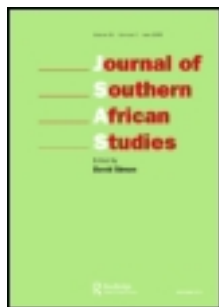


This article was downloaded by: [UNISA University South Africa]

On: 03 February 2012, At: 05:16

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Journal of Southern African Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjss20>

### Digging for Diamonds, Wielding New Words: A Linguistic Perspective on Zimbabwe's 'Blood Diamonds'

Shumirai Nyota<sup>a</sup> & Fortune Sibanda<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Curriculum Studies, Great Zimbabwe University

<sup>b</sup> Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Great Zimbabwe University

Available online: 02 Feb 2012

To cite this article: Shumirai Nyota & Fortune Sibanda (2012): Digging for Diamonds, Wielding New Words: A Linguistic Perspective on Zimbabwe's 'Blood Diamonds', Journal of Southern African Studies, DOI:10.1080/03057070.2012.656436

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2012.656436>



PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# *Digging for Diamonds, Wielding New Words: A Linguistic Perspective on Zimbabwe's 'Blood Diamonds'*

SHUMIRAI NYOTA

(Department of Curriculum Studies, Great Zimbabwe University)

FORTUNE SIBANDA

(Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Great Zimbabwe University)

*The history of diamond mining in Africa is long, complex and heterogeneous. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, before 2006, two diamond mines operated, at River Ranch in Beitbridge and at Murowa in Zvishavane, which both had Kimberley Process Certification. However, the 2006 discovery of diamonds at Chiadzwa in Marange, near Mutare, brought about a dramatic change to Zimbabwe's mining landscape. Propelled by Zimbabwe's deepening economic crisis, soon after this discovery of diamonds was made public, the Chiadzwa diamond fields were invaded by an avalanche of illegal diamond miners from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Chiadzwa became a dynamic site of struggle where new cultural and social identities, languages and consumption patterns emerged in a remarkably short space of time. This study delineates and explicates the new linguistic terms and expressions that rapidly developed among this new, transient community of illegal diamond panners at Chiadzwa, in order to describe their activities, experiences and interactions. The study focuses on the period 2006 to 2008 when the Zimbabwean crisis was at its worst, and the diamond rush was at its peak. Its aim is to analyse the linguistic strategies involved in these illegal miners' emergent 'language', and its socio-economic and political functions in the milieu of Chiadzwa. The article shows that as the illegal diamond miners at Chiadzwa were 'digging for diamonds' they were also, 'wielding new words', suggesting these phenomena are explicable through notions of 'antilinguages' and 'antistructure'. By triangulating a phenomenological approach with interviews and observations, the study explores how Chiadzwa became a highly contested but hugely creative space in which a rich new 'vocabulary' was forged, that reflected the vagaries and complexities of life in the midst of a diamond rush, even as Zimbabwe's economic and political crisis worsened deeply around it.*

## **Introduction**

When the discovery of diamonds at Chiadzwa in Eastern Zimbabwe was made public in 2006,<sup>1</sup> it resulted in a frenzied diamond rush which led to new 'communities' of artisanal

---

1 The informal interviews conducted for this study indicate that some people believe that the presence of diamonds at Chiadzwa was originally discovered during the colonial era and that they had been exploited clandestinely since that time. The *Geological Map of Zimbabwe* (7<sup>th</sup> edition, 1994) shows the existence of intrusive igneous rocks with kimberlite (diamond) noted as available in the Zambezi Valley and the Midlands area. Its 'reliability diagram' shows that Chiadzwa falls under 'mapped areas' and 'from best information available' that lie between 32 and 33 degrees (Eastings) and 19 and 20 degrees (Northings). In his speech to the World Diamond Council in July 2010, Zimbabwe's Minister of Mines, Obert Mpofu, referred to several periods of country-wide exploration and prospecting for

miners and dealers being forged at Chiadzwa. Many, if not most, of the people who made up these transient communities were ordinary Zimbabweans forced by the vagaries and hardships of Zimbabwe's dramatic post-2000 economic decline to go and seek out new forms of livelihood as illegal diamond miners, vendors, buyers and traders of these unregulated diamonds. In addition to, and indeed in confrontation and sometimes collaboration with, such informal traders and artisanal miners, security forces were deployed by the state and tasked to prevent the illegal mining and trading of the precious stone. With astonishing rapidity new linguistic terms and expressions about and by this new community were coined to describe its activities and the complex interactions that emerged between the different players involved.

This study explores the unique 'language' that developed around this transient world of illegal miners, informal traders and security forces, in order to shed light on the extraordinarily dangerous and arduous livelihoods this diamond rush provoked. We will suggest that the new language forged by this new 'community' of illegal diamond miners and traders in the Marange fields at Chiadzwa in Manicaland, can be usefully analysed in terms of Halliday's<sup>2</sup> notion of 'antilanguages', and Turner's<sup>3</sup> socially conservative notion of 'antistructure'. The aim is to analyse the linguistic strategies involved in this 'language', in order to shed light on its socio-economic and political functions in the context of Chiadzwa.

Despite the fact that some illegal diamond mining and trading is still present at Chiadzwa,<sup>4</sup> the article focuses on the period between 2006 and 2008 when the Zimbabwean economic crisis was at its worst, and when the Chiadzwa diamond rush was at its peak, before the military asserted its violent control at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009. Symptoms of the crisis included an extraordinary rate of hyperinflation that was recorded as 231 million per cent in

---

*Footnote 1 continued*

diamonds by companies like De Beers, that had taken place at different times during the twentieth century, before and after independence. Despite these efforts the mines at River Ranch and Marowa were only established in the 1990s and early 2000s (See 'Speech By The Honourable Minister of Mines And Mining Development, Obert Moses Mpfu, At The World Diamond Council, 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting Held in St Petersburg, Russia on 15 July 2010', available at [http://www.worlddiamondcouncil.org/download/7wdc/WDC%202010%20-%20Obert%20Moses%20Mpfu%20\(July%202010\).pdf](http://www.worlddiamondcouncil.org/download/7wdc/WDC%202010%20-%20Obert%20Moses%20Mpfu%20(July%202010).pdf), retrieved on 4 November 2011). It is now known that De Beers had originally identified the presence of diamonds at Marange/Chiadzwa, during prospecting in the area in 2003, but did not inform the government until 2006, when, for still unclear reasons, they abandoned their claim, perhaps because, as Mpfu suggested in his speech, they had indeed 'concluded that the exceptionally poor quality of the diamonds they had recovered, together with the limited extent of the conglomerate made this diamond occurrence of no interest to them'. Even as they gave up their claim in July 2006, the 'rush' had already begun, and various government-linked companies were granted special titles to prospect and to market the diamonds being illegally mined by artisanal miners flocking to the area. As Nyamunda and Mukwambo discuss in greater detail in their contribution to this issue of *JSAS* ('The State and the Bloody Diamond Rush at Chiadzwa: Unpacking the Contested Interests in the Development of Illicit Mining and Trading, c. 2006–2009'), since 2006, various efforts were made by government to regain control over the diamond fields, which culminated in the deaths of hundreds of people by security forces reclaiming control over the area in late 2008 (Human Rights Watch Report, *Diamonds in the Rough Human Rights Abuses in the Marange Diamond Fields of Zimbabwe* (Human Rights Watch, New York, June 2009), available at [http://www.observatori.org/paises/pais\\_82/documentos/zimbabwe0609web.pdf](http://www.observatori.org/paises/pais_82/documentos/zimbabwe0609web.pdf), retrieved on 4 November 2011). Since then the 'unity government' has struggled to establish Kimberley certification for the Chiadzwa diamonds, to enable them to be sold on the open market, and for it to regain control over the considerable profits made. Suspicions have circulated that many involved in the illegal trade prefer to keep their operations beyond state regulation, but in early November 2011, Kimberley certification was finally granted (see, for example, 'Zim Cleared to Sell Marange Diamonds Despite Ongoing Abuses', 2 November 2011 and 'Diamond CSOs Slam Zim Deal for Ignoring Human Rights', 3 November 2011 available at <http://www.swradioafrica.com/2011/11/03/diamond-csos-slam-zim-deal-for-ignoring-human-rights/>, retrieved on 4 November 2011).

