

University of Neuchâtel, Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences

# Gold journeys: Expulsion-induced mobility and the making of artisanal mining spaces in West Africa

An ethnography of itinerant labour at the bottom of the gold supply chain

A thesis in Anthropology submitted to the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences for the degree of Doctor of Human and Social Sciences

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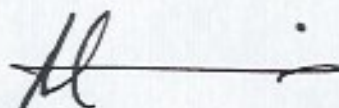
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Le doyen  
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## Abstract

Due to a combination of factors including decreasing agricultural incomes, increased access to new technologies, and the spike in gold prices since 2000, a growing number of men from rural regions in West Africa, in particular from Guinea and Mali, are undertaking ever further and longer journeys to extract gold artisanally to support their families and experiment alternative lifestyles. While the mining boom in West Africa is usually analysed either from the perspective of transnational mining corporations or from the perspective of local communities whose economy depends on artisanal and small-scale mining, this thesis investigates the interstice between these two fields by examining the itinerancies of gold diggers who navigate transnational and informal artisanal mining spaces along the expansion of the industrial mining frontier. By locating the movements of miners at the intersection of three forms of expulsions (from agrarian fields of values, from formal commercial circuits, and from informal work sites), this research proposes an alternative understanding of mobility in artisanal mining spaces to the idea of the “gold rush”, which commonly circulates in academic and development circles. The study argues that expulsion-induced mobility—a notion which I propose as a counterpoint to the concept of “mining-induced displacement”—enables the entanglement of the formal industrial sector and the informal artisanal one.

A close study of extraction sites spread across West-Africa demonstrates that the formal and informal segments of the gold supply chain are complementary rather than competitive, and they articulate one another thanks to the mobility of the informal workers who are systematically expelled by the industry. Secondly, by calling attention to the moral economies, mobility and residential strategies, and the social networks of support developed by itinerant miners, this thesis contends that, despite being continually placed in situation of illegality, gold miners develop resilient institutions that help them cope with the uncertain context of the gold mines, in particular the constant threat of being removed; in doing so, they perpetuate their mobile lifestyle while struggling to respond to the moral obligations rooted in Mandenka kinship. Finally, the territorial governance of mining areas is studied by critically examining the corporate social responsibility programmes of mining corporations which, it is argued, act as an interface in the management of informal workers’ expulsion.

The analysis is based on a 12-month itinerant ethnographic study in Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, and Switzerland between 2009 and 2014. I followed miners’ itinerancies across the continent, traveling with some of them and meeting them regularly in different places, and I also tracked the journey of gold from the mining sites across the various sites of commodification and transformation that conduct it further to Swiss and UAE foundries. My field observations and uncountable informal interviews are supported by biographic narrative interviews and longitudinal network interviews with itinerant miners, as well as expert interviews with state authorities and commercial agents.

Through ethnographic descriptions and through the stories of itinerant miners and the analysis of their social networks of support, this dissertation systematically documents how miners manage their relations on the move with their peers, with local populations, with mining companies, and to a lower extent, with the state. By focusing on the relational strategies miners adopt to render stability

to a social and material environment characterized by extreme forms of precariousness, this thesis makes three distinctive theoretical and empirical contributions. First, it questions the role of locality in systems of migratory circulation by identifying cases where this notion is particularly elusive; therefore, it contributes to analyses of social networks in situations of mobility by describing social spaces independent of lasting territorial anchorages. Then, it calls into question the deterministic dimension in theories on expulsion by demonstrating the active role of miners in these contexts and the production of specific subjectivities and ethical norms that help them cope with the temporality of the mines. Finally, it contributes to enlarging the scope of debates on displacement and dispossession in mining contexts by moving the focus from the sedentary standpoint of the local population—on which research and programmes usually focus—to the temporary itinerant miners who are often neglected both in research and in policies; the notion of expulsion-induced mobility seeks to depict these processes from the standpoint of mobile labour.

**Key words:** Gold mining, Informal itinerant labour, Expulsion induced mobility, Corporate Social Responsibility, Supply chain capitalism, Social networks, West Africa

## Résumé

Avec la baisse des revenus agricoles, l'accès à de nouvelles technologies, et l'augmentation des prix de l'or depuis les années 2000, un nombre grandissant d'hommes venant des régions rurales d'Afrique de l'Ouest, en particulier de Guinée et du Mali, entreprend des voyages toujours plus longs et distants à travers le continent afin d'extraire artisanalement l'or qui leur permet de soutenir leurs familles et d'expérimenter des modes de vie alternatifs. Tandis que le boom minier en Afrique de l'Ouest est généralement envisagé soit du point de vue des multinationales de l'extraction, soit du point de vue des communautés qui dépendent de l'exploitation artisanale de l'or, cette thèse explore l'interstice entre ces deux champs à travers les itinérances des chercheurs d'or qui circulent dans les espaces transnationaux et informels de l'artisanat minier au gré de l'expansion de la frontière de l'industrie minière. En situant les déplacements des mineurs à l'intersection de trois formes d'expulsion (des champs de valeurs agrariens, des circuits commerciaux formels et des sites de travail informels), cette recherche propose une lecture alternative de la mobilité dans le domaine des mines à celle de « la ruée » qui prédomine dans les milieux académiques et les institutions de développement. Le principal argument est que la mobilité induite par l'expulsion systématique des orpailleurs permet d'articuler le secteur formel de l'industrie et le secteur informel de l'artisanat au sein de la chaîne d'approvisionnement de l'or.

En premier lieu, l'examen des sites d'extraction de l'or diffus à travers l'Afrique de l'Ouest démontre que les filières formelles et informelles sont complémentaires plutôt que compétitives et s'enchevêtrent notamment grâce à la mobilité des travailleurs informels systématiquement expulsés par l'industrie. En second lieu, l'attention portée aux économies morales, aux stratégies de mobilité et de résidence, et aux réseaux sociaux de supports développés par les mineurs soutient l'idée que, bien que constamment placés en situation d'illégalité, les orpailleurs développent des institutions résilientes qui leur permettent de s'adapter au contexte incertain des mines d'or, en particulier la menace constante de leur éviction, et de perpétuer ainsi leur mode de vie itinérant tout en répondant aux obligations morales ambivalentes imbriquées dans la parenté mandingue. Finalement, la gouvernance territoriale du secteur est étudiée au prisme d'une analyse critique des programmes de responsabilité sociale des sociétés minières envisagés comme interface dans la gestion de l'expulsion des travailleurs informels.

