

Volume 31 Issue 2

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

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*NGODA: THE WEALTH BENEATH OUR FEET*  
EXHIBITION: AN ADULT EDUCATION PRACTICE  
AT MUTARE MUSEUM, EASTERN ZIMBABWE

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*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/  
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*

*Editor-in-Chief: Robert Mizzi*

*Special Edition Editors: Darlene Clover, Nancy Taber, and Kathy Sanford*  
[www.cjsae-rceea.ca](http://www.cjsae-rceea.ca)

31,2 November/novembre 2019, 51–58

ISSN1925-993X (online)

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L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes  
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# **NGODA: THE WEALTH BENEATH OUR FEET EXHIBITION: AN ADULT EDUCATION PRACTICE AT MUTARE MUSEUM, EASTERN ZIMBABWE**

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## **Abstract**

*Exhibitions in museums are increasingly becoming popular public pedagogical strategies that engage with stories of social struggles faced by certain communities. In this paper, I will look at how we at Mutare Museum used an exhibition on diamond mining—the research, the design, and the production—to create a public forum for dialogue and engagement. The discovery of surface diamonds in Chiadzwa, Eastern Zimbabwe, in 2006 and the subsequent displacement of communities living in the area were topical issues that were articulated in the exhibition for purposes of adult education. Through this exhibition, Mutare Museum provided a space where the community explored complicated conversations and controversies surrounding diamond mining.*

## **Résumé**

*Les expositions de musée comme stratégies de pédagogie publique qui s'engagent avec les récits de luttes sociales vécues par certaines communautés ne cessent de gagner en popularité. Dans cet article, je me penche sur l'utilisation par l'équipe du Mutare Museum de la recherche, de la conception et de la production d'une exposition sur l'extraction des diamants afin de créer un forum public pour le dialogue et l'engagement. Les thématiques actuelles de la découverte en 2006 de diamants en surface à Chiadzwa dans l'est du Zimbabwe et le déplacement subséquent de communautés dans la région étaient articulées par l'exposition aux fins d'éducation des adultes. Grâce à cette exposition, le Mutare Museum a créé un espace où la communauté a pu explorer des sujets difficiles et les controverses liés à l'extraction des diamants.*

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### Introduction

This paper will describe how Mutare Museum engaged one of its constituent communities through an exhibition that addressed a topical issue, and I consider this a practice of adult education. Museums are public pedagogical institutions with a host of adult education opportunities and have over time responded to the needs of local communities with exhibitions promoting social transformation (Clover, Sanford, Johnson, & Bell, 2016). Mutare Museum (shown in Figure 1) is one of five regional museums under the administration of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. In positioning this museum as a site of public pedagogy, I will look at how we developed an exhibition on diamond mining called *Ngoda: The Wealth Beneath Our Feet* and challenged unspoken assumptions about communities by bringing to light stories of their daily struggles. I was involved in the research and design of this exhibition as a curator in the archaeology department, and I worked together with the curator of antiquities, the marketing officer, and the exhibition designer. I will illustrate the processes by which we created this exhibition and how we provided empowering learning experiences to the community and subsequently effected social change. The exhibition elaborated on the events that led to the discovery of surface diamonds by the Chiadzwa community, the regularization of mining activities by government, and the displacement of Indigenous communities. Against this background, I will demonstrate how the museum became a significant site of adult education that advocated for social change and inclusion. This was achieved through embracing new museological practices of community engagement, participation, and representation. Chiadzwa diamond fields are located approximately 130 kilometres southwest of the city of Mutare, Manicaland, Zimbabwe.



Figure 1. The east-facing façade of the Mutare Museum. Photo © Njabulo Chipangura.

### **Setting the Context: Social Inequalities in Alluvial Diamond Mining in Chiadzwa**

The discovery of surface diamonds in Chiadzwa, Marange, in 2006 by community members set in motion a series of events that led to their relocation. From 2006 to 2007, this community freely mined diamonds and was later joined by many other people from across the country as the government was yet to ascertain the real value of the precious stones. Newspapers during this period carried a number of stories on diamond mining in this area (“The Diamond Rush in Manicaland,” 2006). Mining was carried out using basic rudimentary tools such as picks, chisels, and shovels. However, in the middle of 2008, assay tests were done and the government moved into the area and chased away all the miners from the diamond fields whom they considered to be illegal (Ministry of Mines and Mining Development, 2008). At this time, plans were also made to relocate villagers.

Diamond mining then became a cause of social inequality in Chiadzwa, as local villagers were displaced to make way for the establishment of formal diamond mining companies. Instead of benefiting from formal mining, villagers were impoverished as a result of the displacement. The diamonds ended up benefiting a few political elites and causing social exclusion. Villagers who were displaced by the advent of formal mining were relocated at Arda Transau, a government farm in Odzi located 75 kilometres northwest of their original homesteads. We carried out field research at Arda Transau in February 2013, interviewing relocated villagers who shared with us their socio-cultural challenges.

