



## Original article

## Towards the decriminalisation of artisanal gold mining in Eastern Zimbabwe

Njabulo Chipangura

Department of Anthropology, University of the Witwatersrand, Private Bag 3 Wits, 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Makorokoza  
Artisanal mining  
Penhalonga  
Decriminalisation  
Police

## ABSTRACT

This paper will look at recent move by the government of Zimbabwe to decriminalise artisanal gold mining. Focus will be on ASM activities in Penhalonga, Eastern Zimbabwe where I carried out ethnographic fieldwork through interviewing makorokozas (small scale miners). Results of this research will show the complex nature of formalising ASM largely because of contradictions in policy implementation by the government over time. In the wake of periodic clampdown operations on ASM by the government - the paper will analyse the relationship between the police and makorokozas. I will demonstrate that although their relationship was sometimes fraught they were many moments when they negotiated mutually beneficial settlements in the interest of economic benefits accrued from the mining. However, lately, the government of Zimbabwe has introduced new measures that seek to promote the growth of ASM and its decriminalisation. Mining permit application fees have been reduced, environmental impact assessment reports have been scrapped and makorokozas are now free to sell their gold without fear of police persecution.

## 1. Introduction

This research paper investigates a series of attempts by the government of Zimbabwe to decriminalise and formalise artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM; *Chikorokoza*). I argue that over a long period of time since independence in 1980, there have been ad hoc policies put in place by the government to promote ASM although typified mostly by moving one step forward or one step back. In the end, ASM has become a fertile ground for unequal exploitation practices in which various state agents and politicians find a way of fleecing miners (*makorokozas* as they are referred to in local parlance) using illegality and environmental destruction tropes to justify periodic clampdowns on them. Whilst it is noble to regularise ASM, the problem comes with the enforcement mechanisms, which give power to police officers to control mining activities and selling of gold through illegal channels wherein they also benefit. It is estimated that as many as two million people across the country derive their livelihoods from ASM mining of gold (Mawowa, 2013; Spiegel, 2014). The decline of the Zimbabwean economy has spurred the upward uptake of ASM, which has become an avenue for survival and capital accumulation (Mawowa, 2013). However, much at the same time, its growth coincided with a political economy that is controlled by elites from the ruling ZANU PF party who have captured gold-rich areas and are also involved in manipulative cycles; this deprives *makorokozas* of an equal share in the mining itself (Mawowa, 2013; Spiegel, 2017; Mabhena, 2012).

In positioning all these power intricacies, this paper investigates the

new attempts by the government to decriminalise ASM by drawing on an ethnographic study, which I conducted in Penhalonga, Eastern Zimbabwe, between 2016 and 2018. Penhalonga is located 15 km north west of the City of Mutare within the productively rich Mutare-Odzi (MO) gold belt. The gold belt forms a narrow range of hills cutting across the watershed and the drainage platform of Mutare river (Swift, 1956). Mutare river flows over the MO gold belt in a south-easterly direction. In the present paper, I also illustrate an emerging irony in criminalising ASM in Penhalonga, which on one hand advocates for the persecution of *makorokozas* by the police, whilst on the other hand, there are consistent attempts by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) to buy gold from them on a 'no questions asked basis'. The findings from this ethnographic study reveal that although *makorokozas* are regarded as 'illegal' villains, thugs and criminals who are polluting the environment, their activities are contributing towards the growth of the economy. Pseudonyms will be used in this paper in order not to reveal the real identities of interlocutors. Real names are used only when quoting government and non-governmental officials.

## 2. The contradictions in ASM policies in Zimbabwe over time

At independence in 1980, the government of Zimbabwe supported the establishment of several new small-scale mines through the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation (ZMDC) (Mawowa, 2013). In the 1990s, when the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) was launched, ASM was seen by the government as a suitable

E-mail address: [1271193@students.wits.ac.za](mailto:1271193@students.wits.ac.za).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2018.09.003>

Received 27 April 2018; Received in revised form 11 September 2018; Accepted 12 September 2018

Available online 21 September 2018

2214-790X/ © 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

economic fall back that could potentially attract thousands of workers who had lost their jobs. In the formative years of its growth, Rural District Councils (RDCs) were mandated by the government to independently issue riverbed gold mining permits under Statutory Instrument 275 of 1991 called Regulations on Alluvial Gold Panning in Public Streams (Mawowa, 2013; Spiegel, 2015). However, permits for reef gold mining were issued directly by the Ministry of Mines. Nevertheless, artisanal panners would sell their gold to the RBZ through their buying agent – Fidelity Printers, which according to Mawowa (2013:925), offered relatively high prices and would buy as low as 50 g. Thus, gold panning along rivers and streams was legalised and actively encouraged, and panners were recognised by the government as a part of a thriving informal sector (Mabhena, 2012:222). However, at the beginning of the new millennium, the government took a dramatic turn back on ASM by enacting the Environmental Management Act in 2006, which outlawed alluvial gold mining and gave the Ministry of Mines the control of issuing all mining licenses (Mawowa, 2013; Spiegel, 2015).

Subsequently, riverbed gold panning was criminalised and made completely illegal.

However, as noted by Mawowa (2013), these early steps towards the regularisation of ASM in Zimbabwe were not consistent as the government kept on blowing ‘hot and cold’. This is because contradictory messages were sent by the government at one point praising ASM’s contribution to the national economy whilst at another time castigating the same miners for being involved in an illegal activity. In the tone of ASM being illegal, the government launched a nationwide crackdown operation, code-named *Chikorokoza Chapera*, on artisanal miners, by which artisanal mining had ended led by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and other government agencies in 2006 (Spiegel, 2014, 2015; Mabhena, 2012). The rationale behind this operation was that *makorokozas* were illegally mining and selling gold on informal markets, thus prejudicing the government millions of dollars in potential revenue (Spiegel, 2014; Mabhena, 2012). The other logic was that *makorokozas* were damaging the environment without putting in place any rehabilitation plans. With the coming of environmental dictates, artisanal miners were expected to adhere to the best environmental practices or get arrested for failing to comply. Miners were obliged to carry out an environmental impact assessment (EIA) before the commencement of any mining activity. In view of enforcing EIAs as a policy approach, which in fact ended up criminalising ASM, Spiegel (2017:96) argued that ‘it became a discursive rationale for a widespread crackdown against artisanal and smallscale miners ...’