L'analyse proposée se fonde sur une recherche ethnographique itinérante combinant 12 mois d'observation participante en Guinée, au Mali, au Sénégal, en Côte d'Ivoire et en Suisse entre 2009 et 2014. J'y ai suivi d'une part les déplacements d'orpailleurs itinérants à travers le continent, et d'autre part l'or depuis les sites d'extraction à travers les différents lieux de commercialisation et de transformation qui le conduisent ensuite aux fonderies suisses et émiraties. Les observations de terrain et les innombrables entretiens informels ont été complétés par des entretiens narratifs biographiques et des entretiens réseaux longitudinaux avec des mineurs itinérants ainsi que des entretiens d'experts avec des responsables étatiques et agents commerciaux.

A travers diverses descriptions ethnographiques, les récits de mineurs itinérants et l'analyse de leurs réseaux de support, ce travail documente systématiquement les relations entretenues par les orpailleurs avec leurs pairs, avec les populations résidentes, avec les compagnies minières et, dans

une moindre mesure, avec l'état. En focalisant sur les stratégies relationnelles par lesquels les mineurs cherchent à construire une certaine stabilité dans un environnement social et matériel marqué par une extrême précarité, la thèse apporte trois principales contributions empiriques et théoriques. Premièrement, elle questionne le rôle de la localité dans les systèmes de circulation migratoire en s'appuyant sur des cas où cette notion est particulièrement éphémère ; elle contribue ainsi à l'analyse des réseaux sociaux en situation de mobilité par la description d'espace sociaux indépendants d'ancrages territoriaux durables. Ensuite, elle relativise le caractère déterministe des théories de l'expulsion en démontrant le rôle actif des orpailleurs dans ces contextes et en insistant sur la production de subjectivités et de normes éthiques leur permettant de s'adapter à la temporalité de l'extraction minière. Enfin, elle contribue à élargir les débats sur les processus de déplacement et de dépossession dans les contextes miniers en privilégiant la perspective mobile des travailleurs temporaires à celle, sédentaire, des populations locales sur lesquelles l'attention est habituellement portée; la notion de *mobilité-induite par expulsion* vise à décrire ces processus du point de vue des travailleurs itinérants.

**Mots clés:** Extraction aurifère, Travail informel itinérant, Mobilité induite par expulsion, Responsabilité sociale de l'entreprise, Capitalisme des chaînes d'approvisionnement, Réseaux sociaux, Afrique de l'Ouest



## Table of contents

|                                                                                                            |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Abstract.....</b>                                                                                       | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Table of contents.....</b>                                                                              | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Lists of figures, tables and pictures.....</b>                                                          | <b>11</b> |
| <b>Acknowledgements .....</b>                                                                              | <b>13</b> |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>                                                                                  | <b>19</b> |
| Three pictures of an extractive economy .....                                                              | 19        |
| Contextual background: towards an ethnography of gold mining journeys .....                                | 27        |
| State of research and conceptual framework.....                                                            | 39        |
| Construction of the field of study: the transnational spaces of artisanal gold mining in West Africa ..... | 54        |
| Outline of the dissertation .....                                                                          | 68        |

## PART ONE

|                                                                                                                     |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Disentangling gold circuits of production .....</b>                                                              | <b>70</b> |
| <b>Chapter 1: Gold, labour, and the coproduction of artisanal and industrial mining spaces in West Africa .....</b> | <b>71</b> |
| 1.1 Introduction: “Guinea is the richest country in West Africa” .....                                              | 71        |
| 1.2 The organization of artisanal gold mining labour in the Mandenka speaking area.....                             | 74        |
| 1.3 West Africa’s gold in the world’s production.....                                                               | 84        |
| 1.4 Conclusion .....                                                                                                | 98        |
| <b>Chapter 2: Gold and its transformation through the supply chain .....</b>                                        | <b>99</b> |
| 2.1 Introduction: merging the formal and informal circuits .....                                                    | 99        |
| 2.2 Some elements of context .....                                                                                  | 100       |
| 2.3 The four zones of qualification along the supply chain.....                                                     | 102       |
| 2.4 Conclusion .....                                                                                                | 117       |

## PART TWO

|                                                                                                            |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Materializing masculine aspirations .....</b>                                                           | <b>118</b> |
| <b>Chapter 3: Is gold mining a lottery? Gold materiality and the micropolitics of its extraction .....</b> | <b>119</b> |
| 3.1 Introduction: The story of how <i>Damanba</i> became the “big mine” .....                              | 119        |
| 3.2 Changing seniority rules in rural Mandé .....                                                          | 121        |
| 3.3 The social life of a gold particle (from underground mines to market stalls) .....                     | 123        |
| 3.4 Gold materiality: a dense yet fluid resource .....                                                     | 132        |
| 3.5 Luck and cooperation .....                                                                             | 134        |
| 3.6 Conclusion .....                                                                                       | 140        |

|                                                                                                                |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Chapter 4: Going for gold, making male personhood? .....</b>                                                | <b>143</b> |
| 4.1 Introduction: "Another <i>kountani</i> ! There are an increasing number of hotheads in these mines!" ..... | 143        |
| 4.2 Age, transitions, and mobility .....                                                                       | 147        |
| 4.3 <i>Kountaniw'</i> ambivalent aspirations.....                                                              | 150        |
| 4.4 Never-ending navigations .....                                                                             | 168        |
| 4.5 Conclusion .....                                                                                           | 171        |

## PART THREE

|                                                   |            |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Perpetuating precarious circulations .....</b> | <b>173</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------|

|                                                                                            |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Chapter 5: Mining impermanence, <i>kalayantigiw'</i> technologies of mobility .....</b> | <b>174</b> |
| 5.1 Introduction: Kalou four years later, a "professional" miner in Senegal .....          | 174        |
| 5.2 Two approaches of the mobility-locality nexus .....                                    | 179        |
| 5.3 Technologies of mobility across impermanent terrains.....                              | 182        |
| 5.4 <i>Kountigiw'</i> work ethos: everyday transience .....                                | 203        |
| 5.5 Conclusion: making a living out of the ephemerality of mining journeys.....            | 207        |

|                                                                                          |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Chapter 6: Mobile livelihoods between scattered households .....</b>                  | <b>210</b> |
| 6.1 Introduction: "Any time I hear echoes from the mines, I take my bike and I go" ..... | 210        |
| 6.2 Strategies of mobility and residence .....                                           | 213        |
| 6.3 Theoretical types of residency .....                                                 | 215        |
| 6.4 Conclusion .....                                                                     | 229        |