### **The Processes of Making the *Ngoda: The Wealth Beneath Our Feet* Exhibition**

Mutare Museum as a public pedagogical institution responded to the situation in Chiadzwa through an exhibition that positioned the concerns of this community and advocated for social inclusion and transformation. We did this because we felt that a museum exhibition had the potential to address social problems being faced by the Chiadzwa community, and at the same time give space for dialogue about solutions. The research team who carried out the interviews and later the installation of the exhibition comprised two curators (including me), an exhibition designer, a technical officer, and a marketing officer. We carried out the research in February 2013 and the exhibition was opened in May 2013.

The data used in making this exhibition were obtained through analysis of news sources. Relying on the *Manica Post*, we conducted a desktop study to understand the different reports on diamond mining in Chiadzwa. The *Manica Post* is a state-run weekly newspaper that mainly covers news coming out of Eastern Zimbabwe. A close analysis of stories from this weekly publication revealed the complexity of diamond mining and the different activities undertaken by the community before being displaced. We used these narratives to develop the storyline of the exhibition.

During the research, we also collected mining tools—including picks, shovels, chisels, carrying bags, and hammers—which we displayed in the exhibition. To get information on relocations, we interviewed villagers who were relocated from Chiadzwa to make way for the establishment of formal mines and allowed them to express their honest views, which were embraced in the exhibition. Thus, we framed and designed the diamond exhibition with a view of giving the community a voice without too much curatorial intervention. This form of community engagement demonstrates that Mutare Museum became an active site of critical adult learning and public pedagogy. Public pedagogy has been defined as types and sites of education and learning occurring outside formal education institutions (Bloom

& Mintz, 1990; Borg & Mayo, 2000; Burdick & Sandlin, 2013; Grenier, 2010). Hence, museums are sites of cultural politics and public pedagogy that democratize production of knowledge by creating reflexive spaces for addressing topical issues (Giroux, 2011).

Having collected our data through interviews, newspaper surveys, and mining objects, we mounted the exhibition on five-and-a-half- by four-foot upright boards, five inches thick, which featured text panels, images, and captions organized around the exhibition’s themes. In addition, a multimedia display retold the stories of villagers who were relocated from the diamond field. During the run of this exhibition, Mutare Museum became a site of adult learning where alternative information was shared about the social ills of mining and dialogue was initiated. The exhibition became a space for critical public pedagogy in that it stimulated conversations in which the Chiadzwa community spoke about their challenges. The effect that this exhibition had can be related to the view of Grenier and Hafsteinsson (2016) that “museums can support and encourage radical thinking in action through public pedagogy and social movement learning in both the content they choose to highlight and their approaches to representation and engagement” (p. 12).

Our exhibition was divided into four thematic sections. In “Ngoda: The Wealth Beneath Our Feet—Community Mining Phase (2006–2008),” photographs and maps laid out the historical background of the Chiadzwa diamond fields and the community’s discovery of surface diamonds. By 2008, close to 10,000 people, mostly unemployed youths from across the country, had descended on the mining fields. This period was popularly known as *bvupfuwe* in local parlance, referring to the open and free mining for all, without any restrictions (see Figure 2). “Ngoda” then became a buzzword used by community miners to refer to diamonds. It was derived from *ungoda chi-i*, a Shona phrase used by the traders to ask the miners what they preferred in exchange for diamonds.

In the second section, “Formal Diamond Mining in Chiadzwa (2009 to Present Day),” text and images explored the start of a new era. With the end of community mining, the government moved in to establish formal mines and to harness the diamonds. This panel



Figure 2. Some of the community miners during the diamond rush period. Photo © Manica Post.

depicted the formal mining technologies and essentially was designed to give the public an overview of mining after relocation of the community.

In the third section of the exhibition, we used multimedia to tell the stories of villagers who were relocated from their homesteads to Arda Transau Farm. Audio and video narratives of villagers were beamed through a projected wall display to give the public a chance to relate to the whole sequence of events, from community mining to the formalization of mining and relocations. We purposefully used this technique to frame and reinforce identity and belief and convey the socio-cultural values of villagers derived from their sense of place before they were moved to Arda Transau. In the videos, villagers also vented their dissatisfaction with the way the government had tackled relocations.

In the fourth section, “Staying Put: Challenges Faced by the Remaining Villagers,” we presented challenges faced by villagers who were yet to be relocated. This section revealed that access to the area was difficult because it was heavily secured, and as a result, villagers were not free to move in and out of the diamond mining field. This community was also presented in this section as still living in abject poverty because they were not benefiting from the formal diamond mining.

