government only allowed us to mine hoping to benefit somehow. We knew this but we only came here because of hunger and nothing else. Although some people hoped the situation was permanent, we had the feeling that we were fooling ourselves, and ... Chiadzwa was never meant to last for *Magweja*.

20 R Saunders, “Genealogies of power: Blood diamonds, security politics and Zimbabwe’s troubled transition”, M Clarke & C Bassett (eds.), *Legacies of liberation: Post-colonial struggles for a democratic Southern Africa* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2011).

21 Interview with Peter, Chasesyama, 9 August 2007.

Another *gweja*, Agrippa, noted that:²²

... diamonds were a gift from the ancestors who realised our economic suffering but we knew that the government would eventually dispossess us of this heritage.

While *Magweja* constantly negotiated for space within the Chiadzwa landscape, utilising the evolving networks with some degree of success, it was clear from the start that the state was steadily assuming hegemonic influence and that the relationship between the two parties was very unstable and sometimes unpredictable.

The artisanal mining community thus found itself operating within a harsh and tightly monitored political environment in which it had to navigate the deliberate power relations and client networks in order to survive. As Katsaura has noted, the *Magweja* quickly evolved codes to evade and negotiate with authority and utilise the networks availed to them by shadow state elements.²³ Just like some state officials, they also “instrumentalised” the perceived “disorder” or informal arrangements²⁴ - a key feature of shadow networks - to survive in Chiadzwa. Some local *Magweja* simply masqueraded as ordinary villagers going about their daily chores when in actual fact they were on mining expeditions, but this deceptive strategy was rarely effective.²⁵ It faltered due to the tight control and surveillance that was maintained by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) who were sometimes complemented by the army. In controlling the influx of the *Magweja*, the police closely scrutinised people’s identity particulars in order to limit the number of “outside visitors”.²⁶ However, some corrupt police officers often solicited for bribes from all-too-willing would-be informal miners and seasoned *makorokoza* from other areas such as *Kwamusanditevera* on Roy Bennett’s former farm in Chimanmani or from as far as Kadoma who hoped to strike it rich in Chiadzwa. Once admitted to the hills of Chiadzwa, however, the *Magweja* were confined

22 Interview with Agrippa, Chakohwa shopping centre, 9 August 2007.

23 O Katsaura, “Socio-cultural dynamics of informal diamond mining in Chiadzwa, Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 12(6), 2010. See also LM Sachikonye, *The social impact of diamonds extraction in Chiadzwa, Marange* (Johannesburg, *Southern Africa Resource Watch*, 2009).

24 The concept of the “instrumentalization of disorder” was critically applied by Nyamunda and Mukwambo in their article, “The State and the Bloody Diamond Rush in Chiadzwa”. They argue that although Chabal and Daloz, the architects of the concept, overgeneralised the idea that Africa defied the notion of order and instead harnessed disorder as a basis for accumulation and political instrument by powerful politicians, it is nonetheless a useful analytical tool if properly and contextually applied. For a more comprehensive discussion on instrumentalisation of disorder, see P Chabal & JP Daloz, *Africa works: Disorder as a political instrument* (Oxford, James Currey, 1999).

25 Interview with Kusena, Harare, 9 November 2009.

26 “Police seal off Marange”, *The Herald*, 9 October 2007.

there and had to evade authority. Unless syndicates were formed with some police officers, the instances where bribes were paid indicated that these were occasional transactions. In this case, the relationship with authority was temporary, and afterwards, the *Magweja* were on their own. *Magweja* indicated that they preferred very temporary transactions with police or army officers in which they paid bribes as opposed to forming more permanent syndicates as power-relations usually meant that they would be exploited. The price of buying protection was too high as the officers would demand a higher share of the proceeds from diamond sales - in some cases half the money, and in others more than that. Whatever the outcome, the *Magweja* would thus be confined as they carried out mining operations with little freedom to move in and out of the fields and moreover, they also had to be very careful about their movement within the fields which were consistently monitored by security and law enforcement personnel.

Testimony to the shady and clandestine deals that went on in this area has been provided by Mapaso, a *korokoza*, who said in Shona:²⁷

... mapurisa tamajaira. Vanotamburawo sesu saka tiri tose munhamo nematambudziko. Tave kuziva matauriro nekudhiza kwacho.

This means, we are now used to the police. They are also economically suffering like us. We now know how to engage them and grease their palms.

The police found themselves in this predicament and ready to accept bribes because they earned Zimbabwe dollars which at that time, due to escalating inflation, translated to less than US\$5 per month in a country where unemployment was also around 94 percent. One police officer who called himself Gringo (after a famous Harare dramatist and comic TV character) remarked that:²⁸

Mbudzi inodya payakasungirwazve. Asi kana nguva yebasa yasvika, basa rinotongoitwa zvisinei nekuti tinozivana.

The officer implied that, we (the police) have to exploit the opportunity of working in this area to our benefit and enrich ourselves through bribes. However, as state agents we are always cautious to maintain a balance between our police operations mandate and our covert relationship with our *Magweja* allies.

27 Interview with Mapaso, Chakohwa shopping centre, 10 August 2008.

28 Interview with Gringo, Chakohwa shopping centre, 10 August 2008.

This illustrates the uneasy and exploitative relationship between the police and the *Magweja* as police officials displayed split allegiances between their desire for bribes and their commitment to their jobs - a situation that was compounded by poor remuneration on their part and rising unemployment levels in Zimbabwe.