2 M.A.K. Halliday, *Languages as Social Semiotics* (London, Edward Arnold, 1978), p. 164ff.

3 V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago, Aldine, 1969).

4 See, for example, B. Latham and F. Katerere, 'Diamond Smuggling Thrives in Zimbabwe', *The Zimbabwe Situation*, 14 January 2011, available at [http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/jan14\\_2011.html](http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/jan14_2011.html), retrieved on 2 July 2011; *The Zimbabwe Situation*, 'Diamond Rush Grips Chipinge', 31 January 2010, available at <http://www.zimbabwesituation.org/?p=7472>, retrieved on 1 July 2011; AllAboutGemstones.com, 'Conflict and Blood Diamonds: Zimbabwe', available at <http://www.allaboutgemstones.com/conflict-diamonds-zimbabwe.html>, retrieved on 1 July 2011.

May 2008, 500 billion per cent in November 2008 and 89.7 sextillion per cent on 14 November 2008.<sup>5</sup> This financial crisis had deep social effects and exacerbated unemployment figures, with most companies in the country operating at below 10 per cent, and unemployment reaching an all time high of 94 per cent in early 2009.<sup>6</sup> When the new unity government was formed in February 2009, its first action was to abandon its inflation-ravaged currency in favour of a multi-currency regime dependent mainly upon the US dollar and South African Rand.

In this context of worsening economic crisis, the government's announcement of the discovery of diamonds at Chiadzwa in 2006 had dramatic effects.<sup>7</sup> It saw Zimbabweans flocking to Chiadzwa in their thousands. These included informal and artisanal miners, vendors from all walks of life, and illegal or unregulated local and foreign diamond buyers and traders. Chiadzwa thus was seen as a lifeline for many desperate and impoverished Zimbabweans. However, diamond production at Chiadzwa quickly became controversial due to the complex ownership wrangles the fields became entangled in, and especially because of the government's violent crackdown on illegal miners in late 2008, in an army and police blitz code named 'Operation *Hakudzokwe kumunda*' ('You will not return to the field'), which provoked international condemnation of Zimbabwe's 'conflict' or 'blood' diamonds.<sup>8</sup>

Zimbabwe thus joined other African states long embroiled in 'blood diamond' sagas of their own, such as Sierra Leone, Angola, Liberia, Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Claims that the proceeds of illegal sales drove and funded civil wars and other conflicts in these countries had led to the Kimberley Licence Protocol in 2000 through which attempts were made to regulate the international diamond market, and circumscribe illegal trades in 'conflict' diamonds.<sup>9</sup> As Saunders, Vircoulon and others have discussed, the Zimbabwe case challenged the effectiveness of the Kimberley process because however violent events at Chiadzwa became, the situation there never fuelled the kinds of conflicts that Sierra Leone, Angola, Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of Congo had been embroiled in.<sup>10</sup>

5 See, for example, a poster on 'Measure of Inflation' distributed by New ZANJ Publishing House, 2009. The figures used were respectively sourced from Central Statistical Office (May 2008), Government of Zimbabwe (November 2008), Prof. Steve Hanke (14 November 2008). For a detailed analysis of the Zimbabwe crisis, see also, B. Raftopoulos, 'The Crisis in Zimbabwe, 1998–2008', in B. Raftopoulos and A. Mlambo (eds), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2009), pp. 201–32.

6 'Zim Unemployment Skyrockets', *Mail & Guardian*, 30 January 2009, available at <http://mg.co.za/article/2009-01-29-zim-unemployment-skyrockets>, retrieved on 21 March 2011.

7 L.M. Sachikonye, *The Social Impact of Diamonds Extraction in Chiadzwa, Marange* (Johannesburg, Southern Africa Resource Watch, 2009), available at <http://www.sarwatch.org/sawadoc/theStoryArtisMiningMarangeOCT26Final.pdf>, retrieved on 2 February 2011; Partnership Africa Canada (PAC), 'Diamonds and Human Security' (Annual Review, 2009), available at [http://www.pacweb.org/Documents/annual-review-diamonds/AR\\_diamonds\\_2009\\_eng.pdf](http://www.pacweb.org/Documents/annual-review-diamonds/AR_diamonds_2009_eng.pdf), retrieved on 2 February 2011.

8 See Nyamunda and Mukwambo, this issue of *JSAS*. See also T. Vircoulon, 'Time to Rethink the Kimberley Process: The Zimbabwe Case', *On the African Peacebuilding Agenda* (4 November 2010), available at [www.bit.gs/.../time-to-rethink-the-kimberley-process-the-zimbabwe](http://www.bit.gs/.../time-to-rethink-the-kimberley-process-the-zimbabwe), retrieved on 2 February 2011; Partnership Africa Canada, 'Zimbabwe, Diamonds and the Wrong Side of History', available at [http://www.pacweb.org/Documents/diamonds\\_KP/18\\_Zimbabwe-Diamonds\\_March09-Eng.pdf](http://www.pacweb.org/Documents/diamonds_KP/18_Zimbabwe-Diamonds_March09-Eng.pdf), retrieved on 7 July 2011; R. Saunders, 'Briefing Note – Conflict Diamonds from Zimbabwe' (2009), available at [http://www.bicc.de/fataltransactions/pdf/briefing\\_note\\_conflict\\_diamonds\\_from\\_zimbabwe.pdf](http://www.bicc.de/fataltransactions/pdf/briefing_note_conflict_diamonds_from_zimbabwe.pdf), retrieved on 15 January 2011.

9 N. Hordern, 'Diamond Rings on your Fingers or Blood on your Hands?', *New African*, 462 (London, IC Publications, May 2007), p. 136. See also, L. Gberie, 'When Spinning Stops', *New African*, 462 (London, IC Publications, May 2007), p. 140; and A. Hoyt, 'How the African Diamond Trade Works', available at <http://history.howstuffworks.com/african-history/african-diamond-trade2.htm>, retrieved on 4 July 2011. However, in the Zimbabwean context there is no problem of civil wars. The suitability of the label would be in line with the death of unarmed illegal diamond panners who were allegedly shot sporadically by the army and police safeguarding the Chiadzwa fields. Because of this problem, each state has to pass the Kimberley Licence Protocol before its diamonds can be accepted on the official market.

10 Vircoulon, 'Time to Rethink the Kimberley Process'; Saunders, 'Briefing Note – Conflict Diamonds from Zimbabwe'.

After many delays, and amidst much controversy, the Kimberley process finally licensed Chiadzwa diamonds for international sale in November 2011.<sup>11</sup>

There are, however, also some diamond success stories in Africa, which include Botswana and South Africa, where commercial mining of diamonds began as far back as the 1870s. Notably in South Africa, the picture was not all rosy at the beginning, and in some respects the struggles to establish the South African diamond industry closer reflects the recent turmoil in Marange and Chiadzwa, than oblique comparisons with the 'conflict' fuelling diamonds of other African states do. The discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in the 1870s was subsequently followed by Witwatersrand gold rush in the 1880s. By 1899, De Beers Consolidated Mines had amalgamated and concentrated the diamond industry with a world monopoly on diamond sales through the London syndicate.<sup>12</sup> But the discoveries of these two minerals, gold and diamond, and the establishment of monopolies around them was far from unproblematic, or conflict free, and in many ways was dependent upon the asymmetrical labour relations and colonial structures of exploitation that were later formalised through the apartheid years.

