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Contested Diamond Certification: Reconfiguring Global and National Interests in Zimbabwe's Marange Fields

Sam Spiegel

School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh

sam.spiegel@ed.ac.uk

Abstract:

This study examines the political uses of “conflict diamond” discourse in global debates about commodity certification and socially responsible mining in Zimbabwe. Engaging critical literature on “conflict-free” corporate branding initiatives, the study focuses on representations of conflict in Marange, in Zimbabwe's eastern highlands. In 2006, a diamond rush in Marange drew in tens of thousands of artisanal miners from across Zimbabwe as well as foreigners, and the government initiated military crackdowns in 2008. In a highly contested vote in 2009, the international government delegates who comprised the voting members in the Kimberley Process Certification System (KPCS) ruled that conflict in Marange did not meet the KPCS definitions of “conflict diamond.” The study examines discourses of key stakeholders in the multinational diamond industry, human rights organizations, policymakers as well as artisanal miners in Zimbabwe between 2006 and 2014. The article argues that advocacies *against* diamond certification as well as advocacies *favouring* certification *both* tended to overlook the interests of artisanal miners, focusing narrowly on certain forms of conflict while associating artisanal mining with illicitness. The Marange case illustrates how conventional discourses on “conflict diamonds” not only obscure the complex nature of conflicts in contemporary capitalist accumulation processes; they also risk contributing to new forms of structural violence. This analysis highlights the need to pay careful attention to how global commodity certification discourses inter-relate with political agendas at multiple scales. The study draws attention to dilemmas for geographers when portraying the interests of marginalized groups in – and affected by – the diamond mining sector.

Key words: commoditization; global certification; conflict diamonds; extractive sector; Zimbabwe

Highlights

- The case of Zimbabwe challenges the diamond industry's global certification scheme
- Both sides of a global debate about Marange's diamonds simplified "local" concerns
- Narrow technical focus on "conflict commodities" obscured artisanal miners' rights
- Certifying Marange's diamonds revealed fragmented geopolitical and national interests
- Critical geography should analyze commodity certification tools as political instruments of contested capitalism

"We want to go back. Our families have lived there many years. Why can't we have the right to diamonds too? We should be allowed to go back to Marange."

- *Artisanal miner, Harare, May 16, 2009*

1. Introduction

In the 1990s, violence in Sierra Leone and Angola led to a proliferation of literature on diamond mining and reasons for strict governance of global capitalist commodity chains. Recognizing that civil wars had been linked with diamonds traded by rebel forces, with diamond revenues used to carry out atrocities, the term "conflict diamonds" was coined late in the 1990s and popularized in the 2000s (Falls, 2011). In order to prevent boycotts and retain confidence in globally traded diamonds, the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) was established in 2002 by the United Nations General Assembly with support from the multinational diamond mining industry, governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as a global system to ensure that diamond trade would not be threatened by association with conflict (Grant, 2011; Smillie, 2010). The KPCS has since frequently been celebrated as a major breakthrough in socially responsible mining and an "innovation in global governance and conflict prevention" (Haufler, 2010, p. 403). In recent years, however, a growing body of geographical literature has called into question the political and ethical foundations for branding commodities as "fair trade" or "conflict-free" (Schlosser, 2013; Goodman, 2004;

Schroeder, 2010). Recent literature on diamond mining in Africa argues that mainstream policies for promoting global commodity certification have reinforced and re-entrenched existing power inequalities, privileging multinational corporations rather than providing an avenue for promoting social justice (Le Billon, 2012; Zulu and Wilson, 2009).

This article carries forward this debate by examining the politics of certification in Zimbabwe after alluvial diamond deposits were discovered in 2006 in Marange District, in Zimbabwe's eastern highlands. Marange's diamond rush represented a major new development for the global diamond industry as well for government officials in Zimbabwe. Compared with gold and other precious resources such as platinum, diamonds had not previously been a significant feature of Zimbabwe's economic development, albeit with one prominent exception: it had been widely observed that interest in looting diamonds abroad led to Zimbabwe's controversial involvement in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Ness, 2001; Tamm, 2002). The diamond find by Marange's villagers began to write a new chapter in Zimbabwe's resource extraction history, with the scramble for diamonds involving tens of thousands of people from across Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries. This scramble quickly led to competing visions of what a legitimate capitalist commodity chain could look like and how alluvial diamonds sitting near the earth's surface – those that are easily extracted without mechanized equipment – could be politicized.

Within weeks of the start of Marange's diamond rush, spokespeople from the World Diamond Council, a consortium representing the major diamond mining companies and retailers globally, portrayed Marange as a chaotic local space in need of stricter surveillance and control, criticizing smuggling as a rampant problem (Onstad, 2007). In February 2007, a report from Global Witness and Amnesty International warned that illegal diamond trafficking from Zimbabwe threatened the good image of U.S. diamond retailers (Amnesty International and Global Witness, 2007). Concerns about illegality led to multiple interventions by international diamond certification experts between 2007 and 2010, with representatives from the KPCS issuing a series of recommendations that sought to bolster the power of the state to stop illegal diamond mining and illegal trade (Chikane, 2010). In 2009, following military

shootings in Marange, global policymakers debated whether diamonds mined in Zimbabwe should be certified by the KPCS and allowed to be traded in the international market. In a split decision, voting members of the KPCS – comprised of government delegates from countries around the world – ruled that Zimbabwe’s diamonds could be legitimately traded (Chikane, 2010).