Aware of this situation, the central State displayed a large measure of ambivalence, only intervening with draconic police operations when the situation was getting out of hand. This was because the state hoped to benefit from revenue accruals collected by such statutory institutions as the MMCZ. This state agency is the sole marketing entity for minerals in Zimbabwe and it is justified, among other things, on the grounds that any illegal sale of minerals compromises the revenue that is intended to flow to the state. However, this institution was heavily undercapitalised to the extent that it could not compete with the many private and clandestine buyers that invaded Chiadzwa and Mutare between 2006 and 2009. Some were middlemen²⁹ or cohorts of international smugglers stationed in Mozambique and South Africa. Others bought diamonds for resale, while yet others were proxies for big local politicians.³⁰ In this context, two popular buyers known as *Bothy* or *Jangola*,³¹ acquired a reputation for paying well compared to the MMCZ. Of the two, *Jangola* came to be so popular that every diamond strike came to be associated with him. If a *gweja* exclaimed “Yafa mari, yafa na Jangola”³² (trans-literally meaning, the money is dead, the money is dead with *Jangola*) it was simply a code expressing that their find would get them a good profit. This did not apply only to this particular buyer, but also every fair dealer was invariably compared to him. Therefore, since doing business with

29 The use of African middlemen or trader-producers in the marketing of produce has been a common practice for many years in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. The colonial administration always insisted that a would-be trader-producer had to be formally registered through the Native Commissioner (NC). The Grain Marketing Board (GMB) also only allowed one to buy, as a trader-producer, any maize or grain after receiving a registration certificate from their office. However, since independence in 1980 this requirement has not always been insisted upon, thereby giving rise to numerous informal middlemen in the Chiadzwa diamond trade and other sectors of the economy. TV Ncube, “Peasant production and marketing of grain crops in Zimbabwe 1890-1986: An overview”, *Henderson Seminar Paper, (72)*, 1987 has produced a comprehensive analysis of the operations of trader-producers in the country. See also National Archives of Zimbabwe (Records Centre) hereafter referred to as NAZ (RC), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Box 22867, Location 18.5.3R, File: Cancelled Leases: Sanyati: Ngezi, Warnings Re: Buildings, Secretary, Grain Marketing Board, Causeway, Salisbury to Native Jaison (X 8546 Urungwe, Madiro Stores, Karoi, 18th January 1954 and M Nyandoro, *Development and differentiation: The case of TILCOR/ARDA irrigation activities in Sanyati (Zimbabwe), 1939 to 2000* (Saarbrücken, VDM Verlag Dr Muller, December 2008), pp. 22 & 82.

30 Interview with Matiyashe, Mutare, 12 August 2008.

31 Interview with Bothwell Hlahla, Mutare, 13 February 2010. Unfortunately, Bothwell was killed in a car accident in 2011.

32 Interview with Bothwell Hlahla, Mutare, 13 February 2010.

Jangola was lucrative it was difficult for the state to outwit the *Jangolas*. As the state failed to compete with the *Jangolas*, it shifted its approach from ambivalence to criminalising the diamond procurement activities across the field thereby creating a very dangerous habitat in which to conduct business. From 2006, the state commissioned the entrance of *Magweja* onto Chiadzwa from 2006 through appealing to and loosely applying populist discourses of black empowerment for political expediency. However, the trajectory of the developments in Chiadzwa espoused a need for the state to monitor and try to control operations in the area. It was a decision meant to avoid a direct clash with possible voters in the crucial elections of 2008 and it was also meant to be a political diversion from the worsening economic crisis and a source of relief for both the state and the mass of unemployed people. In the end, by 2008, under conditions dictated by the presence of state apparatus, specifically the army and the police, *Magweja* became an important feature of the Chiadzwa landscape which they tactfully navigated as they also evaded and negotiated with authority at various levels. The next section discusses how they reformulated ideas of society and evolved survival strategies as they lived in the period they were invariably confined to the fields or hills of Chiadzwa.

Magweja experiences in the hills and diamond fields of Chiadzwa

There was a new and emerging structure to the largely transitory communities who lived in the Chiadzwa Mountains. The *gweja* population reconstructed ideas about their areas of origin, perhaps to maintain nostalgic perceptions of the comforts of home in this unstable terrain. The illicit nature of their operations allowed them to re-create innovative and basic infrastructure to define these societies. Their identities were, therefore, not linked to some local (Chiadzwa) place names, but to their original homes. According to Amos, there were the Buhheras (i.e. people from *Buhera*), *Bochas*; *Shurugwis* (Karanga) and the *Gonzoni*. The latter were artisanal miners from *Musanditevera* in Chimanimani and other adjoining areas. Those whose origin was Shurugwi came to be stereotypically associated with murderers who seized *Magweja* suspected “of having struck diamonds and swallowed them to protect the

find”.³³ It was commonly believed that they “disemboweled their gweja victim to recover the diamond gems”.³⁴

High density suburbs in Harare such as Mufakose, Mbare and Mabvuku came to be associated with certain *Magweja* who claimed to have come from there and these often recreated their makeshift settlements in Chiadzwa typifying their origins. Tonderai, a gweja, recounted how working with those from Mbare where he came from reflected his intimate association with home. He identified with that group because he was familiar with its customs, habits and manners. Besides, “we relate better compared to a stranger coming from some communal area I do not even know”.³⁵ It was on the basis of these ties that some, not all, mining syndicates were created. The *Sindalos* (syndicates) were the practical avenue for the actual mining that occurred mostly at night or under cover of darkness.

