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"We are one big happy family": The social organisation of artisanal and small scale gold mining in Eastern Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

In Eastern Zimbabwe, artisanal and small scale mining (ASM) has become a way of life that provides a source of livelihood to thousands of unemployed people. Moving away from the popularised discourse that views artisanal miners as 'illegal' villains who recklessly pollute the environment, this paper takes an inside look into their social organisation. It argues that artisanal gold mining is an entrepreneurial activity that is regulated by a set of socio-cultural processes. The paper looks specifically at the growth of ASM within Mutanda Range in Odzi communal lands in Eastern Zimbabwe; it is based on long-term ethnographic engagements involving interviews with miners and participant observation. Despite being labelled as criminals because of the informal nature of their activities, this paper will argue that gold miners working at Mutanda Range have well-organised working structures with clearly defined roles for those who undertake mining.

1. Introduction

In Zimbabwe, artisanal and small scale mining (ASM) for gold is undertaken through the exploitation of reefs and alluvial placer deposits. It is estimated that as many as two million people across the country derive their livelihoods from ASM (Mawowa, 2013; Spiegel, 2017; Chipangura, 2019). Despite the huge role of ASM, relatively little has been written on its social organisation. The exception to this is work focusing on the political economy of ASM, which has been projected as riddled by violent conflicts and capital accumulation by elites (Katsaura, 2010; Moore and Mawowa, 2010; Alexander and McGregor, 2013; Mawowa, 2013; Maringira and Nyamunda, 2016; Spiegel, 2017).

This paper aims to help fill this gap by looking at the social organisation of ASM at Mutanda Range, in Odzi communal lands in Eastern Zimbabwe. I will illuminate the evolution and growth of ASM at Mutanda Range as a socio-cultural practice that has its own set of knowledge practices, developed and perfected by *makorokozas* (gold miners) through mutually constituted working relationships over time. Based on engagement with *makorokozas* working at Mutanda, which took the form of interactive conversations and observations, the study reveals ASM to be a normative way of life structured by apprenticeship processes, organised syndicates and family-like connections. Although ASM in Zimbabwe is often associated with illegality, violence and environmental destruction, the activities of *makorokozas* working at Mutanda Range were found to be clearly organised and to follow defined social patterns and chains of operations.

In presenting this argument I concur with Lahiri-Dutt (2018: 15) who suggests that deep ethnographic insights into the social networks of small-scale miners can allow us to move beyond the generalised tropes of anarchy, greed, blood, conflicts and violence which have long been associated with ASM. Indeed, when I undertook my ethnographic fieldwork in Eastern Zimbabwe during the period 2015–2018, I observed an organised ASM sector in which *makorokozas* were working together in syndicates, literally operating as big happy families, with an overall objective of alleviating themselves from poverty in a country where there are virtually no jobs (Fisher, 2007; Thornton, 2014; Nhlengetwa and Hein, 2015; Hilson et al., 2018; Lahiri-Dutt, 2018; Chipangura, 2019). However, this paper will also examine some incidents of mining conflicts which have been reported in other parts of Zimbabwe, in order to highlight that these violent clashes are gang related and are confined to Midlands and Mashonaland provinces. The paper includes verbatim quotations; the identities of interlocutors are kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

2. Gold mining habitus, syndicates and the apprenticeship process

Habitus — a term originally coined by Bourdieu — is a recognition of a set of learned responses to the world which evolves over time through relationships between individuals and groups (Joyce, 2000; Roux, 2007). Social habitus reflects behaviours, thoughts or

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dispositions to which individuals ascribe, based on their upbringing, education and social environs (Farbstein, 2011). Social coherence amongst *makorokozas* is generated through working together on mining concessions over a long period, sharing life experiences and spending their income together. All these factors contribute to the emergence of similar behavioural traits which then become a part of their shared habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). For example, artisanal miners have a reputation for spending large portions of their earnings on alcohol, drugs, ostentatious gambling, clothes, phones, women and entertainment (Cuvelier, 2010). Their cohesion and displays of similar consumption practices are derived from chains of interdependency, modes of reciprocity and shared everyday life within mining concessions (Gratz, 2009). However, it must be emphasised that miners in any given location are not homogeneous in terms of their spending habits, as these tend to differ according to age groups. Thus, although some characteristic patterns of behaviour amongst *makorokozas* can be analysed using the concept of habitus, some behaviours and moral codes can also be distinctive, depending on individual preferences and age (Gratz, 2009). The spending habits of artisanal miners in DRC, for example, demonstrate similarly differential preferences. Some miners are said to be in the habit of spending hundreds of dollars on alcohol and women in a bid to increase their status, whereas others are more interested in capital accumulation that can transform their lives (Cuvelier, 2010). It can be argued that habitus is the internalisation of the past into the present in which *makorokozas* develop a set of internalised structures, common schemes of perceptions, thought and action that drive them to perform certain similar practices. Such practices are structured, in effect, by internal schemes which are embedded in the course of history, a result of past experiences of which the individual is now a part (ibid.).

Habitus thus generates all possible forms of behaviours that become accepted and are embraced as socio-cultural practices by *makorokozas* and which combine local, regional and global features. Because *makorokozas* live together, they tend to encounter the same kinds of situations, experiences and conditions and the assumption here is that they also share the same habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). A team spirit and an atmosphere of camaraderie typically exist among *makorokozas* that transcend any sense of ethnic difference. Mining skills are acquired through the apprenticeship process which is part of their chain of operations and entails junior *makorokozas* learning from senior *makorokozas*. Apprenticeship can be regarded as an ongoing process of learning mining skills as well as adapting to shifting situations within mining spaces (Gratz, 2009). At the end of the apprenticeship process, the young miners will have gained the necessary mining skills: these are literally embodied in them. Thus, these kinds of social practices shape ASM in that the often taken-for-granted routines of daily life or habitus are structured by working experience over time. The application of Bourdieu's concept in the context of ASM at Mutanda Range proved valuable as it explained the repetition and reproduction of social practices through space and time. Assuming a shared habitus among *makorokozas* allowed many commonalities to emerge in their day-to-day interactions.

