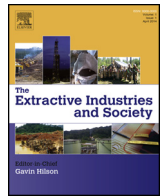




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Extractive Industries and Society

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/exis



Original article

Duty versus agency in the security state of Zimbabwe: Soldiers' deployment in *Chiadzwa* diamond mining

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 September 2016

Received in revised form 14 December 2016

Accepted 14 December 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Artisanal mining

Soldiers

Diamond

Violence

Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

The deployment of soldiers' in diamond mining areas in Zimbabwe is beginning to receive much scholarly attention, partly because scholars researching on such issues are mainly driven by the meta-narratives of 'artisanal miners', popularly known as "magweja" in the Zimbabwean context. In many cases soldiers are presented as perpetrators of violence within deployed areas, with "magweja" and villagers, as victims of military deployment. While this is not untrue, this article explores the ways in which soldiers developed mutual relationships with "magweja", friendships and interactions with villagers, including sexual relationships in the communities surrounding the diamond area. However, we assert that these relationships were always implicitly characterised by unequal power dynamics in which the authority of deployed soldiers was ominously present and fear sometimes informed the actions of villagers. Soldiers' power was always materially represented by the authority vested in them by a powerful demagogic state. It was visibly represented through their combat uniforms, and the gun as part of their daily standing orders, including other soldiering routines such as patrols, and guard duties. We argue that even beyond these circumscribed conditions of relations building, the people behind the combat uniforms had their own agencies that never always resonated with that of the state. Their actions were informed by the chain of command and the consequences wrought by failing to abide by standing orders. In this article, we illuminate those hidden narratives and expose the manner in which the dictatorial state instrumentalises its armed forces despite the disparate personal agencies of those soldiers which are suppressed by the very nature of military service. The paper is based on interviews with soldiers, "magweja" and villagers.

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1. Introduction

Dominant narratives on *Chiadzwa* diamond mining have largely been driven by those of the victims of violence perpetrated by the state and its security apparatus operating in the diamond area before and after what has been termed the 'free for all' period (Saunders, 2016; Nyamunda, 2016). The available literature has largely neglected examining soldiers beyond their roles as conduits of the state, particularly the ways in which they were deployed and the manner in which they were allowed to operate. This paper reveals how the deployed soldiers not only represented state authority as its security officials, but also forged all kinds of relationships with various people in the communities in which they operated. We argue that soldiers narratives in deployment zones cannot be that of violence alone, it is also about other

human-social relations such as making friends, money, establishing consensual sexual partners with local women, and even integrating into the ordinary and everyday. However, the ordinary relations still remained strongly informed by lingering power relationships vested in state authority which increasingly manifested in exploitation and violence. We argue that their behaviour was not necessarily or always out of personal choice but a function of the orders of the chain of command and expected protocol. By tapping into the stories of their experiences, the paper thus identifies their agency in ways that reveal how they also made emotional and rational choices as social agents within the community, but at certain points deployed their authority and the power behind the uniform to claim some level of control over unfolding events inside and beyond the gaze of the state at *Chiadzwa*. It examines the ways in which soldiers forged social relationships with the *magweja/makorokoza* (as diamond traders), and women, but also the way in which they fit into the everyday existence of 'village life' in manners in which they derived social and economic benefits.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2016.12.004>

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Thus, while the traditional understanding of the military is that it resembles a 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961), with a particular 'military culture' (Lande, 2007), the ways in which soldiers forged and established social and sexual relations within the diamond community area reveals that the military institution is not as closed as we may think. In fact, even though soldiers are trained to legitimately use violence on behalf of the state, they are also humane, and social beings. Thus the ways in which they negotiated with civilians in their deployed areas, reveals their humanness in the context of state deployment.

It is important to understand that the ways in which these soldiers acted within the diamond field was also necessitated by the deteriorating Zimbabwean economic situation. At a time of their deployment in the Chiadzwa diamond area, Zimbabwe was experiencing an economic crisis, so the Zimbabwean military operations were largely affected by the Zimbabwean economic crisis. Soldiers lacked deployment resources such as army food rations, combat uniform and patrol boots for example (Maringira, 2016). Hence, the deployment to Chiadzwa provided soldiers and police with an opportunity to plug into the informal economic opportunities emerging in Chiadzwa diamond mining area. This article reveal the ways in which soldiers forged with civilians. It looks at how the economic crisis affected the soldiers' modus operandi, particularly the changes in their relationship with the communities they encountered. The paper is based on the stories of soldiers, *magweja*/makorokoza narratives in Zimbabwe, between 2006 and 2012.

