



# Zimbabwe: A Gold Mining Boom Amid Rapid Agrarian Change

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## 15.1 INTRODUCTION

ASGM in Zimbabwe has a long history dating back to the pre-colonial era (Bent 1896; Beach 1988; Kritzinger 2012a, b). However, it was not until the implementation of Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) in 2000 that it became a widespread economic activity attracting both urban and rural people (Mkodzongi 2013, 2016; Mkodzongi and Spiegel 2018). Within the last decade, ASGM has become a major contributor to the country's annual gold output, with an estimated five hundred thousand people now directly engaged in the sector. In production terms, the ASGM sector has now surpassed the large industrial mines in quarterly and annual gold output (*Financial Gazette* 11 January 2018). Although the activity remains largely illegal and informal, it has become a key part of the widening gold mining frontier in post-land reform Zimbabwe.

The dramatic increase in ASGM-produced gold can be attributed to the global forces underpinning the gold production system, such as the

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scarcity (of gold) and the need to expand the gold mining frontier. However, these forces are entangled with local socio-economic and political factors which will be explored in detail at a later stage. What is important to note here is that a change in agrarian structure, and a difficult socio-economic environment, which rendered industrial mining unviable, has influenced the expansion of ASGM activities in Zimbabwe. Consequently, ASGM is increasingly gaining recognition as an important part of Zimbabwe's economy due to its contribution to national gold output. This has emboldened calls by stakeholders in the ASGM sector (miners, politicians and local communities) for the formalisation of the activity and the decriminalisation of the artisanal miners who are generally viewed as lawless criminals.

This paper explores the dramatic growth of Zimbabwe's ASGM sector in the context of the fast track land and agrarian reforms implemented in 2000. It argues that while global pressures facing the global gold production network have been key to the expansion of the gold mining frontier (through ASGM) in Zimbabwe, local socio-economic and political circumstances have been a catalyst for the reconfiguration of the gold mining frontier. The dramatic increase in people engaged in ASGM and the resultant gold output have ushered in a new trajectory in Zimbabwe's gold mining sector, with new gold mining dynamics which are yet to be fully investigated. As a result, the gold mining sector is undergoing a transformation; the dualistic "big" industrial mines versus "small-scale" informal artisanal mines have been reconfigured. In some places, there is a fusion between the two, characterised by a symbiotic relationship involving, *inter alia*, tribute payment arrangements and technological transfer in the quest for survival. This has led to a hybrid structure where, in some places, artisanal miners operate alongside industrial mines while in others artisanal miners are allowed to access industrial shafts in exchange for tribute. The symbiotic relationship has also led to the sharing of (technology) and geological knowledge as a way of boosting production.

Whatever the nature of the unfolding relationships between "big" industrial gold mines and "small" artisanal workings, the current trajectory has favoured the growth of the ASGM sector which is already producing large amounts of gold. Conceptually, this collaboration and conflicts under new gold mining synergies requires an ontological inquiry into the changing nature and structure of gold and its production under changing ecological conditions. As this chapter will demonstrate, gold mining synergies are underpinned by various dynamics; in some places,

competition over increasingly scarce gold has resulted in fatal violence, while in others the “big” and “small” miners are collaborating. Tribute payment arrangements are also on the rise as “big” mines seek to tap into artisanal miners’ creativity to spur production at a time of great economic distress. Local political elites and Chinese businessmen with political connections to the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) political party have played a key role in the growth of the ASGM sector as sponsors of mining syndicates. They have also used their political connections to smuggle gold across Zimbabwe’s borders and to acquire mining claims. In some places, this has led to the eviction of poor miners from their shafts. In exploring the changing dynamics of gold production in Zimbabwe, this paper pays particular attention to the dramatic increase in ASGM activities which has reconfigured Zimbabwe’s gold mining sector. It utilises ethnographic data gathered in Mhondoro-Ngezi District in central Zimbabwe to highlight the changing dynamics of gold production during a changing agrarian situation.

