

'I want to be a millionaire':

SURVIVAL, TRUST AND DECEPTION
IN SIERRA LEONE'S ECONOMY OF DREAMS

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Figure 1. A diamond digger with big dreams

Introduction: 'One day...'

'One day....' These two words are usually the start of a discussion about people's motivation to be involved in diamond mining in Sierra Leone. It captures the essence of the successful and often less successful efforts that so many people make in mining. The diamond mining sector can be seen as an economy of dreams: an economy driven by dreams of a better future that could perhaps not be found in other areas of economic activity. The notion thus emphasizes that dreams are the driving force behind people's engagement in this economy; it does not suggest that dreams themselves are becoming commoditized. Although the sector can be seen as an economy of dreams, most diamond miners simultaneously experience a nearly continuous postponement of their dreams' realization, as their efforts and hopes remain unfulfilled day after day. It is in such a sphere of despair, characterized by the tensions between dreams and the hardship of everyday life, that alliances must be built and stories of deception thrive.

This article focuses on the dichotomy between the dreams people have and the everyday hardship they face, the complexity of relations within the mining community and the networking strategies that characterize people's positioning in the diamond mining sector. Firstly, the article briefly discusses a history of the diamond sector. Subsequently, I will concentrate on various stakeholders and their ways of creating and operating within fragile networks. The focus is on those that are most directly involved in artisanal mining, and especially the more marginalized groups, such as diamond diggers and petty traders (*banabana*). They are the ones balancing between a struggle for survival and keeping dreams alive, and that engage in vulnerable trust relationships.

The article draws on four months of fieldwork conducted in 2009 in and around Koidu, the capital of Kono district in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone.

From images of wealth to destruction and back to dreams

Koidu has been the center of the diamond mining sector in Sierra Leone since the early 1930s when the first (accounted) diamond was found by the Government's Geological Department. Following a

period of prospecting and surveying, the Government of Sierra Leone issued an exclusive mining and prospecting permit to the Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST) in 1934. From the 1950s onwards, also artisanal mining started gaining popularity and especially the Eastern province, including Koidu, experienced an enormous influx of people (Van der Laan 1965, Lanning and Mueller 1979). Under the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme (ADMS), introduced on 6 February 1956, the first diamond mining and diamond buying licenses were issued. Licenses for diggers were only issued to Sierra Leoneans, but dealer's licenses were not restricted to nationality and many of these came to be held by Lebanese (Van der Laan 1992: 17, Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton 2000). Due to this long history of mining, diamonds have become part and parcel of Sierra Leone's society. They have had a tremendous influence on Sierra Leone's economy through an increased demand for agricultural produce, construction, crafts, manufacturing, trade and transport (Van der Laan 1965: 169). Moreover, diamond mining is embedded in specific social structures with regard to, for example, autochthony, religion, gender and kinship (see for example Van der Laan 1965, DDI International 2008, Levin and Gberie 2006, Ferme 2001, Conteh 1979, Pijpers 2011).

Whereas diamonds have long been a symbol of prosperity and Sierra Leone's development potential, during the war in the 1990s this image changed drastically when diamonds became associated with the cruelties that took place. This initiated a paradigm shift from diamonds as 'a girl's best friend' to 'blood diamonds'. As a result, the mining and trading of diamonds have become focal points in war and post-war analyses (Gberie 2002, Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010). However, after the war the 'blood diamond' paradigm was readjusted and a 'diamonds for development' discourse was established (Van Nieuwenhuizen 2006, Gberie 2009). Nowadays, many people are engaged in diamond mining again and it is currently one of the most important economic activities of Sierra Leone (Levin and Gberie 2006). The once lost dreams of wealth and prosperity seem to be back in the minds of the diggers. As mentioned, exactly those dreams for a better life, a house, a car, schooling for the children or going to Europe, keep the sector alive and have turned the sector into an economy of dreams.