|                                                                                |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Chapter 7: Intimate and economic arrangements along mining routes .....</b> | <b>231</b> |
| 7.1 Introduction: Meillassoux reloaded? .....                                  | 231        |
| 7.2 Labour mobility and the sexual division of labour .....                    | 232        |
| 7.3 Hearth-holds and intimate transactions .....                               | 233        |
| 7.4 Conclusion .....                                                           | 251        |

|                                                                                         |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Chapter 8: Resilient social networks on the move .....</b>                           | <b>253</b> |
| 8.1 Introduction: "I was alone, travelling with my wife" .....                          | 253        |
| 8.2 (In)security, mobile livelihoods, and social networks .....                         | 254        |
| 8.3 Social networks and the study of (im)mobility .....                                 | 256        |
| 8.4 Mapping supports: observing social relations beyond the "network metaphor" .....    | 259        |
| 8.5 General description of interviewees and overview of social networks' composition .. | 260        |
| 8.6 The dynamics of support relations along miners' careers .....                       | 265        |
| 8.7 Differentiated professionalizations .....                                           | 274        |
| 8.8 Conclusion .....                                                                    | 299        |

## PART FOUR

### The workings of expulsions ..... 302

#### Chapter 9: The securitization of an industrial mining enclave: creating local partners and removable illegals..... 303

- 9.1 Introduction: Kalou, 8 moves, 4 expulsions ..... 303
- 9.2 Artisanal and industrial mining in Siguiri: an example of a complicated cohabitation 305
- 9.3 Who competes for what? – the rules of the game ..... 309
- 9.4 The securitisation of large scale gold mining: the making of the partner community of traditional *orpailleurs* vs. the illegal miners coming from abroad ..... 312
- 9.5 The management of expulsion ..... 317
- 9.6 Capital expansion, labour expulsion ..... 324
- 9.7 Conclusion ..... 327

#### Chapter 10: Governing with power lines: the externalization of expulsions ..... 329

- 10.1 Introduction: “Governance is cheap, cheaper than defense” ..... 329
- 10.2 Siguiri, the “modern” city ..... 330
- 10.3 CSR programmes and “community partnership” ..... 332
- 10.4 The state sponsored “corporate gift” of electrification ..... 333
- 10.5 Power lines (re)activating lines of power ..... 334
- 10.6 Externalizing expulsion ..... 337
- 10.7 Conclusion ..... 339

#### Conclusions ..... 341

- Extraction and expulsion-induced mobility ..... 341
- Adaptation and transformation of local institutions in a context of accelerated extraction ... 345
- Resilient networks in the transboundary spaces of artisanal gold mining ..... 347
- Age and Agency in precarious conditions ..... 351

#### Epilogue ..... 354

#### Bibliography ..... 357

#### Appendixes..... 384

- Appendix I : Entretiens semi-structuré type expert - 2012 ..... 384
- Appendix II : Network Map – 2012 ..... 387
- Appendix III : Interview grid « JOURNEYS » 2011, 2012, 2014 ..... 388
- Appendix IV : Thematic grid « Authority, autochthony, access » - 2014 ..... 392
- Appendix V : Thematic interview grid « Material, prices, qualifications » - 2014 ..... 393
- Appendix VI : Thematic interview grid « Protection and prosapiation » - 2014..... 395
- Appendix VII : Grid supply chain - trade (Switzerland) - 2016 ..... 396
- Appendix VIII – Map of main informants and interviewees ..... 399
- Appendix IX – Sketch of a familial compound (*lu*), source : Mamadou Camara, 1999..... 400
- Appendix X – Glossary of *maninkakan* terms ..... 401
- Appendix XI - Detailed table of contents..... 403



## Lists of figures, tables and pictures

### Figures

|                                                                                                                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Figure 1-1 100-years historical chart for (a) real gold price (inflation -adjusted) and (b) annual prices .....                     | 28  |
| Figure 1-2 sites of field research .....                                                                                            | 64  |
| Figure 1-1 Production network for one bucket of raw ore in the "traditional" ASGM industry in Mali and Guinea .....                 | 77  |
| Figure 1-2 Overall titles for Upper Guinea and southern Mali, as of 2014 .....                                                      | 94  |
| Figure 1-3: Average number of controls per trip by different services .....                                                         | 97  |
| Figure 2-1 Geographical sketch of the zones of qualifications on the basis of the aforementioned case .....                         | 116 |
| Figure 3-1 Distribution of raw material among parties per 100 extracted units .....                                                 | 131 |
| Figure 4-1 Screen shot of VCD Guinean theatre piece "Akan N'dya Praa" .....                                                         | 157 |
| Figure 5-1 Kalou's ego work network in Kokoyo .....                                                                                 | 197 |
| Figure 5-2 Moral economies in production settings in/out of the field of the gold mines .....                                       | 206 |
| Figure 5-3 Model of kalayantigiw' technologies of mobility .....                                                                    | 208 |
| Figure 6-1 Networks of support for mobility and work (black: domestic group and kin; grey: others) .....                            | 211 |
| Figure 6-2 "Good shot" strategy .....                                                                                               | 218 |
| Figure 6-3 Biresidential strategy .....                                                                                             | 221 |
| Figure 6-4 Settled emigration .....                                                                                                 | 224 |
| Figure 6-5 Immobility .....                                                                                                         | 227 |
| Figure 8-1 Multiple correspondence analysis of miners' social networks for the first journey .....                                  | 277 |
| Figure 8-2 Examples of kin-dominated (badenya-like) configurations of support networks for miners' mobile livelihoods .....         | 278 |
| Figure 8-3 Examples of non-kin-dominated (fadenya like) configurations .....                                                        | 279 |
| Figure 8-4 Multiple correspondence analysis of experienced miners' social networks for the current journey (at time of study) ..... | 282 |
| Figure 8-5 Examples of family-bounded configurations among experienced miners .....                                                 | 284 |
| Figure 8-6 Fode's map of mining journeys (2004–2012) .....                                                                          | 287 |
| Figure 8-7 Fode's mobility configurations in 2004 (first journey) and 2012 (last journey) .....                                     | 287 |
| Figure 8-8 Examples of opportunistic occasional engagement configurations .....                                                     | 288 |
| Figure 8-9 Sako's map of mining journeys (1998–2012) .....                                                                          | 291 |
| Figure 8-10 Sako's mobility configurations in 1998 (first journey) and 2012 (last journey) .....                                    | 291 |
| Figure 8-11 Examples of professional itinerant configurations .....                                                                 | 293 |
| Figure 8-12 Salim's map of mining journeys ( 2001–2012) .....                                                                       | 296 |
| Figure 8-13 Salim's mobility configuration (2001-2012) .....                                                                        | 297 |
| Figure 9-1 A. Map of the study area, B. Limits of the SAG's lease .....                                                             | 307 |
| Figure 9-2 Overlapping ASM and LSM operations within the S.A.G.'s lease in 2012 .....                                               | 309 |
| Figure 9-3 Security strategy of Anglogold Ashanti (AGA 2011: 37) .....                                                              | 315 |
| Figure 9-4 Mining titles for gold, North-Eastern region of Guinea .....                                                             | 325 |