Makorokozas judge each other based on their mining skills and competence and not by their different places of origin or tribal affiliation (Bryceson and Jonsson, 2010). Writing about artisanal miners in Bolivia, Nash (1979: 12) argued that they address each other as brothers with each one having a nickname that captures his characteristic qualities. Similarly, in his study of ASM in Benin, Gratz (2004) also illustrated how common codes, symbols, particular neologisms, gestures, speech acts and narratives are developed by miners. Gratz gives the example of nicknaming which is a common social practice among *makorokozas* with nicknames generally being derived '…from attitudes, certain events, or circumstances in the biography of a person, or by way of analogy to military ranks, prominent politicians, musicians and actors' (ibid.: 148).

At Mutanda Range, the synchronisation of mining activities by *makorokozas* is built on the basis of the apprenticeship system and close working relationships by syndicates that are subcontracted by concessionaires. The term syndicate is used here to describe a group of *makorokozas* who come together to work as a team; numbers vary between six and ten people in each team. Syndicates that I observed during the fieldwork had been working together for a long period; when they decided to move to a different mining concession they would do so as 'families' which share the same habitus. Such movements were triggered by the news of a discovery of a rich pocket elsewhere within the range. During the field research, for example, a rumour reached *makorokozas* at Muwarvet Mine that a pocket had been discovered at KwaMusharu (at Musharu's Mine). The two syndicates that I had been observing for more than two months moved to Musharu's mine which was located 6 km west of their original location but still on Mutanda Range. One of the miners explained the reason for their mobility as follows:

> We heard that *chaputika* [a sudden unexpected gold discovery] KwaMusharu and that people are making a lot of money there; that's why we have decided to move as a whole syndicate. It's also easy for us to move out like this as a syndicate because it means we won't take time to hit the ground when we get there since we know each other very well. It's always difficult to start up a new syndicate with people who you hardly know and it usually takes time before you connect and get used to working together. *Saka tofamba semhuri* [we move as family] and we have been working like this since we arrived in Mutanda Range two years ago. (Razor, 04.03.16, Mutanda Range.)

The owner of the mine where this syndicate had been working was a War Veteran and based in the City of Mutare where he worked as a soldier. I interviewed him in order to get his views on the high mobility factor of *makorokozas* and the effects on his operations:

> We are used to this high turnover of *makorokozas* — nothing is new. You wouldn't be surprised if after only a few days the whole syndicate will come back again looking for work because the new rich discovery will turn out to be a hoax. This is how the mining cycle here works and I will take them back and give them their shafts. They will of course lose out some money when we go to the mill because their stockpile might not be as big as those who remained behind. Most of *makorokozas* have learnt the hard way about rich pocket discoveries which in most cases are fuelled by lies by unscrupulous claim owners. It's a ploy that they use to hoodwink a good number of *makorokozas* so that they get a lot of ore and shore up their tonnage which will increase chances of getting many grammes at the mill. That's the game, however, at this mine I don't use such dirty tactics. This group (pointing over) has been working for me for more than 2 years now and our relationship has transcended beyond that of workers and an owner. They all call me *mudhara wedu* [our father] which goes to show you the deep family relationship that we have cultivated over a long time of working together. We have mutual trust and respect for each other and that way we are always a happy big family. (WarVet, 06.03.16, Mutanda Range.)

Mining syndicates can be constituted by members who share kinship ties, extended family members, friends who have known each other from original home areas or just acquaintances that have worked together and become familiar with each other through the apprenticeship system (Mkodzongi and Spiegel, 2018: 5). Although it has been reported that relationships among *makorokozas* in these working syndicates are often fraught with conflicts, misunderstandings and violent — in some cases deadly — attacks, findings from my research painted a completely different picture. During the two years of ethnographic fieldwork around Mutanda Range, Odzi, I came across no incidents of violent clashes amongst *makorokozas*. To date, Eastern Zimbabwe has not featured in any of the newspaper articles reporting violent clashes between *makorokozas* which have a become the norm in Midlands,

Mashonaland West and Matabeleland South provinces (News Day, 2018; The Herald, 2018a).

In fact, the only dispute in Eastern Zimbabwe that I encountered in the period of the research was a verbal exchange between members of the Manicaland Mining Association (MMA) during a miners' meeting at Odzi Country Club in September 2018. Two factional groups were vying for control of MMA, which is an affiliate organisation of the Zimbabwe Miners Federation (ZMF). The group of elders who had established the association in 2001 was accused by an emerging group of young miners of failing to advance the gold mining agenda in the province, and of being corrupt, including making personal use of some of the funds that were allocated by the government for the purchase of mining tools for *makorokozas*. I recorded the following concerns voiced by one of the young miners during this meeting:

> This association does not belong to individuals or the so-called mining elders but it's for the whole province. Although we are young and upcoming miners we are not puppets; we need to have our voices represented in this association. Yes, we respect you as our elders who have been in the mining business for a very long time but please stop your corrupt tendencies. Recently, the treasurer bought a Honda Fit car for his girlfriend with money that was supposed to have been used to buy mining tools for the youths and we cannot stand such corrupt practices. The association is not a household item for any individual — it must represent the visions and aspirations of all small-scale miners in the province. Our president ED Mnangagwa is championing the empowering of youth gold miners who are pivotal to economic transformation yet you elders are busy sabotaging him. No!!!! No!!!! No!!! We as the youths and the future, we will not rest and watch you do that. This association has to be dissolved and we must select a new committee through elections. (Chigunduru, 12.09.2018, Odzi Country Club.)

