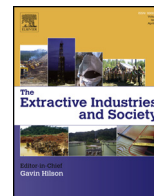




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Original article

Social insecurity, stability and the politics in West Africa: A case study of artisanal and small-scale diamond mining in Guinea, 1958–2008

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ABSTRACT

The period of protracted conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia brought the politics of alluvial diamond mining in West Africa to the forefront of academic and policy-oriented discussions. Using social contract theory, this paper moves away from discussions on how minerals have perpetuated conflict in the region, and interrogates how the governance of diamond mining in Guinea impacts regime stability and social insecurity. More importantly, it attempts to illustrate how artisanal diamond mining contributes to stability. The paper situates this discussion within the broad spectrum of the social contract between state and citizens and an analysis of how these are at play in diamond mining areas. It illustrates how artisanal diamond mining enables specific social contracts to emerge and how this in turn contributes to stability in the regions where they are extracted.

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1. Introduction

Diamond mining activities in West Africa attracted headlines in the international media during the civil war in Sierra Leone, 1991–2002 (Kawamoto, 2012). The diamonds smuggled during the war provided a source of revenue for warring parties, which prolonged the conflict (Smillie et al., 2000). Since then, the role of artisanal diamond mining in West Africa—principally, in Sierra Leone and its neighbours with which it shares borders, Liberia and Guinea—has been extensively reviewed.

All have a wealth of alluvial and kimberlite diamonds, which have attracted a number of foreign investors over the years. But the extraction of alluvial diamonds in all three countries has been particularly contentious, long at the heart of internal and international discussions on smuggling, corruption and environmental degradation (Gberie, 2003). Despite the physical similarities of the stones being mined across all three countries and little difference between the level of mechanisation of the operations linked to their extraction, in Sierra Leone and to some extent, Liberia, the sector has been traditionally dominated by Lebanese smugglers. In Guinea, however, they have not enjoyed the same monopoly and level of access (Smillie et al., 2000). It was only after the coup in Sierra Leone in 1997 that a number of Lebanese diamond traders fled to Guinea, as well as Gambia and Côte

d'Ivoire, although most maintained links with Sierra Leone, where they continued operating (Gberie, 2002). In Guinea, diamond mines remain largely controlled by indigenes, the majority of whom are a part of the Guinean Mandé group.

The purpose of this article is not to undertake a comparative analysis between Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone but to look at the politics of diamond mining in the former, a country which, despite having escaped the large-scale conflict in the politics of its resource management, has, nevertheless, experienced some of the major complexities that generally plague resource extraction in unstable and fragile democracies. Specifically, the paper addresses the somewhat neglected aspect of the politics of artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) of diamonds in the country.

The article contributes to debates which seek to understand why ASM has become a key livelihood activity in rural communities, as well as why it is important to understand the socio-economic dynamics and impacts of the sector in West Africa (Hilson and Gatsinzi, 2014; Hilson, 2016; Banchirigah and Hilson, 2009). It seeks to explain how the governance of artisanal diamond mining in Guinea has affected *regime stability* and influenced *social insecurity*. The focus is on Banankoro, the richest diamond-producing area in Guinea and the location of the highest concentration of artisanal and industrial (diamond) mining activities in the country. The article argues that earlier initiatives taken by different regimes to control the artisanal diamond mining sector were never properly executed, consequently giving rise to a *circumstantial permissive social contract*. The article also argues that

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the employment opportunities offered by artisanal diamond mining activities have created a situation characterised by *regime stability* and on-going *social insecurity* in diamond-rich regions.

The analysis presented here draws on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected during field work in Guinea between August and November 2013. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation and analysis of primary documents retrieved from archives, private organisations, government institutions, NGOs and private businesses. An extensive review of secondary literature, including academic sources, policy documents, company, state and institutional reports, and online sources, was undertaken. The specific respondents who shared their opinions on the concerns of actors working and living in diamond mining areas included: actors directly involved in the artisanal diamond mining activity, including diggers, 'Masters' and community leaders; civil servants actors from government institutions, specifically from the Ministry of Mines and Geology; representatives from the armed forces; current employees of private diamond mining companies; and former employees of (now closed) private diamond mining companies. The majority of respondents directly involved in the artisanal mining activities were from the Mandé ethnic group, but in government institutions and private companies, the respondents were from diverse ethnic groups and from all over the country.

