

## Original article

## Mining what is not mine: Artisanal gold mining in Gwanda, Zimbabwe

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Artisanal mining  
Capital accumulation  
Proletariat  
Extractivism  
Exploitation

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the internal dynamics of artisanal gold mining, focusing on the extraction and distribution of value in the artisanal mining sector. It argues that the youth remain disenfranchised despite being the producers of value. The value of mining does not stay in the hands of the youths who produce it. The state has been blocking the youths from formally participating in and benefiting from artisanal mining in Zimbabwe's countryside through exorbitant prospecting and pegging fees in foreign currency as well as the issuance of blanket EPOs thereby forcing them into wage-labour relations. Youths are exploited as labourers by the classes of capital who own mining claims in the countryside. However, youths resist exploitation through various means, accessing the resources otherwise shut to them.

## 1. Introduction

Many countries across the globe have come to regard artisanal mining as an important economic sector as conventional large-scale mining (Hentschel et al., 2002). In Africa, the recognition of artisanal mining is a break from the previous decades' emphasis on large-scale oil and mineral exploitation by huge mining corporations (Bryceson and Geenen, 2016). Some studies argue that artisanal mining has become instrumental in poverty alleviation and rural development, employing about 100 million people worldwide, 16 million in developing countries and over two million in Zimbabwe (PACT, 2017; Chipangura, 2019). Most of these studies focus on the importance of artisanal mining as an economic livelihood option meant for poverty alleviation and more recently on its contributions to economic development (Hilson et al., 2018; Nhlengetwa and Hein, 2015). Some regard artisanal mining as the only viable livelihood alternative for the rural poor and unemployed particularly those in arid regions where agriculture is a high risk, low return investment (Hentschel et al., 2002; Mkhize and Moyo 2012; Mpofu and Mpofu, 2017). Although other scholars acknowledge that artisanal mining has generated livelihoods for millions of people across the globe, they argue that artisanal mining should not be viewed as a trade undertaken solely by the poor (Bryceson and Geenen, 2016; Mawowa, 2013; Mkodzongi and Spiegel, 2020). Businesspeople, senior politicians and public officials are involved in capital accumulation and rent-seeking in the artisanal mining sector. There is also a conflation of artisanal miners and small-scale miners in existing studies. Although they are noticeably distinct, artisanal and small-scale mining are treated

the same. A distinction can however be made thus; Artisanal miners' are usually individuals or family members involved in very small-scale manual mineral extraction without legal mining title, whereas 'small-scale miners' usually have legal mining title and their operations are larger and more mechanised. For example, in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, small-scale mining is distinguished from artisanal mining by the presence of permanent fixed mining infrastructure (Hentschel et al., 2002:4).

Similar to the scenario in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania, artisanal mining in Gwanda District is dominated by physically fit, risk-taking males aged between 16 to 40 (Bryceson and Geenen, 2006). Therefore the field is dominated by youths as it is labour intensive.

Some scholars characterize artisanal mining as a "social-levelling" sector, describing mining groups as "big happy families" (Bryceson and Geenen, 2006:302; Chipangura 2019, 5). Bryceson and Geenen (2016) argue that physically fit youths from across the social spectrum (that is, without regard to class) gravitate to gold mining sites for the purpose of digging for gold. However, this study seeks to demonstrate the existence of classes (classes of capital and classes of labour) and class conflict within the artisanal gold mining sector. It examines and highlights the internal dynamics and social organization of artisanal mining in Gwanda District of Zimbabwe. It seeks to demonstrate how the youth have been systematically side-lined by the ruling elite and the bourgeoisie from owning the means of production or retaining the value they extract through artisanal mining. The study argues that the youth are being constantly exploited for their labour by the ruling elite who are engaged

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E-mail address: [yejz@cau.edu.cn](mailto:yejz@cau.edu.cn) (J. Ye).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2023.101217>Received 17 December 2021; Received in revised form 26 January 2023; Accepted 26 January 2023  
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in rent seeking and capital accumulation.

## 2. Formalization and licencing

Formalization of artisanal mining entails the enactment of legislation or policy which enables artisanal miners to access minerals legally (Singo and Seguin, 2018). It creates an enabling policy environment for artisanal miners to get relevant information regarding the availability and location of gold deposits, state assistance with mining equipment, funding and technical assistance (*Ibid*). Formalization entails the recognition by the state, of artisanal mining as part of the formal economy and its contribution to the upliftment of livelihoods. Consequently, it involves the state's efforts to address the challenges faced by artisanal miners (Hilson et al., 2022). Once formalization is done, the state can then proceed to issue licences to artisanal miners in order to regulate their operations. Therefore, licencing cannot take place if artisanal mining is not formalized. Reluctance by some governments to formalize artisanal mining leads to informal/illegal artisanal mining and the smuggling of minerals to foreign markets.

Most Southern African states are yet to formalize and licence artisanal miners. The major constraint militating against formalization in most African countries is their focus on capital intensive, large scale mining which contributes significantly to national fiscus in the form of various taxes and royalties (Spiegel, 2015; Hilson et al., 2021). This rent-seeking behaviour emanates from the states' desire for rapid economic growth hence their preference for large-scale mining which contributes immensely to the countries' Gross Domestic Product. As such, the issuance of licences is stifled, leaving artisanal miners to operate outside the ambit of the law (Hilson, 2021; 2022). This is despite the fact that these capital intensive projects have very low local economic impact. Also, the failure to recognize artisanal mining as a national poverty alleviation strategy whilst focusing on the environmental degradation caused by informal artisanal mining has resulted in the reluctance by governments to formalize the sector (Spiegel, 2015; Hilson et al., 2021).