The MMA was indeed dissolved after this meeting, at the end of 2018, but the battle for control has spread to the parent organisation, the ZMF, where splinter groups are locking horns in numerous court cases. The Zvishavane-Mberengwa Mining Association (ZMMA) has filed a court application to bar ZMF president Henrietta Rushwaya from representing its interests, accusing her of being corrupt (The Herald, 2018b,c). However, an elder that I interviewed after the Odzi Country Club meeting expressed confidence that a solution would be found to unite all members of MMA:

> An amicable solution is to harmoniously agree on the way forward and reunite this association that once made ZMF proud. Individual attacks or past innuendos do not solve problems. We must iron out our differences in a positive manner that will benefit, develop and grow the artisanal and small-scale miners in and around Manicaland. Therefore, we stand guided by our mutual discussions and agreements. (Mukuru, 12.09.2018, Odzi Country Club.)

I have highlighted these disputes in order to demonstrate that in Eastern Zimbabwe, ASM is not conflict-free *per se* but the nature of disagreements cannot be portrayed as violent — unlike other parts of the country where infamous machete-wielding gangs of miners are wreaking havoc. Furthermore, this disagreement over the leadership of MMA would not necessarily affect the social organisation of *makorokozas* and their working patterns at Mutanda Range because most of them are subcontracted by concessionaires. It is the concessionaires who usually have affiliations with MMA.

3. Mutanda Range concessionaires and different sharing practices

The Mutanda Range is located in Odzi communal lands, approximately 44 km north-west of the city of Mutare, Eastern Zimbabwe. It forms part of the Mutare–Odzi gold belt which stretches from Penhalonga Valley down to Save River. The Mutare–Odzi belt is an important gold mining area with combined historical production and estimated reserves of 128 t of gold (Phaup, 1937). The Mutare–Odzi greenstone is a late Archaean linear structure that was intruded by sills of Penhalonga granodiorite and peridotite at ca. 2.74 Ga. (Phaup, 1937; Mondlane et al., 2001; Strasburger and Chitate, 2015). It takes the form of a narrow syncline which originated during the emplacement of the granite due to gravitative settling of the heavier schists into the lighter granitic magma (Swift, 1956: 3). The axis of this syncline appears to pitch eastwards with the Mbeza sediments in Penhalonga forming the centre of the syncline which rapidly extends west into Odzi (Phaup, 1937). Since their formation, these sediments have been folded, metamorphosed and intruded by granite, quartz and dolerite and contained several gold reefs which were worked by pre-colonial populations (ibid.: 25). The majority of mines in the Mutare–Odzi gold belt are in the Penhalonga Valley and practically all the gold mined in the area comes from quartz reefs, dolerites or from within the greenstones (ibid.: 83). Serpentines are also common within this belt and are usually found on the flanks of the larger hills together with schist rocks on the lower ground (Swift, 1956).

During my fieldwork at Mutanda Range, ASM was organised around legally registered concessions with owners holding mining certificates issued by the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Development. The process of registering a claim is daunting and expensive which is why many *makorokozas* are reluctant to go through it (Chipangura, 2019). The bureaucratic processes involved in applying for a prospecting licence, pegging of claims, issuance of a mining certificate and carrying out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) are cumbersome (Hilson and Maconachie, 2017; Hilson et al., 2017). The sizes of claims vary but the minimum that can be registered by the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development is 10 ha which is equivalent to one block. Concessionaires are seldom actively involved in the organisation of the mining activities; instead they subcontract *makorokozas* who forms independent working groups popularly known as *masindalos* or syndicates (Chipangura, 2019).

In my previous work in Penhalonga, I observed that each syndicate will share with the concessionaire either the ore, or money obtained after selling the gold (Chipangura, 2019). This practice is also popular at Mutanda Range. Sharing arrangements differs but in general concessionaires get a 50% share from each working syndicate. Amongst *makorokozas* themselves, money is divided up after selling of the gold, according to the kind of work performed during the mining activities. Thus, *makorokozas* who undertake more hazardous tasks such as going underground to dangerous spots deep in the mine receive more money compared to those who move ore to the surface using buckets hoisted by ropes (Chipangura, 2019: 157). This is not a universal system: High (2012) found that in Mongolia, *ninjas* (artisanal miners) receive the same amount of money regardless of age, gender or experience. Remuneration is the same across all mining tasks that are undertaken by *ninjas*. These sharing practices were seen as key to avoiding conflicts and physical retribution that might emerge amongst *ninjas* if the remuneration rates were uneven (High, 2012).

For *makorokozas* working at Mutanda Range, the justification for differential sharing practices is premised on the nature of the work undertaken, given that some tasks are more physically demanding and potentially dangerous. The risks associated with underground mining are captured in Cartelli's (2013: 35) assertion: 'when small scale miners attempt to locate and extract gold, they literally take matters into their own hands, while risks to their personal well-being multiply with each centimetre they descend into the earth'. It can be argued that gold mining tantalizes *makorokozas* with the promise of economic benefits that conceals the much wider spectrum of its risks. It takes courage and mental strength to work underground at such depths. From his research in Benin, Gratz (2003: 193) argues that '…the way people in this gold-mining area conceive of and react to risks and uncertainties is an ongoing process of learning, adaptation to shifting situations but also of ignoring local knowledge'. As a way of cushioning themselves against fear, *makorokozas* that I spoke to confessed that they rely on drugs and

alcohol.

4. Smoking *mbanje,* mining courage and chasing away evil spirits

Over time, the faint-hearted *makorokozas* who would initially have been scared to go into the deep tunnels find courage by smoking *mbanje* (dagga/cannabis/marijuana), which is considered to be an occupational necessity. Thus, most *makorokozas* smoke *mbanje* to give them the much-needed composure to carry out their sometimes highly dangerous mining activities. Puffing cigarettes is a common thing around Mutanda Range, either in the form of packaged cigarettes — Madison being the mostly popular brand, which is light-heartedly referred to as "murder" by *makorokozas* — or a pinch of *mbanje* rolled in a khaki paper or a piece of old newspaper. Because of the courage that *mbanje* gives them, they also call it *dzemabhinya* in local lingo. *Mabhinya* are kidnappers who abduct and kill people: the feeling that *makorokozas* get from smoking *mbanje* is like a killer punch which is required in capturing and cracking the reef belt carrying gold underground. The importance of *mbanje* was confirmed by Finjo:

> Boss, if I don't smoke *mbanje*, I will not be able to go down underground. *Mbanje* gives me the wings to work like a slave and in a day, I make sure that I get more than 6 pulls. I tell you my brother, there is no real *mukorokoza* who don't smoke *mbanje*. When you are dosed with *mbanje* you work extra hard just like a donkey. (Finjo, 06.06.16, Mutanda Range.)