## 15.2 ASGM IN ZIMBABWE: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The history of gold mining and processing in Zimbabwe predates the colonial occupation by Cecil John Rhodes’ British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1890 (Kritzinger 2012a, b; Phimister 1974; Beach 1988). The BSAC was an entity put together by Rhodes in the late nineteenth century in order to expand his gold mining monopoly from the rich gold-fields on the South African Rand to the north of the Limpopo River. It is not surprising that rumours of a “Second Rand” were abound before Rhodes’s pioneers’ incursion into pre-colonial Zimbabwe in 1890. However, although gold mining by local people was widespread across Zimbabwe, rumours of a “Second Rand” north of the Limpopo proved to be largely false. There were no large gold deposits similar to those discovered on the South African Rand. There is no need to explore the dramatic disappointment faced by Rhodes’ mercenaries here; there is already extensive literature on the issue (Millin 1936; Palmer 1977; Alexander 2006).

The history of gold mining in colonial Zimbabwe is thus characterised by the ecological limitations that led to the dramatic disappointments faced by many white adventurers and fortune seekers who trekked to the then Rhodesia in the late nineteenth century in search of gold. Although some gold was discovered with some limited commercial success, gold

discoveries in Zimbabwe were disappointingly insignificant compared to the vast finds on the Rand. This drove many ill-equipped adventurers into bankruptcy (*ibid.*). From as early as 1907, the BSAC was forced to turn the country from a mining economy to an agricultural economy by selling land cheaply to colonial settlers. It is not surprising that Rhodesia became famous for its agricultural produce rather than gold as had been initially anticipated.

According to the Ministry of Mines of Zimbabwe, “gold mining and exploration in Zimbabwe has been going on from ancient times and it is estimated that a third (about 700 tonnes) of all historical gold production was mined locally from the seventh century until the introduction of mechanised mining methods with the arrival of Europeans about a century ago. There are over 4000 recorded gold deposits, nearly all of them located on ancient workings” ([Mines.gov.zw](http://Mines.gov.zw)). Zimbabwe thus has a unique history of gold mining which is extensively documented (Bent 1896; Beach 1988; Kritzinger 2012a, b). Local people produced significant amounts of gold before colonialism which led to a trade network stretching from the interior of the country to the Far East. The legend of King Solomon’s mines, popularised by colonial adventurers such as Rider Haggard (2002), is a testimony to the above.

Due to the history of ancient gold workings, gold mining during and after the colonial era tended to rely on the geological knowledge of local people, and hence, most new mines tended to be located on the so-called ancient workings. According to Kritzinger (2012b: 23), “many early colonial miners praised the technical skill of their unknown predecessors” who observed that “the work was as good as any we can do with all our modern appliances” (McIntosh 1868: 208, quoted in Kritzinger 2012a). As a result, limited geological surveys were undertaken to map out the resource beyond these known workings (Mugumbate 2010). According to Menzel (1934: 7, quoted in Kritzinger 2012b), “former prospecting success made colonial exploration of the schist belts largely a matter of looking for ancient workings.” By the advent of colonial occupation, ecological limitations undermined the development of a vibrant commercial gold mining sector as anticipated, hence the dramatic disappointments faced by colonial-era prospectors.

The expansion of the gold mining frontier in recent times has led to an increase in gold output mainly due to the growth of the ASGM sector as industrial mines have been struggling due to ecological limitations (scarcity of gold) and a difficult socio-economic environment, making

commercial gold mining unprofitable. The expansion of the ASGM sector has been boosted by technological innovation and capital inflows from the Chinese and other investors. Below, I explore the dynamics of Zimbabwe's artisanal gold mining sector within a context of a changing agrarian situation, the rapid growth of the ASGM sector and the relative decline of industrial mining.

### 15.3 ZIMBABWE'S NEW GOLD MINING FRONTIER

Zimbabwe's FTLRP, implemented in 2000, radically transformed property relations in favour of a diverse group of beneficiaries beyond the minority white farmers who owned most of the productive land. Since some of the newly redistributed lands were located on the mineral-rich great dyke geological formation (located in the middle of the country), this allowed newly resettled households access to minerals which were formerly enclosed to them. As a result, some of the newly resettled households are engaged in both peasant farming and ASGM (Mkodzongi and Spiegel 2018). The opening up of the countryside during the radical land reforms has thus enhanced access to mineral resources by people from diverse classes and genders (Moyo 2011; Mkodzongi 2016). These include peasants, unemployed youths, a diverse group of local entrepreneurs, politicians and, more recently, the Chinese. The Chinese involvement in Zimbabwe's ASGM sector has boosted production due to the introduction of a more efficient portable hammer mill which is gradually replacing the local stump mill which has historically dominated the milling operations of artisanal miners. The Chinese work ethic characterised by long working hours under bonded wage labour conditions is also reconfiguring labour relations by deepening the exploitation of miners. This has led to some resentment towards the Chinese by local people.