2. A note on the research process: complicating the orthodox approach to Chiadzwa

The paper is strongly informed by the authors' personal experiences in Chiadzwa and its social environment. This shaped the ways in which we accessed our participants and how this influenced our ideas as presented in the article. The first author was a soldier in the Zimbabwe National Army for just over twelve years. He was once deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo war (1998–2002), a story which may not be part of the paper but which nevertheless shapes his understanding of the ways in which soldiers get deployed and the everyday routines involved.

The first author also had colleagues from his days of training and deployment in the DRC who were deployed in Marange during the unfolding history of Marange diamond mining. Hence the networks he had with the soldiers deployed in Chiadzwa has helped him to access these men, who found social and emotional spaces in their conversations. The military background of the first author has helped us to interpret the soldiers' stories, some of which was informed by 'military language' and discourses. Thus it is important to note that when soldiers are talking about 'briefings', 'patrols', 'passwords' on guard post, pouch, 'ambush', 'magazine', foresight tip, centre-bottom of the white patch etc., it becomes much easier when another soldier interprets it. The first author did the interviews alone with the soldiers, in the spaces of their choice. This was intentional, as we knew that, for participants who understand their stories as 'secrets' and as part of their work in which they were trained, it was important for them to speak with another former soldier. The approach proved to be a successful one, as soldiers were comfortable with sharing their experiences, revealing the ways in which they were deployed and how they later engaged state authority, *magweja*, *ma* buyer in the Chiadzwa diamond field as well as the surrounding communities.

In analysing the stories, the first author reconciled the soldiers' narratives with those of the civilians, most of whom were interviewed by the second author. This process was undertaken to reconcile competing agencies, to gain insight into the perspectives of perceived perpetrators and perceived victims. In

the process this helped us to analyse the narratives with existing scholarship which emphasises that soldiers were inherently violent in the Chiadzwa diamond mining field. We do not deny that many atrocities were perpetrated by state functionaries (soldiers, police and Central Intelligence Organisation), but our purpose is to give voice, not only to the civilians whose stories has been told but very rarely in relation to and directly juxtaposed to the narratives of the soldiers, whose actions have hitherto been viewed as inhuman and lacking empathy for the victims. This paper provides us with an opportunity to understand why, in spite of popular dissent against a predatory state, soldiers are still compelled to carry out their duties. It also provides us with an opportunity to understand their personal motivations in a context of murky soldier-civilian interaction and suggests that this is not as neat and straightforward as implied in literature that decries state violence against civilians. We seek to ask if indeed the soldier himself, even as a functionary of the state, is not himself its unintended victim.

In addition to soldiers' stories, the second author who has had an experience of living close to the Chiadzwa diamond mining area provided a vivid image of the field, and the observations he had during his stay. Thus the second author interviewed other villagers, *magweja* and *ma* buyer. In their stories, the second author was able to link some of the stories to past observations in Chiadzwa area. The participants agreed to share their stories with us and in turn, we kept identities anonymous, only using pseudonyms. In analysing our data, we used thematic analysis, in which our themes and text coherence were drawn from respondents' narratives.

3. Reading Chiadzwa: the silenced and ignored agency of the security forces

The dominant narrative on Chiadzwa has focused around the state and its abuse of power in Chiadzwa. It traces the trajectory of events from the publicisation of the existence of diamonds, the creation of the diamond rush and the experiences of the over thirty five thousand artisanal miners in Chiadzwa during the 'free for all' period between 2006 and 2008 (Nyamunda, 2016; Nyota and Sibanda, 2012; Muchadenyika, 2015). Other works also analyse the factors leading to the violent expulsion of artisanal miners and traders from Chiadzwa as the state began the process of regularising the diamond mining industry (Katsaura, 2010a; Nyamunda and Mukwambo, 2012). Much of the existing literature takes stock of human rights violations in the form of killings, maiming and arrest of illegal miners and the displacement of rural communities in Marange (Human Rights Watch, 2009). It also examines the political and economic legacies of the state's take-over of mining operations and granting of licences to its favoured operators which included both state and private companies.

The process of regularisation was mysterious, even under the watch of President Robert Mugabe and his closest confidants who operated in secrecy and made unilateral decisions over the award of mining tenders (Saunders, 2016). The result was that favoured private companies and those formed by the state security apparatus such as the defence forces and the police, including Ministers and others managed to get tenders. As such, favoured private and foreign companies and the military elite presided over mining operations. Scholars have viewed this as part of the securitization and 'militarisation of the state' (McGregor, 2013; Alexander, 2013; Maringira and Masiya, 2016). These military operations within the diamond field were also shrouded in secrecy to the extent that no-one knew the extent of the business operations that were taking place. This again was reflective of elite predation of the country's diamond resources. But the very accurate dominant narrative was that the state used its security

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