Zimbabwe, during the 1990s and Ghana managed to formalize artisanal mining through decentralization of the issuance of permits (Spiegel, 2015; Hilson et al., 2021; 2022). The centralization of licencing adversely affects the formalization of artisanal mining. However, the Zimbabwe government outlawed artisanal gold mining in June 2006, arguing that the practice was responsible for land degradation (Spiegel, 2009; 2015).

## 3. Surge in artisanal gold mining in Zimbabwe

Artisanal gold mining can be traced as far back as the precolonial era in Zimbabwe when people used to trade with the Portuguese and Arab traders. However, the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs in the beginning of the 1990s saw a sharp increase in artisanal gold mining activity in Zimbabwe (Spiegel, 2009). Expenditure controls and the privatization of some parastatals led to job losses and a huge volume of urban to rural migration. In the rural areas, people engaged in livelihood activities including farming and artisanal gold mining. Concomitantly the state began to encourage individual participation in artisanal mining, accepting low amounts of gold from miners (Mawowa, 2013). Agricultural failure due to the government's FTLRP and other natural factors in the post 2000 era led to a further surge in the number of people engaged in artisanal gold mining in the countryside.

The FTLRP received much condemnation from the European Union, the United States of America and other western countries who argued that the process had been marred by violence and impunity thereby imposing economic sanctions on Zimbabwe (Marongwe 2011; Mkodzongi and Lawrence 2019). The economic sanctions led to the country's isolation from international financial markets and restricted foreign direct investments in almost all sectors including agriculture (Mkodzongi and Lawrence 2019). Resultantly, the country was plunged into an

economic meltdown characterized by food insecurity, capital flight and industrial decline (Richardson 2004). The economic embargo starved the country of the much-needed agriculture finance thereby limiting peasants' capacity for social reproduction let alone producing for the market.

The 1997, 2002 and 2008 Elnino induced droughts as well as flooding in 2000, 2001 and 2018 also worsened the situation, adversely affecting agricultural production leading to food insecurity (Mkhize and Moyo 2012). Erratic rainfall patterns made agriculture unreliable as a source of livelihood (Mpofu and Mpofu 2017). Furthermore, maize (Zimbabwe's staple food and therefore main crop) is only grown in summer in the rain fed areas farmed by peasants. Where there is crop failure, peasants cannot resort to winter cropping thereby making their livelihoods precarious. Therefore, farming results in low utility compared to artisanal mining. In a study on chemical contamination in mining, Mpofu and Mpofu (2017) noted that peasants, particularly young people were no longer interested in farming as it had low returns. The youths argued that artisanal mining had comparatively higher returns which were realized in a matter of weeks compared to farming which gives returns after a year.

Furthermore, the state failed to allocate adequate funding to agriculture in the national budget as agreed on under the Maputo Declaration. This is in spite of the fact that agriculture remains the backbone of the country's economy, underpinning the economic, social and political lives of most Zimbabweans (FAO, 2021; Runganga and Mhaka, 2021). In 2020 for instance, the state allocated only 4% of national funds to agriculture against the agreed minimum 10% Maputo Declaration threshold (Mwandiringana et al., 2020). The Maputo Declaration, to which the Zimbabwe government is a signatory, urges governments in Southern Africa to consider the development of agriculture as a priority in resource allocation. Should the State allocate the said 10% peasants would likely access subsidies or low-cost funding for their agricultural praxis. The state has also been delaying in disbursing payments to farmers who deliver their grain to the Grain Marketing Board. Payments are also made in the local (unstable) Z\$ currency thereby making agriculture unviable for most peasants.

The economic meltdown caused by the economic embargo also made farming an unprofitable enterprise particularly for the peasantry who have no access to agriculture finance and implements (Mkodzongi and Lawrence 2019; Mpofu and Mpofu 2017; Richardson 2004). The state has been buying maize from the peasantry in the local currency which has been subject to erosion by inflation. Ironically, the State has been importing maize at US\$250 per tonne to supplement local production in order to meet domestic demand when the same state offered Z\$1400 (equivalent to US\$198) to the peasantry (Mudimu et al., 2020). Such a scenario results in the promotion of external farmers at the expense of the local peasantry. The situation is worsened by the fact that the peasantry was prohibited from selling their produce in the regional and international market. After procuring maize at Z\$1400/tonne from the peasantry, the state would sell to millers at Z\$4000 thereby making a gross profit of Z\$2600 without adding any value to the maize (Mwandiringana et al., 2020).

The aforementioned challenges and constraints led to a surge in artisanal gold mining as a livelihood alternative (Mkodzongi and Spiegel 2018). Although peasants from other countries have been using proceeds from artisanal mining to fund their agricultural praxis, there is little motivation for Zimbabwe's peasantry particularly rural youths, especially those in arid regions like Gwanda to continue with agriculture (Hilson 2016; Banchrigah and Hilson 2010).

## 4. Study site and data collection methods

The area of study covers ward 21 of Gwanda District which has a plethora of artisanal and small-scale gold mines. Animal husbandry and mining constitute the mainstay of the district's economy. Gwanda District lies in the greenstone belt which is rich in gold deposits hence the

proliferation of both formal and informal gold mining. The district also hosts some of the large gold mines in the country including Blanket, Duration Gold, Farvic, Freda Rebecca and Jessie mines. There is also a plethora of formal and informal artisanal mines across the district which makes Gwanda ideal for the study of the dynamics of extraction and distribution of value in the artisanal mining sector. A map of Gwanda District where the study site is located is shown on Fig. 1 below. The study utilized key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as well as direct and participatory observation to collect qualitative data from January to September 2020.