Zimbabwe's land and agrarian reforms have served as a springboard for the dramatic increase in the number of people engaged in ASGM and the growth of the ASGM sector. The new gold mining frontier which has unfolded in the aftermath of the land reform is thus characterised by the rapid expansion of the ASGM sector and a declining industrial mining sector due to the difficult economic situation currently obtaining in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's industrial gold mining sector, which was the basis for the colonial occupation of the country by British settlers, has significantly

declined due to a difficult operating environment and government policies which do not allow mining companies to retain 100% of their foreign currency earnings. Large mines such as Metallon Gold and Falcon Gold have closed some of their mines due to a combination of economic and geological factors which have undermined the viability of their operations.

While industrial mines have struggled, the ASGM sector has experienced a boom due to local socio-economic, political and ecological conditions favourable to them. These are explored below. First, increased mobility across former white-owned commercial farming areas has allowed peasants and unemployed youth access to mineral-rich deposits which were formerly enclosed to them under colonial-era land tenure arrangements. The location of gold deposits in shallow quartz veins has made the exploitation of such deposits easy for ASGM operators, although this might not be commercially viable for large-scale operators. Second, the introduction of local content during the implementation of Zimbabwe's indigenisation and local empowerment regulations (Mkodzongi 2016) in 2010 which compelled foreign-owned companies to sell a 51% stake to indigenous Zimbabweans influenced the participation of local people in the extractive sector. Third, Zimbabwe's expanding gold mining sector which followed the fast track land reform was underpinned by a "liberation and anti-colonial" narrative popularised by the ZANU PF government at the height of its confrontation with Western countries.

As a result, conflicts between mining companies and the Zimbabwe government emerged. At the height of such confrontations, the then President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, argued that minerals were *matumbu enyika* (the offals or intestines of the country) whose extraction should benefit indigenous Zimbabweans. Such high-level political pronouncements, especially during elections, influenced grassroots discourses over local ownership of mineral resources. Local people deployed such discourses to legitimise their artisanal gold mining activities. Resultantly, the new gold mining frontier was conceptualised as a "liberated" zone of "free" extraction without the need for legal paperwork. People engaged in ASGM claimed that *nyika yakazarurwa* (the country has been opened) from colonial enclosure. The moral economy of their extractive activities was based on the need to reverse colonial histories of land alienation and enclosure.

It is thus not surprising that youths engaged in ASGM chanted anti-colonial slogans such as *pamberi nekuchera* (forward with digging) and

*pasi nevadzvanyiriri* (down with oppressors) when occupying privately owned mine claims. They also viewed their so-called illegal activities as a recovery of their ancestral lands and minerals. Shared histories of land dispossession and enclosure were invoked to justify artisanal gold mining activities. As part of the implementation of indigenisation policies, the government offered unemployed youths mining claims and encouraged them to form cooperatives in order to take advantage of the country's de facto new mining code embedded within the indigenisation and local empowerment regulations. These policies promoted the entry of indigenous Zimbabweans into the mining sector by forcing industrial mining companies to sell a 51% stake to them and to state-owned entities. Where such Zimbabweans could not afford to pay for the indigenous stake, private companies were pressured to provide vendor financing to such entities as was the case with Platinum Group Metal (PGM) mining companies which I examined in detail elsewhere (Mkodzongi 2016). Companies which failed to comply with the indigenisation regulations were threatened with closure, and part of their claim area was repossessed by the government.