### Tables

|                                                                                                         |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Table 1-1 Basic demographics and main sources of income among 12 families in Dyesse .....               | 21  |
| Table 1-2 Estimated numbers of artisanal mine workers per country .....                                 | 28  |
| Table 1-3 Main informants .....                                                                         | 65  |
| Table 1-1: Fatalities in Bouré's artisanal mining sites (2011) .....                                    | 82  |
| Table 1-2 Gold production and employment in the ASGM and LSM sector .....                               | 85  |
| Table 1-3: Main characteristics of the mining codes in the study .....                                  | 91  |
| Table 2-1 Zones of qualification of artisanally mined gold along the global circuit of production ..... | 116 |
| Table 5-1 Itinerant miners and their masters and their respective place of residence .....              | 196 |
| Table 8-1 Distribution of support among main categories .....                                           | 262 |

|                                                                                                           |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Table 8-2 Types of kin relations .....                                                                    | 262 |
| Table 8-3 General distribution of supportive ties by dominant category of relation.....                   | 264 |
| Table 8-4: Evolution in the provision of informational support per category of relation.....              | 266 |
| Table 8-5: Evolution in the provision of financial support per category of relation .....                 | 266 |
| Table 8-6: Evolution in the provision of accommodation per category of relation.....                      | 267 |
| Table 8-7: Evolution in the provision of support for work per category of relation .....                  | 267 |
| Table 8-8: Evolution in the provision of support for travel per category of relation .....                | 267 |
| Table 8-9 Configurations of mobility support network and their main features .....                        | 298 |
| Table 9-1 Kalou's movements during the time of the study, either "spontaneous" or "after expulsion" ..... | 304 |

## Pictures

|                                                                                                                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Picture 1-1 Google map image of Koundiana Koura indicating a past prospection campaign .....                                          | 25  |
| Picture 1-1 Lines of shafts in Fatoya (Guinea).....                                                                                   | 76  |
| Picture 1-2 Excavation of the vertical well to the deposits (Kintinian, Guinea) .....                                                 | 78  |
| Picture 1-3 Access well from deposit level (Mandiana, Guinea).....                                                                    | 78  |
| Picture 1-4 Kalayantigi cutting pieces of quartz rock in the horizontal tunnels at the deposit level (Mandiana, Guinea).....          | 79  |
| Picture 1-5 Surface level (Papara, Côte d'Ivoire).....                                                                                | 80  |
| Picture 2-1 Mixing the heavy sands containing gold with mercury .....                                                                 | 103 |
| Picture 2-2 Burning the mercury-gold amalgam to recover the gold .....                                                                | 103 |
| Picture 2-3 Balanciers or small-scale buyers in the mining site of Kouban Koura .....                                                 | 105 |
| Picture 2-4 Weighing the gold with a hand weighing-scale.....                                                                         | 105 |
| Picture 2-5 Nitric purifying.....                                                                                                     | 106 |
| Picture 2-6 Hammering into a thin bar for weighing .....                                                                              | 106 |
| Picture 2-7 Densimetric weighing in a water bucket and titling of the thin gold bar .....                                             | 107 |
| Picture 2-8 Table of equivalences.....                                                                                                | 108 |
| Picture 2-9: Artisanal gold bar with hand written certification .....                                                                 | 109 |
| Picture 2-10 Ovens at Diabi's .....                                                                                                   | 110 |
| Picture 2-11 melting thin gold bars into a one-piece doré.....                                                                        | 112 |
| Picture 2-12 Making an approximately one kg doré .....                                                                                | 113 |
| Picture 4-1 Riding sports bikes at the end of the day in Karakhéna, 2014.....                                                         | 160 |
| Picture 5-1 Main road to Karakhéna between the towns of Saraya (Senegal) and Kenieba (Mali) .....                                     | 177 |
| Picture 5-2 An alley in Karakhéna, Senegal (2014).....                                                                                | 186 |
| Picture 5-3 Abandoned camp near Massioko, Mali (2013) that was said to have up to 20,000 dwellers a few weeks before the visit.....   | 186 |
| Picture 5-4 Afrigold's waiting infrastructures of extraction and exclusion on the edge of the informal mining site of Karakhéna ..... | 190 |
| Picture 7-1 Campaign for the prevention of AIDS in Siguiri targeted at fudukuruniw.....                                               | 243 |
| Picture 7-2 A kalayantigi (itinerant gold miner) with his spouse and child driving towards the mines of Gbeleko (Guinea).....         | 248 |
| Picture 9-1 Artisanal mine workers collecting bags of ore from an occupied open pit during a day of strike .....                      | 320 |
| Picture 9-2 Tolerated zone for artisanal gold mining in an abandoned pit in Boukaria, 2012 .....                                      | 323 |
| Picture 9-3 Tolerated zone for artisanal gold mining in an abandoned pit in Fatoya, 2010.....                                         | 324 |
| Picture 9-4 Figure 1 5: "Area One" as planned by S.A.G. ....                                                                          | 326 |
| Picture 10-1 Welcome sign at the entrance of Kintinian (the main village of Bouré) .....                                              | 336 |

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All the names of persons in this dissertation, except the ones namely cited above, are pseudonyms.

The names of locations have not been anonymized in order to conserve the geographical references needed to understand the journeys of itinerant miners. The names of companies have not been anonymized either, because they could be looked up very easily anyway.

All photographs, figures, tables, maps and translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Maninkakan terms are written indistinctively with French orthography or according to Mamadou Camara's French-Malinké lexicon (1990). I used the Bamana –w to mark plural forms. The terms are listed in a glossary in Appendix X.