In their article on how new words were wielded or coined as an outcome of the activities that went on in the mining community, Nyota and Sibanda use anthropologist Turner’s notion of anti-structure and anti-society.³⁶ It posits that, it is a temporary alternative which ultimately reaffirms the larger dominant structures of society within which it is located.³⁷ Indeed, these prototype transient settlements fall within this framework as they grew to assume dominance and a state of permanence. However, the origin differences around which syndicates were formed and defined initially on the basis of similar ethnic background (i.e. the *Bhuberas* and *Karangas*) tended to lose effectiveness as time went on as evidenced by the fact that they were deconstructed by 2009. It can be noted that sharing a common origin was definitely a basis for stronger trust networks, but it was not a guarantee for good working partnerships. There were instances where strangers formed temporary but effective partnerships for purposes of work and instances where people from the same area failed to achieve this. In an effort to curb the illicit trade in diamonds in Chiadzwa, the police conducted sporadic raids aimed at breaking the *Magweja* networks. Such intermittent raids eventually

33 Interview with Amos, Mutare, 16 February, 2009.

34 Interview with Amos, Mutare, 16 February, 2009. See also S Nyota and F Sibanda, “Digging for diamonds, wielding new words”, who discuss the linguistic culture that partly informed communities emerging in Chiadzwa. They also capture a lot of these stereotypes. It can be noted however that the terms thieves and murderers were not confined to just *mabhubera* stereotypes, but a more general term, *magombiro* was evolved to generally depict such elements.

35 Interview with Tonderai, Chirasika village, Chiadzwa, 9 September 2008.

36 V Turner, *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure* (New York, Aldine, 1969).

37 S Nyota and F Sibanda, “Digging for diamonds, wielding new words”, p. 9.

rendered constructs of locating or recreating ideas of home less useful. In spite of the raids, the *Magweja* continued to exhibit high levels of agency in a complex environment. As the *Magweja's* struggle to evade authority (in particular the police and the army) persisted, the structures and societies they were responsible for creating in Chiadzwa became convoluted with elements of solidarity becoming more pronounced. *Gweja* solidarity became very strong against the backdrop of the violence instituted by state security details which in many ways was not dissimilar to the violence and thuggery perpetrated by the *magombiro* (thieves and murderers who operated in the diamond mining communities of Chiadzwa) which was a common problem.

The physical environment, however, was also harsh on all categories of people in the area. The cold weather in winter, hunger, fatigue, insecurity, lack of access to the Odzi River that supplied “clean” bathing and drinking water, the prevalence of malaria, cholera and reproductive ill-health affected everyone regardless of who they were or where they came from.³⁸ Exposure to common economic and health pestilences intensified *gweja* group allegiances. Ultimately, the Chiadzwa confinement effectively rendered individual identities less important, forging a nascent community united by common challenges that were more pronounced than differences based on origin. For Nyota and Sibanda, a unique anti-language incidentally emerged to re-enforce this new identity.³⁹ The miners, for instance, created uniform language codes that became necessary for their very existence. Just as the differences and prejudices they brought from their original homes were undermined by bigger common challenges, their new realities or corporeality came to characterise and define the *Magweja*.

Within the confines of the hills, limited and risky navigation assumed corporeal dimensions. In any community, there are numerous constructs of the individual, hygiene, health and death which were transformed in Chiadzwa. Ideas about these were interpreted and re-interpreted to portray life in Chiadzwa - a society that came to resemble a life of cruelty and

38 Interview with Makoti, Chakowha shopping centre, 9 August, 2007. N.B. Pandemics such as cholera which are a consequence of lack of safe and clean water have a deleterious impact on economic growth and development. The diamond mining activities by the *Magweja* though illegal, should not reclude the state from its social responsibility of providing a safe and healthy environment around Chiadzwa. If the threat of this old scourge (cholera) and other mine-related diseases is not addressed with more urgency, great progress in the public health of ordinary Zimbabweans cannot be achieved. For detail on this see M Nyandoro, “Historical overview of the cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe (2008-2009)” and M Nyandoro, “Rethinking hydropolitics: Water governance in post-colonial Zimbabwe from 1980 up to 2012”, Forthcoming.

39 S Nyota and F Sibanda, “Digging for diamonds, wielding new words”.

hostility. In fact, these notions and representations of Chiadzwa, including the incidences of violence, revealed a society that was far from “normal”. Actually, the violence associated with this landscape is reminiscent of ideas about life and death one would find under war circumstances. Reinshaw shows how life was no longer respected during the American Civil War (1861-1865) and how the dead bodies were mutilated for mementos of the victorious soldiers.⁴⁰ The materiality of the dead was not as affective to the estranged enemies as opposed to a death in a community where one lived and was well known. The dead in Chiadzwa were not the responsibility of the wider community. The state on the other hand was preoccupied with establishing measures to prevent the illegal diamond mining in the area. In this context, the major way in which the state attempted to control events in Chiadzwa was through the use of violence. While hostility by the state apparatus was an everyday and usually fatal occurrence especially for the *Magweja*, the violence escalated when security “operations” were instituted to flush out *Magweja* and at the same time “protecting” this natural mineral resource. Notable state measures included what was termed “Operation Chikorokoza Chapera” (No more illegal panning)⁴¹ mounted in early 2007, “Operation Hakudzokwi” (You will not return)⁴² instituted in late 2008 and “Operation Dzokera Kumusha” (Go back home) the decisive flushing out operation introduced in January 2009.⁴³ The 2009 operation was by far the bloodiest of all as it was characterised by instances where people were tortured and killed. The situation was compounded by the very material conditions under which these people lived which often led to illness, injury, hunger and ultimately death.