This characterization might seem contradictory to the more common approach of artisanal mining as a poverty driven activity (Barry 1996, Dumett 1998, ILO 1999, Hentschel *et al.* 2002). In the case of Sierra Leone however, depicting mining as poverty driven feels like stating the obvious. The levels of poverty are so strikingly high that, in this context, almost every choice people make is poverty-driven. What makes diamond mining so distinctive from other activities is that it, supported by the success stories of others, provides the possibility of having dreams of a wealthy life. The sector offers opportunities to improve one's economic and social position, as others have also argued in other cases (Nash 1993, Dumett 1998, Grätz 2003, Grätz 2009). Exactly those opportunities and the hope to fulfill ones' dreams are essential to the sectors' existence and people's motivation to engage in it, as well as it is essential to people's lives in general. Yet, despite the dreams and imaginations of wealth, the level of poverty, deception and uncertainty, that are equally characteristics for the sector, creates a highly vulnerable context in which survival becomes as critical as dreaming. In order to operate in this sphere of despair and to keep pursuing dreams of wealth, a complex network of relations in the mining community is established.

The mining community: Co-habitation and positioning

The diversity of groups, institutions, and individuals that co-act in mining areas, altogether constitute a 'mining community'. The idea of a mining community has developed rapidly over the past decades, primarily by the shift from a perspective focused on a binary relationship between state and companies, to a perspective that also considered 'local communities' (Ballard and Banks 2003: 289). However, the inclusion of 'local communities' did not capture the complexities of mining relations either (Clark and Clark 1999) and it was widened by the inclusion of other stakeholders, such as national and international civil society organizations, NGOs, media, legal agencies and a range of consultants (Ballard and Banks 2003: 289, Luning 2012a). Besides a variety of positions of different groups, also at an individual level we can see a fluid system of positioning as members of specific networks may simultaneously integrate in other networks and might have multiple stakes, thereby engaging in processes of repositioning

and reconfiguration (Bähre 2007a, Luning 2012b). Obviously the mining community is a heterogeneous body of stakes and stakeholders situated at various levels. Furthermore, all these stakeholders operate at different sites ranging from the mining site itself to the places where trade is taking place. These sites can be seen as sites of co-habitation; they are spatial and temporal intertwinements of different people and activities such as different forms of mining, trading, catering and agriculture (see Pijpers 2011).

The Sierra Leone diamond mining sector provides an excellent ethnographic setting for showing the complexity of a mining community. In the following section I will give a brief overview of some of the stakeholders by analyzing a picture of an average mining site (see Figure 2). As explained before, this paper focuses on people that are most directly involved in artisanal mining operations. From the mining site, we will move to town where different diamond dealers are found. The different positions that this analysis focuses on will be important when discussing the importance of networks later in this paper.

Figure 2 shows a mining site located just outside Koidu town. In Sierra Leone, artisanal diamond mining concerns surface and open pit mining. In the picture one can see various men *pulling*. By using



Figure 2. Mining site just outside Koidu

buckets, shovels and a water-pumping machine, they open a pit and dig for gravel (soil) that might contain diamonds. *Pulling* is done during the dry season when the pits are 'easily' accessible and towards the rainy season, when most pits full up with water, the extracted soil will be processed. The men in the picture belong to different groups that usually consist of around three to four diggers coming from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, although it seems that people have a preference to work together with others from the same ethnic group. Groups work independent, but occasionally they team up, for example during *pulling*. A specific and precise system of sharing extracted soil is used to divide the 'gravel' between the groups. Part of this system is determining which part of the pit belongs to whom, something that is indicated by sticks at the bottom of the pit. When the diamondiferous soil is extracted every group will do the *washing*¹ on its own and the group sells the diamonds that are found after which the profit is divided among its members. However, many diggers have strategies to deceive their fellow-diggers, such as hiding diamonds in their mouth or pockets. Consequently, people keep a close eye on each other's movements while searching for diamonds, and suspicions of foul play are raised when colleagues suddenly purchase expensive objects, such as new clothes or a bicycle.