Key informants included senior officers from the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development, Matabeleland South Province and a national executive member of the Zimbabwe Miners Federation. These were interviewed to get an appreciation of government policy on artisanal mining and the opportunities, or lack thereof, open for rural peasants.

Focus Group Discussions were held with the people directly involved in artisanal gold mining, that is, those who do the actual digging. The FGDs were held to understand how value is distributed in the sector, the challenges faced by these people and to ascertain whether they are satisfied with their earnings from artisanal mining and their standards of living. The study utilized direct and participatory observation to better appreciate their plight and get insight into their daily activities and social organization.

## 5. The youth and access to mining rights

The issuance of Exclusive Prospecting Orders (EPOs) to some local and multinational private companies has resulted in the side-lining of the youth from owning the means of production. The key informant from the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development stated that:

About 95% of mining land in Matabeleland South Province is now under EPOs. The pegging of new claims in Gwanda and other Districts in the province has been stopped to pave way for the companies granted EPOs to establish operations. Some stakeholders have been complaining that big mines have been amassing lots of mining land using EPOs without establishing any operations. They are demanding the implementation of a 'Use it or lose it' policy where government repossesses unused mining land. Our challenge however is that repossessing such claims would lead to capital flight. Our track record on respecting property rights makes it difficult to make such a decision. Nevertheless, as a Ministry, we have forwarded a request to the Mining Affairs Board to consider downsizing the mining land under EPOs to allow locals and other investors to peg mines and establish operations.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of EPOs is to bar other prospective miners from prospecting and pegging in a particular area. Therefore, rural youths who may want to embark on (artisanal) mining cannot formally prospect and peg mining claims on their land. Preference is given to big mining entities as the state seems to emphasize job creation where it (the state) aims to proletarianize the youth in favour of global and local capital. This is in spite of the fact that young people and some artisanal miners' organizations have been lobbying the state for years to repossess unused mining claims owned by huge mining companies operating in the country (Mhlanga 2021). Rural youths also complained about the granting of EPOs in the province. A participant stated that:

We have been working for other people for the past six years and managed to raise money to acquire a prospectors' license. However, when we got to the Ministry of Mines they told us that they were not issuing any licenses as there is no available mining land in Gwanda (District). When we asked whether we could be given a prospectors'

license for the adjacent Insiza District, the Ministry officials told us that there was no mining land available in the whole province. They said we can only access claims that would have been forfeited but there were none at the moment. We are therefore forced to continue working for other people (as labourers) or engage in informal mining and risk arrest by the police.<sup>2</sup>

The issuing of EPOs is clear evidence that the state is a mere instrument of the bourgeois used for the domination of lower classes – the youth (Harvey, 1985; Hay, 1999). The state's claim to wield and exercise power is based on notion that it serves to advance and protect common interest. The Zimbabwe government claims to be working on ensuring the attainment of middle-income status by 2030. This vision therefore entails rebuilding the economy under the 'Zimbabwe is open for business' mantra where government seeks to promote foreign direct investment into the country. Under this vision, the rural youth are set to benefit from employment following the anticipated investment inflows. However, the EPOs result in the disenfranchisement of rural youth who are, at best, relegated to become classes of exploited labour for global and local capital. Despite being owners of the natural resources by virtue of being citizens and living in the areas where the mineral deposits are located, the rural youths do not benefit from the resources. Rather, local and global capital reaps the benefits of the resources at the youths' expense. The state thus ensures the polarization of classes of capital and classes of labour. While rural youths may want to escape the classes of labour by registering their own mining claims, the state prevents their mobility through EPOs.

Failure by rural youths to register and operate legally without fear of prosecution is also hampered by the exorbitant costs of mine registration.<sup>3</sup> Participants indicated that they were unable to afford mining registration fees hence some operate informally while others resort to provide labour to miners with registered mining claims. Although prospecting and application fees cost about Z\$6300 (about US\$75) and Z\$12 700 (about US\$150) respectively, pegging fees are beyond the reach of most rural youths.<sup>4</sup> Approved prospectors who conduct pegging in Matabeleland South Province charge between US\$3500 and US\$5000. These prospectors do not accept local currency but insist on upfront payments in hard currency (USD). The state does not provide pegging services nor does it determine the fees to be charged by the independent prospectors who are hired by mining rights applicants. Such a scenario keeps natural resources hidden from rural youth who have no capacity to pay the required fees to register and formally operate mining claims. Therefore, although the FTLRP resulted in the liberation of natural resources previously monopolized by white commercial farmers, this liberation remains virtual to the young people in the countryside. The state is failing to consider rural youths who are willing to engage in artisanal mining. The Mines and Minerals Act makes no mention of artisanal mining thereby placing huge (local and multinational) corporations at the same level as rural youths. If the state had intended to consider artisanal mining as a poverty alleviation tool for rural youths, the Act would have made provision for the relaxation of certain registration requirements for prospective artisanal miners. This is in spite of the fact that the state acknowledges that artisanal miners contribute significantly to the attainment of the national gold production target. For instance, the Minister of Mines and Mining Development Winston Chitando indicated that artisanal miners contributed about 25% of the 2018 gold production of 33 tonnes (Mavhunga, 2019).