Mbanje thus gives *makorokozas* courage to exploit some dreaded spots deep in the mine shafts. Sipiwe, a women miner, complained that this is exactly why women are not allowed to work in artisanal gold mining by their husbands — because there is too much drug abuse. She said: "*makorokozas* work under the influence of *mbanje* and if I may ask you how many husbands would allow their wives to work in such an environment?" (Sipiwe, 18.06.16 Mutanda Range). Although smoking *mbanje*, or even growing the plant, are illegal in Zimbabwe, supplies come through the porous Zimbabwe–Mozambique border and find a ready market among *makorokozas*. In many cases *makorokozas* only purchase *mbanje* from trusted sources; some even confessed that they get their supplies from a police officer stationed at the nearby Odzi Police Camp:

> We have our regular and trusted supplier of *mbanje,* a police officer at Penhalonga Camp, he brings us good grades. I think he gets his stock from Malawi or Mozambique and he sells six balls for only one US dollar which is extraordinarily cheap for that quality. But since he is a police officer, it is also possible that he confiscates the stuff from border jumpers who uses the illegal entry points from Mozambique dotted around Imbeza Valley. If you want to taste it, I can give you …kkkkkkkkkk… [laughing whilst offering me a pull]. Whenever I smoke this grade, I get so much strength to work underground and I only come out after hitting a vein of gold. (Flash, 30.06.16, Mutanda Range.)

Given this background, it can be argued that smoking *mbanje* is an accepted social practice around Mutanda and it is difficult to imagine that it is a banned substance in the country. Within their mining locales, *makorokozas* openly smoke and exchange *mbanje*, blowing the smoke up in the air without any fear of arrest or persecution. In fact, because some police officers are involved in a money-making venture by selling *mbanje* and because *makorokozas* are their major clients, there appears to be a de facto form of legalisation covering the whole business. For some, smoking *mbanje* provides much more than a source of courage and the possibility to work underground for extended periods. Some claim that enveloping the whole mining area with *mbanje* smoke coming from collective puffing chases away bad luck and evil spirits:

> We also use *mbanje* for our daily morning rituals in which all of us smoke together as a syndicate before we go underground. The smoke generated from ten of us here is enough to chase away bad luck and evil spirits that might have been sent by our enemies. We have some of our relatives back home who are not happy with the money we are making out of gold mining. Such people constantly send evil spirits that cause accidents and also try to destabilise our mining activities. However, the smoke that comes from weed is a good chaser of evil spirits and once they get into contact with it they will immediately go back to the sender. (Bones, 12.04.16, Mutanda Range.)

Smoking *mbanje* thus gives *makorokozas* the dual advantage of protection against evil people as well as the strength to mine deep beneath the surface. In Northern Benin, Gratz (2009) argues that most miners involved in ASGM take drugs and alcohol in order to endure the hardships of their work, suggesting a shared belief that the consumption of drugs and alcohol makes it easier for miners to carry out their work — although working in this state also increases the likelihood of accidents (Gratz, 2009).

5. The euphoria of winning the mining "lottery" and spending habits

The "lottery" as a concept is used here to analyse some of the patterned behaviours of *makorokozas* within gold mining, processing, selling and how thereafter they spend their proceeds. My application of the lottery concept derives from a general observation that, despite not getting gold on many attempts, *makorokozas* around Mutanda Range are resilient and don't give up their search. They keep on trying, just like playing the lottery in the hope that one day they will win. The lottery analogy is also applicable in the sense that the entry point to a jackpot requires just a nominal payment in buying a ticket which can potentially transform the buyer into a millionaire. In the same vein, the entry point into ASM typically requires just a basic tool kit — pick, shovel, hammer, metal rods — and physical fitness. Together, these can give the miners a gold jackpot that can change their lives within a short period of time. In their chain of operations, new shafts are sunk, old ones which yield nothing are abandoned, and this goes on until they eventually get to a productively rich gold vein:

> We don't stop working even when the sampled ore has a low grade — we keep on trying because we know that one day we will be lucky. What irks the most is abandoning a shaft when you are so close to getting the big reward. It happened to us once, we left a shaft open and the other syndicate worked in it for just a short time and they got a rich pocket. We had no one to blame but ourselves. But we did not lose hope because of that, we kept going on, we knew that our lucky day would come one day. (Petros, 06.04.16, Mutanda Range.)

The strings of trials, failures and successes in gold mining are also elaborated by Bryceson and Geenen (2016) who argue that earnings in artisanal gold mining are unpredictable because production depends on luck related to various uncontrollable factors that include the presence or absence of rich gold veins. Gold mining is also a game of patience; greater perseverance increases the chances of ultimately getting the big reward (Gratz, 2003; Mkodzongi and Spiegel, 2018). Despite their frequent failures, *makorokozas* are motivated by the hope that one day they strike lucky, will get rich. Moreover, in their search for the winning lottery ticket, they are extremely mobile, moving from one concession to another where they believe they will find rich gold belts. This explains why Razor's syndicate moved from the war veteran's mine when news reached them that a rich gold vein had been discovered at Musharu's mine. However, for Razor and his team it turned out to be a wild goose chase, because nothing came out of it:

> The whole story about Musharu striking a pocket that gave him ore that amounted to a kilogramme at the mill was a lie!!! But myself and my syndicate we had to go and try our luck because you never

know. However, when we got there, we noticed that the sample was very low and wondered how a kg had been obtained from that grade. We sank our shaft and worked for more than two weeks but the sample was not showing — not even a point. Of course we were trying our luck but nothing came out and thus I am telling you that Musharu might have lied to people working around Mutanda that he got a kg. I would want to see his returns from Fidelity in order for me to be satisfied that he indeed got a kg. (Razor, 27.03.16, Mutanda Range.)