Most diggers work from the early morning till around 2 or 3 pm. After working in the pit, many of them engage in other activities such as agriculture, palm-wine tapping or moving around in town visiting dealers (I will come back to the latter activity later on).

As diamond digging is an activity dominated by men, it is hard to see any women in the picture. In fact, it can even be stigmatizing for a woman to be involved in diamond digging as it indicates that the family is so poor that they even have to send their women to the mines. However, women are still present, often engaged in services at the site such as selling food or drinks. It is important to note that this specific distinction is applicable to diamond mining. Gender relations are different when it comes to gold mining, for example, which is more related to the female domain (Pijpers 2011).

¹ During the washing process the gravel is literally washed in a sieve. Mud and invaluable stones are gradually removed until a concentrate, which might contain a diamond, is left.

Mining sites, such as the one on the picture, should officially be owned by a miner: someone who has a mining license. These licenses are issued for one year by the government, but approval must be given by the different responsible chiefs and the land-owners. Both chiefs and land-owners will receive compensation in terms of cash or shares in revenues. Miners can mine themselves and pay diggers a daily wage, but they can also allow diggers on their site in exchange for a percentage of the revenues that the diggers make. Looking at the scale of operations, miners can run big operations using heavy machinery, such as caterpillars, but also small operations such as pictured in Figure 2.

Although there is a theoretical distinction between legal and illegal in theory, in practice the differences between legal and illegal mining operations are not so obvious. The boundaries between the formal and the informal are rather porous in the mining sector and it will not be surprising that they operate relatively intertwined.

Most diggers are backed up by a *supporter*. The term supporter refers to people who support digging activities directly by either providing money or food in exchange for the diamonds that are found. Supporters still have to buy the diamonds, but in negotiations they will take their previous expenses into account. Not surprisingly, many diggers try to sell their diamonds elsewhere to circumvent the 'supporters-deduction'. As access to capital is a prerequisite for being a supporter, many of them are shop owners or have some other kind of business providing them with stable 'support-money'.² Supporters are vital for small-scale artisanal miners as they are the ones investing in people. This becomes particularly visible now as the diamond sector (and therefore the local economy as a whole) is presently under pressure and many supporters step out of business, either because they ran out of money or because they lost faith in a good result. Supporters are usually present at mining sites, either in person or through a representative. They keep an eye on the people they support, making sure that diamonds are not secretly sold somewhere else.

² Interestingly, as stable amounts are required, people use revenues from other activities than diamond mining, indicating that although the opportunities might be great, a stable income is most often sought elsewhere.

We now move away from the mining site that was pictured towards town where the diamonds are traded. Although the connection between mining site and trading spot is mostly established by diggers moving towards the trading areas or offices, some traders might also visit mining sites themselves. Trading is done by *diamond dealers*: a group of stakeholders that could take different forms, depending on financial capacity and legality.

There are roughly three types of dealers. First of all, the dealers who are also called dealers; they work under dealers' licenses issued by the government and have enough financial capacity to buy larger and high quality diamonds. Although a lot of diamonds within Kono district are not sold to a dealer directly, eventually most of the diamonds will leave the district through them. Most of the dealers in Sierra Leone are Lebanese. While being excluded from owning land, like every non-Sierra Leonean, the 1956 Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme allowed non-natives to apply for dealers' licenses and many licenses came to be held by Lebanese (Leighton 1979, Leighton 1992, Levin and Gberie 2006). From the first development of the mining sector onwards, the Lebanese also advanced cash to itinerant dealers, who purchase stones from small-scale miners and illegal diggers, thereby creating an interwoven network of different dealers, both legal and illegal. Nowadays Lebanese also run their own mining operations, but they always depend on others for land and need people to mediate for them.