Zimbabwe's rural youths lack the knowledge on how to access mining rights compared to their urban counterparts. Although ASGM is occasionally touted as a pillar of the economy by the state, there has

<sup>2</sup> FGD with Bina syndicate, 20 June 2020.

<sup>3</sup> FGD with Bina syndicate, 20 June 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with senior Ministry of Mines and Mining Development Official, 17 March 2020, Gwanda.

<sup>1</sup> Interview with senior Ministry of Mines and Mining Development Official, 17 March 2020, Gwanda.



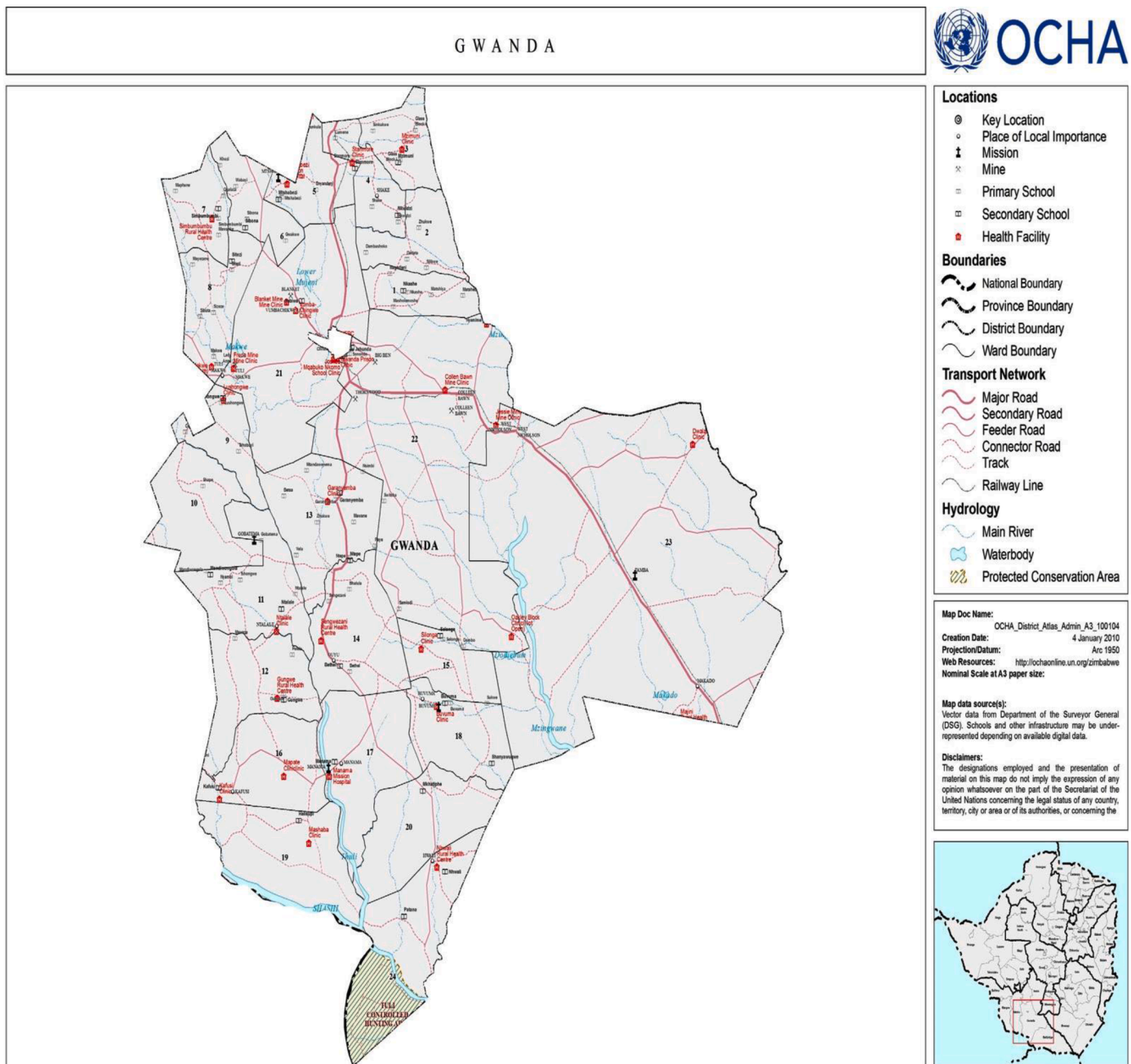


Fig. 1. Map of Gwanda District, where the study was located. Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2010). The full detail of the map can be inspected at [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/A3\\_districts.Gwanda.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/A3_districts.Gwanda.pdf)

been no effort to apprise rural youth on how to access mining rights. Responding to a question on how one can get a mining license, one of the participants during a focus group discussion stated that:

Asikwazi okwama mining license osibuza ngakho. Thina sitshelwa ngabangane ukuthi kule khiwa elifuna siyesebenza then sesisiya emsebenzini. [We do not know anything about applying for mining licenses. All we know is that our colleagues already involved in mining advise us that there is someone who needs labourers and we go].<sup>5</sup>

Although the mining license application process is spelt out in the Mines and Minerals Act, the Environmental Management Regulations of

2014 and other statutory instruments, rural youths have no access to these documents. This is despite the fact that the gold deposits are situated in the rural areas in which these youths live. The Act and other legal instruments are available for sale in bookshops in the urban areas. However, the state does not make any effort to advise people, particularly those in rural areas on where to access such information. This leads some rural youths to operate informally without registration or regulation leading to environmental degradation (Dube et al., 2016). Such informal and illegal forms of operations make it difficult for the youth to establish a viable livelihood. The state has also come up with various operations and programmes such as *Operation Chikorochoza Chapera* to apprehend and prosecute unregistered artisanal miners over the years (Spiegel 2014).