While recent literature emphasizes the importance of Marange’s diamonds to military officials (Towriss, 2013) and the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) (Kriger, 2012), critical scrutiny has yet to be given to the discourses of the global mining industry, human rights organisations and government agents themselves when unpacking the global conflict in Marange, and even less attention has been given to the responses of artisanal miners. The case of Marange, while idiosyncratic given the severity of Zimbabwe’s economic and political crisis in recent years (Hammar et al., 2010), provides a dramatic example of how global capitalist processes can interact with local political circumstances to create new political struggles, where “the messy complexity of development and contested capitalism” (Plumridge Bedi and Thieme, 2013) merits scrutiny. The present article focuses on how discourses of conflict diamonds in Marange exposed fragmented priorities nationally - including within the ruling party, ZANU-PF, itself - as well as globally, showing multiple scales of interests inter-relating during the processes of securing a commodity chain worth billions of dollars. The article draws on the author’s doctoral research covering a seven year period of mining sector politics in Zimbabwe between 2006 and 2013, including document reviews and interviews with key stakeholders in the multinational diamond industry (including representatives of two companies with previous claims to Marange’s diamond exploration rights – De Beers and Africa Consolidated Resources [ACR]), human rights organizations (including representatives of NGOs based in Europe, North America, South Africa and Zimbabwe), government officials (including authorities in the Ministry of Mines and the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation [ZMDC]) as well as over 150 artisanal miners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (Spiegel, 2013). Artisanal miners who had lived in Marange as well as miners from other regions of Zimbabwe were interviewed prior to

and after the KPCS's decision to certify Zimbabwe's diamonds. As the Marange diamond fields were not accessible due to heavy military presence in the region, interviews were conducted in Harare, Bulawayo and in the Kadoma, Insiza and Mazowe regions where the author interviewed temporary diamond panners who had gone to Marange.

There is a growing literature on the need for understanding perspectives of stakeholders along multiple points in commodity value chains, with a view towards conceptualizing equity-sensitive interventions (Butler et al., 2013). In understanding certification schemes, geographers increasingly emphasize how power imbalances at multiple scales lead to a complex "collision of discourses" (Baird and Quastel, 2011, p. 347). Hirons (2011) specifically noted the need for discourse analysis related to artisanal mining, in line with the post-structural view that posits discourse as an "inescapable institutionalization of power relations" (Hirons, 2011, p. 348). The approach taken in this study emphasizes that the Marange case is politically significant both due to global economic interests in protecting the affective image of a commodity that draws its value as a symbol of love (Falls, 2011) as well as due to the regional economic interests at stake. The article argues that the global diamond certification process that was pursued in Zimbabwe promoted a discourse of securitization that obscured the conceptual distinction between spaces of *regulation*, where norms for promoting legitimate mining could be distinguished and enforced, and spaces of *dispossession*, where certain classes of small-scale producers could be systematically excluded. Diamond fields became spaces where illegality was used as a justification for bringing in police and military to remove people from the land in order to set up the so-called "right way" (Bone, 2010) to mine diamonds – namely, extraction by larger companies. The study focuses on how the language of "conflict diamonds" served strategic interests among elite actors within Zimbabwe as well as internationally in the 2006-2013 period, contributing to an exclusionary form of capitalism that marginalized artisanal miners. In this regard, the analysis is situated within the growing calls for examining discourses by corporate actors and political elites that legitimize prevailing capitalist practices (Dolan and Rajak, 2011; Welker, 2009).

Section 2 provides political and economic context for understanding the Marange conflict, providing a brief overview of conflicts of interest and violence in managing the newfound diamond wealth. Section 3 analyses the spatial politics conveyed by the global diamond industry's technical definitions of "conflict diamonds," exploring how the Marange case study adds to recent critiques of "violence implicit in regulatory interventions in resource governance" (Le Billon, 2012, p. 123). Examining political maneuverings at national and international scales, the analysis explores how and why prominent debates about the KPCS's technical roles eclipsed the advocacies of artisanal miners regarding access to Marange. Section 4 considers the implications of geopolitically contested commodity certification discourses and concludes by returning to the question of what features of diamond sector conflict drive global attention, rethinking implications for geographers.

2. Contextualising Marange's Diamond Conflicts in a Shifting Terrain of National Crisis

Since 2000, Zimbabwe's economic and political instability has been the subject of much debate, with scholars stressing the need for nuanced attention to how economic crisis has created both winners and losers (Bond and Sharife, 2012; Rutherford, 2012; McGregor, 2008; Saunders, 2007; Saunders, 2011). The post-2000 crisis built upon an already worsening economy, as the early 1990's saw Zimbabwe suffering under its disastrous Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP), promoted by the World Bank and embraced by President Robert Mugabe's government. Sachikonye (2012) argues that over the 2005-2009 period, Zimbabwe's government increasingly moved from what previously looked like a "development state" to a "predatory state." With hyperinflation rising above 1 million percent during the period of the diamond rush between 2006 and 2008, Jones calls this hyperinflationary economy the "*kukiya-kiya* economy" – meaning an economy of "making do" in chi-Shona (Jones, 2010, p. 285). This economic decline deepened reliance on artisanal mining – the extraction of minerals using rudimentary practices – as a survival strategy (Kamete, 2008; Mabhena, 2012). In the early 2000s, estimates suggested that artisanal mining in Zimbabwe directly involved at least 500,000 people, supporting the livelihoods of two million people - primarily in the gold sector (Shoko

and Veiga, 2004). At the same time, as Chifamba (2003) observed, the liberalized structure of Zimbabwe's mining industry ever since the ESAP period manifested in an oligopolistic mining industry (Chifamba, 2003) that favoured elite (black and white) ownership regimes. Dreschler (2001) similarly noted that the country's mineral industry had long been dominated by large mining companies in ways that precluded mineral ownership by Zimbabweans local artisanal miners.

Marange's diamond rush emerged midyear in 2006, when news began to spread of a major discovery of alluvial diamonds; within the first few weeks of Marange's "good news" the diamond fields turned into what reporters dubbed "the largest diamond rush in Africa in the last 100 years" (Thornycroft, 2006). As one artisanal miner recalled, the diamond rush drew huge numbers of people from provinces and countries near and far, noting: "More than thousands went to Marange... The trains were fully booked."¹ He added: "more than 500 people made [mining license] applications for the Marange diamonds." According to interviews with members of the Zimbabwe Miners Federation (ZMF), an organization representing artisanal and small scale miners across the country, the diamond scramble in Marange involved local villagers, government agents and diverse groups from other areas of the country and other countries; those rushing for diamonds included Lebanese, South African, Congolese and Indian "fortune-seekers" as well as people from all across Zimbabwe, with different types of groups of people involved in diverse mining and trade arrangements (Nyota and Sibanda, 2012; Nyamunda and Mukwambo, 2012).

Legal exploration rights for the Marange diamond fields had been held by De Beers throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, only to be relinquished in 2006 to African Consolidated Resources (ACR), a multi-national company based in Britain with Zimbabwean partners. The renewal of the ACR license was contested by senior government officials, and the Minerals Marketing Corporation of Zimbabwe (MMCZ), the sole state buyer and marketer of diamonds, was instead granted mining rights for Marange's diamonds. In the wake of this take-over, in

¹ Interview with member of the Zimbabwe Miners Federation at a small-scale gold mining site near Batani village, Mazowe, December 4, 2012.