During these operations which were not only limited to Chiadzwa but also spilled over to surrounding shopping centers in Chirasika, Chakohwa, Chaseyama, Hot Springs and Nyanyadzi to name a few, the state security forces randomly assaulted people and looted personal valuables like cell phones and money (in all available currencies) from business people and the villagers. These events preceded the demonetisation of the Zimbabwean dollar culminating in the adoption of a multi-currency system in the country in February 2009. Some Chiadzwa villagers tending their fields were

40 L Reinshaw, “The scientific and affective identification of Republican civilian victims”.

41 Sokwanele, “Operation Chikorokoza Chapera (No Illegal Panning): Zimbabwe’s blood diamonds - transcript”, *Sokwanele*, 31 October 2009.

42 “Operation Hakudzokwi”, *The Herald*, 24 November 2008. This was an operation jointly carried out by security personnel to restore sanity at Chiadzwa diamond fields by decisively dealing with illegal diamond dealers and panners.

43 T Nyamunda and P Mukwambo, “The state and the bloody diamond rush in Chiadzwa”, p. 14.

brutally assaulted, whilst others were robbed of their money and diamonds. The methods of assault ranged from the use of fists, boots, assault sticks, gun butting, mossback shooting and the unleashing of police dogs against defenseless people. To this end, the *Magweja* who had become so familiar with police violence branded one particular vicious police dog “Bruno”. They even printed and wore t-shirts with pictures of “Bruno” as a stark reminder of police brutality on the diamond fields. There was also a ruthless and infamous police official, Chief Superintendent Johannes Gowu, who allegedly was notorious for shooting and killing *Magweja* on sight. This prompted responses which were not only anti-police brutality, but also anti-state. The challenge for the authorities was that they could not always distinguish easily between those who were ordinary villagers not involved in mining and trading activities. Indeed, *Magweja* would sometimes find refuge among the villagers. Moreover, the locals also largely took up the lucrative opportunities as they emerged and thus the brutal force of the police and soldiers simply swept through the area. This partly explains why in the post-2009 period, villagers were summarily evacuated from their traditional homes to be resettled in the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA) Transau area along the ODZI River in order to give way to formal mining operations.

One respondent, Richard, narrated the story of one of his friends who was caught by soldiers whilst coming from the mining fields on his way back home to Harare. He had not been successful in finding diamonds and only had enough money for his transport. Richard claims that the man was thoroughly beaten by the soldiers, who, in the hope that he would reveal the whereabouts of his diamonds cut the soles of his feet with their bayonets and only left him for dead after they were satisfied that he was not in possession of diamonds. The virtually incapacitated man had to be ferried in a wheelbarrow to the nearest clinic which is more than 20 km away. At the clinic, the nurses required a police report before they could treat him of the wounds he had sustained, but he could not get such a report as he was involved in illegal diamond mining. Richard also told the story of a fellow *gweja* who was caught by the soldiers during one of these operations and because he did not have diamonds, it is alleged that they let the police dog bite him, leaving him ravaged and bleeding.⁴⁴ Numerous stories were narrated of the horrors perpetrated by state officials in the diamond fields. State responses, instead of curbing the illegal practice, made the *Magweja* to become hardened as they

⁴⁴ Interview with Richard, Hot Springs shopping centre, 2 January 2007.

strove to adapt to difficult mining conditions. To a large extent, it was this situation that shaped the character, way of operation and resilience of the *Magweja* in Chiadzwa.

Because of the constant running battles the *Magweja* had with law enforcement officers,⁴⁵ they could not create a community with the necessary supportive infrastructure. They lived in fear of being displaced from Chiadzwa and its confines at short notice. Thus the inhabitants of this nascent community, who lived in makeshift shelter, were exposed to the vagaries of nature. Since their settlement in the Chiadzwa hills was illegal and their work hazardous, they hardly kept decent clothes and blankets to protect them from the cold. They also lacked fresh food supplies and often relied on food prepared and sold by people from the surrounding areas or food “vendors”. Such food was usually prepared under unhygienic conditions and it was a health risk.

Magweja did not only suffer from lack of clean food provisions and clothing. They were also easily identifiable because of their filth resulting from many days spent looking for diamonds without bathing or changing clothes. The nearest place where they could get ample water supplies for a bath or laundry was the Odzi River which was 18 km away. Walking to the river to bath was not an attractive option because the probability of encountering patrolling security forces was very high. In an interview with Samuel, he revealed that personal hygiene was not a priority for the artisanal miners. *Magweja* and *magwejelina* had to be “content” with sweaty and dusty work clothes during the process of digging for diamonds as Image 3 illustrates.

Image 3: *Magweja* & *Magwejelina* in Chiadzwa, Marange (Zimbabwe)



Source: “Small-scale diamond production in Chiadzwa, Mutare West, Zimbabwe” at <http://marangediamondszimbabwe.blogspot.com/>, Accessed on 14 December 2012.

⁴⁵ “Panners at war with cops”, *Manica Post*, 28 December 2007.

At night, the same clothes served as pyjamas. Sneakers got worn out quickly as they were worn 24 hours a day. In this risky business, they were not taken off during sleep as one “could wake up and start running”.⁴⁶ Samuel stated that a bath was only taken along with a new set of clothes when one was visiting the nearby shopping centers. At the shopping centers, successful *Magweja* were identified by new clothes and shoes as well as a generally reckless spending attitude while the unsuccessful ones were identified by their dirty “work clothes” and they sometimes longed to permanently return home.