Rural youths also lament being excluded from land allocation during the FTLRP. Rural youths argue that exclusion from land allocation also

<sup>5</sup> FGD with Coleen Bawn syndicate, 7 March 2020.

means exclusion from determining land use.<sup>6</sup> Other studies also indicate that the FTLRP registered a few land allocations to young people (Scoones, 2015; Moyo 2003). Rural youths argued they are unable to lay claim over natural resources within their areas including gold deposits as they themselves do not own the land. During a focus group discussion, one participant retorted:

This land belongs to our fore-fathers yet foreigners come to extract our gold, extract timber and we get nothing. Our brothers employed in the mining and lumbering companies mine and extract resources which ultimately do not belong to them. If only we owned the land, then we could demand royalties or shares in the foreign companies in our areas.<sup>7</sup>

The youths' autochthonous claims of natural resources ownership in the countryside is compromised by the fact that they do not own the land on which they live and seek to irk a livelihood. Furthermore, rural folk are sometimes forced to halt or suspend their agricultural activities where mineral deposits are discovered on their land. The Mines and Minerals Act (*Chapter 21:05*) does not provide for the inclusion of the landowner in the prospective mining project. As such, rural folk lose their land and the opportunity to benefit from the mineral deposits therein as autochthones.

Most rural youths have no access to suitable mining equipment and the necessary skills to conduct mining in a safe, viable manner. Only a few mining groups use such equipment as jack hammers and headgears. Most resort to the use of simple tools such as hammers, picks and shovels.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, artisanal mining, as opposed to small scale mining, is labour intensive hence its male dominance. Women are usually engaged in ancillary goods and services provision. Most benefit from the sale and hire of equipment to the artisanal miners. Therefore, there are also classes of capital and classes of labour amongst the women. There are those who own the hired equipment and those who serve as employees to the equipment owners. However, actual artisanal mining appears to be a preserve of males due to its labour intensive nature. During the study there were no females engaged in the actual digging for gold. The lack of specialized equipment reduces labour productivity resulting in low overall output. The low production and productivity results in low profits over time as the artisanal miners are able to come up with a load suitable for milling after long periods of time. On average, artisanal miners with access to jackhammers, headgears and other such equipment go to the mill once per week yet those using rudimentary tools take about two to three weeks to produce the same load. There are also no institutions that train young people in artisanal mining in order to equip them with the necessary skills to improve both efficiency and safety. Young people acquire mining skills from those already engaged in artisanal mining through the informal apprenticeship process during the mining process (Gratz 2009; Chipangura 2019). However, these mining skills border on risk taking rather than safety thereby posing a danger for the youths. Several mining accidents, some of which were fatal were recorded in Gwanda District over the years. Some of the accidents involved artisanal miners operating illegally in disused mines and claims under EPOs.

Owing to the imposition of EPOs, high costs of registering mining claims and lack of knowledge on mining policies, most youths form groups and approach a 'sponsor' – local politician, businessman or senior civil servant who then applies for a prospectus licence. Using this prospectus licence, the group goes around prospecting for gold reserves using metal detectors or focus on disused or forfeited mines. Once the group ascertains the presence of gold reserves at a given place, the 'sponsor' then registers the claim and buys ration and other material to be used in the mining process. Therefore, the 'sponsor' becomes the

owner of the means of production – the land/mining claim – while the youth remain labourers who can be dismissed by the 'sponsor' at any given moment.

## 6. Social organization and income distribution

Much of the literature on artisanal gold mining projects this livelihood activity as a disorderly enterprise riddled with violence and fatal conflicts (Spiegel 2017; Alexander and McGregor 2013; Katsaura 2010). Artisanal miners have been described as nomadic, always moving from one place to another in search of the precious metal (Mawowa 2013). However, this study established that artisanal mining has both horizontal and vertical networks. The horizontal networks can be observed as groups of individual labourers interact and work together, often sharing the proceeds of their labour equally. The vertical networks stretch from the individual labourers who serve as the face of artisanal mining on the ground to as 'high' as senior government officials in their lofty offices.<sup>9</sup>

At the bottom of the artisanal mining pyramid are three identifiable groups of classes of labour namely, the *cabinet*, *omaholoha* and *omantsheza*. The horizontal network often referred to as syndicate or '*cabinet*' is usually made up of young men who come from the same village. The *cabinet* is usually referred to in a derogatory manner as *otsheketsha/makorokoza*. The *cabinet* may also include a few other members met during the mining endeavors on the ground. Mining syndicate membership is constantly changing as different individuals join and leave the *cabinet* in search of 'greener pastures'. The *cabinet* constitutes the backbone by which artisanal mining stands as they are responsible for extracting the gold ore, risking their lives in the mining pits and shafts. Each *cabinet* or syndicate has a leader who is usually responsible for searching for new opportunities and 'new' mining areas. The *cabinet* leader is usually responsible for mobilizing the individual labourers and communicates directly with the claim owner or 'sponsor'. Despite his 'supervisory' role, this *cabinet* leader does not necessarily get an extra share of the income from the mining venture after milling. However, he is usually (but not always) the most knowledgeable and seasoned *tsheketsha*/artisanal miner in the group. This *cabinet* leader directs work on the ground, giving instructions on which direction to take when digging, when to blast and ensuring that all *cabinet* members carry out their responsibilities.<sup>10</sup>