To Jeanne and Célian

To Eddy, Maraka den





# Introduction

Artisanal gold mining is a centuries-old activity in the region encompassing upper Guinea, southern Mali, and eastern Senegal, and particularly in Bambouk and Bouré, where this research began. In the last 20 years, this region has witnessed a series of technological, social, and political changes that have profoundly transformed its economy. These transformations can be summarized into a few essential points: both industrial and artisanal production of gold increased with the rise in gold prices during the 2000s; new technologies emerged that allowed artisanal miners to mine all year long despite seasonal variations; this meant that gold mining was no longer a seasonal activity and contributed a larger share to the family's income; and therefore, the growth of the artisanal gold mining sector accelerated, and an increasing number of itinerant workers travelled further to distant sites. Within a span of a few years, many rural regions in Guinea, Mali, and Senegal were transformed from a predominantly agrarian and relatively sedentarized economy based on yearly cycles and characterized by a culture valorising ideals of permanence, to an extractive one characterized by nomadic-like lifestyles and relatively uncertain incomes wherein anything close to "permanence" is challenged on a daily basis. Altogether, these changes contributed to transforming not only the regional landscape, but also the way people thought of time and space, especially amongst the growing numbers of itinerant artisanal gold miners on which this thesis focuses.

In order to introduce the main themes of this dissertation, which looks at how miners use mobility to make a living in the precarious and rapidly changing environment of the gold mines, I will set the context for the social and economic changes engendered by the growth in the mining industry by drawing three pictures from observations in three different villages in upper Guinea (where the study started). These pictures of an extractive economy are based upon one survey, two field notes excerpts, and one satellite image.

## **Three pictures of an extractive economy**

### **Picture one – Dyesse: less farming, more mining**

The findings of a short survey conducted in the village of Dyesse, close to Kankan, offers a window into the recent temporal and economic changes taking place in rural Mandé,<sup>1</sup> the Mandenka-

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term Mandenka (group of languages) or Mandé world to refer to a geographical and cultural sphere dominated by Mandenka-speaking people, including the Bamana, Malinke, Dyula, and Soninke groups of languages (Conrad and Frank 1995).

speaking area that stretches over Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Burkina Faso, and Ivory Coast. It highlights, in particular, the motives of itinerant miners through the link between the increase in artisanal mining and rural deagrarianization.

The southern part of Kankan is often considered to be the heart of the Malinké farmland, where villages have existed since the twelfth century (Tamsir Niane 1960). Agriculture was traditionally the most valued mode of production, and Malinké's patriarchal "gerontocracy," known as *fasiya* (authority of classificatory fathers), served as village authorities in these agrarian societies (see e.g., Meillassoux 1975; Meillassoux 2000). During my time there, Sandaly (with whom I collaborated during the most part of this research) and I conducted a short survey among 12 of the 62 families living in the village to assess the importance of gold in the local economy.<sup>2</sup> We then interviewed the *lutigiw* (heads of familial compounds) about the share of gold mining in their family's income since 2008 – we asked them about the effects of Moussa Dadi's coup and the global financial crisis in 2008, and how the mining industry had changed since the year 2000.

The survey indicated that during the last year, 91% of adults had been engaged in the surging mining economy. All the families stated that gold revenues had been their primary source of income since at least 2000, and its importance had only risen. Only one family stated that the share of gold in the family's income has remained stable between 2000 and 2008, and that they don't depend primarily on gold for their livelihood but on agriculture. This can be attributed to the Keita family's hereditary wealth – they are descendants of the founders of the village and thus own large portions of land. The 11 other families stated that gold is their primary source of income, ahead of "traditional" livelihoods such as farming, trade, metalwork, or specific forms of specialized agriculture (see Table 1-1). Thus, though their social life is mainly organized around agrarian norms and values, most families appear to have been affected by the deagrarianization that began in the mid-1990s (Bryceson 2002; Bryceson 1996; Hugon 1998) and have switched to gold mining as a primary source of income<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Each family (here understood as people living within the same *lu*, i.e., the large familial unit on which production is based) consisted of an average of 32 persons; the smallest *lu* was made up of 10 persons and the largest one, 51. Altogether, the families included 117 men (all men of working age), 75 women, 11 elders (unable to work), and 170 children (not officially included in the workforce, though they may participate in domestic tasks). The 12 *lutigi* (heads of households) were interviewed separately about the economic activities of their families and historic trends in the composition of their incomes over the last 20 years. They were asked whether mining had played a direct role in their family's income, how many family members had worked in the mining sector in the last few years, and how the *lu*'s income had changed in recent years.

<sup>3</sup>In fact, artisanal mining has now become the second largest source of livelihood in Guinea (Diallo 2017); other authors have also established a link between deagrarianization and artisanal mining (Banchirigah and Hilson 2010; Bryceson, et al. 2013a; Hilson and Garforth 2012).

Table 1-1 Basic demographics and main sources of income among 12 families in Dyesse

| Family name(Jam u) | Members of the family | including men | including women | including elders | including children | Incomes from the mine this year? | Numbers of people involved in mining? | Mining incomes since 2008? | Evolution of the share of mining incomes since 2008? | Mining incomes since 2000? | Evolution of the share of mining incomes between 2000 and 2008? | Principaux revenus par ordre d'importance |
|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Kourouma           | 46                    | 8             | 3               | 1                | 34                 | yes                              | 12                                    | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Cashew , Smithing                  |
| Cisse              | 22                    | 8             | 7               | 2                | 5                  | yes                              | 14                                    | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Mixed agriculture , trade          |
| Traore             | 38                    | 10            | 6               | 1                | 21                 | yes                              | 16                                    | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Cashew , cattle                    |
| Keita              | 49                    | 22            | 10              | 1                | 16                 | yes                              | 32                                    | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Cashew , Rice                      |
| Keita              | 51                    | 11            | 17              | 3                | 20                 | yes                              | 29                                    | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | stable                                                          | Mixed agriculture , Mine , cattle         |
| Cisse              | 26                    | 12            | 7               | 0                | 7                  | yes                              | 15                                    | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Mixed agriculture , cattle         |
| Konate             | 26                    | 5             | 5               | 0                | 16                 | yes                              | 10                                    | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Mixed agriculture , Elevge         |
| Konate             | 42                    | 16            | 5               | 0                | 21                 | yes                              | 7                                     | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Mixed agriculture , Cashew         |
| Traore             | 27                    | 6             | 7               | 1                | 13                 | yes                              | 13                                    | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Cashew , cattle                    |
| Traore             | 10                    | 3             | 2               | 1                | 4                  | yes                              | 5                                     | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Cashew , Mixed agriculture         |
| Traore             | 16                    | 5             | 3               | 0                | 8                  | yes                              | 8                                     | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Cashew , cattle                    |
| Traore             | 23                    | 11            | 3               | 1                | 5                  | yes                              | 14                                    | yes                        | increase                                             | yes                        | increase                                                        | Mine , Cashew , cattle                    |
|                    |                       | 117           | 75              |                  |                    |                                  | 175                                   |                            |                                                      |                            |                                                                 |                                           |

adultes 192

The changes provoked by these economic transformations have often been analysed in terms of the contradictions that arise between the social values and expectations promoted in agrarian economies from which an increasing number of people are excluded and the adverse economic conditions that exist in reality (e.g. Geschiere 1984), in particular concerning youths (Abbink and Van Kessel 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Durham 2000).