Besides the licensed and capital-strong dealers, *djula* are active in the sector. The word *djula* used to refer to 'professional traders and to Mande-speaking minorities in parts of Côte d'Ivoire' (Launay and Miran 2000: 5). However, the meaning of the term became more and more generalized, referring to people involved in (informal) trading (*ibid.*: 6). As a group of dealers in the Sierra Leone mining sector, the *djula* have quite an ambivalent position, some people recognize them as a group of dealers and others don't. Some say they are the same as *banabana* (see below), others say they are agents working for licensed dealers. The most broadly supported opinion however is that *djula* are people who sell and buy diamonds, do not have official licenses, but do have money to spend on buying. They are in between the licensed dealers and the *banabana*, often acting as middlemen and well-known traders.

The *banabana* are an interesting group of dealers. The word *banabana* is used to describe 'people who look for survival' or 'big things'. Hence, the name implies the expectancy of something better to happen as well as the structural search for finding a means to survive, thereby drawing attention to the dreams-survival paradox in the sector again. Besides the lack of monetary capital, *banabana* do not hold licenses, which implies that they are officially illegal. Business is done in an *open yai* which is a public place located in town or adjacent to mining sites where people come to sell and buy (mainly small) diamonds. However, *open yai* could also refer to the informal group of dealers itself in which it means 'a condition of being, of general astuteness and awareness to the goings on in the diamond business' (Levin and Gberie 2006). The amounts of money circulating among and that are available to *banabana* are quite low, sometimes as little as a couple of dollars. Smaller diamonds are therefore often offered to *banabana* and not to the *djula* or dealers directly, for which larger and more expensive diamonds are reserved. However, after a *banabana* has bought a diamond, they often sell to *the djula*, the dealers or to each other, thereby creating a long chain of buying and selling.

Despite that this is only a partial layout of the mining community, it already shows its internal complexity. Diggers work in groups consisting of people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds, they simultaneously engage in farming or gardening, women are selling food at mining sites, dealers exist in different forms, land-owners and chiefs are involved in the allocation of land and supporters push money into the sector and appoint others to control mining sites. The mining sector might not be a state-controlled whole, but it is tightly organized in terms of, for example, gender, work division, rights and responsibilities, cooperation, and sharing diamondiferous soil.

Of course, this overview doesn't cover everybody who is involved, many more people and groups could be added such as government officers, the larger companies that operate in the area, diamond buyers from overseas, chiefs in different areas in the country and international as well as local civil society groups. Furthermore, although there is a multiplicity of positions in the sector, it is important to understand that these positions are not fixed and that there is a lot of back and forth movement. The stories of people that found diamonds,

and subsequently became rich supporters or dealers, but then lost everything and had to start mining again are numerous. Moreover, as mentioned before, people engage in multiple networks simultaneously. A government official working at the local mines department can be a supporter as well, a dealer can also be miner and chiefs might both oppose and support mining, depending on the social political context they engage in.

Survival strategies: trust and deceiving networks

In the previous sections I have discussed some of the driving forces behind the diamond mining sector, thereby characterizing this sector as an economy of dreams. I have also introduced part of the ‘mining community’, explaining how various stakeholders are engaged in mining activities. Most important is that many people (especially diggers and *banabana*) participate in an economy of dreams, but experience an everyday sphere of despair. In order to deal with this tension and to be able to survive in the diamond sector, a network must be build.

An important element in creating networks is the role of trust. According to Levin and Gberie (2006: 35) ‘by far the most important determinant of price is the relative expertise of the negotiating parties’. In a field consisting of unequal relations in terms of knowledge and power, one should either be sure that potential counterparts are trustworthy or empower oneself by developing expertise in the field of diamond mining. If you don’t have this power of expertise yourself and you are dependent on others, it is critical to work with people you trust. In following the tough path of becoming a ‘Millionaire’, building reliable networks thus becomes a strategy of survival.