October of 2007, only months after its expulsion from the mine, ACR reported that it had “suffered losses of at least US\$1 billion through the illegal extraction of diamonds by artisanal and small-scale miners from its claims in Marange” (Financial Gazette, 2007) in addition to an estimated US\$2 million worth of diamonds seized during a raid by police on its Harare offices. ACR claimed the government’s decision to overturn its ownership claims was illegal and that MMCZ had no right to the claims because the Precious Stones Trade Act prohibits any licensed dealers like MMCZ from engaging in mining activities, let alone the sole legal buyer (Muleya, 2007).

In this account, “conflict” relates to a “conflict of interest” – not “physical conflict” per se – and touches on a broader question of who has the right to mine. This ownership issue, which continues to be debated in judicial courts (at the end of the study period in 2013), was widely portrayed as a friction between ACR and the government. Media reports regularly portrayed the ownership debate as a reflection of corporation-versus-government politics that showcased ZANU-PF’s contempt for foreign companies (Zimbabwe Independent, 2007). The narrative of this kind of friction was given further validity, it may seem, as soon as government leaders asserted their power by proceeding to mine the diamonds despite a judicial ruling in ACR’s favour. However, focusing narrowly on this sense of friction obscures the numerous public protests of different groups of constituents - including artisanal miners - who were also heavily marginalized by government plans for diamond sector management.

As Marange’s controversy began to emerge during the 2006 Rural District Council elections, a report published by international elections observers noted that “local residents [in Marange] were allowed to invade diamond claims owned by the British-listed company Africa Consolidated Resources.” It continued: “the Minister of Mines Amos Midzi even addressed...the illegal miners and allowed them to go ahead with their activities” (Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 2006). This sense of being “allowed” to access the diamond fields was short-lived. As government reports emphasized that illegal trading and smuggling was among the most significant economic problems in the country (RBZ, 2007), coercive policing was presented as a necessary measure to secure revenue for the state. In the period following

November 2006, government concerns about smuggling began to intensify and strategies of control by political elites had numerous surveillance dimensions; an Israeli secret service team was hired by the government to root out illegal miners in 2006 and police squads were formed to take control of Marange. Specifically, a crackdown called *Operation Chikorokoza Chapera* (“No Illegal Mining”) was established to control artisanal mining – in Marange and surrounding areas (Hansard, 2007). In November 2008, a crackdown with a harsher title was given to the diamond operation, “*Operation Hakudzokwi*” (meaning “Operation No Return”), in which police squads were replaced by military squads. *Operation Hakudzokwi* targeted areas where diamond mining occurred and where smuggling routes were believed to be taking place on the road to Mutare and the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border. Reports indicated that approximately 9,000 miners were arrested in Marange. As part of this November 2008 crackdown, in reacting to a call by the World Diamond Council to control smuggling, the Air Force of Zimbabwe was deployed, after some police officers refused orders to shoot illegal miners, resulting in deploying military helicopter gunships and the shooting of hundreds of illegal miners (Partnership Africa Canada, 2010). According to small-scale miners interviewed in this study and as also reported by others (Partnership Africa Canada, 2010), there were hundreds of deaths from police and military shootings as well destruction of village settlements

The death toll at first - by mid-December - ranged from 83 (as estimated by the Mutare City Council) to 140 (as estimated by the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change [MDC]) (Dixon, 2008; SW Radio, 2008). Media stories thereafter suggested that at least 200 illegal miners were killed.² A cartoon in the *Mail and Guardian* (2009) showing an image of helicopter shooting and surveillance epitomizes much of the literature on the dark sides of the “shadow state” in Africa and its associated violence and corruption – and suggests that mining activities were under the watchful eye of military monitors, what Chabal and Daloz (1999) call “political instrumentalization of disorder” (p. xviii). While the helicopter shooting

² Interviews in December 2012 with two miners (one, a gold digger in Mazowe and the other, a riverbed gold panner in Nyanga and Mutoko) who had been in Marange during the shooting, suggested that burial grounds from this incident have yet to be discovered.

debacle also brought renewed global focus on profiteering and greed at the highest levels, global focus on corruption was superimposed upon an already-existing national tension over the millions of dollars believed to be benefiting elite groups. However, as political shifts emerged in 2009 after the formation of the Government of National Unity, with power shared between ZANU-PF and MDC, both political parties began voicing to the international community that Zimbabwe's diamonds were legitimate and that KPCS monitors were *over-emphasizing* the helicopter incident. Speaking publicly about such issues in 2009 became delicate for MDC party workers once a unity government was formed, as some MDC politicians were under considerable pressure to make the 'unity government' work (see Barclay, 2010).

3. The Scalar Politics of Conflict: Raising Questions about Diamond Certification

While the above section provided a preliminary illustration of the conflicts at issue in Marange, these were far from a clear match with the formal definition for "conflict diamonds." The definition given by the KPCS reflected a highly specific geopolitical worldview: "*Conflict diamonds are diamonds that originate from areas controlled by forces or factions opposed to legitimate and internationally recognized governments, and are used to fund military action in opposition to those governments*" (UN, 2001). Marange's case can be conceptualized as one example among a growing number of documented cases of "conflict" that fail to match this definition (Le Billon, 2012). Zulu and Wilson (2009) emphasize that this definition, despite being created with Sierra Leone in mind, overlooks contemporary conflicts in Sierra Leone, as "state centrism distorts or conceals spatial dimensions of conflict" (p. 1110). Indeed various African case studies have demonstrated shortcomings of international diamond certification advocacies. A study by Taylor and Mokhawa (2003) explain how the advocacy of international Kimberley Process regulators in Botswana came into conflict with the San Bushmen, a local tribe that was pushed off its land. Their research suggested that international "clean and safe" diamond promoters gave little regard for local interests, favouring state-led control instead while burnishing foreign corporate powers. With the Marange saga evoking similar tensions, the analysis below examines how dominant global narratives of ZANU-PF's

misrule inter-related with narratives of corporate corruption and the politicized role of KPCS as an instrument for promoting “sound mining practices,” to the detriment of artisanal miners.