In this context, mining is certainly a vital economic activity, but it is also a means to create an alternative identity for those excluded both from “traditional” agrarian spheres of values and from the benefits accrued from Guinean “fast capitalism” (McGovern 2015). I hence hypothesize that mining can also be located as supporting alternative fields of values like the ones many youths have engaged with like music, travel, migration, and by going on other “adventures” (see Bredeloup 2014) or imagining such “adventures” (see e.g., Kieffer 2006; Masquelier 2013).

## Picture two – Koumban: leaving to and returning from the gold mines

Let’s now move to the village of Koumban, where the miners we interviewed expressed different views on what “going to the mines” meant to them and their families.

*Excerpts adapted from field notes, January 2011*

We had just returned to Kankan [a major city in upper Guinea] from Koumban [Sandaly’s village] with Sandaly. When we arrived, we saw that Aisha, Sandaly’s sister, was busy trying to calm her neighbour and friend, Diessou, who was crying. I assumed that something bad must have happened in her family, and so Sandaly and I discreetly parked the motorbike by the house and started unpacking our stuff in the room. Sekou, Diessou’s elder son, has left and she does not know where he has gone, Aisha explained. He probably went to Kouroussa with his friends to try his luck in the gold mines, she added. She then asked Sandaly to perform his role as the oldest male and the substitute head of the household and comfort her

friend. Unlike Diessou, who imagined the worst about the informal gold mining sites, Aïsha said to Sandaly that she has known “about the mines for [a] long [time].”

Diessou’s son, who was around 20 years old, had surprised his mother that morning by announcing to her that he was going on a journey, but he had refused to tell her where he was going or what he was going to do. He had apparently made this decision without consulting his father, which according to Diessou, was unacceptable and, as she said to Sandaly, would bring shame to the family. Sekou usually worked in a motorbike mechanic workshop in town. Apparently his boss and master in the workshop – to whom Diessou had rushed first, in order to question him – did not know anything about Sekou’s departure, but he had told her that her son must have gone to the gold mines in the north. His young apprentices in the workshop had apparently been speaking of the gold mines, and some of them had made a few short trips to Kouroussa [a secondary city surrounded by gold mining sites]. Knowing that gold mining areas have a very bad reputation, especially among urban dwellers who imagine them to be places where money is gained and spent in immoral conditions, Sandaly did his best to appease Diessou’s worries and pointed out that his own brother in Koumban was working in the gold mines and was a responsible and respected father. Her son would certainly come back within a week, Sandaly added, although, as he later told me, he knew that this may not be the case at all.

This incident was particularly striking since it showed that these sudden departures to the gold mines – a phenomenon that had been described to me by many young men in the mining sector – are not just part of young men’s fantasies, but reflect actual practices amongst some of them. It is one among many such stories of “disappearances,” as people referred to them, which I heard in the cities of Conakry, Kankan, and Siguiri. Nearly everyone I spoke to had a friend or a brother who had “disappeared” – who had left for the gold mines weeks, months, or even years ago. Some of them sporadically passed on news to the family through acquaintances, but others did not, thus letting opened all kinds of wonders about their situation.

While the dramatic nature of this particular story captures the urgency and suddenness of these departures, where youths “rush” to gold mining sites with hopes of quickly transforming their lives, this must, however, be contrasted with the fact that, for many, though it may require a highly mobile lifestyle, mining gold has become a relatively stable source of income.

*Excerpts adapted from field notes, March 2011*

Sandaly and I were once more in Koumban, visiting his mother and brothers on our way back from Mali to Kankan. As usual, the conversation turned to which mines were proving to be the most profitable that year, a topic on which everyone, including Adama, who is not involved in any way in mining gold, seems to agree: “This year, Mandiana is giving a lot.” Karamo, Sandaly’s other brother, who frequently travels between Koumban and the gold mines, confirmed the rumour and said that he may join his friends in the mines and work there for a while if his work in the village eases a little.

Suddenly, we were interrupted by a lot of noise and agitation: two motorbikes heavily loaded with bags stopped in the middle of the courtyard. The drivers, both covered with orange lateritic dust from head to feet, greeted Karamo while taking off their plastic glasses. Sandaly, who doesn't stay in Koumban most of the time, didn't seem to know them, but Adama greeted them warmly as if they were old friends. Once they had taken off their jackets and had been offered water, they were seated with us for *attaya* (green tea) and were introduced to Sandaly and I by Karamo. He said that the two men were mining mates (*'amis des mines'*), whom he had worked with in the past; and now, they visit whenever they are passing by on the way home. They had met in the northern mining region of Sieke and had travelled and worked together in Mali. Karamo always returned to his village during the agricultural season, but his two friends remained in the mines.

This visit was a surprise to Karamo; in fact, the friends had been on their way home – one lived near Mamou and the other near Dabola, both of which were further west from Kankan. Since they knew that visiting Koumban would require only a small detour, they had decided to visit their friend. Both were happy with what they were earning in the mines, but they had decided to return home for a few months since they had heard that the informal mining site where they worked was about to be closed down. People were still working there, they explained, but the situation was getting increasingly tense, and some workers had already left. Rather than being expelled and having to abandon a half-operated shaft, they had decided to leave now, after completing the excavation of some rich ore.

The term “gold rush” brings to mind images of chaos and irrationality, that men “rush” to gold-rich areas to make a quick buck. However, this is in fact rarely the case. Although they may “disappear” for relatively long periods of time, many return to their homes more or less regularly. They usually build strong friendships with other workers from distant regions, and they organize their moves to make the best use of new opportunities that open up; often, their moves are not motivated by the possibilities a new site offers, but by the unpredictable closure of the informal mining sites where they are already working.

This form of mining, where miners are continuously on the move, strongly contrasts how artisanal gold mining is usually portrayed – either as seasonal work that complements agriculture (e.g. Cartier and Bürge 2011; Panella 2007) or as a one-time “rush” to a new site following rumours of “discovery” (e.g. Grégoire and Gagnol 2017). Studies have focussed on these forms of artisanal mining – for instance, the World Bank clearly distinguishes between these two forms (see Weber-Fahr, et al. 2001) – but less attention has been paid to itinerant artisanal mining as a full-time occupation that miners pursue as a long-term career, despite the fact that the sector has been growing for two decades and has become the primary source of income for many men in rural sub-Saharan Africa. The mobility that such a lifestyle involves has, oddly enough, been poorly investigated (noticeable exceptions being Bryceson and Jonsson 2010 in the case of Tanzania; Jonsson and Bryceson 2009), and there has been limited work on how mobility links with temporal change.