For example, the discovery of diamonds in Griqualand West attracted a variety of different players, as, in Van Zyl's words, 'both the Free State and the South African Republic, as well as the Griqua chief Waterboer and a few Black headmen, claimed parts of the diamond fields'.<sup>13</sup> Griqualand West became a site of struggle, particularly after it was annexed by the British in 1871 to the detriment of Boer interests. In fact, the adventurous, cosmopolitan population of the diamond fields had political and socio-economic repercussions throughout South Africa. For instance, the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, the Sekukuni War in the Transvaal, the Basuto Rebellion of 1880–1891, as well as the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902, were clashes that partly developed from these contested economic and political interests.<sup>14</sup> This shows how the birth of the diamond industry in South Africa introduced multi-faceted problems for both white and black people. Capital and labour problems emerged with thousands of blacks flocking to work on diamond diggings. The Union of South Africa's government benefited from the uneven two-tier labour system that accorded white miners a privileged position at the expense of the majority of black African miners, some of whom were labour migrants from across the region. There was also great disparity in wages and working conditions of white and black miners, to the extent that white miners could earn as much as sixteen times the amount that black miners did. This exploitative system of parallel development was later cemented through the apartheid policies that haunted the country until 1994 with the coming of majority rule. It is hard to separate the history of South African diamond mining from the historical wars and social struggles that forged South Africa's political development, and in some ways perhaps this precarious situation is as relevant and comparable to the Zimbabwean experience at Chiadzwa, as hasty comparisons with the effects of 'conflict' diamonds for the historical development of other, independent African states, further north.<sup>15</sup>

11 See 'Zim Cleared to Sell Marange Diamonds Despite Ongoing Abuses', 2 November 2011 and 'Diamond CSOs Slam Zim Deal for Ignoring Human Rights', 3 November 2011, available at <http://www.swradioafrica.com/2011/11/03/diamond-csos-slam-zim-deal-for-ignoring-human-rights/>, retrieved on 4 November 2011).

12 P. Curtin, S. Feierman, L. Thompson and J. Vansina, *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London, Longman, 1995), p. 448; See also, M.C. Van Zyl, 'State and Colonies in South Africa, 1854–1902', in C.F.J. Muller (ed.), *Five Hundred Years: A History of South Africa* (Third edition, Pretoria, H&R Academica, 1981).

13 Van Zyl, 'State and Colonies in South Africa, 1854–1902', p. 304.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 305.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 449. It is interesting to note that in one instance in 1992, European miners, who were permitted, unlike African workers, to take industrial action and to form labour unions, went on strike. The strike turned violent and the government called in the army to suppress it, claiming 230 lives. Although the victims, in this case, were white miners, this 'bloody' encounter is illustrative of the social struggles that can surround the establishment of 'legal' mining industries, and therefore substantiates our point here that the South African experience is as relevant to the Zimbabwe case, as comparison with the more recent diamond-fuelled conflicts elsewhere on the continent.

As the Zimbabwe crisis intensified over the last decade, the old middle classes have effectively been eliminated, or at least diminished. The rich have become much richer, and fewer, and the poor much poorer. Zimbabwe's 'traditional' middle class of teachers, nurses and lecturers suffered with the poor, forcing many to flock to Chiadzwa to work as vendors, miners and diamond traders. These former middle classes were part and parcel of the new, transient community forged at Chiadzwa – a community which was trans-generation, trans-gender and trans-ethnic. The mobility and transience of this population is reflected in the divergent estimates that have been made about its size; one Human Rights Watch report estimated there were 35,000 people working at or around the Marange diamond fields in 2009, whilst a report by Partnership Africa Canada, in the same period, suggested there were between 15,000 to 20,000 people there.<sup>16</sup> Despite these differences however, these figures do show that this new, emergent Chiadzwa community was quite huge. As these people embarked upon new livelihood and survival activities in the context of Zimbabwe's deeply troubled economic and political situation, new linguistic terms and expressions emerged and were devised with which to describe their new experiences. It is this new language, forged by the new Chiadzwa community as they went about digging for and trading diamonds, which is the focus of this article. The aim is to explore the linguistic strategies involved in this new language, and their socio-economic and political functions.

Whereas urban youth culture has often been identified as the source of many linguistic innovations in Zimbabwean and other African contexts,<sup>17</sup> work by some authors suggests a much broader constituency has taken part in the linguistic innovations deriving from Zimbabwe's post-2000 economic and political crisis.<sup>18</sup> This is certainly reflected in the new language forged by the community of diverse Zimbabweans that flocked to Chiadzwa. Nevertheless, the language innovations that artisanal miners and diamond traders forged at Chiadzwa does parallel urban youth languages in that it is an in-group language code that set them apart from the surrounding rural populations. Like urban youth languages, this language also set them apart from the state authorities, and from the rest of the country. In addition, it set these illegal miners apart from communities around other mining areas, including at Murowa and River Ranch where diamonds are mined legally, and where a steady increase in production has been registered in recent years.<sup>19</sup> Again, just as with the innovations of urban youth languages, the linguistic strategies of the new language forged at Chiadzwa deviate from the norm. And like these urban youth languages, the artisanal mining language of the Chiadzwa diamond rush, can be usefully explored through Halliday's notion of 'antilanguages'.<sup>20</sup>

## Antilanguages

This study relies on Halliday's concept of 'antilanguage' which he coined in his description of argots or slang.<sup>21</sup> He explained 'antilanguage' as the creation of an 'antisociety', which is

16 HRW, *Diamonds in the Rough*; Partnership Africa Canada, 'Zimbabwe, Diamonds and the Wrong Side of History', Occasional Paper # 18 (March 2009), available at [http://www.pacweb.org/Documents/diamonds\\_KP/18\\_zimbabwe-Diamonds-March09-Eng.pdf](http://www.pacweb.org/Documents/diamonds_KP/18_zimbabwe-Diamonds-March09-Eng.pdf), retrieved on 10 July 2011.

17 See, for example, R. Mate, 'Youth Lyrics, Street Language and the Politics of Age: Contextualising the Youth Question in the Third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe', *JSAS*, 38, 1 (March 2012), this issue.

18 See J.L. Jones, 'Nothing is Straight in Zimbabwe: The Rise of the Kukiya-kiya Economy 2000–2008', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36, 2 (2010); M. Kadenga and G. Mavunga, 'Linguistic Innovation During a National Crisis: An Analysis of Selected Shona Metaphors Created During the Zimbabwe Crisis', *South African Journal of African Languages*, 2 (2010).

19 'Murowa Gem Production Rises 88pc', *The Sunday Mail* (24–30 July 2011).

20 See: M.A.K. Halliday, *Languages as Social Semiotics* (London, Edward Arnold, 1978), Chapter 9, pp. 164–82); See also, F. Veit Wild, "'Zimbolicious" The Creative Potential of Linguistic Innovation: The Case of Shona-English in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35, 3 (2009); R. Kiessling and M. Mous, 'Urban Youth Languages in Africa', *Anthropological Linguistics*, 46, 3 (2004).

21 Halliday, *Languages as Social Semiotics*.

set up within the structures of a larger dominant society as a conscious alternative to it. We suggest that what Halliday refers to as 'antisociety' is akin to what the anthropologist Victor Turner viewed as 'antistructure', in the sense that it is a temporary alternative which ultimately re-affirms the larger dominant structures of society within which it is located. In the view of Hodge and Kress,<sup>22</sup> the role of antilanguages is primarily to create group identity and to assert group differences from a dominant group, and that the central meaning of antilanguages is hostility and rejection of the dominant order. It is in this light that the functions of the language of the Chiadzwa illegal diamond miners are examined. Halliday further points out that the simplest form taken by an antilanguage is that of new words for the old, or a partial language re-lexicalisation. In his words, 'the principle is that of same grammar, different vocabulary; but different vocabulary only in certain areas, typically those that are central to the activities of the subculture and that set it off most sharply from the established society'.<sup>23</sup> We use this principle to highlight the activities central to the Chiadzwa miners' community. While in all languages linguistic expressions tend to be charged with social value, Bernstein (cited in Halliday) points out that in antilanguages, this is more clearly foregrounded. Bernstein refers to this as 'sociolinguistic coding orientation'; the tendency to associate certain ways of meaning with certain social contexts.<sup>24</sup> We will use this to establish the kinds of meanings that were exchanged within the social environment of the artisanal miners at Chiadzwa.