3.1 “Not a Diamonds Problem”

The dominant perspective advanced by spokespeople representing the multi-national diamond industry was that Marange’s controversy was a problem of smuggling in conjunction with a problem of national leadership within the Government of Zimbabwe. This was illustrated in the *Washington Post*, where Andrew Bone, the Director of International Relations at De Beers, wrote that problems in Marange were a “governance problem not a diamonds problem” (Bone, 2010). Mr. Bone’s choice of language promoted the view that diamond mining controversies boiled down to Mugabe’s misrule, thereby protecting the global diamond industry’s “conflict-free” branding instrument itself. This view, which was common in the international news coverage of Marange, unsurprisingly drew a reaction from the government. Using the state newspapers as well as interview opportunities in international media, government officials in Zimbabwe, in response, decried Western imperialism in how foreign diamond industry spokespeople and foreign government officials asserted a regime change agenda when speaking of the Marange conflict.

The dominant “ZANU-PF misrule” framing as exemplified by Andrew Bone’s language tapped into a wider geopolitical tension that was unfolding. The legitimacy of the Zimbabwe Government was increasingly questioned as the Marange saga developed, particularly following the contested elections in 2008 and growing concerns about violence related to the elections as well as to diamond revenues (Raftoupolous, 2010; Saunders, 2011). Numerous Western governments, including the U.S. Government, attempted to impose new sanctions on Zimbabwe in 2008, while government leaders from China, Russia and several African countries opposed sanctions (Spiegel and Le Billon, 2009). Geopolitical tensions in the KPCS meetings became exceedingly high profile, as emphasized in an interview with a Zimbabwe government representative who was a delegate at the KPCS meetings in Israel, where international delegates debated whether the Government of Zimbabwe had managed the diamond sector in a manner

that violated the KP. When asked about the reasons for harsh policing and ultimately militarisation as mechanisms for governing the diamond fields, he explained the state's coercive management tactics as follows: "The shooting [Marange] was necessary. It is exactly what we [the Zimbabwe government] were told to do by the Kimberley Certification Scheme to stop the chaos in Marange. We had to formalise the diamond fields and stop the smuggling."³

Furthermore, using language that cast the Marange controversy as a geopolitical issue, he argued that critics of the government "wanted Zimbabwe to be a weak state" and also that they "wanted the government to crack down on the diamond rush." He argued that critics were more concerned with politics than with unlocking the potential power of diamonds to benefit Zimbabweans, stating: "The people from the U.S. State Department come to the KP meetings to criticize us, to promote what they call 'democracy', to prevent the trade of Zimbabwe diamonds and to promote the wealthier countries' diamond industries...[the interviewee later referenced 'Canadian diamonds' as an example]..." He then added, "If we cannot trade diamonds we cannot properly formalise the diamond fields [in Marange] so it [having Zimbabwe's diamonds cleared as legitimate for export under the KP system] is a must..."⁴ He also noted that, "Zimbabwe has done everything possible to comply with KP standards,"⁵ using language which reflected the view that Marange's resource regulation challenge needed to be seen as the sort of challenge that any government would find if thousands of people rushed for diamonds and deprived the state of revenue.

The Minister of Mines had also noted that the Government of Zimbabwe actually invited in a team of foreign experts working with the KP: "We expect the team to visit River Ranch, Murowa and Marange so that they can make their assessment. I'd like to dispel the notion that the [KP] team has imposed itself on us ... they are here at our invitation" (Karombo, 2007, p. 1). As foreign KP experts pressed on with investigations in the period between 2007 and 2010, higher penalties for informal miners were imposed and more arrests were made.

³ Interview with consultant to the Ministry of Mines and Zimbabwe Government Delegate for the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme Meetings, February 13, 2013, Harare.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

ZANU-PF politicians led a charge for introducing *automatic 5-year jail penalties* for any artisanal miner caught in possession of diamonds. In public announcements, government spokespeople initially mocked the slowness of the KPCS delegation in doing its work; but arguably, they were seeking to give as much focus as possible to this issue, while speeding up processes of militarized control. One news article explained how the state leaders suspected diamonds were being smuggled and the government was “worried about this”; the headline read: “Zim diamonds could be financing international terror groups” (Baxter, 2008).

This framing of the crackdown by the Zimbabwean government as aimed simply at complying with KPCS requirements was contested at KP meetings, as described in an interview with the Chairperson of the KPCS Review Team for Zimbabwe (for the 2009-2010 period), who instead emphasized internal problems of governance in Zimbabwe. While some mining company representatives and those with whom they were allied presented the conundrum as how to respond to ZANU-PF's misrule, and conversely the Government of Zimbabwe portrayed the motivations of Western critics as driven by a desire for regime change, these geopolitical tensions were also reflected within the KPCS itself. Indeed, according to the above interviewee, KPCS meetings were dominated by tensions between African government officials and U.S. government officials, who “were seeing Zimbabwe differently”⁶, noting that two *related but distinct* types of friction were dominating the discussion. The first of these frictions centered on whether the *technical* definition of “conflict diamonds” should be expanded so as to include *state-led* violence; this could have ramifications for any country (not just Zimbabwe) and Zimbabwe was seen as a test case in this regard, with the multinational diamond industry's narrow definition of conflict at stake. The second friction was geopolitical and centred on *Zimbabwe's unique place* in the Pan-African political landscape; here the debate was specifically whether African government leaders who had historically been loyal to President

⁶ Interview with Chairperson of the KPCS Review Team for Zimbabwe (for the 2009-2010 period), September 8, 2009, Maputo, Mozambique (two months before the members of the KPCS voted against suspending Zimbabwe).

Robert Mugabe would be willing to boycott diamonds from Zimbabwe.⁷ While the KPCS Review Team for Zimbabwe was preoccupied with these questions, a more fundamental concern to artisanal miners locally – as expressed by the Zimbabwe Miners Federation President – was the role of large-scale mining companies and why artisanal miners were never given rights to the diamond fields, as discussed next.