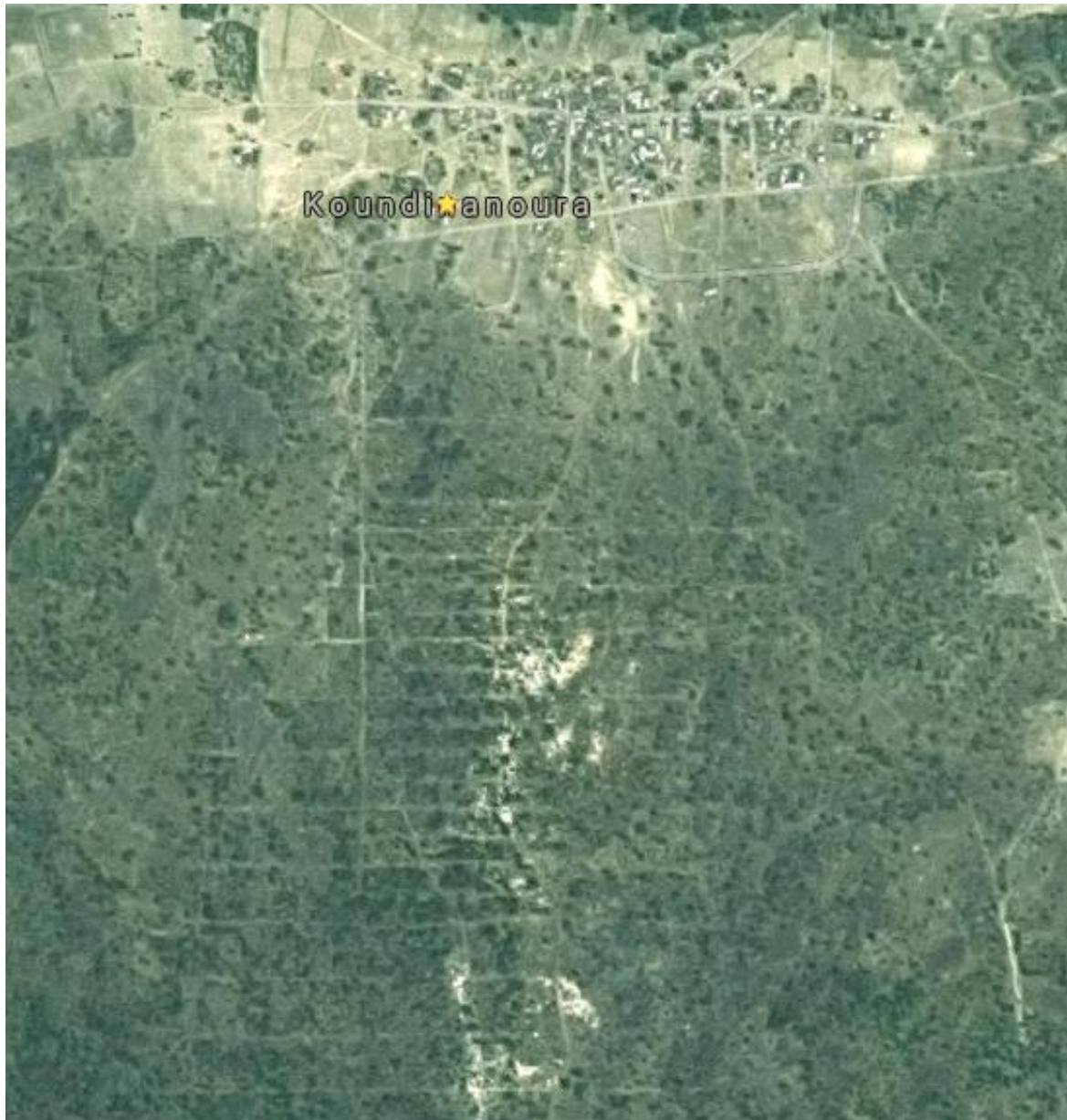
Here, my proposition will be that, with the accelerated temporality of extraction, where earlier there had been relatively well-defined stages in men's lives, and "adventurous travels" were seen as part of the growing-up process (e.g. Amselle 1976; Bredeloup 2008; Bredeloup 2014; Cissé 1964), now these stages have become blurred and are increasingly replaced by itinerant ways of life that extend in time and space. Along with these changes, mobility as a response to uncertainty has now become the new norm (see also e.g. Vigh 2006). Therefore, I contend that these topics cannot be studied from the (sedentary) perspective of the mining sites or the villages, but rather, should be studied from the (mobile) perspective of the itinerant miners who navigate a variety of places and build social spaces that traverse boundaries between nation-states and administrative regions, formality and informality, lineage-based statuses, and age groups.

### **Picture three – Koundiana: industrial exploration and the threat of expulsion**

Fifteen years ago, Koundiana Koura (i.e., "little Koundiana", the "cadet" village of Koundiana) was an agricultural hamlet in the process of becoming a real village. But like Dyesse, its economy transformed rapidly with the growth in artisanal mining. Large numbers of artisanal miners migrate to the village every year to "try their luck" in the surrounding informal mining sites.

The story of how a new artisanal mining site emerges is always interesting, since it reveals the roles played by different actors in the development of the site. In Koundiana Koura, like in so many places across West Africa, a large lease was granted to a junior mining company for exploration ten years ago; at that time, there were only a few artisanal pits around the village. Systematic prospection work was conducted over a few months, over the course of which long quadratic ridges that still mark the ground were created, as seen in the image above (see Picture 1-1). For the villagers, the company's interest in their land raised ambivalent hopes and expectations, as mining projects often do (see e.g. Ferguson 1999; Luning 2012a). Industrial mining is seen as having the potential to offer jobs and development, and, at the same time, this kind of prospection work is interpreted as hinting at the presence of subterranean reserves whose profitability can only be imagined. Subsequently, since there is no certainty regarding what the project holds in store, locals often respond by mining artisanally as much gold as possible "before there is nothing left". Both local and itinerant artisanal miners have been mining ore from underground tunnels in the region for the last few years though the company is yet to start actively mining the site. For the inhabitants as well as the new temporary miners who have arrived at the scene, this expansion of the "resource frontier" (Tsing 2005:28), "a zone of *not yet* – not yet mapped, not yet regulated," physically manifested by the company's prospection work, meant that, from there on, they could be expelled from the land at any time.