In the case of artisanal gold mining in Benin, Grätz (2003, 2004) shows that trust and mistrust are part of the special social and cultural embeddedness of gold mining. ‘You cannot trust all – but a good comrade is somebody to trust, because he will be fair to you’ is a widespread statement in this respect (Grätz 2003: 13). Trust needs a certain extent of mutual understanding (Grätz 2004); it is a two-way relationship that needs to be confirmed. Furthermore, he convincingly emphasizes the importance of friendship and the creation of social relations when he argues: ‘stable social relations, ties of affec-

tion and common basic ethical assumptions are generally elements which generate trust, stabilize social networks and guarantee economic stability, especially outside formally legal regulations' (*ibid.*: 164). In the mining sector in Sierra Leone, there are similar processes of building relations and creating a network. Interesting, however, is the ambivalent role that trust plays in these processes.

The following stories demonstrate both the precarious situation in which people in the diamond mining sector operate and the way in which networks are created. The first story is a brief history of a diamond digger and reflects on the way he moves within the mining sector.

Peter – plumber, digger and money finder?

Peter, a plumber by profession, came to Kono many years ago to try his luck in diamond mining. He is always narrating how hard mining is and that he would prefer to go to another place or to go back to his village to work as a plumber again. As he explains: 'There are no good diamonds.' Unfortunately, there is no money and he can by no means, currently make the step away from mining towards plumbing. Peter is working at a site in a working group consistent of mainly Muslims. He himself is a Christian, but that is not a problem. The only problem is that if he goes to church on Sunday, anything that will be found that day will not be shared with him. Although Peter is very much dissatisfied with this fact, he also has his own cheating methods. When they are washing diamonds and he finds one, he will try to put it in his mouth when nobody is paying attention, keep it there for the whole day and then try to sell it after work. Since they don't find diamonds often, Peter needs other ways to find money. This is the reason why we often met Peter in the street, in the afternoon. He visits dealers in town asking for small money, requesting assistance or support. Sometimes a dealer will give him some 'small' money, 1,000 or 2,000 Leones,³ but often his case is rejected. Fortunately there is a researcher walking around in the area who might also be a source

³ During the time of research (March-August 2009) 1 US\$ equaled about 3000 SLL (Sierra Leone Leones).

of survival. By sharing his (often sad) stories with me, he is on the one hand being open and helpful, but on the other trying to build a relationship in which requests for assistance are possible. Although Peter has consciously made the move to diamond mining, due to the current hardships he is thinking of moving back to his old profession again.

Peter's story tells how he, coming from a background as a plumber, pursues a better life through working in the diamond mines. Unfortunately, the better life is hard to reach and it's a daily struggle to make ends meet. He operates in a team of diamond diggers, but this immediate network is fragile; he cannot trust his fellow diggers and seeks refuge in cheating strategies himself as well. Furthermore, there are no good diamonds anymore (they don't find enough diamonds that have a reasonable quality and size) and he has to find other ways of finding a living. By walking around in Koidu town and visiting dealers, he is extending his network and literally finding his money. Through my presence as a researcher, I also became part of his network as a potential source of income. The story further highlights people's flexibility in moving between livelihood strategies. This flexibility is a necessary one, it is required in order to respond to sudden crises, but it is also highly constrained by a lack of opportunities (often lack of access to money). But perhaps his extended network allows him to continue his search for better days.

Another interesting illustration of the creation of networks is the way in which *banabana* operate. As said, *banabana* often do their business at the Open Yai, where a lot of other *banabana* are present. Although they work alone, they keep a close eye on each other and one could often hear the phrase: 'I am behind you'. One *banabana* explained this as follows:

"There is a lot of cordiality among the *banabana*, cordiality for each other. It is for bad times, maybe some time you have diamonds, then you can help others, some other time you experience bad times and somebody can help you. This 'I am behind you' thing can also be done by dealers if the stone is big enough. But not everybody does it to everybody; it depends on your cordiality.