These inhuman living conditions were compounded by the lack of proper meals as the *Magweja* did not create time to cook their own food as they were always absorbed by extracting diamond from the ground. They ate food sold by “vendors” who brought it from nearby homes to the hills. The food was expensive and the “vendors” ran the risk of running into police patrols. The police usually confiscated or mixed the food with sand thereby making it inedible.⁴⁷ This was an insurgency tactic meant to force the *Magweja* out of their hiding confinements in the hills from either arrest or exploitation by the police who were using their authority to achieve accumulation. This food often went bad quickly due to the high temperatures in Chiadzwa, but a combination of the vendors’ desire to make a profit and the *Magweja*’s desperation for food meant that even food in a questionable state was consumed. Cases of food poisoning and diarrhoea were common but went untreated and unrecorded as there were no health facilities nearby and it was also dangerous for the sick to access them. With or without fresh food and good sanitary conditions, the major focus of *Magweja* was finding as much diamond as possible. Everyone within the gweja community was trying to survive by any means possible (“kukiya kiya” in Shona), which as Jones has noted, was becoming a key characteristic of the Zimbabwean economy in the post-2000 period.⁴⁸

The lack of reputable or respectable sanitary conditions was confirmed by one of our interview respondents, Mike, who explained how *Magweja* had to rely on the “bush system” or “bush toilets” as there were no proper toilets. Sometimes, makeshift toilets were erected, but these were communal and without proper sanitary ware. The indiscriminate use of the area for toilet purposes posed a health hazard to the community as the “bush system”

46 Interview with Samuel, Chakohwa shopping centre, 15 December 2008.

47 Interview with Faith, a food vendor, Chakohwa shopping centre, 11 December, 2008.

48 J.L. Jones, “Nothing is straight in Zimbabwe: The rise of the Kukiya-kiya economy 2000-2008”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36(2), 2010, pp. 285-299.

encroached onto areas originally demarcated for village settlement.⁴⁹ Potable water was also not easily available and *Magweja* relied on either dirty water from shallow wells or expensive bottled water sold by “vendors”. The scarcity of water meant that whatever water was found was used sparingly and in most cases for drinking, with little or none used for bathing or washing hands - a recipe for cholera and diarrheal diseases. What was emerging in Chiadzwa, therefore, was something that had all the tenets of an anti-society.⁵⁰

Given the unhygienic conditions that prevailed in Chiadzwa, some cases of cholera were reported in 2008. These were not isolated cases, but they were part of the broader medical emergency that reached unmanageable levels in 2008-9 due to crumbling health infrastructure in Zimbabwe.⁵¹ Because of the illicit nature of diamond mining activities in Chiadzwa, no official statistics of cholera victims or deaths were kept. However, interviews with the *Magweja* and health personnel from the surrounding areas reveal a limited number of reported cases as only a few managed to navigate their way to the surrounding clinics such as Chakohwa which actually became a cholera center. From the interview with Sister Mbano, the nursing sister in charge at Chakohwa clinic, several *Magweja* were admitted at the Chakohwa cholera centre.⁵²

The working conditions in the diamond fields were also unfavorable and remained as such since no one was directly responsible for improving the *Magweja's* operating conditions because of the illicit nature of the activity. Given the criminalisation of the mining activities by the state, there was no proper infrastructure put in place. For example, there were no roads, carriage equipment, safe and proper tunnels. Thus, the mining tunnels (*matonera* as they were called by the *Magweja*) constructed by the diggers were fragile and liable to cave in. This was one of the most common causes of *Magweja* deaths in Chiadzwa as the diggers were sometimes crushed or trapped and suffocated underneath. Although Nyota and Sibanda depict *Magweja* as having celebrated the deaths of syndicate colleagues as a sign of good things to come,⁵³ the diggers had respect for their dead. According to one respondent, the diggers were naturally touched by coming across a dead body in the tunnels, but this would not make them abandon the activity as they were seeking to survive.⁵⁴

49 Interview with Mike, Chakohwa shopping centre, 11 December 2008.

50 MAK Halliday, *Language as social semiotic*.

51 M Nyandoro, “Historical overview of the cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe (2008-2009)”.

52 Interview with Sister Mbano, the sister in charge at Chakohwa clinic, 15 December 2008.

53 S Nyota and F Sibanda, “Digging for diamonds, wielding new words”.

54 Interview with Richard, Hot Springs shopping centre, 2 January 2007.

They believed that disrespecting those who perished in the process of extracting diamond or *ngoda* would bring ill-fate or prompt misfortune to an individual and his family culminating in death or *ngozi* - a Shona word referring to restless and sometimes avenging spirits or the return of the spirit of a dead person for the purpose of haunting and tormenting those who wronged her/him in life. As such, the *Magweja* respected their departed companions. There was usually solidarity and empathy with colleagues who perished while trying to survive in the diamond fields. Of course, the emotions ascribed to close companions did not always prevail where strangers were concerned, but the death of fellow *Magweja* was always a traumatic experience. The emotional impact of death however became lessened for the *Magweja* confined to the hills of Chiadzwa because of worsening state brutality. Nonetheless the unclaimed and “unclaimable” bodies, lying and wasting away from home without a proper burial, had an affective presence.⁵⁵ This is because of the central importance generally attached to death in Zimbabwe African culture. A body has to be committed to the ancestors through traditional burial and any failure to undertake such ceremonies can result in *ngozi* or can bring instability to the family of the deceased until the corpse of the dead has been found, retrieved and laid to rest. This can be compared to an instance in Zimbabwe’s recent history where the state attempted to repatriate the bodies of people who were bombed and killed by Rhodesian security forces in 1979 so that they could be laid to rest in their country of origin. This incident occurred towards the end of Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle. The exercise entailed bringing their restless souls “home” to be laid to rest. However, the same affection was not shared by *magombiro* and some state officials in Chiadzwa.