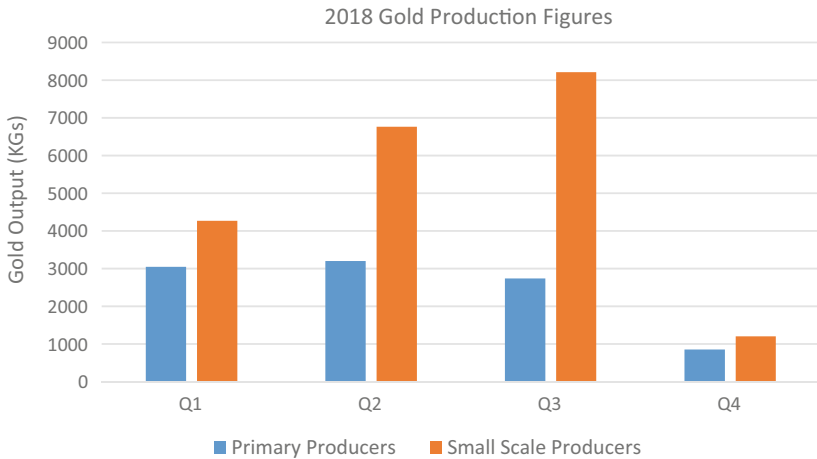
Zimbabwe's ASGM remains largely informal, although a minority of operators can afford to apply for a claim and acquire a mining permit. The reason the majority of ASGM operators remain illegal is that the process of acquiring the requisite paperwork in order to comply with environmental regulations is expensive, thus forcing most people to operate without a licence. Despite the illegality of the activity, in recent years ASGM has grown to become the major source of Zimbabwe's gold output, surpassing the large industrial mines whose production has been steadily declining in the last 20 years. Due to its informal nature and the widespread gold smuggling activities, especially to South Africa, quarterly and annual gold production figures are very difficult to estimate. However, figures from the Fidelity Printers and Refineries (a government agency with the sole mandate to buy gold) show that in the last few years, gold deliveries from the ASGM sector have surpassed those from the industrial mines. Such figures could be much higher if gold smuggled to South Africa and other destinations was to be accounted for.

Several factors have influenced the dramatic rise and the upward trajectory of the ASGM production trend. According to the *Financial Gazette* (11 January 2018), the government provided 40 million US dollars which targeted 179 artisanal gold mining syndicates with the aim of improving their operations. This support has influenced social differentiation in the

sector and the emergence of some small-scale gold capitalists with enough capital to procure equipment, hire labour and invest in other businesses. Below are figures which show the changing dynamics of gold production in Zimbabwe (Fig. 15.1).

The dramatic growth of the ASGM sector, demonstrated by the figures provided above, has led the government to gradually embrace the sector, although this has fallen short of formalisation. Although the government has encouraged youths to form syndicates and to apply for mining claims, such youths have not been provided with adequate support to formalise their operations and to comply with environmental regulations. Their activities thus continue to take place on an informal basis and rely on political patronage for their tenure and protection rather than legal paperwork. This has left them vulnerable to evictions by the government, while those who are more politically connected can acquire the necessary paperwork to mine legally.

In more recent times, the government has shifted its earlier policies which criminalised ASGM to accepting that artisanal gold mining is a strategic sector which brings in the much-needed foreign currency into the country through gold exports. To demonstrate the government's ambiguous attitude towards ASGM, it continues to actively promote the



**Fig. 15.1** ASGM vs primary gold production in Zimbabwe, 2018 (*Source* Government of Zimbabwe)



sector by, for example, providing funds for mechanisation to qualifying miners. Government agencies such as the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) are also running pilot projects to help artisanal miners to comply with environmental regulations through the reduction of fees levied for the undertaking of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) in a bid to regularise and formalise the sector. However, ASGM remains informal and illegal despite the government's recent change in attitude towards the sector. A major question that remains unanswered is, why has the government failed to formalise the sector when it is now the biggest producer of gold?

There is no easy answer to the above question, suffice to say that some local media claims that some high-profile political figures who are engaged in ASGM are reluctant to formalise the sector as this will expose their gold smuggling syndicates (NewZWire 14 February 2019). They further claim that politicians engaged in ASGM are deliberately undermining the industrial mining sector in favour of ASGM as it is beneficial to them. This is cited as the reason why the ASGM sector has expanded rapidly while industrial mines are struggling to acquire spare parts and pay bills due to foreign currency shortages. However, it is difficult to verify the above claims. What can be said with certainty is that ecological limitations and difficult economic conditions are behind the decline in industrial mining. Moreover, the technology to deepen mineshafts is expensive to acquire, leading many miners to close mineshafts or rent them out to ASGM operators.

Under a *de facto* formalisation programme supported by the government, mining syndicates were encouraged to formally register and allowed to operate on mine claims owned by industrial mines. A report in the government-owned *Chronicle* (16 October 2015) indicated that 1400 artisanal miners were formalised in Silobela and Kwekwe under Freda Rebecca Mine. In Shurugwi, 1000 artisanal miners were formalised under Falcon Gold Mine while in Mazowe, around 1000 were formalised under Metallon Gold Company's claims. In an interview (Harare 23 March 2019), Denga, a Riozim Mine official, indicated that the company provides training to artisanal miners operating on its claims and allows them to mine as long as they sell their gold to the company.