'Maybe if you are a dealer with a diamond and I am a dealer and your friend, I will call you to say: 'O Robert, I am behind you. Don't forget about me''.

The story explains that when you see somebody having business, you can partake in the transaction and ask for a share of the profit by stating 'I am behind you'. Although, this system might be presented as a form of social security, since it is presented as a way of caring for each other in bad times, we should be aware that such systems can also result in skewed and tensed relationships, as for example shown by Bähre (2007b) in the case of financial self-help groups in South Africa. Despite the act of 'being behind somebody' appears to be socially and economically securing, people are not always happy when they find someone behind them and it could just as well lead to conflicts about money resulting in negative consequences on the long run.

As both stories show, people establish networks on which they can rely in times of need. The precarious situation in which people find themselves every day requires the creation of networks with for example dealers, family and friends. These networks serve as a social security system. For Peter, his relations with dealers are opportunities to find immediately needed money and *banabana* have found a way to share business benefits. However, the stories also indicate that relations cannot always be trusted and that networks are fragile and open to deception. The following two stories elaborate on this issue of deception and the violation of trust relationships.

A few weeks ago Sory went to a dealer with a friend. They made up a story that he owed his friend 20,000 Leones and they intended to ask a dealer to borrow them the money, after which they wanted to share this amount. The dealer they went to is the dealer where they used to sell their diamonds. The dealer gave them the money, but directly to the friend. When going back his friend refused to give Sory his own part.

(Diggers, companions of Sory), 24 June 2009)

A couple of days ago somebody found a big diamond. He was walking through the streets asking the people if there was poverty in

this country. The dealer paid him 30 million Leones for the diamond. Although he did not realize it yet, that amount was far too little. The dealer left the country with the diamond. He was afraid that people wanted to rob and maybe kill him in order to lay their hands on this diamond. This digger was not only cheated by his dealer. As he was illiterate, he went to the dealer with somebody else, a friend, who was literate. However, this friend and the dealer made a deal together and this friend is now in Liberia. The deception is even worse for the digger, because he was given a lower amount than what they have told him. Because he was illiterate though, he could not recount and did not realize he was deceived. (Diggers, 29 April 2009)

Both of the stories highlight the role of (lack of) knowledge and especially the skewed power relations due to differences in knowledge in the networks that people create. They also show that trust is an important, but fragile or even dangerous, element in creating alliances. In the first story two friends first decide to cheat a dealer together and then one of them suddenly deceives the other. So, we see that trust changes according to the situation. At the site, there was an agreement based on trust and they had a shared 'enemy', but at the dealers' office the relation shifted and one of them decided to violate their trust-relation by walking away with the full amount. In the second story, too, someone places trust in a friend, but is cheated twice-over. His lack of knowledge makes him vulnerable, even to his friend who was supposed to be in his support.

The stories also indicate that the violation of trust is accepted rather matter-of-factly. Moreover, the sector is often characterized as a system of distrust, for example as many diggers, miners, as well as dealers, emphasize that 'there is no truth in the mining sector' or 'for diamonds you cannot trust anybody. Because for diamonds, the moment you see a diamond, your heart changes'. Apparently distrust seems to be inherent to this system in which trust is essential. It can therefore be questioned whether trust in this case is not merely a 'faked trust', used as a strategy allowing the creation of relationships from which one might gain. Still, people continue to create relations of trust that are vulnerable to violation. This seems paradoxical.