Reports of brutality in Chiadzwa were not one-sided. The soldiers and police did not just assault pacified *Magweja*. There were cases of *Magweja* retaliating. Comparatively, while cases of *gweja* violence on the police and soldiers were fewer, they were no less brutal.⁵⁶ Using whatever instruments at their disposal, the *Magweja*, given a chance, would strike back. Samuel jokingly said that the security forces needed to stay in groups, especially during one of their “operations” because if one got separated from the others with a group of *Magweja* nearby, “tinomuita party” (we will have a field day with him).⁵⁷ This is reflective of the kinds of resistance, both covert and overt, employed by the

55 J Fontein, “Between tortured bodies and resurfacing bones”.

56 “Panners at War with Cops”, *Manica Post*, 28 December 2007.

57 Interview with Samuel, Chakohwa shopping centre, 15 December 2008.

weak in order to counteract state measures.⁵⁸

Although these random acts of violence against the security forces attracted serious reprisals from the law enforcement agencies, the *Magweja* considered it a small price to pay as the security forces were going to beat them anyway. Acts of violence became so entrenched that ideas of bodily injury were transformed. For example, brutality became an accepted tool of negotiating space. This is not to say that *Magweja* and the police were always at war. Sometimes uneasy alliances were forged as both parties worked together to procure diamonds. In some cases, the police solicited bribes from *Magweja* to enter the diamond fields for a limited time to collect diamondiferous soil (*mutaka*) which they carried out of the field after their allocated time was up and proceeded to sift (*kusketa*) for diamonds elsewhere. At other times, the police would tip off their *Magweja* allies on safe areas to dig as well as warn them of an impending operation against them.⁵⁹ Mathew, a Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) soldier, stated that:⁶⁰

... we also want diamonds (ngoda), but at the same time we need to do our work. If we do not do our work we lose the opportunity to make money.

Within Chiadzwa and its surrounding areas, violence was not limited to that between *Magweja* and the state security forces. There was violence among individual *Magweja*, syndicates and *magombiro* who meted attacks on other diggers. Some *Magweja* disagreed on modes of operation, women (quarrels over women) or even the sharing of proceeds. Similarly, syndicates had conflicts over territory or claims over tunnels and sometimes diamond finds. While there was solidarity between the generality of the diamond diggers, there were some unsavory elements, particularly *magombiro*. In most cases, these were failed *Magweja* who resorted to plundering successful diggers. In extreme cases, they went as far as murdering their victims for refusing to give up their wealth, or for genuinely not having found diamonds. Because of the fear of security forces and *magombiro*, successful *Magweja* sometimes swallowed their diamonds to avoid detection and in this way “safely” transported them to potential buyers. However, aware of this discreet strategy of transporting the precious mineral from the diamond fields, the *magombiro* sometimes waylaid the *Magweja*, killed them and then disemboweled them to retrieve

58 JC Scott, *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985).

59 Interview with Samuel, Chakohwa shopping centre, 15 December 2008.

60 Interview with Martha, a soldier, Chakohwa shopping centre, 16 December 2008.

the diamonds.⁶¹ Such gruesome acts of violence became “accepted” risks of the job, making *Magweja* very hardened people. These experiences also help explain their psycho-social character. For example, when they made money, they spent it recklessly as a form of rehabilitating, re-humanising, cleansing and re-conscientising themselves. All these elements, however, combined to depict them as social and moral morons.

A perennial challenge in the Chiadzwa wilderness was reproductive health which was totally sidelined as it was subordinated to the primary interest of making a quick profit. Reproductive health is defined as:⁶²

A state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing ... in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes (such as satisfying safe sex life [in which people] have the capability to reduce and [the] freedom to decide, if, when and how often to do so.

The unavailability of reproductive health support structures meant that there was little or no effort to ensure safe effective protection from unwanted pregnancies and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), curb gender-based violence related to reproductive health especially in relation to adolescents, ensure satisfactory contraceptive choices and treatment of STIs.⁶³ All this is believed to have severe negative implications on health especially in the context of Zimbabwe’s high HIV prevalence rate. According to the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, HIV prevalence among those in the 15-49 years reproductive age group is currently at 13.7%.⁶⁴ In Chiadzwa, most of our interview respondents testified to an increase in prostitution, cohabitation and sexual activities as part of the outcome or social effect of diamond mining activities. Health challenges, however, did not preclude people from encroaching on the Chiadzwa landscape in search of diamonds. The diamonds created untold social problems for the local community and the money was not as easily obtained as romantic versions portray especially for those on the ground. The population in Chiadzwa comprised both men and women (single, married, divorced or widowed) and in a few extreme cases, whole families, including small children.⁶⁵ Whenever possible, women were mostly engaged in selling food and providing sexual services or entertainment while

61 Interview with Mike, Chakohwa shopping centre, 11 December 2008.

62 International Conference on Population and Development, 1994.

63 Interview with Sister Mbano, Sister in Charge, Chakowa clinic. Similar sentiments were expressed in numerous discussions we had with different groups of *Magweja*.