Fidelity Printers and Refiners (FRP) is subsidiary company of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) and is the sole buyer of artisanally mined gold in Zimbabwe. FRP has mobile buying units stationed on most gold milling plants in the country. Although Razor and his syndicate did not get any gold from their attempt, it is possible that the concessionaire Musharu had obtained ore rich enough to give him a kilogram of gold because luck was on his side. *Raki harifanani* (luck cannot be the same) is a popular saying amongst *makorokozas* who believe that there is no harm in continuing to try because one day they will get their own winning lottery ticket.

If *makorokozas* do hit the gold jackpot, there is euphoria associated with having large sums of money, as Petros explained: "we celebrate together as a team after selling gold and usually we go to Mutare to enjoy the fruits of our concerted effort". In Mhondoro–Ngezi, Mashonaland West province, Mkodzongi and Spiegel (2018) also observed that *makorokozas* in the area can go for long periods without getting any gold but they don't abandon their working areas. Just as at Mutanda, *makorokozas* in Mhondoro–Ngezi are driven by the hope that one day they will get the winning lottery ticket. Success in mining thus depends on a number of factors of which having the good luck to discover a productive gold vein is what all *makorokozas* yearn for.

Income-spending behaviours by *makorokozas* when they do have a windfall differs according to individual preferences and age. Young *makorokozas* have a habit of spending large portions of their earnings on alcohol, drugs, gambling, clothes, phones, women and entertainment. Cuvelier (2010) argues that artisanal miners in Katanga Province, DRC spend lavishly on alcohol and women in a bid to increase their status. They spend excessively with no thought for durable accumulation through investments in cattle or buildings. Welsh (2003: 298) suggests that this kind of conspicuous consumption is triggered by the element of uncertainty in mining: it is a chance for miners to exert their agency for as long as the moment lasts. However, the case presented by Cuvelier (2010) appears to differ from that of the *makorokozas* that I engaged with at Mutanda Range, where uses of money tend to differ between individuals:

For me the money that I get from gold mining is used in taking care of my family back home. But, some of my colleagues who do not have family responsibilities tend to be reckless when spending. They have a tendency of spending all their monies at beerhalls and night clubs with women, driven by the belief that they can always come back to the mine the next day and get more money. This explains why they do not save any extra cent. However, I really feel that we should use the money that we get wisely because the ability to get more gold is a matter of luck (Softaz, 06.04.16, Mutanda.)

Softaz's notion of variations in spending habits amongst *makorokozas* is supported by my research observations: when they come into money, not all of them spend it faster than they can make it. Because it is hard-earned money from a strenuous mining job, some *makorokozas* believe it should be spent on excesses, as a way of thanking *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits) for giving them the luck:

If you are given gold by the ancestral spirits, you must show gratitude by drinking and smoking and thanking them because if you don't do this you might never be given another fortune again. So, usually when I get money from this work I drink a lot of beer. Gold mining is very difficult and tiresome — so drinking beer will also be a way of trying to relax my mind (Marwadzo, 26.04.16, Mutanda.)

In contrast, however, some *makorokozas* prefer to remit part of their earnings to their families back home through Ecocash, a popular mobile money transfer platform in Zimbabwe. Chutsa shared these sentiments:

I am married and have children who are going to school and they are my priority. I wish to settle their education for them to have a better life than the one I am living here. So, whenever I get *kamari* (money) I rush to Odzi and send it home. In most cases I put the money in my Ecocash account and it is used to pay school fees as well as for family upkeep. (Chutsa, 06.07.16, Mutanda)

Variations in spending habits can also be detected in the Mhondoro–Ngezi case study presented by Mkodzongi and Spiegel (2018), who found that many of the *makorokozas* use income generated from ASGM to buy livestock and farm implements as well as paying school fees for their children and providing for their families. Spending variations are closely connected to age factors: many of the young *makorokozas* that I spoke to at Mutanda Range are not worried about investing in anything but would prefer to *chop* (quickly spend) their money. These young *makorokozas* usually spend their money as fast as they earn it; there is popular phrase which they utter when they get drunk: *mari inofa imwe kumunda saka tomirerei kuidya?* (we will get more money when we get back to the mine so why not spend all that we have now?). This sense of confidence that they will get another winning lottery ticket — which of course is not guaranteed — leads most of these young miners to spent their monies on luxuries such as expensive whisky's, clothing, cell phones, gambling and alcohol abuse. There is also drug abuse, most commonly in the consumption of Broncleer cough syrup (*brongo*), as confirmed in an interview with an elderly man:

Drug abuse by young miners is a very common thing here. Many of them spent a lot of money on substances such as a *brongo* (Broncleer) as you can see from all these empty small bottle strewn around the shafts. And when they get drunk they can't work: imagine how can someone *akasticker* (local parlance that refers to an extreme stage of drunkenness in which one can't even move) get into the shaft? They also recklessly spent money on prostitutes and these big loud and noisy Chinese phones that are not even durable. This is different from me — I am investing all of my money back home in Bocha where I am constructing a four-bedroom house which is near completion. (Pombi, 23.06.17, Mutanda Range.)

It is clear, therefore, that an analysis of spending habits by *makorokozas* should be informed by an appreciation of the age differences amongst syndicate members. In his study of sapphire mining in Madagascar, Welsh (2003) also found that consumption patterns amongst miners differed according to age groups. As the miners get older, they tend to give up on excessive consumption practices in favour of durable capital accumulation through proper investments (ibid.). In the Mutanda Range, the notion of syndicates as big happy families implies close-knit working relationships, but this is sometimes disrupted when young *makorokozas* abuse drugs such as Broncleer to get high. This cough syrup contains codeine and its abuse — including overdoses — by some *makorokozas* and many urban youths has become a major problem in Zimbabwe.