Therefore, punishing *makorokozas* for not having completed EIA reports became a government means of control and a strategy for economic accumulation through corrupt implementation tendencies by the police, politicians and government departments involved in the exercise (Spiegel, 2017). Thus, in many cases, mining continued under the watchful eyes of law enforcement agents in return for bribes (Mabhena, 2012). According to Spiegel (2015), the crackdown itself was used as a means of masking power dynamics in resource control rather than eradicating illegal mining as per se. During the execution of the operation, it was reported that more than 26,000 *makorokozas* were arrested countrywide, among which some were fined and released whilst some received jail terms of up to 5 years (Mawowa, 2013). In retrospect as argued by Mawowa (2013:935), one is at will to argue that government policies on ASM have been inconsistent with high levels of double dipping masked by a mirage ban of the sector. In doing this, Mawowa (2013:934) argued that the state ‘...vacillated between supporting and criminalizing artisanal mining’. It is in this same context that despite the high drive to criminalise ASM using Operation *Chikorokoza Chapera*, the government also began to issue license to gold buying agents across the country, and most of these buyers were however proxies of senior ZANU PF officials (Mawowa, 2013:935). According to Spiegel (2015:544), ‘the case of Zimbabwe’s ASM sector highlights how, in times of economic instability, formalisation policies can become important in new ways, used by political elites to

consolidate power rather than distribute development opportunities in rural districts’.

### 2.1. *Chikorokoza* as a socio-cultural way of life and its popularised narratives

ASM/*Chikorokoza* can be defined as mining operations carried out by individuals organised into groups (four to eight individuals) or syndicates (ten or more individuals), which are entirely financed by limited resources and undertaken full-time, using simple techniques and traditional instruments with low level of mechanisation (Dreschler, 2001). The central feature of *Chikorokoza* is the use of rudimentary tools as opposed to large machinery used in industrial mining. The activities are also regarded as typically highly mobile and labour intensive and generally exploit marginal small deposits, which occur near the surface and usually exhausted after only a few years. However, in most developing countries, artisanal miners/*makorokozas* are regarded as illegal villains who recklessly pollute the environment and are also stereotyped as criminals, which is a common label for marginalised people in the informal economy (Tripp, 1997; Nhlengetwa and Hein, 2015; Fisher, 2007; Thornton, 2014; Chipangura, 2017; Spiegel, 2017). Despite this, Munakamwe (2017) argued that the branding of *makorokozas* as ‘illegal’ creates an unrealistic dualism because the gold they produce is consumed by a world market that is called ‘legal’, which does not even question the source upon buying. According to Mawowa (2013:922), in Zimbabwe, ‘ASM blurs the boundary between informal and registered small-scale miners, both of which are generally included in the definition’. However, he also opines that policy and legal frameworks in the country do not give a specific definition of what ASM is, and because of this deficit, there is no law that specifically regulates the practice (Mawowa, 2013).

However, even though in most cases, ASM is criminalised, it still sustains the livelihoods of millions of people in mineral-rich tracts of poorer countries worldwide (Lahiri-Dutt, 2011:2). The most popular narrative by governments and other policy drivers places sustainable development and poverty alleviation at the core of ASM (Hilson, 2009). The poverty-driven narrative posits that in many areas of rural sub-Saharan Africa, people engage in ASM because there are only few viable income economic alternatives (Hilson and Garforth, 2012; Childs, 2008; Mawowa, 2013). Katsaura (2010a:341); (2010b) writing about illegal diamond mining in Chiadzwa, Eastern Zimbabwe, confirmed this by arguing that the push for *Chikorokoza* in the area was driven by poverty associated with macroeconomic, political and social challenges faced by the country. Hiron (2011:354) also added weight to this narrative by arguing that, ‘ASM is largely a poverty driven activity, typically practiced in the poorest and most remote rural areas of a country by a largely itinerant, poorly educated populace with little other employment alternatives’. However, ASM has often been defined in terms of what it is not - it is not formalised, not mechanised and not regulated. All these descriptions of ASM are highly problematic in their failure to recognise that it is a practice driven by the knowledge and entrepreneurship skills of *makorokozas*. Seemingly supporting this argument, Mawowa (2013) categorically stated that ‘associating ASM only with informality and casting it as a survival strategy for the poor is clearly inadequate in the Zimbabwean context, as senior civil servants, ZANU PF politicians and military figures play a critical role in ASM and the informal economy more generally’. Moreover, the emphasis placed on *Chikorokoza* as source of economic livelihood and poverty alleviator seems to overshadow its normative evolution as a cultural way of life (Brycesson and Geenen, 2016). Be that as it may, some of the interlocutors during the engagements supported the poverty and unemployment narrative:

There are no jobs in Zimbabwe and we can’t all be chicken farmers and sell eggs as well. Mining is a difficult job but we really do not have a choice because it is the only industry left for us which can be

really rewarding if you really work hard. I came here in search of work and resorted to go into mining activities joining my friends who were already in the gold mining activities. They oriented me and all I can say is there are a lot of people surviving very well on gold mining activities. (Mukamba, 06.04.16, Penhalonga)

The chicken farming narrative brought by Mukamba gives an indication on the major preoccupation of Zimbabweans in the face of growing unemployment. Instead of seeing chicken farming as an alternative livelihood, Mukamba views it as an overcrowded activity, which is virtually done by everyone, and he prefers *Chikorokoza* as his alternative. The same view was expressed by Rhoda who is working in Mutare river as a panner; she said, 'it's better to do gold panning in this river because we survive well and feed our families regularly than working in garden projects that are facilitated by NGO's here'. NGOs in Penhalonga have set up community market gardening projects possibly as alternative livelihood schemes, but this has not attracted many villagers who prefer to do gold panning in Mutare river. As Siegel and Veiga (2010:273) argued, '... alternative livelihoods are about creating laws or economic incentives to transfer people out of artisanal mining altogether'. However, the choice of joining *Chikorokoza* is influenced by attractive higher returns and earnings than other available livelihood options. Moreover, given the economic situation in Zimbabwe, *Chikorokoza* acts as an alternative economic occupation. Childs (2008:4) writing about *Galamesys* in Ghana also argued that earnings from the proposed alternative projects of snail rearing and soap making are significantly less than that from ASM. From the conversations, the panners expressed their unwillingness to work in gardens, which have periodic low returns as compared to panning:

Panning is much better than just working in donor community sponsored vegetable and tomato gardens every day. Proceeds from market gardening will only be realised after some time of waiting for vegetables to be ripe and ready for sale. This is different from gold panning where there is quick money. Also with panning I know that even if I get one point of gold per day, I can sell and get quick money to buy my children some food to eat). (Laiza, 16.06.16, Mutare River)

Viewed against the background, it can be argued that *Chikorokoza* in Zimbabwe is associated with the poverty induction trope, which tends to conceal all the other social structures in which *makorokozas* operate in. Some have also argued that *Chikorokoza* is an entrepreneurial activity populated by opportunistic people with the hope of getting quick riches (Banchirigah and Hilson, 2010). The get rich quick narrative presupposes that the stimulating factor for *makorokozas* to enter into mining is the desire to amass fortune from fast money. Again, this narrative completely ignores the technical skills of *makorokozas*. Technically speaking, *makorokozas* are gifted artisans who work on instincts with no prior classical geological exploration, no drilling, no proven reserves or engineering studies (Veiga et al 2006:437). Further, different actors co-exist within the ASM setup and are involved in different social actions. Thus, Nyoni (2017:133) writing about ASM in Roodeport, South Africa, argued as follows:

whilst conventional literature has tended to project *Zamazama* activities as tainted with 'illegality' and instability, the reality points to a group of persons successfully deriving their livelihoods from this form of mining and who have drawn from various forms of agency in dealing with the challenges frequently encountered.

The actors include diggers, sievers, washers, claim owners and buyers. This shows that *makorokozas* have well-organised setups that fulfil the different activities associated with gold production stages from mining, crushing, grinding, washing, processing and selling. In support of social organisation in ASM, Bryccesson and Geenen (2016:5) also put forward the following idea:

while engagement in artisanal mining may be an individual

livelihood choice, it initiates a process in which the skill acquisition, economic exchange, psychological reorientation, and social positioning of individuals evolve towards a shared occupational identity and mutual respected professionalism norms, taking shape outside of state regulation.

Thus, government and NGO policies should progress towards more sensitive interpretations of local situations because contrary to popular narratives of anarchism, *makorokozas* have defined structures and high levels of organisation. Environmental and health-related problems are also believed to be other typical characteristic features of *Chikorokoza* within the policy-driven discourses, which cast a blind eye on its socioeconomic importance (Hirons, 2011). These are supported by the criminalisation and marginalisation discourse in which *makorokozas* are said to be violent, dangerous and illiterate; this is certainly not the case with all of them (Hilson et al., 2007; Fisher, 2007). Henceforth, this trope was disputed by an interlocutor working in Penhalonga who explained as follows:

We are always involved in running battles with security guards working for Redwing Mine. They accuse us of stealing ore on their claims. The government must allow us to work in adjacent areas where they are claims which Redwing mine is not utilising. Recently one of our colleagues was shot dead by these trigger-happy security guards. They falsely accused him of having encroached into the mining areas which was a lie. The only truth is that as *makorokozas* we are just treated as thugs or criminals who deserve to be shot even for no good reason). (Kondo, 04.10.16, Penhalonga)

Redwing is a large-scale mine, which is run by a company called Metallon Gold, and has many reef claims around Penhalonga, some of them were decommissioned because they became uneconomic to work on. This research work was carried out around Redwing mine by interviewing *makorokozas* working on abandoned and decommissioned mine shafts. In some cases, I also observed that some were organised as syndicates around legally registered claims where owners had been issued with mining certificates by the Ministry of Mines. However, the process of registering a claim was reported to be daunting and expensive – a reason why many *makorokozas* could not afford to have their own mines. During the same interviews, they complained about the preferential treatment given to ZANU PF politicians and war veterans in the allocation of claims ceded by Redwing mine. Bidza expressed a lack of transparency in the system when he said, 'the former Redwing claims were corruptly distributed to government officials, war veterans and politicians and not to us *makorokozas*. Because of this social exclusion, we are left with no option other than to work for them and we are paid peanuts- very little money'. Furthermore, the other bureaucratic process cited by my informants was what they unanimously rereferred to as the 'unnecessary requirement' of carrying out an expensive EIA after obtaining a mining license. The cost of registering a one-block claim (10 ha) inclusive of all processes starting from the application of prospecting license, pegging, notification of RDC, verification, issuing mine certificate and conducting an EIA was said to be around US\$7000. For this reason, most of the *makorokozas* would end up being subcontracted by claim owners:

I cannot afford to register a claim as an individual because the process is very expensive to undertake. The reason why I came here from Buhera (my rural area) is that I was unemployed with no money at all, so where will I get the money to register a claim, yet I am poor? You see so it's better to work as syndicates on registered claims without paying anything. What I only brought with me here is that shovel, chisel and hammer (pointing at the tools). The 50/50 sharing of money after selling the gold with the claim owners is not a problem at all. This is our way of life and we have come to accept. Maybe one day after making enough money I will be able to register my own claim. (Bhutisi, 08.06.16, Penhalonga)

Claim owners are seldom actively involved in the organisation of mining activities and instead subcontract *makorokozas* who form independent working groups popularly known as *masindalos* (syndicates) as alluded to by Bhutisi during the conversation. Each syndicate will then share with the claim owner either the ore or money obtained after selling the gold. Sharing arrangements differ, but it generally emerged that claim owners are entitled to get a 50% share within each working syndicate. The composition of these syndicates differs, but from my observation around Penhalonga, the largest syndicate had 15 *makorokozas* whilst the smallest one had 5 *makorokozas*. I also observed one claim that had 13 syndicates who were working simultaneously. The claim owner, Kedha, whose father is a war veteran in a conversation said, 'I have 13 groups that are working on my mine which has 10 blocks. They did not pay anything on their first month as they were settling down but after that I got a 50% share from each syndicate'. However, Kedha also hinted that *makorokozas* are highly migrant moving across different claims in the area in search for the most paying belts where they will reassemble their syndicates, and thus, it was difficult to retain them for long. Another claim owner in the same area expressed the view that some *makorokozas* were not honest at all:

Sometimes as a claim owner you might be unfortunate to work with *makorokozas* who have criminal minds. When they come in looking for working space they appear so honest but such type of thieves' devise ways of stealing ore after each day's work and by the time we get to month end they will just disappear. (Choga, 08.06.16, Penhalonga)

Nevertheless, most *makorokozas* value honesty and transparency in the way that they conduct their work within their well-organised syndicates. This is because to them, syndicating is based on the ideas trust and joint responsibility generated from the repeated reproduction of daily practices (Katsaura, 2010a; Geenen, 2011). In some cases, when claim owners engage *makorokozas*, they buy all the necessary working tools and cover for much of the costs associated with 'dry' periods of not getting any gold. However, during the conversations, it also emerged that there were differences in pay outs amongst *makorokozas* themselves. Those with more hazardous or specialised tasks received more money; for example, those who work underground in the tunnels get more than those who move the ore to the ground using buckets hoisted by ropes:

Working in underground shafts is not easy at all because you can spend 10 or more hours there driving the gold belt and sending the ore to the ground using buckets hoisted by a rope tied to a winch acting as a pulley. This means that when it comes to sharing of money after selling the gold, 'veteran' miners like me always working underground get a little more, kkkkkkkkkk (laughing) than guys receiving the ore on the surface. (Njonda, 08.06.16, Penhalonga)

### 3. 'The heroes of Zimbabwean economy'; the decriminalisation of *Chikorokoza*

In December 2013, the government of Zimbabwe announced a plan to decriminalise *Chikorokoza* and to capacitate Fidelity Printers and Refiners (FRP), a subsidiary of the RBZ as the sole buyer of artisanally mined gold (The Herald 12 December 2013). Thereafter, the RBZ governor, Dr. John Mangudya, announced that the ZRP must not arrest artisanal miners for mining and carrying gold (The Sunday Mail, 22 January 2017). He was quoted saying, 'in 2016, the total gold output was 23 tonnes of which 15 tonnes came through from *makorokozas*, thus contributing almost US\$1 billion of revenue at a time when the country was desperately in need of foreign currency.' (The Sunday Mail, 22 January 17) (also see Fig. 1)

The RBZ boss went on to say that the police should not enforce wanton arrests on gold panners but rather should consider imposing

other penalties such as fines. He expressed his unhappiness over the continuous harassment and arrest of *makorokozas* by police officers and was quoted saying, 'we said we should not arrest *makorokozas*, but I am informed they are being arrested. I think we need to allow them to mine their gold and take it to FRP so that we generate more foreign currency and import fuel, raw materials and other things'. The *makorokozas* were hailed by the RBZ boss as 'heroes of Zimbabwe's economy'. Working undisturbed by police raids certainly increase their output as one interlocutor said during a conversation:

On a very bad day caused mostly by police raids and associated disturbances I can work for at least 8 points. It's better than nothing because the price of a point ranges between \$2.50 - \$4.50. Apart from *porisi* (police) it also depends on the type of belt that we will be working on and the determination of the team. Some days we get 20–40 grams per day and our highest here was 122 g. (Njonda, 28.01.16, Penhalonga)

Recently, the RBZ governor was once again quoted saying, 'I am always proud when I talk about artisanal miners of gold. In the month of July 2017, artisanal miners produced more gold than large scale producers at 1,2 tonnes which they produced in July versus 930 kg from large scale producers of gold, that is fantastic'. According to the governor, at that time, Fidelity Printers and Refiners (FPR) was said to be paying \$15 million on a weekly basis to over 300,000 artisanal gold miners (News Day, 28 August 2017). Thus, to increase gold deliveries to FPR from *makorokozas* who have for long been disenfranchised due to the criminalisation of many of their activities because of stringent laws, RBZ is now buying gold from *makorokozas* on a 'no questions asked basis' (Herald, 14 April 2016). During my numerous conversations with *makorokozas*, one of the interlocutors, Kodza acknowledged that they freely sell their gold to the government without the fear of arrest or persecution when he stated as follows:

We sell our gold to the fidelity company, which is owned by government. Of course, there are other ways like selling it on the black market but as for us we only sell it to the government mandated company. We do not go anywhere else and we are satisfied with the prices that we are offered by fidelity. (Kodza 25.08.17, Penhalonga)

The possession of gold according to the decriminalisation arrangement has ceased to be an offence if sold to FRP. However, the brokerage networks also involve other players who are not legally allowed to buy gold but offer better prices than FRP. This point was revealed by Mukamba who said:

A lot of people come to Penhalonga because they know that this area is full of gold. So *Mavheti* (buyers) usually comes here and buy gold from us. I don't necessarily know their identities and where they sale the gold because all I want is money and if I am paid that's it!!!!. We sell the gold to whoever offers us a better price. Fidelity government buying agent usually runs out of money and we are left with no option but to sell the gold to other players. Sir Cash is a prominent buyer from Harare who offers better deals buying at \$35 per gram, whilst the government rate is always fixed at \$25 per gram. Sir also gives us advanced payments which we used to buy food as when we run out of supplies at the mine. The money is subtracted on our next transaction when we sell to him). (Mukamba 26.08.17, Penhalonga)

Recognising the importance of ASM in African economies, Hilson (2009:2) argued that it is a major coup for many governments because gold is a standard currency that produces the much-needed foreign currency. This argument agrees well with the push for decriminalisation by RBZ in which *makorokozas* are being urged to sell their gold on a 'no questions asked' basis. However, from the conversations that I had with *makorokozas*, I realised that they were not so much concerned with where their gold will end to and who buys the gold for them.



Fig. 1. Showing levels of gold contribution by *makorokozas* in 2017.