3.2 Discourses of Corruption as Simultaneously “State” and “Corporate”

As the value of soldiers’ pay collapsed with soaring inflation, it was widely stated that diamonds were used to secure the loyalty soldiers as well as enrich party leaders (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Prior to the Marange saga, researchers had occasionally praised the Zimbabwe Government for promoting legalization of artisanal and small-scale *gold* mining as a means of proactive control, and donors had provided sustainability-oriented funds for developing small-scale mining in the 1990s and early 2000s.⁸ However, amidst the economic crisis and politicized context of Marange, as one artisanal miner noted, “...the question of the rights of villagers in the area who discovered the diamonds was not taken seriously.”⁹ When politically well-connected companies were given rights to mine Marange diamonds, the creation of legalization programmes for artisanal diamond mining was generally regarded as “not a realistic idea, given the political circumstances” – to borrow the words of an artisanal miner who was interviewed in Harare¹⁰ even as some artisanal miners insisted they should be able to dig for diamonds.

In one sense, the discourse of ZANU-PF elites pointed to “illegal” artisanal miners as a threat to national economic security, scapegoating miners to deflect from widespread allegations of the corruption of ZANU-PF and military officials. However, as noted by an

⁷ Voting members initially agreed on a “temporary” prohibition on the sale of Zimbabwe’s diamonds until the matters were cleared up; this lasted six months. In July, 2010, portions of the Marange diamonds were cleared for export.

⁸ In 1991, alluvial mining (panning) along the country’s streams was legalized, providing what some believe to be one of Africa’s more proactive examples of riverbed alluvial mining regulation (Maponga and Ngorima, 2003; Spiegel, 2009; Zwane et al., 2006).

⁹ Interview with short-term small-scale diamond miner, May 16, 2009, Harare.

¹⁰ Interview with artisanal gold miner, May 15, 2009, Harare.

interviewee working in the Ministry of Local Government in Harare, “corruption” in Marange was more complex than a problem of “state corruption.” He emphasized that Marange’s controversy highlighted a longer-standing friction over access to areas that have been under control by larger-scale companies. De Beers had the diamond prospecting rights prior to 2006 and De Beers, he argued, could not possibly have failed to know the value of the diamond fields. He pointed out what had become a common focus point in public discourse by 2007: De Beers did not report significant alluvial diamond deposits while it possessed the mining license. From his perspective, the only logical explanation for De Beers’ silence on the value of the deposit was that De Beers had been looting. Corruption in the 2006-2009 period should, thus, he rationalized, be understood in the context of a wider history of corruption, which in turn shaped government thinking about managing Marange’s diamond fields.¹¹ In his words, “De Beers must have been looting for years. There is no other explanation really...for how the biggest diamond deposit in Southern Africa...all of Africa...went un-noticed for so many years.”

This particular concern - about the secret use of licenses and looting by companies - rightly or wrongly tapped into a wider national concern about foreign companies and the government’s incapacity to effectively manage large-scale mining (not just small-scale mining). Examination of illicit financial flows is attracting increasing scholarly investigation (e.g. Le Billon, 2011), emphasizing not just state corruption but also multi-national companies’ patterns of avoiding taxation and royalty payments.¹² This argument in the literature suggests that the framing of corruption exclusively at a local scale as a *demand-side* phenomenon rather than a more global *supply-side* pattern may only serve to mask such practices - and is prompting attention of African policy makers (Africa Partnership Forum, 2012). An analytic focus on corruption in this vein situates Marange in a wider context of state complicity with corporate corruption in Zimbabwe – including how in the early 1980s and 1990s a number of mining

¹¹ Interview with senior official in the Ministry of Local Government, May 11, 2009, Harare.

¹² Cross (2011) also insightfully details the attempts of companies such as De Beers to employ an “ethic of detachment” to absolve themselves from problems experienced in the processes of diamond production..

companies were granted Exclusive Prospecting Orders (EPOs) for diamond prospecting, including the Marange area but also other regions. By 2000, approximately 463 diamond EPOs were allocated, and as Tsiko (2007) noted, “some companies held over 20,000 claims each for over 20 years” (p. 2) and never developed them. Representatives of regional small-scale mining associations argued in interviews in 2009 (and in advocacies to the government) that the government should *revoke* the EPOs for multinationals, saying the companies were sitting on these vast claims blocking the participation of local companies and others in the exploration of precious minerals. Some of the multinationals were accused, by both government leaders and small-scale miners alike (albeit with different interests), of utilizing EPOs to benefit financially on the global stock exchange without developing the mines.

While some small-scale miners thought that Marange’s suddenly discovered economic value could be attributed to a culture of corporate secrecy, others suggested that nobody could have imagined just how valuable Marange was in reality. “There was a rumour that the ancestral spirits were hiding the diamonds for us,” was one artisanal miner’s recollection of some of the rhetoric he had heard amongst artisanal gold miners as they discussed the secret of the value of diamonds in Marange.¹³ According to some government statements, there seemed no doubt that De Beers had been extracting diamonds for years in secret, a claim that Minister Mpopfu publicly made and that De Beers publicly denied.¹⁴ While discourse that blamed De Beers reinforced the ZANU-PF strategy of demonizing Western companies in the extractive sector, it also was used to justify an elite take-over in Marange. According to government policy, any regulated diamond enterprise had to be at least 50% controlled by the government; but in practice, by 2012, Chinese and South African companies partnered with political elites in Zimbabwe, as stressed in the First Report of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Diamond Mining (published in June 2013). This Parliamentary Committee issued a stern

¹³ Interview with short-term small-scale diamond miner, May 16, 2009, Harare.

¹⁴ According to Minister Mpopfu, “My records show that they collected more than 100 000 tonnes of diamond concentrate and this was mostly alluvial, but they say they still want to find out whether they are diamonds or not....Even up to today, I have not got a report about what happened to our samples. In Marange, it doesn’t take two minutes to find out that they are diamonds, but it took them 15 years. What hypocrisy!” (Newsday, 2012).

condemnation of the Minister of Mines' personal handling of the Marange diamonds "formalisation" plans, noting that there was a lack of transparency in the company contracting process. It also emphasized that 4,300 families were displaced, noting that "many communities are being relocated without proper resettlement plans which put communities in danger of losing their livelihood system" (Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mining, 2013, p. 20).