Elsewhere, the fast and frivolous spending of money by gold miners has been characterised as 'eating' hot money, bitter money, wild money and polluted money (Welsh, 2003; Gratz, 2009; High, 2013). Hot money is described by Welsh (2003) in terms of spending profits accumulated from sapphire mining on non-durable goods and services. This money has to be spent quickly because of the belief amongst miners that nothing good can come out of it (Welsh, 2003; High, 2013). Similarly, *ninjas* (artisanal miners) in Mongolia also believe that if they use polluted money acquired from the mine to buy durable objects, those items will mysteriously disappear or cause a misfortune; they use this myth to justify their excessive spending habits on fleeting consumer

goods, entertainment and alcohol (High, 2013). However, as is clear in the quote above from Pombi, the reckless abuse of money by *makorokozas* does not represent a homogeneous pattern of behaviour. This underscores the need to recognise that other *makorokozas* create valuable streams of revenue (Werthmann, 2009) by investing back home in durable items such as the building of houses.

6. "We are one big happy mining family": the learning curve

As *makorokozas* live together, they encounter the same kinds of situations, experiences and conditions and share the same habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). The concept of habitus was used in observing certain similar behavioural traits of *makorokozas* during the research. Habitus generates forms of behaviours that become acceptable and are embraced as cultural practices by *makorokozas*. Indeed, because they live together, the shared habitus explains certain repetitions and reproductions of social practices throughout space and time. A team spirit and an atmosphere of camaraderie exist among *makorokozas* transcending any sense of ethnic differences. Syndicates can be constituted by peers that have migrated together from their place of origin, or by total strangers who meet at the mining site (Gratz, 2009: 14). The idea of learning without having any prior experience is grounded in the shared habitus, as expressed by Petros when he said: "I saw some *makorokozas* mining around Mutanda and I realized that they were making a lot of money and I decided to join them. We just clicked and over time I was taught by them how to perform different mining tasks" (Petros, 06.04.16, Mutanda Range.) Petros's orientation into mining was based simply on his physical ability to perform the given tasks under the supervision of the more experienced miners. As a newcomer, Petros was taught by senior mentors how and where to dig. Therefore, within the chain of operations, *makorokozas* acquire mining skills through social contacts and informal apprenticeship at their mining sites. Strangers with no prior mining knowledge usually become friends because they share the same experiences, exchange information and favours and help each in the spirit of comradeship (Gratz, 2003). Thus, it did not take any scholarly knowledge in geology or mining engineering for Petros to be incorporated into the mining activities; rather, he was inducted through a simple apprentice programme led by experienced miners, as described by Chibaba, a senior miner:

> I am now a veteran miner, I started gold mining at Musanditeera in Chimanimani in the year 2000. I made a lot of money and worked there for 7 years until I moved to Chiadzwa when diamonds were discovered in that area. Diamond mining in Chiadzwa was relatively easy compared to my earlier experience in gold mining. This was because the Chiadzwa discovery comprised of surface deposits of which there was no need at all to dig shafts. We were chased away from Chiadzwa in 2008 by an army operation; that is when I decided to come to Mutanda. So, I have more than 9 years of working experience in this area and all these young boys that you see here, including Petros, I am the one who taught them how to mine from scratch. They are my protégés. (Chibaba, 06.04.16, Mutanda Range.)

In discussion with Netso, another senior miner, he recounted how he came to Mutanda all the way from Kadoma in Central Zimbabwe, approximately 380 km east of Odzi. Netso said that he was attracted by the huge sums of money that most his peers who were already working in the area were bringing home. Hitherto, he had no previous mining experience but all the same it was relatively easy to become oriented by senior *makorokozas*. This illustrates the argument that I have made elsewhere, that although *makorokozas* are often vilified as criminals they have deep mining knowledge which is demonstrated by the ways in which they easily identify productive gold belts without prior geological training (Chipangura, 2019). Netso himself conceded that it only took him a week to be oriented through a form of social and mining apprenticeship and thereafter he became a "veteran" *mukorokoza* just like everyone else working in the area. He said: "at first I did not have any gold mining knowledge. The knowledge that I have now was practically obtained through first-hand guidance by other senior miners" (Netso, 09.04.16, Mutanda Range). The knowledge and skills of *makorokozas* together with their entrepreneurial spirit offers them a stable source of livelihood (Hilson et al., 2018).

During the apprenticeship period *makorokozas* earn as they learn and there is no need for any form of specialised mining skills. In addition, mining relationships often transform into friendship ties based on honesty, mutual esteem, gratitude and trust, built on continued cooperation over time (Gratz, 2004). This view was expressed by Petros when he said: "once you are oriented through the different stages of training you become part of the family in which we work together as brothers" (Petros, 06.04.16, Mutanda Range). Incoming and new miners learn different mining operations from their senior peers who have been in the business for many years. As a result, social differences are kept at bay with emphasis placed on egalitarianism, fairness, camaraderie and friendship (Bryceson and Geenen, 2016). Moreover, a relative homogeneity of activities and state of mind amongst *makorokozas* creates a shared identity. Throughout my observations and interactions, the idea of one big family kept on recurring:

> When we are working here as a syndicate we consider ourselves as one family with one love. We are like soldiers in a war and always covering each other's backs. Here there is no room for ethnic differences based on the places one comes from — we all know ourselves as miners with a common goal of getting gold. Whether you are *Ndebele*, *Zezuru*, *Manyika, Kore-kore* or *Karanga* [the main ethnic groups in Zimbabwe] is not so much of a big deal. When we encounter problems, we join hands together as a united family. For example we lost one of our colleagues last year in an accident when one of our shafts collapsed. We retrieved his body, bought him a decent coffin and we took him to his rural home in Masvingo for burial. Even his family was grateful for the support and unity we showed. That's what a mining family entails — oneness because you never know what tomorrow holds for you. (Mafia, 09.06.2016, Mutanda Range.)