#### 4. Policing gold mining areas, *magombiros* and social justice

According to Katsaura (2010a:341); (2010b), the deployment of security agents in illegal mining areas while entailing the use of outright force is also indicative of the exercise of symbolic power by the state. Their mere presence is a form of symbolic violence in that it makes a statement against the miners by intimidating them into moving away from the mining areas. Therefore, attempts to diffuse this form of violence by decriminalising *Chikorokoza* came as a relief for *makorokozas* who were always playing hide-and-seek with law enforcement agencies. However, during the conversations, police officers were still accused of soliciting for daily bribes from *makorokozas* if they were to get free mining access without the fear of harassment and arrests. This practice was observed within the Mutare river where *makorokozas* worked on claims that were owned by a Russian mining company called the Development Trust of Zimbabwe (DTZ OZGEO). Mining operations by DTZ ceased in 2013 after a government order cancelled their alluvial gold mining special grant permit citing rehabilitation failures. Penhalonga police station is situated 2 km south of Mutare river, and thus, I was able to observe all the contestations as they played out between *makorokozas* and the police. Kenge has been working in Mutare river ever since the cancelling of DTZ mining operations, he shared his experience at the hands of police as follows:

If you want to mine here without police harassment you ought to give them a bribe. They are only after bribes because their salaries are pathetic and there is no money in the country. They come here every morning chasing us and pretending as if they want to arrest us. All this will be fake because they will later ask for bribes and we usually pay them per 5 bond per day (a bond note is a surrogate currency used in Zimbabwe and is pegged at a 1:1 equivalence rate with the US dollar. They were introduced as a way of trying to cushion the prevailing cash crisis). Imagine how much money they make from all the *makorokozas* working here – it must be over one thousand dollars a day. But as the saying goes – wherever there are police officers there is money so we pay off the bribes without hesitating because we know we will make more money. Some police officers also have their own syndicates so if you belong to such you would be privileged because you don't pay bribe and you not harassed at all). (Kenge, 25.01.16, Mutare River, Penhalonga)

Drawing from the conversation with Kenge, I deployed the actor-oriented approach to illustrate how power relations operate between

the police and *makorokozas* in Penhalonga. Thus, in examining *Chikorokoza* and the relationships between the various actors, the actor-oriented approach interrogated the complexities and intricacies associated with their activities. Most importantly, the actor network approach also underscored the dialectics of power and agency in *Chikorokoza* together with the configuration of the resources in geographical space (Wilson, 2011). This is so because, taken together, the activities of various actors coupled with the spatial configuration of the resource could facilitate or restrict *Chikorokoza*. Therefore, power and agency situate the involvement of police officers in *Chikorokoza* and the establishment of mutually beneficial working relationships with *makorokozas*. Elsewhere, as argued by Mawowa (2013), in Totororo gold mining area in Central Zimbabwe, police officers who were sent to chase away *makorokozas* ended up controlling strategic points into the mine by charging a standardised entry fee. It also emerged that the power and control wielded by police officers radiated throughout the space even outside the mining areas. This view was emphatically expressed by Kenge who said that 'police officers can threaten to arrest you when they merely suspect that you are a miner – say they see you at Penhalonga shops wearing clothes with mud stains. In most cases you would end up giving them a small bribe for them not to harass you in public – they are all after money'.

In explaining the involvement of police in Zimbabwe where they are deployed to offer security services but in turn end up collecting bribes and even colluding with *makorokozas* in mining, Maringira and Masiya (2016) used the metaphor of a goat. They argued that when a goat is tied to a tree with a rope, it can browse only within a certain confined area limited by the length of the rope and it eats whatever it reaches because it feels somewhat that it has a territorial entitlement (Maringira and Masiya, 2016:269). Similarly, police officers working in Penhalonga behave as if they have an obligation either to fleece or simply connive with them in *Chikorokoza* because of their short stints in deployment. In a confidential conversation with police officer Garwe outside the mining area at some hang out place in Mutare, he revealed the following:

I was recently moved to the Criminal Investigation Department Gold Squad and just last week we were deployed in Penhalonga to deal with some errant *makorokozas* working within Mutare River. The instruction was clear we were supposed to be apprehend them because their activities are illegal. But on getting to the ground, I realised that the arbitrary arrests won't give me food on my table and won't bring my salary on time or ease the cash shortages that we

are experiencing in the country. I decided to join them and offer them protection within their syndicates in return for a fee – protection fee which allowed them to pan unabated. So, I literary became a part of them though standing a distance away from their ‘illegal operations’ but when it came to sharing the money I would receive my own portion for the protection service. All my other colleagues from the squad did the same and we would advise *makorokozas* to lay low during the day and work at night to avoid detection. Since our deployment in the area would only last for four weeks before being rotated to another section I had to make sure that I amassed all the money that I could from these clandestine operations. Once you are off the gold squad section you might never again get another chance to work there again. *Wangu hanzi chawawana batisisa cause midzimu haupi kawiri* (a popular Shona idiom which means that once you given a chance to make money by the ancestors you must grab it with all your hands because that chance might never come back to your side again. The other thing is that if you want to enhance your chances of being redeployed again – you must make sure that you give the bosses at Mutare Central Police Station some share from the loot just to keep them happy. That way they will push for your redeployment to another assignment whenever it arises because they know that they will be beneficiaries as well. If you don’t give them anything you might be posted to the rural areas where you will be dealing with stock theft kkkkkkkk!!! (laughing) and you know that there is no money working with such trivial issues. (Officer Garwe, 29.08.16, Mutare)

Apart from the police officers, it also emerged from the interactions that the cycle of corruption in gold mining in Penhalonga involved high ranking government officials and top politicians in the ruling party, ZANU PF. The other buyers that have been referred to in the earlier discussion who were offering better prices than FRP were said to be front runners of some scrupulous politicians who smuggle the gold outside the country to South Africa, Mozambique and Lebanon where they get very good prices. During a conversation with Mukamba on brokerage networks and his preferred choice of selling gold to unlicensed buyers, he said

They are a lot of buyers in Penhalonga and most of them come from Harare with huge sums of money. But I strongly suspect that these buyers work for top politicians and government officials because they always bring new US dollar notes in a country like Zimbabwe where there is massive foreign currency shortages. So, I always question the source of their money which must be from top guys with political power. I also remember hearing stories around here about buyers working for Gono (Gideon Gono is the former governor of the RBZ) which might be true. Surprisingly, these buyers are not arrested by the police or even harassed like us. I am sure they also pay off huge bribes to the police and because they have political connections they become untouchable like leopards (*imbada idzi wangu*). (Mukamba, 06. 04.16, Penhalonga)