## Methodology

Our data was collected between 2006 and 2008. The study's aim was to record and examine the forms and meanings of terms and expressions created at Chiadzwa, in order to capture the activities and experiences of the newly created Chiadzwa community. Seeking a phenomenological understanding of the emergent situation at Chiadzwa, we adopted a qualitative approach as a useful hermeneutic tool for the study. Husserl's notions of *epoché*, empathy, descriptive accuracy and *eidetic* intuition were particularly useful for this research.<sup>25</sup> *Epoché* is a phenomenological procedure which stresses the 'bracketing out' of the researchers' preconceived ideas about the nature of the 'external world'; in our case the life and activities of the community of artisanal miners at Chiadzwa. This was important because of the negative connotations that commonly surround unregulated artisanal miners in Zimbabwe, and especially the illegal diamond miners at Chiadzwa, or *magweja* as they became known. We adopted empathetic interpolation in order to get to the root of *magweja* experiences, because as Cox asserts, such an empathetic attitude allows the researcher 'to think their thoughts and feel their emotions'.<sup>26</sup> Emphasising 'descriptive accuracy' or 'thick description'<sup>27</sup> during data collection allowed a detailed picture of the views, language and operations of the new community at Chiadzwa to emerge. These phenomenological methods combined well with other research instruments used in the study. Data was also gathered

22 R. Hodge and G. Kress, 'Social Semiotics, Style, and Ideology', in N. Coupland and A. Jaworski (eds), *Sociolinguistics: A Reader and Coursebook* (London, Macmillan, 1997).

23 Halliday, *Languages as Social Semiotics*, p. 165.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

25 J.L. Cox, *Expressing the Sacred: An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1996), p. 19; T. Groenewald, 'A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3, 1 (April 2004), available at [~ iiqm/backissues/3\\_1/pdf.groenewald.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf.groenewald.pdf)>[http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3\\_1/pdf.groenewald.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf.groenewald.pdf), retrieved on 12 January 2010; D. Allen, 'Phenomenology of Religion', in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Volume 13 (New York, Macmillan, 1987).

26 Cox, *Expressing the Sacred*, pp. 27 & 31.

27 C. Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3–30.

through observation and informal interviews with members of the Chiadzwa community, and those they interacted with, in other strategic spaces and contexts, besides the famous diamond fields of Marange themselves, such as in *kombis* (commuter omnibuses), at soccer matches, drinking places, and the street corners and other places where black market foreign currency dealers operated. We also talked to people, including some colleagues, who had been to, or whose children were at Chiadzwa as artisanal diamond miners, vendors or traders.

After gathering this data, we categorised the many neologisms used by, and about, the illegal miners, according to the aspects of the diamond mining ‘industry’ that they served. These include terms for the diamonds themselves; terms which reflected the diverse socio-economic background of the *magweja*; expressions which gave a sense of the political economy in which the illegal miners operated, and of their strategies for survival; and terms that reflected the wider, new ‘service’ economy that grew up around the miners, to provide them with their daily needs and amenities.

### *Ngoda in Ngodaland*

Soon after discovery, the Chiadzwa diamonds were named *ngoda*, a term which has no identified local source but which is adapted to Shona phonology and morphology. For example, it has the voiced implosive /d/, and its syllable shape is consonant and vowel (CV) which are both typically Shona. Two derivations from the term, *ngoda*, namely *ngodaglass* (for clear diamonds) and *ngodaland* (the land of *ngoda*) are both made up of lexical items from Shona and English. In Chiadzwa diction, the term *ngodaland* was used synonymously with the term *munda* (field) which was used metaphorically to refer to Chiadzwa diamond field, where people earned a living just like a farmer earns his/her living from tilling the land. This makes sense in Zimbabwe where agriculture is the mainstay of the rural economy. Clear diamonds are also known by the slang term *zhulas*, which does not conform to Shona syllabic constraints of CV. In general, *zhula* has been coined as slang for money. Of all the referents for diamonds, *ngoda* became the most popular, such that it is used to refer to all types of diamonds, and it has also found its way into both the local print and electronic media whenever Chiadzwa diamonds are talked about. Chances are high that the term may be included in the next Shona dictionary. Such developments, where ‘deviant’ terms get absorbed into dominant languages, have been explained as the cause of variations present in ‘antilanguages’, since they create a need for the creation of new deviations to take the place of the absorbed ones.<sup>28</sup>

### *Magweja, Gwejeline, Gwejana and Gwejembere*

The expressions discussed here are mainly the names given to the miners. We locate their origins; we show how the miners discuss them and attribute meanings to them. Young male adult illegal or artisanal miners were given the name, *gweja*, a noun which was derived from the Shona ideophone, *gweje* (which refers to interlocking of horns, especially of bulls fighting). Thus, the noun *gweja* can be said to be deviant in that there is no Shona noun referring to people interlocking horns. In the context of Chiadzwa, the name *gweja*, whose plural is *magweja*, was given with reference to clashes<sup>29</sup> between the illegal miners and the security officers stationed there, to protect against illegal mining and smuggling. From the data gathered, however, the term has different connotative meanings for the different people who

28 R. Kiessling and M. Mous, ‘Urban Youth Languages in Africa’, *Anthropological Linguistics*, 46, 3 (2004), p. 314.

29 Such clashes between the two factions can be metaphorically understood as the interlocking of horns.



found themselves referred to as *magweja*. Connotative meaning is the real-world value perceived in terms of the tacit socio-cultural principles that a speaker associates with an expression, over and above its purely conceptual meaning.<sup>30</sup>

As already pointed out, the Chiadzwa diamond rush attracted people of diverse backgrounds which included unemployed people who became ‘permanent’ illegal miners, and employed people who would go to Chiadzwa and come back to their often ‘non-paying’ jobs. These different *magweja* attribute different connotative meanings to the term *gweja*, depending on their real-world values. In the eyes of ‘permanent’ *magweja*, the name *gweja* connoted such notions as bravery and aggressiveness. They even described themselves as *gweja akafa kare* (a *gweja* is a dead person, he fears nothing). Apparently this was in reference to their ingenuity and bravery as they negotiated their way through the harsh conditions they encountered in the diamond fields, such as clashes with security forces, and also the dangerous ditches scattered in the fields which they referred to with the adoptive *matonera* (tunnels) and the slang, *dhips* (deep). They would say, ‘if a *gweja* fears going into Chiadzwa fields, he will die of starvation’. However, in the eyes of Chiadzwa community, *magweja* were initially seen as a threat to local communities, as Newman Chiadzwa, son of Headman Chiadzwa, explained in an interview he held with Pan-African News Wire on 29 November 2009:

When the illegal activities started in Chiadzwa the community was gripped with fear as most of the so-called *magweja* (diamond panners) used to move around villages stealing goats and chickens. They used to stay in the mountains, cutting down trees, putting up fires everywhere and this turned out to be bad for the community. Our women were even afraid to go and fetch firewood in the bush because of the *magweja* that were all over the area.<sup>31</sup>

As these *magweja* quickly became richer than people in formal employment, they showed the moral underpinnings of their choices. For example, we learn of their denunciation of education as no more than a route to poverty, from a *gweja* conversion of one of the late Simon Chimbetu’s songs, entitled ‘Newspaper’ in the *2000 Blend*.<sup>32</sup> The following lyrics by this famous Zimbabwean musician: *Dai ndakadzidza, Dai ndiri member, Madegrees, mathemometer ndaiverenga ndoga* (If only I were educated, I would be somebody in society, I would read the thermometer and degrees on my own), were changed by the *magweja* into: *Dai ndakadzidza, Dai ndiri teacher. Dai ndiri teacher, Dai ndiri rombe, Dai ndiri rombe, Dai ndisina mari* (If I were educated, I would be a teacher. If I were a teacher, I would have been destitute. If I were destitute, I would lack money and wealth). Such attitudes by *magweja* not only scorned all people who valued education or engaged in white-collar jobs, it also reflected the harsh realities of Zimbabwe’s crisis for the educated but deeply impoverished middle classes. The song was in bad taste to those it scorned, but the *magweja* themselves enjoyed dancing to the music in night clubs which were now a preserve for them rather than for the formally employed.