### **Conversations and Debates Generated by the Exhibition**

With the roll-out of this exhibition, Mutare Museum suddenly became a nerve centre of adult education with debates centring on the need to compensate Chiadzwa villagers. In this regard it can be argued that a museum can promote social change through exhibits and educational programs that raise public awareness of social issues and encourage effective action (Silverman, 2010). Using this exhibition as a platform to speak, the villagers advocated for the repealing of the decision to declare sections of the Chiadzwa community as “protected areas” under the *Protected Places and Areas Act*, chapter 11:12. The exhibition illustrated how this law resembled pre-independence laws that were designed to confine Africans and how this had brought untold suffering to the people of Chiadzwa. Because of it, they were no longer able to freely move in and out of Chiadzwa as they were constantly subjected to inhumane searches for diamonds, and when found without identification documents, they were severely harassed by police and soldiers. Community members interviewed also revealed that owing to the *Protected Places and Areas Act*, relatives and friends of those living in Chiadzwa were no longer able to visit them when they needed to, even in the case of emergencies such as funerals. This was because they were required to first go to the Ministry of Home Affairs to seek a permit to enter Chiadzwa—a move that effectively made it impossible for outsiders to get in.

Another concern raised by the villagers through conversations generated by this exhibition was about the growing levels of poverty in the area. In addition to the fact that not a single new school or clinic has been built from the proceeds of diamond wealth, the very roads that lead to the diamond fields are in an advanced state of dilapidation, making it hard for vehicles travelling to Chiadzwa to safely access the area. The damage to the roads has been worsened by the huge trucks used by mining companies to transport goods to and from the diamond mines. The villagers appealed to the mining companies and the government to tar the roads. In undertaking this kind of an exhibition, it can be argued that Mutare Museum embraced what Karp and Kratz (2014) called the “interrogative museum,” “which purposefully moves away from exhibitions that seem to deliver a lecture [which] might be

declarative, indicative, or even imperative in mood—to a more dialogue-based sense of asking a series of questions” (p. 282). Furthermore, dialogue on compensation stimulated by this exhibition encouraged the government to consider establishing Community Share Ownership Trusts (CSOT). As a result, the Marange–Chiadzwa CSOT was formed by the government, and mining companies started donating money for community development projects. However, on April 23, 2018, the remaining villagers still living close to Chiadzwa staged a demonstration against the government and mining companies. The demonstration (see Figure 3) called on all villagers of Chiadzwa to come together and demand an end to theft of diamonds by the Chinese, torture, victimization, indiscriminate shootings, and continuous displacement from their agricultural fields.



Figure 3. A poster used during a demonstration by Chiadzwa villagers who were opposing the plundering of diamonds in their area. Poster © Tapiwa Nhachi.

### **New Museology and Community Engagement as a Pedagogical Practice**

In the process of creating this exhibition, we used the engagement zone as a critical adult education approach that gave Chiadzwa villagers agency to shape the narratives that were presented. They described the challenges they were facing as a result of the discovery of diamonds and how they were not benefiting in any way. The use of the museum as an engagement zone for active adult learning was borrowed from the concept of a contact zone, developed by Pratt (1991), as a space of exchange, action, and transaction carried out within the spirit of reciprocity. In the same manner, museums are typical spaces of collective meaning making, co-knowledge production, and praxis for social and self-reflexivity (Clover et al., 2016). Museums are also pedagogical institutions that give communities space to explore controversial issues together (Banz, 2008; Gray, 2016).

On the other hand, new museology was used as a pedagogical practice that allowed the Chiadzwa community to be actively involved in the production of this exhibition. According to Hutchison (2013), “New museology is one way of describing a body of practical and theoretical museum work that takes account of the way museums position cultures and social identities in their collections and exhibitions and of the way they interact with their publics” (p. 145). New museology has a particular interest in democratic learning and inclusive practices that involve developing collaborative relationships with diverse groups and audiences. Whereas in the old museology, Mutare Museum was imagined as a repository of dominant cultures, new museology advocates for its opening as a democratic space that offers diverse learning choices to the community. As a pedagogical practice, new museology promotes the need to develop strategies that redress the exclusivity and centralized authority of the museum.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have discussed how we formulated an exhibition at Mutare Museum called *Ngoda: The Wealth Beneath Our Feet* as a practice of adult education. This exhibition followed the story of the discovery of surface diamonds in Chiadzwa, Eastern Zimbabwe, in 2006 by community members before they were displaced and relocated to Arda Transau in 2008. This became a topical hot-spot issue that we decided to portray in an exhibition, and in the process the museum became an active space of critical public pedagogy and social change. As we were carrying out the research for the exhibition, villagers expressed a plethora of challenges that they were facing as a result of the discovery of diamonds. Displacements to make way for formal diamond mining resulted in villagers being relocated to Arda Transau Farm. We also embraced new museology as a practice of adult education that allowed for collaborative work with the Chiadzwa community in the processes that led to the creation of this exhibition.

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