In sum, the intricate and varied relations between state and corporate actors described here highlighted the analytic importance of moving beyond what Plumridge Bedi and Thieme (2013) referred to as a false binary of state and market, private and public. While the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee focused on *internal* corruption within the Ministry of Mines, it is important to note that the global certification system in itself can also be conceptualized as a form of corruption or even legalized institutional violence, as suggested by Hines and Snow (2007). To better understand how various international and local civil society organizations conceptualized Marange's saga, we turn to NGO discourses and how these evolved.

3.3. Evolving Civil Society Discourses on Marange's Diamonds

As critical geographers have observed, advocacies of international diamond-focused NGOs like Global Witness (which played a major role in creating the KPCS) have often been closely allied to the interests of diamond corporations such as De Beers, working off the global standardized assumption that a "clean diamond" can be "objectively" certified through commercial audits and monitoring activities by the KPCS (Le Billon, 2012; 2006). The Marange conflicts left dilemmas for human rights campaigners at different points in the saga, and with different positions taken by various international and local NGOs. During the early days of the diamond rush in 2007, most human rights NGO advocacies- both from Southern Africa and internationally - suggested that bringing Marange's unruly diamond trade under control was the priority and adding more police was essential. For example, before the military shootings of 2008, one report by a South African-based NGO, Southern Africa Resource Watch (SARW), wrote: "Control over the diamond fields remains difficult for the

authorities...because the police have inadequate human resources” (SARW, 2007). In this narrative, the government was being dispossessed of the diamonds and this needed to be stopped; the solution would have to be more human and financial resources for law enforcement. Supporting this observation, reports widely noted that “the thickly forested fields [in Marange] are manned by less than 50 officers, a number too little for the vast fields” (The Sunday Mail, 2007). At the same time, the advocacies for more police were complex given that local villagers and panners on the one hand, and police on the other, often spoke of engaging in “running battles,” a term also used by a police officer working with the Criminal Investigations Department during an interview in Bulawayo.¹⁵ Stories of being chased and then killed started to circulate in mining communities in 2007, although they were scarcely reported in the media at the time (in contrast to the period following the helicopter shootings in 2008). Some artisanal panners interviewed wondered how NGO advocacies could prioritize tighter police controls without adequate government plans in place to promote livelihood activities for local people.

A now-Harare-based former Marange artisanal diamond panner captured sentiments about militarization in 2008, stating: “The diamond panners were targeted with brutality and it was merciless....This was a military exercise and the military was vicious... This is Zimbabwe you know... Here the diamonds are not for the people but for just the people with guns.”¹⁶ After the military shootings, while “rights” perspectives promoted by international NGOs were conditioned by their attention to the KPCS priorities and the international discourse of the need to prevent diamond smuggling, rights perspectives took on different meanings. Some human rights groups began to re-evaluate their positions and, as the diamonds saga drew on, their campaign discourses began to change from stressing the need for more control to attention to the physical acts of violence by state security forces. Significantly, in December of 2011, Global Witness publicly withdrew its support for the KPCS altogether after the KPCS vote allowed Zimbabwe’s diamonds to be certificated on the international market (Eligon, 2011).

¹⁵ Interview with official from the Zimbabwe Republic Police - Criminal Investigations Department, April 30, 2009, Bulawayo.

¹⁶ Interview with former short-term alluvial diamond panner, May 16, 2009, Harare.

Yet a notable feature of the discourse of most international human rights NGOs – an example being Human Rights Watch – was to play up the threat of brutality as a separate issue, divorced from community concerns about resource dispossession, economic distortions or livelihood criminalization. A 21-page report by Human Rights Watch describes the 2006-2010 period as being consistently marked by a pattern of “deliberate chaos” by political elites and military domination in Marange; its analysis did not address artisanal miners who operated outside of military control in the 2006-2007 period, nor did its recommendations address artisanal mining at all (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

Moreover, corruption was often linked inextricably with the identities of marginalized artisanal miners, with international NGO and media reports emphasizing the politician-artisanal mining liaison as a generally corrupt endeavour. This trend in reportage began early on in the saga; for example, as reported in the *Mail and Guardian* in January 2007, early in the diamond rush: “[A]t least three Ministers in Manicaland mobilized villagers to pan for diamonds... The diamonds were subsequently sold on the black market bypassing the MMCZ” (Mail and Guardian, 2007). Villagers, in other words, were discursively turned into “the mobilized” but rarely recognized in international discourse as having resource rights of their own, nor portrayed as *resistant* to police and military control.

Interviews with members of artisanal mining associations in 2009, 2012 and 2013 led to two key findings: first, many of the artisanal miners *did resist* pressures to collaborate with ZANU-PF elites, and secondly, most members of the 7 artisanal mining associations who were interviewed felt strongly that they were not supported by international NGOs, let alone by state authorities. This was emphasized specifically during a participant observation experience in February 2013 at a meeting convened by the Zimbabwe Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Council, where women and men speaking on behalf of artisanal miner associations lamented the lack of international support for their rights. As one miner decried, “Our families have lived

there [in Marange] many years. Why can't we have the right to diamonds too?"¹⁷ In discussion with members of the Zimbabwe Miners Federation, questions emerged about whether paradigms for global diamond certification and control help local citizens or hurt rural populations. When the author of this study specifically asked artisanal miners in 2009 about whether the KPCS should suspend Zimbabwe from the certified diamond market, some suggested that it would be wise to refrain from a diamond ban. As one interviewee noted, "it isn't right to boycott us."¹⁸ For others, it mattered little, as smuggling clearly persisted. Others puzzled about why the international diamond certifiers would let Zimbabwe "off the hook"; as one miner protested to me: "We're not allowed to mine, but the police are... I don't understand the certification and how it works."¹⁹

This sense of marginalisation is also echoed by some NGOs in Zimbabwe, which have argued that artisanal miners should be taken more seriously. Maguwu (2011), Director of the Centre for Research and Development in Harare (one of the more vocal local organisations that protested the Marange violence) articulated how displacement of artisanal miners continued to take place in the years following the 2008 killings, particularly

during times when high ranking international and government officials are expected to tour the diamond fields... Between March and April 2011, more than four hundred artisanal miners were severely assaulted by state security agents ahead of a visit by the Africa Diamond Producers Association [which had been invited by the Zimbabwean government to witness that mining operations in Marange comply with international standards] (Maguwu, 2011 p. 5).