Another challenge facing the industrial mines has to do with the government policy which does not allow them to keep 100% of their foreign currency earnings. They are only allowed to keep 55% in foreign currency, and the remainder of their earnings are converted into the local bond

notes currency. This has undermined the viability of their operations due to spiralling costs which they cannot afford. Since artisanal miners do not require large amounts of capital to cover upfront mining costs such as labour and machinery, the current economic environment is favourable to them. This has contributed to their success during a period of great economic distress.

## 15.4 CONCEPTUALISING THE NEW MINING FRONTIER

In their analysis of the global trends in gold mining, Geenen and Verbrugge (Chapter 2, this volume) have proposed a new theoretical framework which they have dubbed the Global Gold Production System. This new theoretical proposition is an attempt to better understand the emerging trends and tendencies underpinning the global gold mining sector which is increasingly characterised by new gold mining crystallizations. Building on earlier work by other scholars (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986; Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994; Bair 2008; Coe et al. 2008; Henderson et al. 2002), their theoretical proposition highlights the emerging dynamics underpinning the global gold mining industry such as global expansion, technological innovation and the increasing reliance on informal labour in ASGM operations.

The dynamics underpinning gold mining crystallizations are influenced by both global and local factors. While some of these dynamics can be generalised across different countries and regions, there is need for a nuanced understanding of how local socio-economic, ecological and political factors have influenced the global gold production system. As the case studies in this volume demonstrate, gold mining crystallizations have been influenced by diverse factors, some of which cannot be generalised. For example, in Zimbabwe, expansion of the gold mining sector has been largely influenced by the change in the agrarian structure which allowed landless peasants access to ecologically rich lands. Furthermore, the implementation of indigenisation and local empowerment regulations (promulgated in 2010) had the effect of allowing unemployed youths to engage in ASGM and thus boosted gold production and the growth of the sector. More importantly, improved mobility across areas that were historically enclosed and inaccessible has further boosted ASGM activities and helped in the widening of the gold mining frontier. An important point is that ASGM was historically limited to dilapidated mineshafts or river beds. However, the land reform opened up large areas of formerly

enclosed lands to prospecting miners and led to new gold discoveries in newly resettled areas (Mkodzongi and Spiegel 2018). This had the effect of freeing up gold that had been enclosed under a colonial-era agrarian structure.

As a result, farmers who were resettled in gold-rich areas are now engaged in both mining and smallholder agriculture, while others are leasing their lands to artisanal miners as a way of gaining income from mining. As noted earlier, the involvement of the Chinese has intensified the widening of the frontier through capital investment and technological innovation which has boosted gold production. However, like in many African countries, Chinese involvement in ASGM is both celebrated and despised due to their competition with indigenous capitalists involved in mining. Anti-Chinese discourses have thus emerged in favour of indigenous operators. These sentiments are underpinned by claims that the Chinese exploit local people through poor remuneration and bad working conditions. However, it is important to note here that exploitative labour relations underpin most ASGM operations and are not only associated with the Chinese. Across many ASGM syndicates, those who do most of the labour-intensive work are paid very little. This has led to many miners moving across the gold mining frontier in search of better opportunities. In some places, miners have been forced to exit the frontier in pursuit of more remunerative livelihoods.

Our work in central Zimbabwe (Mkodzongi and Spiegel 2018) has explored the dynamics of ASGM, including how mobilities across the gold mining frontier are reshaping rural livelihoods, labour and gold production. A key feature of our findings is that artisanal miners are highly mobile, moving across the frontier in search of better livelihoods, opportunities and working conditions. Some miners exited the frontier (Bryceson 2018) in search of other livelihood opportunities, only to return a few months or years later, while others went back to pursue agrarian-based livelihoods. Those who became successful in their mining careers expanded their operations by acquiring gold milling and processing equipment (Interview with Gora 7 June 2017). Others acquired new gold claims, expanding their workforce and investing in other businesses. Success is thus influenced by a combination of luck (in terms of finding gold), political connections and access to capital. Our work (Mkodzongi and Spiegel 2018) in central Zimbabwe indicates that the frontier is a contested terrain, underpinned by a class struggle, pitting the poor and mostly exploited labourers against their syndicate bosses.

However, despite the above, Zimbabwe's gold mining frontier is rapidly expanding during a period of economic distress.