64 Central Statistical Office (CSO), *Multiple Indicator Monitoring Survey, Harare*, Government Printer, 2009.

65 Interview with Givemore, Chiadzwa, 15 December 2008.

a few were involved in the actual diamond panning as well. The latter were known as “magwejelina”. Most adolescents of school-going age, both male and female, dropped out of school from the surrounding areas to join in the mining activities.⁶⁶

In some cases, because of the relatively smaller ratio of women compared to men, there were several instances of women with concurrent multiple partners. In most instances, payment for sexual services was in diamond form and to a less extent in cash (US dollars) and other goods. One prominent *gweja*, Givemore, recounted how during his stay in Chiadzwa he had three different sexual partners with whom he inconsistently used condoms and how sometimes he paid his female clients with meat because it was very scarce. Sometimes, he was entertained on a deferred payment basis, promising to pay them only when he had “found” sufficient diamonds to do so. However, more often than not, he never honored his side of the bargain which eventually forced the women to stop asking for payment and cohabited with him or opted for *Magweja* who were willing to pay.⁶⁷ Another *gweja*, Samuel, admitted to contracting an STI (whose variety he did not know) twice. In the first instance, he treated it using *maguchu* (home-made traditional herbal concoctions) and the second occasion forced him to visit a clinic. In his view, other than distance, a major deterrent from using recognised or formal health facilities was the negative treatment that they received from health personnel at clinics because they were *Magweja*.⁶⁸

Research that has been conducted on some African societies has revealed that adolescents and young adults often engage in pre-marital sexual relationships, either sequentially or simultaneously because of economic need but this has both socio-economic and health risks and Chiadzwa is a prime example of how economic forces shaped reproductive behaviour.⁶⁹ Mhloyi and Basset, for instance, argue that many young African women only have a limited ability to reduce the risk of HIV infection because limiting the number of their sexual partners would be equivalent to their social and economic demise.⁷⁰ Among

66 Interview with a group of *Magweja*, Chakohwa Shopping Centre, 23 December 2008.

67 Interview with Givemore, Chiadzwa, 15 December 2008.

68 Interview with Samuel, Chakohwa shopping centre, 15 December 2008.

69 A Carael & C Allen, “Main’ girlfriends, girlfriends, marriage and money: The social context of HIV risk behavior in Sub-Saharan Africa”, PSI Research Division Working Paper, 5, *Social Marketing and Communications for Health*, 1997.

70 M Mhloyi & J Basset, “Main’ girlfriends, girlfriends, marriage and money: The social context of HIV risk behavior in Sub-Saharan Africa”, PSI Research Division Working Paper, 5, *Social Marketing and Communications for Health*, 1997.

our female respondents were commercial sex workers (CSW) who spoke of *kumunda kwaifaya* or how the diamond fields were very rewarding.⁷¹ These women stated that they usually entertained several partners in one night who would pay in diamonds and that by the end of the night, they would have realised a sizeable cache. They argued that commercial sex work paid more than the actual mining because sometimes the miners came back empty handed. Therefore, commercial sex assured them of cash every night as most of them had a big client base.

Most of the female respondents, a number of whom were in some form of domestic and legal union outside Chiadzwa ranging from formal marriage, cohabitation or customary union, were young and doubled as commercial sex workers as well as providers of goods like clothes and food. In some instances, these women entertained male clients who were reluctant to use protection and therefore charged them more by adding a “risk fee” to the normal price after conducting a “visual AIDS test (VAT)”.⁷² The women did not lack knowledge of the dangers associated with reproductive health as Adamchak and other scholars have noted. They state that:⁷³

Knowledge about HIV/AIDS is not sufficient to protect individuals. Knowledge must be translated into personal assessment of risk and subsequently into behavioral change. Perceived risk is an individual determination which may be based on a correct identification of very real, actual danger.

The women involved in Chiadzwa commercial sex work were more concerned with survival at that time than they were worried by issues of long-term sustainability. Their actions were shaped by the conditions that impelled a self-imposed confinement on their part in a terrain where hygiene and access to contraception were severely constrained. In the circumstances, ideas of morality were non-essential as sex and sexuality were not sacrosanct and became commonplace. Thus, a combination of material and moral poverty became one of the biggest factors behind arbitrary sexual relations.

It can be noted that the riches amassed from the exploitation of diamonds created an avenue for upward social mobility as well as numerous social challenges resulting in one journalist commenting that, families were broken,

71 Focus group discussion with *magwejelina* (illegal female diamond miners) and commercial sex workers, Nyanyadzi shopping centre.

72 Focus group discussion with *magwejelina* and commercial sex workers, Nyanyadzi shopping centre.

73 SE Adamchak et al., “Knowledge of STIs and AIDS, risk awareness and condom use”, *Zimbabwe Further Analysis* (Maryland, 1997).

while some unwanted pregnancies were conceived, all because of the power of the diamond.⁷⁴ There were several reported cases of unwanted pregnancies that resulted in illegal abortions and these only came to light as the women hemorrhaged or sustained internal damage and had to be rushed to clinics in the surrounding areas.⁷⁵ Faith, one of our female respondents, revealed the problems arising from these abortions as girls aged less than 16 years are considered minors in Zimbabwe and cannot be arrested in cases of abortion.⁷⁶ She recounted the story of a 15-year old schoolgirl (name not provided) who became the household head after the death of her mother which was also followed by her father moving away. In order to fend for the household, the girl started selling food in the Chiadzwa diamond mining community as well as engaging in commercial sex. She then fell pregnant and the would-be father of the child (a *gweja*) denied responsibility, causing the girl to abort while at school. The fetus was dumped in the school blair toilet where it was subsequently discovered because of the blood stains found in the toilet. The girl, who was taken to the local clinic for treatment or rehabilitation, was later sent home after receiving a stern warning, but the issue was eventually forgotten.⁷⁷