Also at the bottom of the proverbial food chain are *omaholoha*; a group of young men whose role is to haul ore from the mine to the surface and loading it into trucks for transportation to the mill. These are hired and paid by the 'sponsor' at the request of the *cabinet*. Their payment is based on negotiation with the *cabinet* but the amount ranges between US\$10 to US\$20 for a 7 tonne load in Gwanda.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the *cabinet* however, *omaholoha* do not bear much risk as their payment is not based on whether the ore contains any gold. *Omaholoha* are usually paid as soon as they finish loading the ore into the designated truck for transportation to the mill. *Omanstheza*, though part of the classes of labour, are not necessarily employed by anyone per se. They, like the *cabinet*, are a self-organized group of young men who work to load/feed gold ore into the mill. In exchange for their labour, *omantsheza* clean up the mill after milling is completed in the hope of scrounging some remaining gold. However, there is no guarantee that they will get any remains after the cleaning exercise. The *cabinet* normally allow *omantsheza* to load ore into the mill as it provides *cabinet* members time to rest during the milling process. 'Sponsors' are also agreeable to the arrangement as it does not cost them anything.

Rural youths comprising the *cabinet* get a little 'piece of the cake'

<sup>6</sup> FGD with Coleen Bawn syndicate, 7 March 2020.

<sup>7</sup> FGD with Bina syndicate, 20 June 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Field observation.

<sup>9</sup> FGD with West Nicholson syndicate, 5 August 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Field observation.

<sup>11</sup> FGD with West Nicholson syndicate, August 2020 and FDG with Coleen Bawn syndicate, 7 March 2020.

after milling as those constituting the classes of capital get much of the cake. There are various income distribution mechanisms at play within the study area. One criterion in most of the artisanal mining arrangements dominant in the Coleen Bawn area is that the mine/claim owner usually demands 30% of the proceeds from the mine before expenses are deducted. Some mining claim owners demand the share in real gold while others accept cash after the gold is sold to Fidelity Printers and Refineries (FP&R) or on the parallel market. Others buy the gold from the 'sponsor' and *cabinet* at an agreed price then retain their 30% 'royalty' fee.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the mine owner enjoys this 30% merely by having successfully registered the claim in his name. Mining claim owners do not usually contribute to the mining venture save for permitting the 'sponsor' to dig at his mine. There are very few incidents where the mining claim owners also serve as sponsors at their own mining claims. Where mining claim owners run operations, they usually employ wage labour.

After deducting the amount required by the mining claim owner, the 'sponsors' deduct money for all the operating expenses for the venture. These include ration (food) for the *cabinet*, explosives, diesel for the compressor and generators, hired equipment such as electric pumps and compressors, if any. After deducting these expenses, the 'sponsor' takes half of the remaining money. The *cabinet*, usually an eight to fifteen-member team then shares the balance which becomes a very small percentage for an individual *cabinet* member. Any loss is transferred to the *cabinet* members with some 'sponsors' forcing them to carry forward unrecovered expenses in the event of a loss. In the event that proceeds were very low, the 'sponsor' recovers his money spent on operating expenses while the rural youths remain without compensation for their drudgery. Such a scenario makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the rural youths to move from their proletariat state to become owners of the means of production – mining claims and/or equipment.

Apart from 'sponsors', there are also *ezinkulu* who act as middlemen only to exploit the rural youth. *Ezinkulu* are individuals who identify areas with rich mineral deposits and then seek a 'sponsor' to fund mining operations. After securing a 'sponsor', *ezinkulu* mobilize rural youths to dig and extract ore for milling. These are more common in the Bina mining area where they control a number of *cabinets* working on various mining claims or different shafts on the same claim.<sup>13</sup> Like the merchants in the agricultural sector, *ezinkulu* merely facilitate that mine owners, 'sponsors' and the rural youth come together for the extraction and milling of gold ore. As such, these belong to the classes of capital although they do not necessarily own the means of production. While mining claim owners and 'sponsors' are clear owners of capital – the mining land wherein the mineral deposits lie and the finance for extracting the said gold ore – *ezinkulu* do not own nor contribute such kind of means/resources. They are also not part of the classes of labour who directly expend their labour in the extraction and milling of the gold ore. However, by representing the mine owners and mobilizing finance through the 'sponsors', they safely fall into the classes of capital.

Where *ezinkulu* are involved, there are two main income distribution channels. After paying the 30% 'royalty' fee to the mining claim owner and deducting operating expenses, *ezinkulu* get an equal share of the remaining proceeds with the 'sponsor' and *cabinet*.<sup>13</sup> For instance, if the proceeds after paying the mine owner and deducting expenses amount to US\$6000, *ezinkulu* (if it is just one individual) gets US\$2000, the 'sponsor' US\$2000 and the *cabinet* shares the remaining US\$2000. However, where there are two *ezinkulu*, the amount is split four ways with the 'sponsor', *cabinet* and each *ezinkulu* getting US\$1500. This is despite the fact that *ezinkulu* do not contribute anything. Where *ezinkulu* identify unregistered mining land or poach someone else's claim, they

normally incorporate a senior politician from the ruling Zimbabwe African National Unity Patriotic Front Party for protection.<sup>14</sup> The identified politician or senior government official from the security sector is meant to protect the *cabinet* from arrest for illegal mining. The senior ZANU P.F or senior government official is then treated as *ezinkulu* when sharing the proceeds of the informal mining venture.