Police officers and corrupt government officials are not the only social ills identified by *makorokozas* during the interactions. There is also the menacing problem of *magombiros* (thieves) who target to steal either money or ore from *makorokozas*. It emerged that most of *magombiros* will be former *makorokozas* who would have failed to make it because of lack of patience in mining or increased debts. However, some are ex police officers or soldiers. Ziki explained that *magombiros* are a problem and that when are caught they won’t be remorseful as they are decisively disciplined. The other major challenge with the *magombiro* phenomenon as was brought out in the conversation with Bhutisi is that they usually work in cohorts with unscrupulous police officers who offer them protection, and even if they are caught, they are released within a short period of time:

*Magombiro* are thieves who prey on us to steal gold ore. They are a huge problem and the worst part of it is that they work in syndicates

with police officers who give them protection. So, we normally take turns as a syndicate to guard our ore during the night. I have realised that most of these thieves are guys who would have at one point worked with us but failed to make it in mining because of being lazy and lack of patience or are ex-soldiers. But once we catch them we deal with them instantly without handing them to the corrupt police officer where we know they will be released within days. We teach them a good lesson that they will never forget. (Bhutisi, 07.06.16, Penhalonga)

This dialogue with Bhutisi demonstrates that *makorokozas* have their own social justice setup systems by which they deal with *magombiros*. Discipline is at the core of *Chikorokoza*, and thus, they do not tolerate any acts of sabotage even by *magombiros* who they regard as ‘greedy rebels’ trying to reap where they did not sow. Be that as it may, *makorokozas* are not violent, they are honest people trying to make a decent living, and similar to any other normal social group, they get irritated by attempts of ‘rebels’ to steal from them. *Magombiros* are categorised here as mining ‘rebels’ who as cowards would have failed to live up to rigors of underground mining, and as Bhutisi correctly pointed out, ‘*Chikorokoza* requires a lot of patience and discipline’. Social cohesion in *Chikorokoza* thus demands trustworthiness among themselves to avoid situations in which ore can be stolen by the ‘rebels’. The practice of *Chigombiro* (stealing and robbing miners using violence and force) has also been explored in depth by Katsaura (2010a); (2010b) who investigated its genesis in the diamond panning period in Chiadzwa, Marange, Eastern Zimbabwe. He argued that this practice became so uncontrollable at the height of anarchy and lawlessness in Chiadzwa with police officers also turning into *magombiros* using service riffles to steal from both *makorokozas* and diamond buyers. In Penhalonga, one incident was recounted to me by an informant who said that ‘our syndicate was robbed by three *magombiros* at gun point last year at night – we had just come from the mill and they took away our money, cell phones and other valuables. We couldn’t make a police report because of fear of being arrested. However, in earnest we were all convinced the *magombiros* were active police members who had access to guns’. From this interaction, it is clear that although sometimes there is a working relationship between the police and *makorokozas* during the day, it is not a guaranteed pact because the same police officers can rob them at night even after charging them mining ‘royalties’.

## 5. Empowering mining entrepreneurs in Penhalonga

According to Noetstaller (1995:16), ‘the small-scale enterprise segment has consistently been identified as a fertile ground for the growth of indigenous entrepreneurship and that this is particularly true for artisanal operations’. In Penhalonga, after realising the plight of *makorokozas*, the Centre for Natural Resources Governance (CNRG), a non-governmental organisation, is assisting with working tools and registration processes. During conversations with *makorokozas*, they revealed that the costs associated with registering mining claims were repulsive such that they prefer to mine ‘illegally’ or to be subcontracted by claim owners. Thus, the CNRG has been running a project themed ‘Formalizing Artisanal Mining’ which started in June 2015. The formalisation process was proposed as a move towards decriminalising artisanal mining by assisting *makorokozas* in complying with the law in terms of registration of claims and environmental regulations.

Subsequently, the CNRG mobilised 52 (27 women and 25 men) artisanal gold miners and organised them into five syndicates. These syndicates were assisted financially to register gold mining claims. They were further provided with equipment to aid in shaft sinking and with food stuffs for consumption during their mining activities. Ten blocks of gold were identified by *makorokozas*, which were then applied by the CNRG for issuing mining permits on behalf of *makorokozas*. The working tools donated comprised wheelbarrows, shovels, picks, chisels,

buckets and ropes. Therefore, it can be argued that the CNRG recognised the importance of ASM in Penhalonga as an exemplifier of ingenuity and entrepreneurship that deserved to be supported. Elsewhere, Thornton (2014:2) writing about *Zamazamas* in Roodeport, South Africa, posits that ‘they are genuine entrepreneurs in a society that has been chronically unable to generate much entrepreneurial spirit’.

In a conversation with the director of the CNRG, he explained that they are promoting *Chikorokoza* in Penhalonga as an entrepreneurial activity meant to empower the locals who under the given economic situation cannot afford to go through the expensive registration processes:

We assisted the artisanal miners to form 5 syndicates of 10–12 members each. The groups were gender balanced, in line with our gender policy which seeks to create equal opportunities between man and women. We paid a prospecting license of US\$1200 per claim. A consultant has also been engaged to carry out pegging. This process may take a month or so as it involves meticulous verification to avoid pegging a claim that has already been allocated to someone. Pegging costs \$400.00 per claim. The other charge is notification fee which we paid to the Local Authority, in this case the Mutasa Rural District Council under whose jurisdiction Penhalonga falls. The notification fee is US\$200.00 per claim. We also paid US\$8000 for the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) which must be carried out before mining operations commences. (Farai Maguwu, 25.01.16, Penhalonga)

This clearly shows that the process of registering a claim is very expensive, which *makorokozas* cannot afford. Despite the challenges associated with ASM, Thornton (2014) rightfully described *makorokozas* as entrepreneurs who create significant numbers of jobs and economic value for many local communities. Although their knowledge and mining skills are non-standardised, they are distinctively different from the systems and practices within a large-scale mine. They usually exploit gold bearing ore that is not exploitable using industrial methods and have a good knowledge of the geology, selecting ‘belts’ (veins) that contain the richest ore grades (Thornton, 2014:2). Gold deposits are usually near the surface and mined using simple tools, and the simplicity also extends to processing and marketing arrangements (Sinding, 2005; Hilson, 2009). Thus, the rare skills of *makorokozas*, which form a part of their ingenuity, enable them to transform dirt into gold, which is not an easy feat, given that they use only basic rudimentary tools.