In his analysis of the Madagascar sapphire trade, Walsh (2008) provides an interesting case of people who get 'burned', i.e. deceived because expected returns fail to materialize. Building upon Mauss (1990 [1925]), who argued that collectively acknowledged obligations to give, receive and reciprocate can be essential to the functioning and reproduction of social and economic networks, Walsh (2008: 63) shows that in the sapphire trade, the actors seemingly obliged by reciprocal relations, are actually only 'potentially obliged, always free to neglect the obligatory'. In other words, one can always decide not to reciprocate and thus harm the relation that has been built. The case Walsh (2008) makes concerning the sapphire trade in Madagascar can also be made for the diamond sector in Sierra Leone. Not only are gifts, in the broadest sense, hardly reciprocated, also cheating, which could be considered as an extreme form of harming a relation, is part of daily life and widely accepted. Diamonds are often kept behind or are sold by diggers to others than their supporter. Trust among people might change from situation to situation (as is shown by the example of Sory and his friend), and sharing profits as an official part of business relations most often remains a potential obligation, or an obligation without severe consequences when it is not met.

If a relation based on trust is so fragile, and is likely to be harmed, then why do people continue to rely on their networks? Similar to Walsh argument (Walsh 2008: 67) it paradoxically seems that the only way to succeed, or perhaps survive, in a system characterized by various sorts of deception is to develop and maintain relationships in which one can have a sort of confidence. Especially in a context where a properly functioning legal system is absent, engaging in fragile networks might be the only solution people have. An interesting insight in explaining this continuous engagement in deceptive relations is provided by a digger who explained to me that his brother is a dealer in the area. His brother also supports him in diamond mining. When asked about cheating, the man said that of course he is cheating his brother and his brother knows. His brother thinks that in the end the stolen profit will go to their mother. He continued explaining that 'there is no work where there is no thieving. It is the game. Even when you are working in parliament or the bank, it's all over the world'. The acceptance of cheating here is partially explained

as a lack of influence people have to change the system, as well as in terms of communal or indirect reciprocity. Deceit and the refusal of returning a gift or favor will turn out as an opportunity for someone else. Just like someone else's deceit might become an opportunity for oneself. If everybody sells their diamond to someone else than their own supporter, eventually, all supporters will have their benefit, one could argue. It is in this way of reasoning that the communal aspect of Mauss's (1990 [1925]) idea of reciprocity occurs. Despite the lack of a direct return gift, the lack of reciprocity, there is a common understanding that a gift will eventually be returned, albeit indirectly. However, although this analysis might create a kind of ideal image of communal or indirect reciprocity, we have to realize that it is likely that this system will turn out beneficial for a lucky few, whilst leaving many others with their hopes 'burned'.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the diamond mining sector in Sierra Leone as an economy of dreams. The history of diamond mining has showed several paradigm shifts, from diamonds being a symbol of prosperity and development potential, to images of destruction and war, but back again to an opportunity to dream of a better life. These dreams are the driving force behind people's motivation to be involved in the mining sector; they keep the sector alive and are vital to the lives of people engaged in it. However, there is a tension between the dreams of wealth and the everyday hardship people face, or, in other words, between the economy of dreams and the sphere of despair.

As we have seen, the sector consists of a variety of people and groups of people that co-act in 'the mining community'. The various positions within this community are not fixed, instead, people move within and between them, engaging in processes of repositioning. Hence, the mining community is a heterogeneous body of stakes and stakeholders; of sites of co-habitation, characterized by spatial and temporal intertwinements of different people and activities. In order to successfully engage in the sector one has to build networks. People create relationships with others, as this empowers them to manoeuvre within unequal power relations, and provides them with a form of social security. The alliances people create might even become

survival strategies. However, the networks people build appear to be fragile and the trust on which relations are based is easily violated. The stories of people who are deceived by friends are numerous and practically everybody in the sector admits that *'there is no truth in mining'*. Nevertheless, within the precarious and volatile context of the artisanal diamond mining sector in Sierra Leone, it remains critical to build networks. Moreover, since most diggers lack expertise and capital, creating alliances becomes even more important. Even though there is a high risk of being deceived by those one (forcefully) trusts, people have to build networks and create alliances in order to survive and to continue pursuing their dreams of a better future. Because perhaps one day diamond mining might bring that better future.

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