## 15.5 THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF ASGM

The widespread engagement in ASGM by a diverse group of people (peasants, unemployed youths, security officers, the Chinese, etc.) has led to the rapid development of the ASGM sector, including a move towards mechanisation and social differentiation. In terms of how such people are socially organised, our work in central Zimbabwe (Mkodzongi and Spiegel 2018) shows that most ASGM miners operate in so-called syndicates, comprising a sponsor who provides capital, and labourers who dig for a percentage of the finds (Interview with Chitewe 13 March 2016). Furthermore, we note that mining involves people of diverse ages, those who do the labour-intensive work of digging tend to be young men driven into mining by the dearth of other sources of income given the difficult economic conditions currently obtaining in Zimbabwe. Sponsors tend to dominate the ASM value chain due to their ability to hire labour, buy gold at cheaper prices and resale it at a profit. Similar tendencies have been observed elsewhere (Chipangura 2019).

Our research further demonstrates that a large amount of gold produced by artisanal miners tends to be smuggled to South Africa (Interview with Tichi 16 April 2017), making it difficult for one to estimate the amount of gold produced in the ASGM sector annually. However, what is important to note is that under the new gold mining frontier, the ASGM sector has grown exponentially to surpass large industrial mines which have been struggling due to the difficult economic situation facing Zimbabwe.

The complex set of relationships underpinning the new gold mining frontier highlighted earlier point to new gold mining synergies which can be difficult to generalise across locations, provinces or countries. In the Kwekwe and Kadoma areas, gold mining is characterised by violence due to competition over finite gold resources. Since most artisanal miners operate without legal paperwork, this often leads to conflicts, especially when they find gold in a place owned by someone else. Conflicts can be a result of opportunistic gangs (locally known as *mbimbos*, *magombiro* or *mashurugwi*), attacking miners after a gold discovery (Interview with Chari 20 November 2014). Such gangs often operate in collaboration with politically connected individuals to acquire legal paperwork that

can be used to evict miners from a productive mine. Conflicts can also emerge among a group of people operating under one syndicate often sharing kinship ties. Such conflicts can be a result of a syndicate leader failing to share the proceeds from mining equally among syndicate members. In some places, a claim owner might find his claim being worked by miners without his approval. There are three potential ways the conflict can be resolved. First, the claim owner might demand a percentage of the mined ore in order to allow the miners to continue mining in the disputed pit or claim. Second, a claim owner can drive out the illegal miners depending on how politically connected they are. Finally, in some cases, the illegal occupier can utilise political connections to resist eviction.

In some instances, politics can be a source of conflict, especially when individuals use their political connections to sponsor illegal miners to occupy privately owned mines. This is often characterised by the use of indigenization narratives to force especially foreign mine owners to allow local people to mine on their claim. This was especially the case in Chegutu in central Zimbabwe where local youths were sponsored by a local politician to occupy a private mine. This led to a conflict which lasted for many weeks and resulted in some fatalities when the owners of the mine backfilled some shafts without giving notice to artisanal miners operating underground (*The Herald* 4 January 2016). However, it is becoming common for struggling industrial mines to resort to tribute collection due to their inability to replace ageing mining machinery and to procure fuel, given the economic challenges facing Zimbabwe. For example, my fieldwork near the battlefields area in central Zimbabwe showed how artisanal miners were allowed to access an abandoned mine owned by the RIOZIM mining company (Interview with Shumba 3 March 2019). The situation at the mine was widely publicised when part of the mine was flooded leading to the deaths of nearly 50 miners. The accident which was declared a national disaster demonstrated the complexities surrounding the new gold commodity frontier in Zimbabwe.

Before the disaster, the real owners of Cricket Mine were not known. It looked like a typical artisanal mining camp with no clear owner, but a self-organised committee overseeing the operations of various syndicates operating at the mine. It was only during the disaster which received widespread media attention that RIOZIM claimed ownership of the mine. Very little was known about the arrangements they had with artisanal miners. However, interviews with the miners like Murakati (22 March