In similar spirit, Claude Kabemba, Director of SARW, lamented the side-lining of Africa-based civil society organisations as these processes took hold. He argued:

African civil society has not found space in the KP to lead the discussion on the Marange diamonds. It plays a peripheral role, remaining a passive recipient of Western civil society articulations and positions (Kabemba, 2011, p. 20).

He further argued:

¹⁷ Participant observation, Inaugural Meeting of the Zimbabwe Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Council, Jameson Hotel, February 14, 2013.

¹⁸ Interview with short-term small-scale diamond miner, May 16, 2009, Harare.

¹⁹ Interview with short-term small-scale diamond miner, May 16, 2009, Harare.

Zimbabwean civil society, together with regional organisations, needs to undertake more homegrown advocacy... When Zimbabwean civil society starts to lead the debate, I believe that it can produce balanced analysis on the Marange diamonds—analysis that factors in Zimbabwe’s political dimension and the geostrategic positioning of key world actors that are compounding the difficulty of finding a lasting solution (Kabemba, 2011, p. 20).

Interviews conducted with Kabemba in February 2014 emphasized that not much has changed in terms of the limited participation of artisanal miners and NGOs vis-à-vis diamond sector governance in Zimbabwe, though he pointed out that some NGOs such as SARW have been engaged by Zimbabwe’s Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mining to train government officials responsible for monitoring policy implementation. Notwithstanding the complex economic and political interests that connect powerful state actors and diamond mining companies, ensuring that diamond mining corporations are more transparent is among the training priorities he emphasized.

3.4 Revisiting the Discourse of “Conflict Diamonds”

The above analysis provides context for understanding political tensions in Marange – a region that, by 2013, was deemed to have the largest producing diamond mines in the world in term of carats, with an estimated production of 16.9 million carats (Kitco, 2013). Discourses on “conflict diamonds” require a critical geographical analysis that pays attention both to the *global* scale of corporate branding and to the *historical context* in which such discourses have developed. While Marange’s diamond mining activities embroiled multiple actors locally, nationally and internationally, the global initiatives to thwart “conflict diamonds” throughout the 2000s were narrowly premised on efforts to eliminate illegal diamond trafficking, operating under the perspective that diamonds can be a “guerrilla’s best friend, providing rebel groups the ‘loot’ necessary to purchase their weapons and the ‘booty’ rewarding their atrocities” (Le Billon, 2006, p. 782). Such representations, and the very definition of “conflict diamonds,” presuppose that governments are indeed acting in legitimate ways. The concern that ZANU-PF had illegitimately taken control of the government became particularly significantly in 2008 during an election widely thought to have been actually “won” by the opposition, MDC

(Kriger, 2012). The legitimacy of ZANU-PF rule in Zimbabwe was also cast in doubt earlier, as various elections throughout the past decade came under criticism for vote rigging, as noted by many interviewees as well as by other scholars (Dorman, 2005) and amidst allegations that institutionalized corruption has been rampant (Bracking, 2005). Indeed, the crackdown against government-defined “illegality” in Marange’s diamond fields is just one instance among a long list of “crackdown operations” throughout Zimbabwe’s post-colonial history (Bratton and Masunungure, 2006), and the language of “restoring order” has long been central to the governments’ repressive measures against “informal” sector workers (Potts, 2006; Kamete, 2012). However, given the perspective that is formally promoted by the KPCS, any local resistance against the ZANU-PF command structure using revenue from smuggled diamonds could be construed as a potential “conflict diamonds” risk.

While “conflict diamond” discourses are often linked with ideas of “rebel violence”, as in the case of Sierra Leone’s conflict diamonds, interviews conducted with small-scale miners as well as government officials in Zimbabwe reinforced the point that the KP’s notion of “rebels” does not apply in Zimbabwe’s case. Artisanal miners interviewed in this study nevertheless often spoke of how they felt they were being treated as “rebellious” and “criminal” by just trying to survive by finding diamonds. Even assuming that such “economic rebelliousness” ought to be controlled by Zimbabwean police, the international policy community was divided on the question of how best to pressure the government to formalize diamond mining responsibly, and Marange’s diamond saga became an impetus for rethinking the economic and political interests that are served by resource formalization paradigms.²⁰

The globally contested spatial dimension of the discourse is significant both in how the discourse about Marange evolved in relation to the government’s legitimacy problems as well as how the discourse of smuggling began. Initially, in the early stages of the diamond rush, state control was said by KPCS inspectors to be necessary because of smuggling – and not just

²⁰ Notably, during participant observation work in 2009, 2012 and 2013, the author attended several meetings with both artisanal miners and policymakers present in the same time, and in each case, artisanal miners were told by policymakers that no artisanal miner was granted a license for small-scale diamond mining.

smuggling of Zimbabwe's diamonds but also smuggling of other countries' diamonds through Zimbabwe. The World Diamond Council²¹ - representing the interest of the global diamond industry – expressed worry that smuggled DRC “blood diamonds” were being mixed with Zimbabwe's diamonds, many of which lacked certification records, and smuggled abroad. The World Diamond Council chairman, Eli Izhakoff, alleged that diamonds from both Marange and River Ranch Mine (one of the two already-operating diamond mines in Zimbabwe) were being smuggled into South Africa. This was picked up by media coverage that suggested that old ZANU-PF connections with DRC diamond traders (from the DRC war days) were coming into play to pass off smuggled diamonds as legitimate (IRIN, 2007). This particular concern promoted a vision of diamond governance that saw any and all cross-border smuggling as problematic, in keeping with the rules of the KPCS (Smillie, 2010). Coming from the World Diamond Council, this discourse suggested that smuggling could taint the image of the industry. The discourse on conflict diamonds was thus intertwined not only with a discourse on appropriate governance – but indeed with the dominant discourse of macro-economic development that could benefit from “properly conducted” diamond mining that served the interests of global capitalism, not the interests of local artisanal miners. This analysis resonates with Welker's analysis of corporate responsibility discourse in the mining sector in Indonesia (Welker, 2009) wherein political elites and corporate actors justified mining sector securitization measures according to what they framed as a moral need, namely the pursuit of development and modernization.