The *cabinet*, *omantsheza* and *omaholoha* who constitute the classes of labour can be regarded as a class in itself as postulated by Marx (Munro, 2013). These groups of rural youths share a common relation to the means of production. None of them own the means of production; *omaholoha* operate as wage labour while the *cabinet* gets a form of a commission (a form of wage). *Omantsheza* are not directly paid for their labour but have to expend their labour to be allowed to clean the mill for 'scraps'. However, these rural youths lack class consciousness, that is, they are not organized in a manner as to pursue their shared interests. Although they may utilize everyday forms of resistance as postulated by James Scott, they have been unable to represent themselves as a class. In light of this inability these rural youths, like other poor people in Zimbabwe and Africa at large, lack social power and therefore suffer lack of capabilities (World Bank 1995, 2). These rural youths are voiceless and powerless, without means to confront the owners of the means of production or the state to lobby for the improvement of their wellbeing. On the other hand, the owners of the means of production are not only a class in itself but also a class for itself. In pursuit of their common interest, the mining claim owners belong to associations which represents them and lobbies the state on their behalf. For instance, the Zimbabwe Miners Federation (ZMF) and Prospectors' Union represent the interests of the classes of capital.

Where gold is mined formally from registered claims, claim owners sell part of it to FP&R while the rest is channelled to the parallel market. The state has no way of verifying the actual quantity of gold obtained from mining claims hence the mining claim owners sell a small percentage to the state to avoid forfeiture of their mining claims by the state.<sup>15</sup> In cases of informal artisanal mining, all the gold is channelled to the parallel market. During the FGDs, participants indicated that there are several gold buyers who offer lucrative terms to miners compared to the terms offered by the state. Prior to June 2020, the state has been paying miners 55% in USD and the remaining 45% in the local Z\$ currency (into the miners' bank accounts) for gold delivered to FP&R (Chingwere, 2020). This was in response to a general complaint from miners and politicians over the previous 40% USD, 60% Z\$ payment terms. However, in both situations the Z\$ component was paid into the sellers' bank account at the interbank rate which was far below the (parallel) market rate. Furthermore, most artisanal miners do not have bank accounts and prefer being paid either in USD or SAR than the unstable local Z\$ currency. Although the state reviewed its payment terms on 26 May 2020, offering 100% payment in USD to artisanal and small-scale gold miners, most artisanal miners still prefer the parallel market as prices are higher than those offered by the state. For instance, from June 2020 the state pegged gold prices at a flat rate of US\$45 against the parallel market rate of US\$48 – US\$50 per gram (Chingwere, 2020).

Members of the security services are in engaged in rent-seeking behaviour, extorting money from artisanal miners using the Environmental Management Act and the Mining Laws and Regulations.<sup>16</sup> The Environmental Management Act requires miners to conduct Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) before starting operations while the Mining Laws and Regulations make it illegal for persons without prospecting or mining licences to have gold in their possession. Since most

<sup>12</sup> FGD with Coleen Bawn syndicate.

<sup>13</sup> FGD with Bina syndicate, 20 June 2020.

<sup>14</sup> FGD with Bina syndicate, 20 June 2020 and FGD with West Nicholson syndicate, 5 August 2020.

<sup>15</sup> FGD with West Nicholson syndicate, August 2020 and FDG with Coleen Bawn syndicate, 7 March 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a member of the police, September 2020, Gwanda.



artisanal miners cannot afford EIAs with some operating informally, members of the security services demand bribes, threatening to arrest artisanal miners and confiscating their gold/ore. It is the fear of arrest and confiscation of gold or gold ore which leads some *cabinets* and sponsors to sometimes incorporate senior politicians from the province or members of security services into their operations (to avoid harassment). The incorporated politicians or members of the security services are treated as *ezinkulu*, getting a share of the proceeds from the artisanal gold mining operations without contributing any capital to the venture. The parallel market is reportedly run by senior national politicians who employ runners to buy gold from both formal and informal artisanal miners. These offer higher prices than FP&R and do not require any documentation to prove the ownership of mining claims. The gold buying licences they use cannot be easily acquired by ordinary citizens. Rather, they are issued on the basis of political patronage as only those people with links to senior Zanu P.F politicians are given gold buying licences. These buyers reportedly smuggle the gold to neighbouring South Africa as well as overseas to Dubai, Cyprus and other countries.<sup>17</sup> During FGDs, the rural youths indicated that gold buyers sponsored by senior Zanu P.F politicians offer the best rates in town.<sup>18</sup>

However, artisanal mining provides employment to several youths with some coming from as far as Binga and other districts in Zimbabwe. Other studies on artisanal mining in Southern Africa also noted that the sector provides the much-needed source of income to otherwise-jobless youths, with millions of households engaged simultaneously in seasonal social reproduction (agriculture) and artisanal mining (Hilson et al., 2021). Some of the artisanal miners have managed to build their own houses thereby providing a market for the local home industry which provides building materials. Therefore, given the semi-arid and drought-prone nature of Gwanda district, artisanal mining provides a source of livelihood to rural youths and an income for their survival and reinvestment in social reproduction agriculture. Furthermore, artisanal mining has some positive externalities whereby other youths and women benefit as they get clients for their commodities including clothes, food and beverages which they sell to the artisanal miners. Without the incomes obtained from artisanal mining, these 'vendors' would have limited clientele for their commodities. However, these commodities are often overpriced as there is a general sentiment that artisanal miners make lots of money.