2019) showed that a person whose identity was not known was collecting tribute from miners. His links to the RIOZIM mining company could not be confirmed during interviews as we were not able to interview him. This demonstrates the often-complicated synergies between the large formal mines and the mostly informal artisanal miners which are sometimes ignored in literature. In interview with a miner, Chigamba (24 March 2019), it emerged that in some places, industrial mines can simply abandon mineshafts and allow illegal miners to operate them without demanding tribute. This can happen when mineshafts are too expensive to maintain due to scarcity and ecological limitations. This can lead to a “free for all” situation where everyone has access on an egalitarian basis and is free to enter or exit the mine site. This was the case at Blue Grass Mine near the town of Kadoma, a place I visited during fieldwork in 2014. When I interviewed one miner, Banda (27 November 2014), I was told that the mine had been forcibly acquired from the owner by ZANU PF political party aligned youths as part of an empowerment process. During my stay at the mine camp, it was obvious that the youths were supported by the ruling ZANU PF political party. Mining activities were characterised by chanting of political party slogans with youths encouraged to confirm their allegiance to the ruling party before commencing mining operations. However, during an interview with Bonzo (23 November 2014), I discovered that anyone could come and mine as long as they were a young person from Zimbabwe. Furthermore, miners could enter and exit the mine as they wished.

The above situation was very common across Zimbabwe, where an abandoned mine was given to the youths, or a mine owner was forced off their mine for political reasons. Zimbabwe’s ASGM sector is thus influenced by diverse socio-economic and political factors which in some instances have encouraged collaboration between “large and small,” or conflicts between the two. The outcome is that ASGM has expanded rapidly at the back of radical land reforms which allow peasants and other unemployed youths access to ecologically rich lands by artisanal miners. However, the difficult socio-economic environment characterised by distortions in the financial markets, electricity shortages and declining ore reserves has negatively affected the operations of industrial mines.

## 15.6 CONCLUSIONS

While the history of gold mining in Zimbabwe dates back to the pre-colonial era, the dynamics of gold production have dramatically changed in the last two decades. The country's gold mining frontier is underpinned by the dramatic growth of the ASGM sector at a time when a difficult socio-economic environment has undermined the viability of industrial mines. Industrial mines are struggling to invest in technological innovations to reach gold ores which are increasingly inaccessible due to increasing depths. This has led to the expansion of the gold mining frontier through ASGM. Rising demand for gold during a period of ecological scarcity has led to new dynamics in the gold mining sector. These are characterised by abandoned mineshafts, the emergence of tribute mining and de facto joint venture production arrangements between industrial mines and the ASGM sector in order to meet production targets. The involvement of the Chinese as both mine operators and vendors of mining equipment has helped to intensify production in the ASGM sector.

The dramatic growth of the ASGM sector at a time when large industrial mines are in decline has led to increasing demands for the formalisation of the sector. While the government has so far failed to formalise the sector, debates at higher political levels seem to favour formalisation. Widespread incidents of violence, environmental destruction and accidents have also emboldened calls for the formalisation and monitoring of ASGM activities. The dramatic growth of Zimbabwe's ASGM is thus inextricably linked to the implementation of land and agrarian reforms in 2000, which freed up mineral-rich lands previously enclosed under a colonial-era agrarian structure. This has contributed to the widening of the gold mining frontier and intensification of ASGM activities across newly resettled lands.

This unprecedented expansion of ASGM has provided a source of livelihoods to unemployed people and poor peasants at a time of difficult economic circumstances. However, this has also contributed to extensive environmental destruction which will likely undermine livelihoods in the long term. The widening of the gold mining frontier is underpinned by exploitative labour relations sponsored by global mining capital under a new wave of primitive accumulation of capital. A local capitalist class with political connections has played the role of a comprador bourgeoisie facilitating the expansion of ASGM and the ramping up of gold production. The rise of ASGM to prominence during a changing agrarian situation in

Zimbabwe demonstrates how the gold mining frontier has unfolded and its implications on national gold output. Its long-term dynamics require further investigation beyond the scope of this paper, suffice to say that increasing scarcity and ecological limitations have produced diverse gold mining crystallisations beyond the dualistic structure popularised in literature. The case studies in this volume demonstrate that the global gold mining sector is undergoing dynamic changes which are influenced by diverse factors, some localised and some global. This has shaped the way the global gold mining frontier has unfolded across different locations, regions and countries.

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## INTERVIEWS

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- Chari interviewed at Etina on 20 November 2014.
- Chigamba interviewed at Battlefields on 24 March 2019.
- Chitewe interviewed at Lincoln Mine on 13 March 2016.
- Denga interviewed in Harare 23 March 2019.
- Gora interviewed at Lincoln Mine on 7 June 2017.
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