Makorokozas thus engage in a process whereby their mining skills, norms, ethics and cosmopolitan identities converge in an ad hoc fashion while they work together as one big happy family. Their first apprenticeship is on the mining site; beyond that, they judge each other based on mining skill and competence and not by tribal affiliation. In Eastern Zimbabwe, ASM has a heterogeneous social composition because *makorokozas* belong to different ethnic affiliations and social backgrounds. The ultimate, shared goal for *makorokozas* is striking gold, which is not determined or influenced by ethnic arrangements or kinship relations. Consequently, mining relationships are not manifested through kinship ties but rather are propagated by mutual respect and other ephemeral means such as drinking together, sharing jokes and common everyday working experiences in the mine shafts (Welsh, 2003). Working together as a team in this respect does not require a binding agreement, a monetary arrangement or other social formalisations; all that matters is reliability and a hardworking mentality (High, 2012). I also observed that at Mutanda Range *makorokozas* preferred to aggregate into syndicates as total strangers in which friendship ties and mutual relationships would develop as a result of working together. This was regarded as a better working arrangement than kin-based systems which are dominated by hierarchies of seniority and too many levels of respect. In Benin, Gratz (2009: 14) argues that social coherence and reciprocity are at the heart of working relationships in syndicates, to the extent that a miner gets the same share even when he has been absent for a while because of illness or family problems.

7. *Mashurungwi* and the rise of gang violence in ASM

In this article, I have demonstrated and argued that syndicates

working at Mutanda Range exhibit characteristics of happy families that share the same habitus and enjoy working relationships which are developed and perfected through the apprenticeship system. It is true that disagreements sometimes emerge within these syndicates but these are quickly resolved before they degenerate into violent clashes. Such disagreements are short lived and therefore do not affect long-term working relationships which are encapsulated in the principle of one big happy family. I want to further argue here that violent clashes in ASM in Zimbabwe must be analysed and understood within the particular contexts in which they occur. This is because, in most established syndicates that are working on registered gold claims and contracted by concessionaires, as in the case of Mutanda Range, such clashes are rare.

Nonetheless, incidents of gang violence in Midlands and Mashonaland provinces have been widely reported in the media, with rogue miners popularly known as *mashurungwi* becoming notorious for terrorising *makorokozas* with machetes and for seizing control over productive gold veins (News Day, 2019; The Herald, 2019). *Mashurungwi* is a title derived from Shurugwi, the mining town in Midlands where the menacing thugs reportedly began their activities. Another group from the same province, known as *El Shabab*, is also linked to violent activities that have come to be associated with ASM in Zimbabwe. However, to portray these isolated clashes as representative of all artisanal gold mining activities in the country would be hugely misleading. We cannot use a broad-brushstroke analysis in explaining these incidents of violence. It is also important to understand that the aspirations of *makorokozas* are not the same as those of *mashurungwi* and that violent activities in Midlands and Mashonaland provinces cannot be used to depict social organisation within ASM. Rather, I would argue that these conflicts — which have become bloody and even deadly — are based in a political economy undergirded by infighting for control of resources and capital amongst elite members of the ruling ZANU PF party Moore and Mawowa, 2010; Alexander and McGregor, 2013 Mawowa, 2013; Nyamunda and Maringira, 2016; Spiegel, 2017).

In the study area of Mutanda Range, *makorokozas* spoke occasionally about *magombiro* (thieves) who prey on their stockpiles of ore at night. In order to prevent such thefts, *makorokozas* take turns on guard duty. Most *magombiros* are said to be former *makorokozas* who have failed to make a living because of lack of patience (Chipangura, 2019: 159). When *magombiros* are caught trying to steal ore, instant justice is usually administered on them by *makorokozas* (Chipangura, 2019). In this regard it can be posited that *makorokozas* working at Mutanda Range have set up their own social justice systems in which they deal with rogue elements such as *magombiros*. Discipline is at the heart of ASM and the miners do not tolerate any acts of sabotage by *magombiros* whom they regard as “greedy rebels” trying to reap where they did not sow (ibid.). Be that as it may, *makorokozas* in this area cannot be regarded as violent: rather they are honest people trying to make a decent living and, like most social groups, they react negatively to attempts by others to steal from them (ibid.).

The situation in Midlands and Mashonaland provinces, where machete-wielding *mashurungwi* are in the habit of violently displacing syndicates whenever a lucrative gold deposit is discovered (News Day, 2018), is very different. Most miners in these areas now carry their own machetes in order to defend themselves and protect their ore from *mashurungwi* (News Day, 2018; The Herald, 2019). The most violent clashes usually erupt as a result of retaliations by syndicates of *makorokozas* who have lost their ore to *mashurungwi*, but sometimes syndicate members also resort to using machetes amongst themselves to settle disputes that arise over the sharing of proceeds, fights over women, beer, cigarettes and mobile phones (News Day, 2018). In Mazowe area of Mashonaland Central, a group of thugs believed to be *mashurungwi* recently invaded Jumbo mine and attacked security guards before getting away with a stockpile of ore (The Herald, 2019). Similarly, at Eldorado Mine in Chinhoyi, security guards were attacked by a machete-wielding gang of *mashurungwi* who forced entry and stole gold ore and money (News Day, 2019). In Kwekwe, Gaika gold mine was recently turned into a deadly battle zone by two rival gangs of *mashurungwi* competing for control of rich gold deposits (The Herald, 2019). However, Kwekwe is not new to mining violence: in November 2003, an intense fight for control between local panners and a “foreign” group known as Vampire turned the city into a war zone which caused havoc and affected a lot of the rich mines (Moore and Mawowa, 2010; Mawowa, 2013).