As the economic crisis intensified more and more professionals, including teachers and nurses, would go to Chiadzwa and then come back to their non-paying jobs. Our interactions with such *magweja* suggest that they were not proud of these activities in the way that the ‘permanent’ *magweja* were, as the following statement implies: *Tose tangova magweja* (we have all become *magweja*). Such a statement said by a professional-turned-*gweja* is not

30 G.N. Leech, *Semantics* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981); A. Mwhiki, ‘Meaning as Use: A Functional View of Semantics and Pragmatics’, *Swahili*, 11 (2004), p. 134.

31 Pan-African News Wire, ‘Newman Chiadzwa Sets the Record Straight on Zimbabwe Diamonds’ (29 November 2009), available at <http://panafricannews.blogspot.com/2009/11/newman-chiadzwa-sets-record-straight-on.html>, retrieved on 20 July 2011.

32 S. Chimbetu, ‘Newspaper’, on the Album *2000 Blend* (Harare, Gramma Records, 2000).

a compliment. The attitude one reads from such a statement is of somebody forced by circumstances, in this case Zimbabwe's socio-economic crisis, to turn to other sources of livelihood. Similarly, some of the elderly people we spoke to also had a negative view of *gweja* practices. One elderly *gweja* remarked: *ugweja hwakauya uhu, huchatipedza* (this *gweja* practice will eliminate us).

As more and more people joined Chiadzwa, there were derivations from the term *gweja*, tracking changes in the gender and age of the operators at Chiadzwa with appropriate terms of address. These include *gwejeline*, referring to young female *magweja*. The word comprises *gweja* + *line*. The affix *line* is English-inspired and thus gives the name an English flavour comparable to names like *Joceline*, *Joyline* and *Merciline*, which came to Zimbabwe via the English language. The emergence of these terms reflects how normal gender roles and structures of patriarchy,<sup>33</sup> were challenged in the Chiadzwa context, particularly because mining in Zimbabwe has long been associated with masculinity. Minors also joined the diamond rush as is evidenced by the derivation *gwejana*. The term is derived from the root *gwej-* + *-ana*. The deminutive stem *-ana* referring to the young,<sup>34</sup> as in *vana* (children), *mwana* (child), *mbudzana* (young one of a goat) and others. Some of them abandoned school together with their teachers, in order to make a living at Chiadzwa. This fits wider patterns across Zimbabwe where children, particularly in the context of rising numbers of orphans and child-headed households as a result of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, have joined the burgeoning informal economy.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, the presence of elderly women was indicated by the term *gwejambuya* which is derived from the root word *gweja-* + *-mbuya*. The Shona term *mbuya* refers to an old woman. Therefore, *gwejambuya* is an elderly female *gweja*. The unisex term, *gwejembere* refers to elderly male and female *magweja* at Chiadzwa. It is derived from *gweja-* + *-mbere*. The stem *-mbere* is part of the word *chembere* that refers to the elderly regardless of gender. Normally, or in the past, such elders would be taken care of by their grown-up children, in formal employment. Such a set-up is aptly reflected in the Shona proverb, '*Chirere chigokurerawo*' (Raise the child so that s/he will be able to look after you in old age). However, the economic crisis forced many to join the bandwagon for survival at Chiadzwa, since most of their children had abandoned formal employment, which had stopped sustaining them. Some of the elderly people went on their own, in the hope or belief that success in getting *ngoda* was not only guaranteed by sheer bravery, as the younger *magweja* would have it, but also depended on an individual's luck (*mhanza*) or – for the more religious – God's grace or blessing (*nyasha*).

### *Babylons, Magombiro and Sindalos*

Some of the terms and expressions which we collected are reflective of the political economy in which illegal diamond mining was carried out and miners' strategies for survival. Illegal diamond mining is an extraordinarily dangerous means of making a living because of the abuses which accompanied the police and security forces' efforts to control *magweja* who

33 See, for example, M.R. Cutrufelli, *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression* (London, Zed Books, 1983), Chapter 2, pp. 41–86.

34 G. Fortune, *Shona Grammatical Constructions*, Volume 1 (Harare, Mercury Press, 1985); P. Mashiri and C. Warinda, *Dudzira Mutauro ReChiShona 'A' Level* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1999).

35 C. Msengezi, 'Ndonanzva Banga', in C. Chirikure (ed.), *Tipei Dariro* (Harare, College Press, 1994); F. Sibanda, T. Makahamadze and R.S. Maposa, "'Hawks and Doves": The Impact of Operation Murambatsvina on Johane Marange Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe', *Exchange*, 37, 1 (2008); E. Chitando, *Living with Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS 1* (Geneva, WCC Publications, 2007); F. Sibanda, *HIV and AIDS-Related Stigma and Discrimination: A Philosophical Reflection on the Experiences of Students at Great Zimbabwe University* (Saarbrücken, Lambert Academic Publishing GmbH & Co. KG, 2010).

could set dogs on miners, beat them up and even shoot them.<sup>36</sup> The acrimonious relations between *magweja* and security officers led *magweja* to coin new insults, which often reflected their social meaning and beliefs. One example was the common *magweja* references to police as *Babylons*, reflecting identification with a Rastafarian view of authority. The etymology of the term 'Babylon' can be traced to the Rastafarian movement which links perceived contemporary oppressors to the biblical Babylon that subjected the Israelites to captivity. In Rasta theology, *Babylon* commonly refers to authorities such as the police, politicians and the church.<sup>37</sup> Commenting on the efficacies of Rastafarian language, Pollard points out how the language and history of Rastafari culture can provide an ideological framework that stimulates a challenge to any perceived 'Babylon system'.<sup>38</sup>

Many of the *magweja* considered themselves rastas, or have adopted rasta practices, mannerisms and beliefs. Often they wore dreadlocks and smoked *dagga* (marijuana), which in rastafari faith is believed to connect adherents with the spiritual world, and facilitates 'reasoning sessions' and meditation.<sup>39</sup> Many others just saw themselves, like rastas, as dispossessed or 'downpressed', economically and socially, and invented words to show an anti-authority attitude reminiscent of 'resistance identity', which is a characteristic of 'antilanguages'. Castellás describes resistance identity as 'exclusion of the excluders by the excluded'.<sup>40</sup> Such attitudes gave the *magweja* a sense of *camaraderie*.