The period 1958–2008 featured a number of political phases during which Guinea managed to avoid resource-related conflict despite the country's extremely poor record of governance, increasing poverty, coercive regimes, extreme violence in both neighbouring Sierra Leone and Liberia, and external threats from rebel insurgencies in 2000 from both countries. During the period covered by this paper [1958–2008], Guinea had two main regimes. The first post-colonial regime [1958–1984], was led by Sékou Touré, whose ideology was based on socialist doctrines (Lewin, 2010) which had significant consequences for the development of the state. Touré's regime was dictatorial, coercive and repressive. The country during Touré's regime was closed to foreign interactions except for those led and managed by the State. Under the second regime [1984–2008], led by Lansana Conté, the Guinean economy was liberalised, but this resulted in little socio-economic improvement amongst the general population. Conté, a former member of the armed forces, despite having liberalised the country and legalised multi-party elections, remained dictatorial, 'winning' all elections from 1993 until his death in 2008. By the time Conté died, Guinea had been under 50 years of dictatorial rule. Whilst both regimes were dictatorial, Touré's regime was more extreme in its use of force and repression compared to that of Conté.

2. Mining in Guinea: an overview

Mineral extraction has been the dominant economic activity in Guinea since 1958. With its production of 700,000 tons annually (though potentially, 15 million tons of per year), Guinea is amongst the world's largest producers and exporters of bauxite (SM Guinea, 2010; KPMG, 2014). Three main mineral resources, bauxite, gold and diamonds, are the main branches of Guinea's extractives economy, although the former is by far the biggest contributor, economically. Industrial mining in Guinea commenced in the early-1960s, following the first production of bauxite and its transformation into alumina; bauxite mining and production would begin to flourish in Boké-Sangarédi and in Kindia-Débélé beginning in 1973–74.

Guinea has the world's largest reserve of exceptional-quality bauxite, estimated at 20 billion tons (Campbell, 2006). Over half of foreign investment in the country is in the mining sector, which is also the country's largest source of export revenues. Mining

revenues contribute 15.8% of public expenses in the areas of health, education, water and infrastructure development (MEF, 2002). In 2005, mining accounted for about 80% of the country's export revenues and 20% of GDP (Huijbregts and Palut, 2005). Although by 2010, mining only accounted for about 65% of the country's export revenue (World Bank, 2015), it remains an important source of state revenues. In 2013, mining accounted for 18.7% of the state's total income (IMF, 2015). Over the years, mining has consistently been the main source of paid employment in Guinea. Industrial mining activities provided about 22,000 direct full-time jobs and created an additional 50,000 jobs indirectly (IMF, 2008). Despite the slow economic growth in the country, from 1958 to 2008, economic growth in Guinea can be credited to the mining sector which was the biggest employer after government, and the largest contributor to export revenue and most stable source of tax revenue for the state.

Guinea is geographically divided into four regions: Upper Guinea, Middle Guinea, Maritime Guinea and Forest Guinea. Diamonds are mostly found in Upper Guinea, more precisely in Banankoro within the Kérouané area and in Forest Guinea (primarily in the region of Kissidougou, Beyla, Guéckédou and Macenta along the rivers Baoulé, Milo and Diani). In 1996, diamonds were also discovered in the West of Kindia and in Forécariah (MMG, 2005). In Upper Guinea, the majority of citizens are Mandé. Following their discovery in Sierra Leone in 1930, diamonds were discovered in Guinea in 1934 near the river Makona in the Macenta area (Soumah, 2008). They occur as kimberlite and alluvial deposits. Guinea's diamond resource potential "is estimated to be about 40 million carats, while the estimate production capacity was within a range of 480,000 to 720,000 carats per year" (Chirico et al., 2014:48). In Banankoro, which is the focus of this study, the majority of diamonds are alluvial, extracted by using artisanal, semi-industrial and industrial methods.

Few studies have explored the socio-economic impact of ASM of diamonds and the context in which it takes place in Guinea. Of the few available papers on the subject, most focus on gold (see e.g. Bolay, 2014; Dessertine, 2016). This paper, therefore, helps to bridge this gap by exploring the ways in which ASM of diamonds contributes to Guinea's economy. Artisanal diamond mining has created an estimated 103,000 jobs in the country (Chirico et al., 2014), although the exact number of those employed is not known.

In Guinea, ASM features simple tools and techniques. The former include a shovel, sieve—commonly called a *tami* in Guinea—a bucket and bags in which to carry the gravel and transport it to the nearest river or water point for washing. These tools are light and the majority are locally-made, and therefore, are affordable to those interested in starting diamond mining. Larger artisanal diamond mine sites, despite featuring some industrial tools, are generally basic setups, manned by operators who are often exposed to high safety risks. Artisanal diamond diggers lack adequate clothing and equipment to enable them to securely extract water or dig holes. They often have no shoes, they work long hours without rest and wash recovered diamonds in unclean water. However, this work remains one of the few options available to many of them.

Once artisanal diamond miners have earned money from their discoveries, they tend to upgrade to larger sites and use machines where and when needed. These sites become small-sized, semi-industrial diamond mining sites. Where there is too much water on large sites, miners use small pumps to remove the water. Artisanal washing units commonly called *laverie artisanale* are used to separate mud, sand, gravel and large stones, after which diamonds are collected. The equipment is basic and parts are often fabricated locally although some pieces are imported, such as the water pump and parts of the washing unit.

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