Ultimately, some African governments, including South Africa and Angola, refused to vote Zimbabwe out of the KPCS, expressing political “*solidarity*”²² with President Robert Mugabe in some cases – and in most cases, expressing their opposition to the idea of expanding

²¹ The World Diamond Council, established in 2000, is an organisation that represents the interests of over 50 diamond trading companies and diamond mining companies, introduced specifically “to address the challenges of conflict diamonds.” It is a “key participant in the development and implementation of the KPCS (<http://www.worlddiamondcouncil.com/>, accessed September 13, 2013).

²² Gabriel Shumba, speaking on behalf of the Zimbabwe Blood Diamonds Campaign, characterizes the support of some African countries as “misguided solidarity to Robert Mugabe” (The Zimbabwean, 2011). Influential Kimberley Process members, including South Africa, supported allowing Zimbabwean diamond exports; China and India also publicly declared their support in 2011.

the definition of “conflict” beyond the KP’s “conflict diamond” definition. Some diamond companies – including De Beers – also lobbied to keep the diamond conflict certification definition the way it was. An interview with a De Beers spokesperson suggested that diamond companies were very resistant and opposed to changing the definition of conflict diamonds to include types of conflict beyond the existing definition.²³ However, not all companies had the same interests. While Canadian diamond companies and Canadian government officials publicly denigrated Zimbabwe’s illicit diamonds and urged for their boycott (Davis, 2011), Ian Smillie, a prominent Canadian researcher who has worked with the NGO Partnership Africa Canada, suggested that Australian companies were more inclined to defend Zimbabwe’s diamond exports initially, since another diamond mining company in another part of Zimbabwe was partly owned by Australians. In some cases, international companies and foreign governments changed their position. For instance, although Australian government representatives initially resisted supporting a ban on Zimbabwe’s diamond exports (leading to Ian Smillie’s critiques), they began to support the notion of a partial ban once it became evident that Murowa Diamond Mine (in South Central Zimbabwe), 78% owned by Rio Tinto, under Australian ownership, could be exempt from the sanctions, which could be directed purely at the Marange diamonds rather than all Zimbabwean diamonds.

Some NGO spokespeople changed their position too, illustrated most powerfully when Ian Smillie resigned from his position in the KPCS in May of 2009, citing his frustration with the diamond certification system and specifically its lack of firmness, eventually criticizing how its “consensus decision-making process has turned it into a dozy talk shop – unable and unwilling to deal with noncompliance” (Smillie, 2013, p. 1020). As one news source put it: “The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme has this week been dealt the hardest blow to its reputation and standing since its inception, when Ian Smillie, the driving force behind Partnership Africa-Canada, the immensely influential conflict diamonds NGO, quietly announced his departure from participation in the KP” (Even-Zohar, 2009). This change in

²³ Interview with advisor on International Relations Strategy to De Beers Diamond Company, January 17, 2009, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

position exemplified the eroding confidence in global certification as an effective conflict-prevention tool. It also suggested that what ensued in Zimbabwe in the aftermath of a diamond discovery in 2006 was a dynamic assemblage of political frictions, where geopolitical tensions over Zimbabwe's crisis of governance legitimacy and global definitional debates over "conflict diamonds" converged and produced, in that process of convergence, a shifting fragmentation in perspectives on how efforts to certify "conflict-free" diamonds should work.

4. Conclusions

To conclude, the multinational diamond industry's certification discourses are often linked with ideas of rebel violence, providing a fashionable point of analytic focus in the international policymaking and academic communities. Multiple econometric and political studies have sought to measure how rebel conflict increases due to diamond extraction in Africa, often making the case for curbing illegal mining and promoting "sound practices" in the multinational mining industry (e.g. Olsson, 2006; Lujala et al., 2005; Collier, 2010). But *who are the rebels* in Zimbabwe's case? Women and men interviewed in this study often spoke of how they felt they were being treated as "rebellious" and "criminal" by just trying to survive by finding minerals.

The present study dovetails with the work of Jones (2010) in emphasizing that operating in the "parallel market" has been an act of survival for thousands of people in Zimbabwe due to extreme economic and political crises. Furthermore, it illustrated how the question of policing "illegitimate" diamond mining powerfully divided both the national and international policy communities in the wake of Marange's diamond discovery, raising questions that go far beyond Zimbabwe's borders. The study's analysis suggested that multinational corporate power, "fair trade" commoditization, and technocratic development ideology inter-related with authoritarian state control tactics during a period of instability in ways that exacerbated the marginalization of poor communities.

This study's analytic approach to understand conflict in Marange also builds upon Le Billon's concern about the risk of "essentialising and depoliticizing violence" (Le Billon, 2012,

p. 87) and the work of Nyota and Sibanda (2012), who draw attention to the displacement of villagers that occurred when large-scale mining companies were awarded contracts for this region's diamond rights. Physical acts of human rights abuses by military soldiers in Marange were the most widely reported problem cited in international human rights NGO reports after the end of 2008, but this study has sought to re-conceptualise the Marange saga by re-configuring analytic focus on the rights of artisanal miners and marginalized communities to pursue their livelihoods. Approaching rights and fair trade from this alternative perspective suggests that the depoliticisation of "illegality" is an inherent problem that obscures the dispossession of small producers. In examining patterns of land reform in Zimbabwe years prior to the diamond rush, Andreasson (2006) observed that "property rights necessarily generate violent, and oftentimes lethal, processes of dispossession... In this context of ongoing dispossession, further privatisation and commodification can only exacerbate contemporary problems of marginalisation and dispossession" (p. 3); the securitization of property rights in Marange provided an especially violent example of this.

This analysis adds to growing skepticism among geographers when contemplating the power of a "conflict-free" brand to account for complex injustices in the mining sector and to critiques of "fair trade" movements for "fetishizing" while obfuscating capitalist commodity chains more broadly (Goodman, 2004; Schlosser, 2013, Schroeder, 2010). Klooster (2010) refers to the "fantasy" that neoliberal fair trade certification can promote "fair trade" while maintaining business as usual. The Marange case suggests that critiques of ethical branding instruments should take into account the diverse and dynamic political interests inherent in mining industry/civil society/government initiatives that strive for the certification of commodity chains. Attention to conflict-free diamonds, while of great use to corporate interests in protecting the image of a global commodity chain, provided no benefit to populations in Zimbabwe who were marginalized and oppressed in the process. Ultimately, the Marange saga represents not simply the most serious challenge yet to the diamond industry's corporate branding instrument, but also calls into question the rhetorical focus points of those who have sought to critique it.

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