Such *gweja* behaviour can also be explained in the light of Victor Turner's notions of liminality, *communitas* and *antistructure*.<sup>41</sup> Turner asserts that many social processes and uprisings, like rituals, have liminal stages in which the structures of everyday life of the immediate past have been dislocated, but new structures are yet to surface to substitute them, a situation he termed 'anti-structure'.<sup>42</sup> The creative energy and comradeship experienced among *magweja* at Chiadzwa resembles the liminal states identified by Turner, which he termed 'communitas'. This refers to feelings of community, social equality, solidarity and togetherness, exhibited by those in a context where normal social structures and statuses have broken down. Like Turner's description of initiates in the middle stage of rituals, where there is a 'sameness' of liminal personae, normal or 'conventional' socio-structural distinctions did not count for much among *magweja* at Chiadzwa.<sup>43</sup> The 'communitas' moments of *antistructure* creates a comity of comrades rather than hierarchical structures, and as Deflem points out,<sup>44</sup> subjects are deprived of rank status and property. In the context of the new community of *magweja* at Chiadzwa, there was

36 O. Katsaura, 'Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Informal Diamond Mining in Chiadzwa, Zimbabwe', *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 12, 6 (2010); L.M. Sachikonye, *The Social Impact of Diamonds Extraction in Chiadzwa, Marange* (Johannesburg, *Southern Africa Resource Watch*, 2009), available at <http://www.sarwatch.org/sawadoc/theStoryArtisMiningMarange OCT26 Final.pdf>, retrieved on 20 June 2011; R. Saunders, 'Briefing Note – Conflict Diamonds from Zimbabwe', (2009), available at [http://www.bicc.de/fataltransactions/pdf/briefing\\_note\\_conflict\\_diamonds\\_from\\_zimbabwe.pdf](http://www.bicc.de/fataltransactions/pdf/briefing_note_conflict_diamonds_from_zimbabwe.pdf), retrieved on 15 January 2011.

37 P. Henry, 'Rastafarianism and the Reality of Dread', in L.R. Gordon (ed.), *Existence in Black* (London, Routledge, 1997).

38 V. Pollard, 'Sound and Power: The Language of the Rastafari', in S. Makoni, G. Smitherman, A.F. Ball and A.K. Spears, (eds), *Black Linguistics: Language, Society and Politics in Africa and the Americas* (London, Routledge, 2003).

39 R.E. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek?: Afro Cultures and God-Talk* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990), p. 92; See, for example, N.S. Murrell, W.D. Spencer and A.A. Mcfarlane (eds), *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader* (Kingston, IRP, 1998), p. 32.

40 M. Castellás, *The Power of Identity* (Malden, Mass., Blackwell, 1997), cited in R. Kiessling and M. Mous, 'Urban Youth Languages in Africa', *Anthropological Linguistics*, 46, 3 (2004), p. 313.

41 Turner, *The Ritual Process*.

42 Potatoskins, 'Antistructure in Tahrir', 10 February 2011, available at <http://connectedincairo.com/2011/02/10/antistructure-in-tahrir/>, retrieved on 5 May 2011.

43 V.W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 100.

44 M. Deflem, 'Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 3, 1 (1991), pp. 1–25.

a sense that older or otherwise normal social distinctions no longer mattered, whether educated or uneducated, male or female, old or young. However, just as for Turner these periods of ‘anti-structure’ do not last, and the fate of any kind of ‘anti-structure’ and *communitas* is an inevitable ‘decline and fall into structure and law’,<sup>45</sup> so the ‘*communitas*’ of the *magweja* community at Chiadzwa, was often short-lived. Social structures and hierarchies re-emerged and or were re-asserted at different levels and in different ways, not only as witnessed in the violent re-establishment of military control over the diamonds fields as a whole at the end of 2008, but also in the complex and ambiguous relations that often emerged between police officers and *magweja*, or between and within different groups or ‘*syndicates*’ of *magweja* themselves.

In addition to describing state security agents as *Babylons*, another derogatory term used by the *magweja* for these agents was the slang *gombiro*, which has no semantic equivalent in mainstream Shona. The term was used synonymously with another slang term, *gumha-gumha*. The Shona word *gumha* means ‘shake vigorously’. A *gombiro* or *magombiro* (plural) was so named because he or she thrived on exploiting others through cunning and unscrupulous means, and could swindle people of their *ngoda*, money and goods. At Chiadzwa, a *gombiro* could be an officially recognised police officer by profession who came to Chiadzwa on state duty, but instead strategically placed himself/herself in order to solicit for bribes from *magweja*. Our informants told us that typically such a police officer might approach *magweja* in an unthreatening way, and engage them in a short conversation whose purpose was known to both parties. Likewise the *magweja* would also be polite. Such a verbal exchange between a police officer and a *gweja* leader might begin as follows:

<i>Gombiro</i> (police officer);	<i>Gweja!</i>
Leader of <i>gweja</i> group;	Officer!
<i>Gombiro</i> ;	<i>Huya tinzwe</i> (Come let’s talk).

Following such an invitation, the leader of the *gweja* group would negotiate a bribe (*kudhiza* in *gweja* slang) that would enable the group to get into the fields freely. The *gweja* uses the term of address, ‘officer’, to show recognition of the officer’s status and position, thereby illustrating the dialectical relationship between *communitas* and structure that Turner identified, and how the ‘*antistructure*’ forged by the *gweja* communities at Chiadzwa would often reaffirm existing structures of authority.

The other type of *magombiro* were predatory gangs who preyed on *magweja* and vendors. Such *gombiros* often targeted *magweja* who came from far away and did not know the local area or the local dialect well. They would ambush such *magweja* in order to dispossess them of their diamonds and other valuables. They would also manufacture fake diamonds, for instance from broken bottles, and sell them to unsuspecting buyers. We also heard that some of *gombiros* would pretend to be plain clothes security officers during the night and forcibly take diamond ore sacks from the miners. There were stories of such *gombiros* running in the direction of vendors, pretending to be running away from on duty security officers, thereby causing a stampede among the vendors who would in their panic leave their wares to the mercy of the *gombiros*.

In order to boost their security against these adversities, *magweja* worked in *syndicates* – called *sindalos* in *gweja* slang – who lived together *kumabase* (at base camps). The governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe estimated that 500 illegal diamonds *syndicates* were operating at Chiadzwa by October 2008.<sup>46</sup> Illustrating further how the ‘*antistructure*’ of the

45 Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 132; See also, Deflem, ‘Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner’s Processual Symbolic Analysis’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30, 1 (1991), p. 12.

46 Partnership Africa Canada, ‘Zimbabwe, Diamonds and the Wrong Side of History: The Diamonds and Human Security Project’, Occasional Paper # 18 (March 2009), available at [http://www.pacweb.org/Documents/diamonds\\_KP/18\\_zimbabwe-Diamonds-March09-Eng.pdf](http://www.pacweb.org/Documents/diamonds_KP/18_zimbabwe-Diamonds-March09-Eng.pdf), retrieved on 10 July 2011.

transient communities forged at Chiadzwa did not entirely overturn broader social distinctions among Zimbabweans, most *sindalos* were named after *magweja*'s places of origin, which included almost all urban and rural areas of Zimbabwe, from Shurugwi and Kwekwe, to Karoi, Chipinge, Gokwe and Checheche. Different *sindalos* acquired different reputations. A group from Shurugwi, known as *maShurugwi* was renowned for being particularly ruthless and callous. Some participants said that groups such as *maShurugwi* had previously operated in the Midlands as illegal small-scale gold miners known as *makorokoza*, where they gained their experience and reputations.<sup>47</sup> The less powerful or courageous *magweja* could easily be displaced from the *dhips* (deep pits) or *tonera* (tunnels) they were mining by more daring and ruthless groups. In such encounters the more ruthless might mock those they were displacing with familiar and derogatory phrases like: '*mainini chibudai imomo isu varume tipinde*' (little woman/mother, get out of the tunnel so that we men can get in).<sup>48</sup>

*Sindalos* who came from bigger cities like Harare, often took the names of suburbs like Mbare and Mufakose. Those from institutions such as Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) also named their *sindalos* in the same manner. Such self-organisation amongst *magweja* groups made it possible to guard against *gombiros* infiltrating groups of miners. In addition, this *sindalo* organisation enabled channels of communication both at Chiadzwa, but also back home, through which, for example, the families of fellow *magweja* could be informed in case of misfortunes such as injury, arrest or death. Some of the base camp names indicated the kinds of things that took place there. One such base was *pa24* hours (the 24-hour place), implying the *magweja* there would be awake and operating 24 hours a day. Another example is *paTV* (at the television), which was located at the highest point in the hills; the *magweja* there said the location helped them to observe the movements of security forces, so that they would know when it was safe to enter the fields. Yet another example of a base name was *Mai Mujuru*, which is linguistically unusual in that it does not have a locative prefix which it should have according to the dictates of Shona locatives' rules of construction. *Mai Majura* was named after the Vice-President, Joice Mujuru, who was said to own it.<sup>49</sup> All *magweja* regarded that location as the most profitable of the Chiadzwa diamond fields. In *gweja* diction this was referred to as *panyanga* – that is, at the nucleus or heart of the fields, though not in terms of geographical location but rather value.