These brutal incidents, past and present, testify to a growing level of violence in Midlands and Mashonaland provinces. However, few arrests are made because the gangs responsible are connected to the ruling ZANU PF party and its powerful politicians (Moore and Mawowa, 2010). Even when suspects are arrested they are quickly released because of their powerful political connections (Daily News, 2018). This leads Mawowa (2013) to argue that ASM in Zimbabwe is tied to a political economy of resource and wealth accumulation that is controlled by individuals in the ruling ZANU PF party. In this sense, mining activities do not only contribute to material reproduction but also political reproduction (Uran, 2018). The menacing activities of *mashurungwi* demonstrate that gangs are proxies of powerful political figures locked in an intense tussle for resource control and wealth accumulation from ASM. The state-run daily newspaper reported that even the military (The Herald, 2018b,c) is calling for an end to machete attacks in Kwekwe. Peace-building actions by the army and attempts to reach out to rogue gangs of *mashurungwi* are not new in the Midlands province. Mawowa (2013: 933) claims that at Totororo gold mine in Kwekwe, a certain politically connected gang leader had become so powerful that members of the police force would even “salute’ him. In Silobela, Midlands province, violence broke out at the not-so-aptly named Peace Mine between a local chief and members of the Silobela community-share ownership trust (Daily News, 2019). An attempt by Chief Sigodo and his gang of *mashurungwi* to forcibly wrest control of this rich gold mine from the community led to fierce fighting which spilled over to the nearby business centre for days (ibid.). Since Peace Mine was established in 2014 as a government-initiated community-owned venture, there have been a number of reports of violent clashes, all of which seem to have a political undercurrent.

Apart from gang-related violence — which has been on the rise in Midlands and Mashonaland provinces — another form of violence that has been reported relates to knife attacks between *makorokozas* (for an example from Gwanda, Matabeleland South, see Chronicle, 2019). Serious injuries and deaths have been recorded in fights which have been attributed to disagreements over sharing of money and altercations over women (Mawowa, 2013). In Zhombe, Midlands province, the media ran an account of eight *makorokozas* who stabbed two fellow miners, leaving one dead and another battling for his life, following a fight over a gold claim (News Day, 2019). According to Mawowa (2013), it is a common occurrence in Midlands province for members of the same syndicate to fight against each other in disputes over rich gold pickings or the sharing of money. Some deadly fights have also been attributed to impromptu alliances of convenience in which locals (*vana vemuno*) fight against foreigners (*havasi vemuno*) (Mawowa, 2013).

This picture is markedly different from the ethnographic data that I gathered working with *makorokozas* at Mutanda Range, Eastern Zimbabwe, where miners would peacefully move to another area where a new discovery of gold had been reported. In the event that the discovery was not as big as the rumours suggested, most *makorokozas* would return to their former mines and be welcomed back by concessionaires without hesitation. In this article, I have argued that this marks a certain degree of coherence in their social organisation. This ready re-admittance can be explained by a popular Shona proverb amongst *makorokozas* which says: *hatingarasi mbereko nekufirwa* (no matter how many misfortunes befall our other syndicates in different gold mining chases, we don’t give up on each other — we are always open to working together as one big family).

8. Conclusion

In this article, I have looked at the growth of ASM at Mutanda Range, Eastern Zimbabwe, as a socio-cultural process and a way of life that is undergirded by certain prescriptions followed by *makorokozas* through an apprenticeship system and the idea of working together as one big happy family. Within this mining family, miners develop a sense of unison that is based on working together for long periods of time. As a result, certain similar behavioural patterns emerge amongst *makorokoza* such as moving together between different mining concessions, assisting each other in times of difficulties, spending their income together and sharing their everyday working experiences. Nevertheless, I have also stressed that variations do exist in their spending habits and I looked especially at how age differences inform the different ways in which money is consumed. I also examined how, in some cases, *makorokozas* assign themselves different working roles which entail different money-sharing arrangements. In such cases, for example, courageous miners who work in dangerous areas of the mine 20–60 m underground would get a bigger share compared to those who work hoisting ore to the surface. However, through a well-knit apprenticeship process, the junior miners are trained and will eventually learn the rigours of underground mining. Smoking *mbanje* is one of the ways in which *makorokozas* gain the courage to go underground without fear and hesitation.

I have also used the lottery concept in analysing the resoluteness and determination that *makorokozas* exhibit in their continuous efforts to find a lucrative gold vein. The lottery ticket analogy was used regarding the series of failed attempts that *makorokozas* sometimes have to undergo when mining without finding gold. Despite hitting many barren veins, they don't give up in their search — akin to playing the lottery with an expectation that one day they will get the winning ticket. When luck eventually smiles on them and they find themselves mining rich gold pockets, they spend their resulting hard-earned cash in different ways. In the euphoria of a big find, they often do everything together as a family. This big happy mining family does not acknowledge any tribal or ethnic differences; rather, it brings together *makorokozas* from different parts of the country to work as one at any given mining location.

In the final part of the paper, I also provided examples of violent and even deadly clashes that have been a feature of ASM in other parts of Zimbabwe, particularly in Midlands and Mashonaland provinces. In these areas, gangs of rogue miners and thieves known as *mashurungwi* have become notorious for attacking *makorokozas* with machetes and displacing them from their concessions. *Mashurungwi* have connections to the powerful political figures in the ruling ZANU PF party and as a result they are able to maintain their reign of terror without being arrested or charged. However, I have argued that such isolated cases of violence cannot be used to explain the social organisation of ASM in the country as a whole. In Eastern Zimbabwe, where I conducted my ethnographic research, I did not come across such incidents of violence: the main confrontations that I witnessed were related to leadership disagreements within the MMA. In sum, it seems that in Midlands and Mashonaland provinces, violence has become an avenue for survival and capital accumulation linked to a political economy that is controlled by elites from the ruling ZANU PF party who vie for control of gold-rich areas (Moore and Mawowa, 2010; Moore, 2012; Mawowa, 2013; Spiegel, 2017). In contrast, in Eastern Zimbabwe, as I have illustrated in this paper, ASM is an entreprenural enterprise that is well organised within a specific socio-cultural ethos which regulates how *makorokozas* work and relate with each other.

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