## 6. The new dispensation and relaxation of stringent mining policies

In November 2017, a wave of protests sparked the country that pushed for the ouster of President Robert Mugabe of the ruling ZANU PF party. The protestors with the support of the army managed to force Mugabe, who had been in power for 37 years, to resign. With his resignation, his former deputy, Emmerson Mnangagwa who he had fired 2 weeks earlier, took over the control of both the party and the state. It had been widely reported that before his dramatic ascendancy to the presidency, Mnangagwa had a significant control of major small-scale gold mines in Central Zimbabwe (Spiegel, 2014; Mabhena 2013). The new dispensation led by Mnangagwa immediately started to preach the gospel of re-engagement and the narrative that Zimbabwe was now open for business after having suffered international isolation during the 37 years of Mugabe’s misrule. ASM of gold suddenly came under spotlight as one area that could be used to unlock economic prosperity, and the new dispensation’s open door policy was promoted. A 100-day rapid response plan for economic turnaround was put in place with all government departments instructed to come up with strategies that would promote an ease of doing business in the country. As a result, there was an upsurge in the number of gold mining permit applications at the Ministry of Mines. The Ministry responded by reducing

prospecting application fees from US\$500 to US\$200 and mining license fee from US\$1000 to US\$200. The RDC notification fees of US\$200 was also scrapped away. The president himself speaking during one of his campaign rallies in June 2018 bemoaned the labelling of gold miners as *makorokozas* saying that this term was derogatory; he encouraged the nation to embrace them as ‘skilled artisans’ playing an important role in reviving the economy. This new wave of respect for artisanal miners advocated by the president meant that government departments and the police had to change their militant persecution approaches. Subsequently, a soft stance was adopted as the new government tried to decriminalise ASM with both Ministry of Mines and the Environment Management Agency (EMA) taking a lead in repudiating the draconian policies that had been used since 2006 at the start of Operation *Chikorokoza Chapera*.

I interviewed an official at the Ministry of Mines in Mutare who divulged that one of their targets in the 100 day working plan was to promote ASM gold mining in view of its potential to stimulate economic growth. Similarly, another official at the EMA in Mutare spoke about a directive that came from their head office that artisanal small-scale miners should be exempted from carrying out full EIAs. Instead, the agency developed new operational guidelines for miners; this reduced the costs of engaging EIA consultancies. These new promulgations effectively meant that miners were now free to go about their activities without fear of police arrests and associated disturbances. However, it must be noted that although changes in mining policies were quickly adopted and passed on by the new dispensation, for many years, the Zimbabwe Miners Federation (ZMF) had been trying to engage government officials in policy dialogue in view of de-criminalising ASM (Spiegel, 2017). The new changes in the EIA policy were welcomed by the members of the ZMF, with its president quoted in a daily national newspaper as follows:

This move is part of government’s effort to formalize small-scale gold mining whose contribution in the country’s overall mineral haul has been on the upward and has shown potential to grow even further. The new development will see our miners only having to fill in blank spaces in a simplified document as opposed to the previous dispensation where they had to submit a comprehensive EIA by engaging consultants who were charging US\$7000 and above. Furthermore, the number of days for the application process to obtain an EIA license has been reduced from the current 60 days to a couple of days after application. Therefore, the new set up will go a long way in the efforts to formalize small scale mining operations and is also evidence that government under President Mnangagwa is listening to the sector’s needs. (Interview with the President of the ZMF, extracted from the Herald, 2 August 2018)

However, this soft stance on ASM by the EMA received a low approval rating by many environmental consultancies. They argued that this was a political move, which was going to be detrimental to environmental protection. I had a conversation with a Mutare-based EIA consultancy team, and one of its members was of the opinion that instead of lifting EIAs on small-scale miners, the EMA should have looked at the EIA cost drivers first. Additional costs in the form of exorbitant stakeholder consultation fees were cited as the biggest impediment and not consultancy professional fees. Upon checking the stakeholder consultation fees for government departments and RDC’s, I also realised that the outcry by consultancies was justified. For example, the Mutasa RDC was charging US\$300 as the EIA consultation fees, and the Zimbabwe National Authority (ZINWA) fees was at US\$200, when factored, all these costs would mean that the overall cost of conducting an EIA would become significantly higher.

## 7. Conclusion

Several attempts have been made by the Zimbabwean government to decriminalise and formalise ASM. This paper investigated how

changes in government policies have projected ASM in different lens, which made the sector vulnerable to control by greedy politicians, the police and government departments. I have shown that the tussle for control by these actors was not always necessarily a means towards regularising the so called ‘illegalities’ in ASM but rather was a gateway to personal riches. My focus was particularly on policing ASM activities in Penhalonga, Eastern Zimbabwe. I used ethnographic evidence derived from interviews and participant observations to reveal the intricate web of interactions between *makorokozas* and the police as they negotiated mutual benefits from ASM at moments when it was outlawed. The complexity of illegalising ASM as I have shown in the paper was further compounded by a government decision imploring police not to arrest *makorokozas* because they were producing high amounts of gold than large-scale mines. This again appeared to be a rhetoric, and I argue that in trying to decriminalise ASM, the government would at times blow hot and cold, and it is such kind of contradictions that were used by the police and other interested actors in clamping down *makorokozas*. Instead of bringing order to ASM in Penhalonga, police operations were seen to be premised on scrupulous arrangements where officers would set up working syndicates with *makorokozas* and or charge them fees to gain entry into mining areas under their guard. However, I also demonstrated that in some areas, some *makorokozas* preferred to work as syndicates on registered claims to avoid the cat-and-mouse game with the police. Sharing agreements were crafted in which the owner of the claim would receive 50% of money obtained after milling, and *makorokozas* would share the remaining percentage. It also emerged from the research that the allocation of productive gold claims in Penhalonga by the Ministry of Mines was skewed in favour of powerful political figures and war veterans. This again left *makorokozas* at the peril of exploitation by claim owners and goes on to show how those who were in position of authority-controlled ASM in Penhalonga. However, the coming of a new dispensation after the fall of Robert Mugabe in November 2016 heralded a new beginning for ASM as the government took giant steps towards the decriminalisation of the sector. Amongst the many significant achievements that I have alluded to in this paper were the reduction of mining application fees and the scrapping away of the lengthy and expensive EIA process. Therefore, a raft of new measures were put in place that promoted ASM with the president taking a lead in recognising the miners as skilled artisans and not criminals ‘*makorokozas*’ – a term that he said must not be used. This in itself will go a long in promoting ASM by taking away the police sting which criminalised activities of artisans whilst at the same time benefiting from the power and control they wielded when it came to clampdown operations of yesteryears.