Any new member joining a *sindalo* was educated on the security terms and expressions which *magweja* used as warnings of impending clashes with police officers or of police raids into the diamond fields or at the *sindalo* bases. These included many secret codes typical of 'antilinguages', such as '*chabvondoka*' (a metaphor suggesting instability); '*gweja nyumwawo*' (which means a *gweja* should use his/her intuition to sense danger); '*herere-herere*' (an onomatopoeic ideophone warning *magweja* to flee); '*chacolour*' (in reference to the colours of police and military uniforms) and '*chabhiridha*' (meaning 'it has become very dangerous and tense', and is a Shona word derived from the English to 'build'). It was imperative that all *magweja* learnt these metaphors because they warned of impending danger from security forces charged with guarding the fields.

47 See, for example, A. Kori, *Makorokoza: Small-Scale Gold Mining in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 2006).

48 Such mocking, derogatory statements could cause clashes particularly when they were applied to both men and women. Often such words were typically directed at more 'timid' *magweja*, illustrating something of the bravado that was common to encounters between *magweja* groups.

49 O. Katsaura, 'Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Informal Diamond Mining in Chiadzwa, Zimbabwe', *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 12, 6 (2010), available at [http://www.jsd-africa.com/Jsda/V12No6\\_Fall2010-B/PDF](http://www.jsd-africa.com/Jsda/V12No6_Fall2010-B/PDF), retrieved on 20 June 2011. We also gathered this from informants who asserted that the place paid most but was also the most heavily guarded.

These escalating, violent clashes in the period leading up to the violent expulsions of late 2008, meant that going to Chiadzwa was inherently risky; as *magweja* would say: '*kumaziva ndadzoka*' (you will be lucky to return alive). However, notwithstanding differences in gender, age and ethnicity amongst *magweja*, or the struggles and tensions that frequently emerged between *sindalos* over particular pits and tunnels, *magweja* were often ready to unite against the police and the army; they often exhibited the comity of comrades. Sometimes they found a unity of purpose in their intermittent skirmishes with the 'Babylons'. *Magweja* could come up with slogans with phrases like: 'all *magweja* unite!', or in a moment of strategic retreat that required resilience, '*Gweja "war"*'. The term 'war' can be understood as having two meanings here. On one hand, 'war' refers to confrontation. On the other hand, 'war' literally means 'stop', a meaning that is clearer expressed in the sound than in the word. Even in days of 'peace' some *magweja*, shaken to the marrow, would ask the bold ones, '*Kuri sei?*' (How is the situation, in the diamond fields?), and other *magweja* ended up creating a diction of bravado that mocked such frightened people, whom they referred to as '*magwara (tyoi)*'. In other words, '*magwara*' were not perceived as real *magweja* but '*vanakuri sei?*' (those who are known for asking about the situation in the fields).

Syndicates also used specific code names that facilitated particular group communication, and set the terms and conditions for the group's conduct. Examples include, among others, '*Asipo Haapo*' (He who is not here/ is not around), which connotes that where resources are in short supply people could just take what they want, much to the detriment of absent members. This reflects that short-term and immediate nature of a *gweja* lifestyle. Another derogatory term was '*matako*' (which can be translated as bums) referring to those who had remained behind or were just too slow. In addition, some *magweja* coined the term '*Apusa Apusa*'<sup>50</sup> (to suggest that the one who is not watchful will lose out), to encourage group members to be active. The term '*maziso ezizi*' (eyes of an owl) reflected how for *magweja*, night time was prime time; syndicate members were expected to go into the fields at the night, under the cover of darkness, for security reasons.

### *Gunners, Mutaka and Skating*

There was a division of labour in every *sindalo*. Success was based on a unity of purpose within a group. Within a syndicate, the advance party responsible for digging were called gunners. They used *mugwara* (an iron spike), *piki* (a Shona word derived from English 'pick axe' – in *gweja* diction the ideophone *pikiduru* has been formed showing the action of uprooting the treasured diamonds), *shavhiza* (shovel) and a sack. This could be very dangerous because some places had very deep pits. This was the case at a place known as *kumadhops* (at the deep place), so named because the seam (*bhande*) of diamond was at a great depth. In such situations a *gunner* might go down two to three metres and then create a tunnel (*tonera*) horizontally, as dictated by the pattern of the seam. This was risky, and indeed many people died in tunnels. However, often diamond extraction would not be discontinued in good places where a tunnel had collapsed and killed or maimed a – '*gunner*'. In fact, *magweja* would often just say, '*watila wanatsa. Kutila kwake tinoti gomo ratipa*' (one who has died is a blessing in disguise. His death is an indicator that the spiritual world has provided for us). *Magweja* often believed that the death of '*gunner*' in action would bring them luck at that spot. Such deaths were sometimes interpreted as a kind of *kuchekeresa*; a form of human sacrifice often associated with 'ritual murders' and witchcraft, that is believed to ensure future wealth and success. Some *magweja* might even celebrate the death

50 This label is derived from the Shona word '*kupusa*' which means being unwise. The same name tag was used to refer to a church organisation where male adherents sexually abused women folk with impunity.

of a fellow *gweja*, with full conviction that they would in turn be rewarded with ‘manna from heaven’.<sup>51</sup> Yet aside from this heady mix of fatalism and multiple religious convictions, the dangers and risks associated with these diggings meant that many *magweja* smoked *dagga* or *mbanje* (marijuana) in search of courage, buying the drug from vendors who advertised it as ‘*dzako dzemabhinya*’ (your own share, suitable for dangerous people).

Following a team of ‘*gunners*’ were those who would carry the *mutaka* – the dug out soil expected to contain diamonds. This term *mutaka* refers to the wetness of the soil, and is a corruption of the word *dagga* or *dhaka*, which means mud (but also in some contexts, marijuana). This *mutaka* would be loaded into bags of different sizes, depending on the strength, age or gender of the one to carry it. Where a *sindalo* comprised of *gwejelines*, this was one of their special duties: to carry the *mutaka* to the next stage of processing, far away from the place of extraction. However, some *gwejelines* also went digging for diamonds. The person who carried *mutaka* needed to have speed and be careful to avoid being robbed by *gombiros* on the way. A small load of *mutaka* was called *bhozwell* (named after a name of a well-known buyer). A very big load of *mutaka* was called *zipagamaga* or *zihagamaga*. The *zi-* in the latter two words is an augmentative noun prefix of class 21, meaning, in this case, a gigantic load.