Chiadzwa appeared to be a source of economic salvation for many who had learnt of the “discovery” of diamonds and possible riches to be accrued there. Yet the narratives from the *Magweja* who were involved in the mining of diamonds are far from romantic. Generally, people outside Chiadzwa were either obsessed by the romantic tales of the rich and famous *Jangolas* or were exposed to the lavish and extravagant lifestyles of successful diamond dealers. Within the hills and diamond fields of Chiadzwa, the scenario was less appealing. The environment was informed by the constant presence of military and law enforcement officers to monitor Chiadzwa on behalf of the State. If called upon to do so, they would implement violent operations against different categories of people exploiting opportunities that arose in Chiadzwa, especially the *Magweja*. These developments imposed corporeal effects of a major magnitude to those stationed or confined within Chiadzwa. They risked, among other things, illness, injury and death in pursuit of a lucrative diamond find. While some degree of cooperation between the police and army personnel with *Magweja* sometimes existed, their relationship

74 “Is Marange the biblical Canaan?” *The Manica Post*, 9 November 2007.

75 Interview with Sister Mbano, the sister in charge at Chakohwa clinic, 15 December 2008.

76 Interview with Faith, a food vendor, Chakohwa shopping centre, 11 December, 2008.

77 Focus group discussion with *magwejelina* and commercial sex workers, Nyanyadzi shopping centre. Faith was one of the respondents.

tended to be increasingly informed by violence. As such, *Magweja* evolved navigational skills to evade authority in the hills. They also utilised their influence to manipulate ZANU-PF political anxieties and bribe poorly paid soldiers and police stationed at Chiadzwa to negotiate entrance and operate in the diamond fields. The process of gaining access to this arena was akin to voluntary confinement as any activities within the hills and fields of Chiadzwa were informed by a violent co-existence with state monitoring and control apparatus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, this article has demonstrated that the lifestyles of the artisanal diamond miners are perfect examples of new survival strategies by people who had no previous training in complying with their chosen profession. The *Magweja's* adaptation and survival strategies were informed by the conditions that obtained in the diamond fields. They devised skills of adjusting to difficult mining conditions, but these were however matched if not exceeded by various responses from state policing agents. Thus, although the adaptation of the *Magweja* in creating an income which emerged in the context of some state agencies' misuse of power in Zimbabwe had the effect of tarnishing the image of the state, it nevertheless revealed great resilience by these informal miners who were striving to navigate the hills that imposed voluntary confinement on them. It also illustrates *gweja* tenacity in their socio-economic and political negotiation for space in the diamond mining landscape of Chiadzwa in the period 2006 to 2009.

The nascent community which was expelled in early 2009 had to reformulate their perceptions of humanity, health, reproductive health, spirituality and other societal values given the conditions they were subjected to. Chiadzwa altered these realities and created negative legacies with long lasting effects. Children were forced to become adults as they found themselves working indefatigably in Chiadzwa hoping to make a diamond find to take back home. The violence associated with the activities in the diamond fields occurred at various levels which included being exposed to an open environment and the vagaries of the weather for extended periods of time, the violence unleashed by the police, soldiers, and *magombiro* coupled with the sheer stress of sometimes staying in the fields without making a find. The state ignored these challenges, but those coming out of Chiadzwa tended to face many psycho-

social and physical challenges that the government and scholars interested in the economic history of mining have not generally considered. There is also the issue of the many deceased *Magweja* whose bodies were lost and buried *kuminda yengoda* (diamond fields). These bodies are yet to be repatriated to the deceased's home areas for decent burial to avoid *ngozi*. As Renshaw has noted, bodies are “an object of mourning”,⁷⁸ but in the case of the *Magweja* who perished whilst seeking a fortune in Chiadzwa, traditional death rituals have not been performed thereby making the dead potentially restless souls and possibly subject to *ngozi*.⁷⁹

Using various methodological approaches, this article has analysed how the artisanal mining community in Chiadzwa emerged to formulate and reformulate ideas of society and belonging. Built on the initiative of *Magweja* to eke out a living at the height of Zimbabwe's economic crisis and hostile State response, the wilderness was rough and excruciating, accommodating elements that were driven by the desire to make a quick profit. What emerged was a social identity within the anti-society most vividly identified as *Magweja* but which was exposed to the triumvirate form of violence. The environment, state law enforcement and security agents and the *magombiro* all unleashed violence on *Magweja* who were the principal victims of these experiences. There were other challenges such as injury, illness both generally and related to reproductive health, death and issues of spirituality. In the end, the individual experiences of the *Magweja* in Chiadzwa molded an oft hardened individual who needed time to be rehabilitated from the ravages of the environment in which they had to exist for so long.

Image 4: Chiadzwa Area Map



Source: G Mwonzora, “‘Diamond Rush’ and the Relocation of the Chiadzwa Community in Zimbabwe”, MA dissertation, ISS, 2011, p. 20.

78 L Renshaw, “The scientific and affective identification of Republican civilian victims from the Spanish civil war”, p. 12.

79 J Fontein, “Between tortured bodies and resurfacing bones”.