## 7. Resistance to exploitation

Rural youths are not silent victims of exploitation by the classes of capital. Rather, they resist and avoid exploitation using various overt and covert means. The study observed that unregistered youth mining groups usually operate at night under the cover of darkness to avoid detection by the Police. These groups usually target disused mining shafts or unguarded mining claims where they mine overnight. In similar studies, it has been noted that artisanal miners are often engaged in running battles with police and mine security guards (Chipangura, 2018; Katsaura, 2010). Therefore, in order to work without police harassment, the artisanal miners have resorted to working at night, "playing hide-and-seek" with state agents and security guards (Chipangura, 2018).

Artisanal mining groups also pay security guards to gain access to mines. For known rich gold mines, artisanal miners pay between five hundred (US\$ 500) to one thousand dollars (US\$ 1000) for a twenty four to forty-eight hour period of access. During this period, security guards allow the artisanal miners to dig ore from the mine. The ore is then ferried to a stamp mill or hammer mill where it is processed and team

members share the proceeds. The bribe money cannot be demanded back in the event that the collected ore does not cover costs after milling. It is considered a loss and the artisanal miners seek other funds elsewhere to continue their trade.

Cases of violence are also rife in the artisanal mining areas as some youth groups intimidate registered artisanal miners with a view to access mineral resources. An interview with the key informant from the Police revealed that there are numerous reports of mine workers being attacked by informal artisanal miners across Gwanda district. The key informant added that cases of theft of gold ore and mine dump have also been rampant across the district. However, the forms of violence in Gwanda differ from those widely reported in the Midlands and Mashonaland Central provinces. In Gwanda, violence is instigated by some groups of artisanal miners who use violence in order to mine at a particular claim overnight or for a few hours and leave the site. Violence in the Midlands and Mashonaland provinces is caused by infighting amongst senior ZANU PF members seeking control of mineral resources (Alexander and McGregor, 2013; Mawowa, 2013; Spiegel, 2017) while the violence in Gwanda is mainly a result of artisanal miners seeking access to mineral resources for livelihoods' sake.

Information gleaned through FGDs with the artisanal mining groups revealed that there is employment of indigenous knowledge systems in locating areas with rich gold deposits. Participants indicated that they normally target areas with many Pod Mahogany trees which are associated with gold deposits. The artisanal miners then move around holding two (2) copper wires parallel to each other at close range. Once the two wires attract, the miners mark the area as having gold deposits. Therefore, artisanal miners are able to detect location of gold deposits without geological survey maps or sophisticated survey machinery. As such, artisanal miners defy the general thinking that one has to have access to financial capital to conduct exploration. They rely on indigenous knowledge systems thereby resisting the notion that one has to engage in wage-labour relations to access the gains from mining.

Where artisanal miners are employed at a registered mining claim, they take advantage of security gaps defraud the mine owner. Artisanal mine workers identify rich ore and hide it underground. The rich ore is only brought out to the surface when the mining claim owner and/or his proxy have left. The artisanal miners use small pestles and mortar to crush the ore which is then processed in a dish to access free gold. This gold is then sold on the parallel market in defiance of the government directive to sell all gold to Fidelity Refineries.

## 8. Conclusion

The state is engaged in neoextractivist tendencies, side-lining the rural youth in favour of local and global capital. Although the youths are engaged in value extraction and risking their lives in the process, they do not retain this value. Rather, it is taken up the political hierarchy where it is then exported out of the country – far from Gwanda District from which it has been extracted. Although artisanal mining is providing a source of livelihood for youths in the semi-arid area, the youths are left with little value for the purposes of social reproduction (of labour) while the rest is channelled into the global capital value chain. As noted by Ye et al. (2019) this extractivism is made possible by a docile labour force. The youths involved in artisanal gold mining lack class consciousness. Although these youths are a class in itself, they lack class consciousness to act on and represent their common interests as a class (for itself). This lack of class consciousness amongst the classes of labour results in the skewed distribution of value thereby breeding deep inequalities between the classes of capital and the classes of labour in the artisanal gold mining sector. The issuance of EPOs is a further entrenchment of neo-extractivism as it creates a monopoly over the control of mineral resources in the district and province at large. Although three companies were issued with EPOs, it is ironic that all of them share the same public relations officer. This shows that the three entities could actually be one entity holding onto mining land at the expense of thousands of rural

<sup>17</sup> Interview with senior Ministry of Mines and Mining Development Official, 17 March 2020, Gwanda.

<sup>18</sup> FGD with West Nicholson syndicate, August 2020 and FDG with Coleen Bawn syndicate, 7 March 2020.

youths who would otherwise have been benefiting from the mineral deposits. The EPOs have the effect of creating enclosures and keeping out youths from the means of production. Therefore, commons have been declared private property with the state apparatus bent on barring the youth from accessing the enclosed mining land. Rural youths have been relegated to the classes of labour by the state whose policies have ensured polarity between the classes of labour and those of capital. The state is also unclear on its policy on how to deal with artisanal miners, straddling legalization and criminalizing artisanal mining. This is made clear by its reference to the artisanal mining peasants as *otsheket-sha/makorokoza* when the youths are digging for gold but referring to them as miners when the same youths deliver gold to Fidelity Printers and Refineries.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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