After digging out and carrying *mutaka* came the process called *skating*. Every load of *mutaka* went through a gruelling process of separating sand from diamonds. The first stage was called sieving or *hessening* (from hessen sack). This required water and people often sieved near a water source. Where it was necessary, the water was fetched by *gwejelines*. ‘Skating’ was the next stage. When *magweja* skated *mutaka*, they expected to find diamonds. When they found nothing, this was referred to as ‘*yakaba sample*’ (*yakaba* is a Shona word derived from *kukaba* which means ‘to kick’. Thus ‘*yakaba sample*’ means the pain resulting from failure to find diamonds. This is similar to the pain one gets from being kicked or kicking a hard object). *Magweja* could choose to re-sieve *mutaka* abandoned by another group. It was possible that the previous group had abandoned their *mutaka* because of approaching security officers. In *gweja* diction, re-sieving discarded *mutaka* was called ‘redubbing’. Success in getting *ngoda* or *zhulas* was cause for celebration, and was accompanied by the utterances like, *chafa*, *yafa mare* or *chashowa* (it has died; it has become money; it has shown, respectively). Some might also say: ‘*Mwari/vadzimu vakomborera, Zamu rambuya rasisa ngoda*’ (God/the ancestors have given graciously, grandmother’s breasts are letting the diamonds flow), reflecting emergent beliefs that the *ngoda* had been provided by the local ancestral grandmother, whose name, Chiadzwa, refers both to the place, and the local headman’s lineage. The phrase *Zamu rambuya Nehanda rasisa ngoda* later became the title of a hit song by renowned Zimbabwean social musician, Hosea Chipanga.<sup>52</sup>

Once diamonds were extracted, the process of marketing was intricate. This could be done within ‘*ngodaland*’, outside it and even beyond the borders of Zimbabwe. The porous security around the mining fields meant buyers from very diverse backgrounds came to the area wielding *forex* (foreign currency). Some buyers came from South Africa, Mozambique and Nigeria. Some were local businesspeople and cross-border traders from Birchenough Bridge and Beit Bridge. The diamonds were also sold along the Mutare–Masvingo, Mutare–Chimanmani and Marange–Mutare roads.<sup>53</sup> The medium of trade was cash – Zimbabwean dollars or United States

51 Some *magweja* believed that the diamonds were like the biblical ‘manna’ that Moses used to feed the wandering Israelites, illustrating how Christian discourses and themes were appropriated alongside and intertwined with ancestral and other ‘traditional’ religious themes in *gweja* diction and life.

52 H. Chipanga, ‘Zamu rambuya Nehanda rasisa Ngoda’ in the Album *Pharaoh* (Harare, Gramma Records, 2006). This album by Hosiach Chipanga was banned in Zimbabwe during the crisis because of its connotative meaning that compared the ruling élite in Zimbabwe during the Chiadzwa turmoil to the biblical pharaoh who subjected the Israelites to bondage.

53 S. Kadungure, ‘Illegal Diamond Dealers Invade Marange’, *The Manica Post* (20–26 October 2006), p.1.

dollars, known as *mayusa* or *Usas* – and material goods. In barter trading, they could exchange diamonds with foodstuffs, clothes, detergents, fresh produce, fruits, maize and even furniture such as wardrobes. It is said that in early months after the discovery of diamonds, some people could exchange one small pebble of diamond for bread, and certainly the majority of *magweja* did not always realise the potential value of diamonds they were selling. When *magweja* were in possession of cash after trading the precious mineral, this stage was described as *yafa mare*.

*Magweja* devised an appropriate diction on the nature of transactions and buyers. A buyer who paid well was referred to as *buyer anobhadhara* (a buyer who pays). In contrast, a buyer known for being stingy or for swindling sellers was known as *buyer wemutsege* (buyer who pays peanuts) or *buyer anojuta* (buyer who swindles). Not getting value for what one sold was described as '*kunyura*' (drowning or making loss). There was one buyer at Chiadzwa who was known for not being at all selective about the type of diamond that he purchased, (whether *ngoda* or *girazi*),<sup>54</sup> who, as a result, became known as *gonyeti*. '*Gonyeti*' is Shona slang for heavy lorries and trucks (in other words, vehicles able to ferry large amounts of goods), and its use here reflected that buyer's emphasis on quantity rather than quality, so '*gonyeti*' became his label.

As large numbers of vendors collected at Chiadzwa to supply the *magweja* with goods ranging from clothing and electrical gadgets to food and drinks, a number of new terms were coined to describe food and drinks in *ngodaland*. These included, among others, *dotonya*, which has no semantic equivalent in Shona, and is slang for good food, well prepared and appetising. *Ravhizha* referred to poorly prepared food. This was also known as *nyerani*, a term originally coined to refer to soil that has very few or no diamonds. *Chipapa* (formed by clipping off the last syllable of *chipapata*, meaning something thick and dry) was the term used to refer to especially thick sadza, Zimbabwe's staple food. *Khuvha* referred to a soft drink and water became known as ZINWA (an acronym for Zimbabwe National Water Authority). Because Chiadzwa is an arid region with frequent water shortages, bottled water was often sold to the miners. Finally, *dzemabhinya* (for dangerous people) or *muzii* (that which quietens) was used refer to *dagga* or *mbanje* (marijuana). Interestingly, after the violent elections of March–June 2008, vendors began to advertise *mbanje* in ways which reflected the broad political circumstances of that time. For example an exchange between *mbanje* sellers and *magweja* could go as follows:

*Uya utore dzako dzemabhinya dzakafuudhaiwa. Dzino dzakavhara nekudhaka Mugabe naTsvangirai vakapedzisira vaita re-run pamaharmonised presidential elections aJune 2008.*

(Come and take your high grade of *mbanje*, of a grade that hyponotised Mugabe and Tsvangirai to the extent that they ended up going for a re-run in June 2008 presidential elections in Zimbabwe.)

The *magweja* might then respond by adding:

*'Wakanyanya kudhakwa nadzo ndiMugabe akapedzisira ave kuita one-man election Tsvangirai arega.'*

(Mugabe was drugged more for he ended up holding a one-man election when Tsvangirai withdrew his candidature in protest.)

Exchanges of this kind illustrate how the new 'anti-language' forged amongst and by *magweja* at Chiadzwa, was not entirely divorced from events occurring elsewhere in Zimbabwe at the time; rather it could incorporate political commentary on the broader changing political landscape, of which, of course, it was a part.

54 This is a Shona derivation from English word 'glass'. In *geweja* tradition it means clear diamonds which are highly prized as compared to '*ngoda*' which are rough diamonds.



## Conclusion

This study set out to explore the unique 'language' that developed around the world of the illegal miners at the Chiadzwa diamonds fields, in order to shed light on this dangerous means of making a living in the midst of the worst period of Zimbabwe's post-2000 economic decline. The 'antilanguage' described here is vivid and rich, and the many expressions used by the illegal miners give a fascinating sense of the socio-economic make up and identity of the illegal miners and their community, and the political economy in which they operated. While the diamond miners' 'antilanguage' deviated in interesting ways from both standard Shona and local dialects, it did so in ways that mediated social, economic and political relations amongst the informal miners, as well as between them and outsiders patronising the area. There was, sometimes, a 'comity of communitas' within the 'antistructure' of this transient, and diverse new community of artisanal miners, diamond traders, and the vendors that collected around them, and yet as Turner predicted, old social structures and hierarchies were also re-affirmed, and new forms of social relationships and organisation forged. Most of all this new language illustrates the high levels of creativity and tenacity with which Zimbabweans engaged with the opportunities presented to them after the discovery of diamonds was announced in 2006, even as Zimbabwe's broader political and economic crisis sank to new depths of despair. But these new found fortunes did not last long. By early 2009, just as the new government of national unity between the Movement for Democratic Change (Tsvangirai), MDC-M and the former ruling party, ZANU(PF) was finally being implemented, the bulk of this new community had been forced out of Chiadzwa, as the ZANU(PF)-aligned military violently asserted its control over the diamond fields.

SHUMIRAI NYOTA

*Department of Curriculum Studies, Great Zimbabwe University, P.O. Box 1235, Masvingo, Zimbabwe, E-mail: shumirai.nyota@gmail.com*

FORTUNE SIBANDA

*Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Great Zimbabwe University, P.O. Box 1235, Masvingo, Zimbabwe, E-mail: sibanda35@gmail.com*