## References

- Banchirigah, S.M., Hilson, G., 2010. De-agrarianization, re-agrarianization and local economic development: re-orientating livelihoods in African artisanal mining communities. *Policy Sci.* 43 (2), 157–180.
- Brycson, D.F., Geenen, S., 2016. Artisanal frontier mining of gold in Africa: labour transformation in Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Afr. Aff.* 115 (459), 296–317.
- Childs, J., 2008. Reforming small scale mining in sub-Saharan Africa: political and ideological challenges to a fair-trade gold initiative. *Resour. Policy* 33, 2–7.
- Chipangura, N., 2017. Archaeological technologies of gold mining and processing and their relationship with contemporary artisanal and small scale mining: a case of Mutanda Site, Mutare, Zimbabwe. In: Nhemachena, A., Warikandwa, T. (Eds.), *Mining Africa: Law, Environment, Society and Politics in Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Langaa Publishers, Bermuda, pp. 103–134.

- Dreschler, B., 2001. Small-scale mining and sustainable development within the SADC region. Working paper 84. Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development (MMSD) Project. International Institute for Environment and Development, London, pp. 56–68.
- Fisher, E., 2007. Occupying the margins: labour integration and social exclusion in artisanal mining in Tanzania. *Dev. Change* 38 (4), 735–760.
- Geenen, S., 2011. Relations and regulations in local gold trade networks in South Kivu, DR Congo. *J. East. Afr. Stud.* 5 (3), 427–446.
- Hilson, G., 2009. Small scale mining, poverty and economic development in sub-Saharan Africa: an overview. *Resour. Policy* 34, 1–5.
- Hilson, G., Garforth, C., 2012. Agricultural poverty and the expansion of artisanal mining in sub-Saharan Africa: experiences from South west Mali and Southeast Ghana. *Popul. Res. Policy Rev.* 31 (3), 435–464.
- Hilson, G., et al., 2007. To move or not to move: reflections on the resettlement of artisanal miners in the Western region of Ghana. *Afr. Aff.* 106 (424), 413–436.
- Hiron, M., 2011. Introduction: gendering the masculine field of mining for sustainable community livelihoods. In: Dutt, K.L. (Ed.), *Gendering the Field: Towards Sustainable Livelihoods for Mining Communities*. The Australian National University Press, Canberra, pp. 1–20.
- Mabhena, C., 2012. Mining with a ‘Vuvuzela’: reconfiguring artisanal mining in Southern Zimbabwe and its implications to rural livelihoods. *J. Contemp. Afr. Stud.* 30 (2), 219–233.
- Maringira, G., Masiya, T., 2016. The security sector and the plunder of Zimbabwe’s Chidzwa alluvial diamonds: the ‘goat mentality’ in practice. *Afr. Secur. Rev.* 25 (4), 368–377.
- Mawowa, S., 2013. The political economy of artisanal and small-scale Gold mining in Central Zimbabwe. *J. South. Afr. Stud.* 39 (4), 921–936.
- Munakamwe, J., 2017. Livelihood strategies, mobilisation and resistance in Johannesburg, South Africa. In: Nhemachena, A., Warikandwa, T. (Eds.), *Mining Africa: Law, Environment, Society and Politics in Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Langaa Publishers, Bermuda, pp. 155–186.
- Nhlangetwa, K., Hein, K.A.A., 2015. Zama-Zama in the Durban Deep/Roodepoort area of Johannesburg, South Africa: an invasive or alternative livelihood? *Extr. Ind. Soc.* 2, 1–3.
- Noetstaller, R., 1995. Historical Perspectives and Key Issues of Artisanal Mining: Keynote Speech at the International Roundtable on Artisanal Mining. World Bank, Washington D.C.
- Nyoni, P., 2017. Unsung heroes? An anthropological approach into the experiences of ‘zamazamas’ in Johannesburg, South Africa. In: Nhemachena, A., Warikandwa, T. (Eds.), *Mining Africa: Law, Environment, Society and Politics in Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Langaa Publishers, Bermuda, pp. 133–154.
- Siegel, S., Veiga, M.M., 2010. The myth of alternative livelihoods: artisanal mining, gold and poverty. *Int. J. Environ. Pollut.* 41 (3–4), 272–288.
- Sinding, K., 2005. The dynamics of artisanal and small scale –mining reform. *Nat. Resour. Forum* 29, 243–252.
- Spiegel, J.S., 2014. Legacies of a nationwide crackdown in Zimbabwe: operation chikorokoza chopera in gold mining communities. *J. Mod. Afr. Stud.* 52 (4), 541–570.
- Spiegel, J.S., 2015. Shifting formalisation policies and recentralizing power: the case of Zimbabwe’s artisanal Gold mining Sector. *Soc. Nat. Resour.* 28, 543–558.
- Spiegel, J.S., 2017. EIAs, power and political ecology: situating resource struggles and the techno-politics of small scale mining. *Geoforum* 87, 95–107.
- Swift, W.H., 1956. The geology of the odzi Gold belt. Southern Rhodesia Geological Survey Bulletin No. 45. Government Printers, Salisbury.
- Thornton, R., 2014. Zamazama, “illegal” artisanal miners, severely misrepresented by press and government. *Extr. Ind. Soc.* 1, 127–129.
- Tripp, A.M., 1997. Changing the Rules: the Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania. University of California Press, Berkeley CA.
- Wilson, S.A., 2011. Sierra Leone’s illicit diamonds: the challenges and the way forward. *GeoJournal* 76 (3), 191–212.

## News paper Articles

- Artisanal Miners increase output, News Day, 28 August 2017.
- Don’t arrest gold mines- Mangudya, The Sunday Mail 22 January 2017.
- EMA softens for miners, The Herald, 2 August 2018.
- Small Scale miners boost gold deliveries, The Herald, 14 April 2016.
- Zama Zamas and the Snake that Breathes Fire, The Con, 16 September 2016.