*Picture 1-1 Google map image of Koundiana Koura indicating a past prospection campaign*



Like illustrated with Karamo’s friends in the previous picture, the informality of the artisanal mining sector, the nature of the work, the leasing of land to corporations, and the formalizing of the sector, have all placed most mine workers in a constant state of possible expulsion (see e.g. Ayelazuno 2011; Bolay 2014; Bolay 2016; Geenen 2014). I argue that these are the main driving forces behind their movements and not an irrational attraction toward gold. So, contrary to the idea that there are two separate and relatively well-defined sectors – the artisanal (and informal) and the industrial (and formal) mining sectors – I suggest that artisanal gold mining needs to be considered in relation to industrial mining, and not in opposition to it, since both operate within the same spaces and within one same supply chain; gold extracted in one or the other system merges further along in the chain (Fold, et al. 2014). This implies issues of scale concerning the relations and “frictions”

(Tsing 2011) between social sites in sometimes distant places whose unstable assemblage underlies the supply chain of gold. From such a “supply chain perspective” (Tsing 2009), I consider itinerant miners’ movements and work an integrative and necessary component in the working of the gold industry at large rather than just an unintended and temporary effect of the expansion of the gold frontier in West Africa.

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These three vignettes illustrate three different structural factors that shape the increase of artisanal mining: the decreasing access to agrarian fields of value, the standardization of itinerant mining as a source of livelihood, and the acceleration of artisanal extraction as a response to the threat of being excluded from its benefit. Together, these pictures show that miners do not “rush” to gold mining sites hastily, nor do they “invade” host villages and cause rampant chaos. Instead, artisanal mining has emerged as a relatively stable source of livelihood generation situated at the intersection of various processes of social and physical “expulsions” (Sassen 2016 [2014]): expulsion from “traditional” fields of value, expulsion from the agrarian economy, and expulsion from land and work locations. As I shall discuss in the next section, though Sassen’s all-encompassing notion of expulsions may be over-deterministic, it nevertheless offers an alternative to dominant “gold rush” narratives and will provide a broader framework to guide the study and addresses the driving and structural forces at play in framing the mobility of gold miners.

On the basis of these introductory examples, I propose two main arguments which will guide the study. First, industrial and artisanal gold mining should not be analysed separately. Everything indicates that these two sectors, which are part of the same supply chain, co-produce and mutually impact each other. For instance, industrial mining projects tend to choose mining sites based on the presence of artisanal gold diggers. Conversely, artisanal gold miners would not have been rendered illegal if not for the passing of laws or the granting of leases to corporations, both of which have accelerated in recent times due to the expansion of the industrial sector. Significant amounts of gold, which would have been unprofitable for large-scale industrial operations to mine, would not have entered the supply chain if it were not collected by informal gold miners. The list of these interdependencies could be endlessly extended. Therefore, rather than taking for granted various categories such as legal and illegal, formal and informal, locals and strangers, and development and destruction, which are often used to depict the two sectors, I suggest we examine the boundaries that form these categories as objects of enquiry. From the perspective of the itinerant gold miners, the question is what these boundaries practically and subjectively do? This includes how they articulate the two sectors and their respective modes of production, and how they produce or transform moral economies in certain high-stake areas.



Secondly, artisanal gold mining is often a full-time and long-term occupation for miners. Though imaginings of “gold rushes” and quick money do play a role in miners’ motivations, these should not be allowed to obscure the rationalities and structural factors at play in shaping miners’ decisions and movements. An ethnography of artisanal gold mining, thus, needs to locate the activity at the junction of the various kinds of expulsion that produce it as a social field. Thus, I hypothesize that it is necessary to see expulsion as the framework which dictates miners’ movements and in turn produces peculiar subjectivities; I also suggest that it is necessary to examine itinerant miners’ agency within this frame, which leads them, amongst other things, to develop alternative socio-spatial arrangements that question conventional hierarchies, norms of access, as well as ideas of time and space.

These arguments raise three sets of questions that I propose to explore through this thesis:

**How does artisanal mining integrate into the larger gold supply chain, and how does its interaction with other segments of the sector affect artisanal miners’ labour?**

**How are mining journeys experienced and organized in spite of the inherent uncertainty of mining terrains?**

**What subjectivities arise from such a lifestyle, and what social spaces emerge from itinerant miners’ journeys?**

Before I attempt to answer these questions, I shall first provide more contextual and theoretical background to the issues they raise.

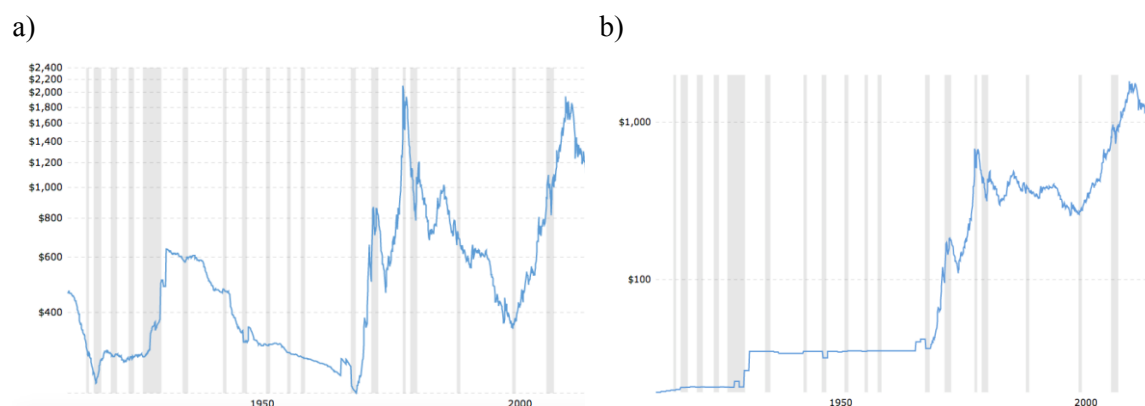
### **Contextual background: towards an ethnography of gold mining journeys**

#### **Deagrarianization and the acceleration of artisanal extraction**

In 1999, the International Labour Office (ILO) released a document that highlighted the increasing importance of artisanal mining as a source of employment worldwide (Jennings 1999). The gold rate had reached an unprecedented peak in the 1980s, which led to a renewed interest in the resource among impoverished rural populations that could access it through artisanal methods. However, the gold rate by itself was seemingly not the main driver that attracted miners to gold mines, since the growth of the artisanal mining sector began to accelerate only later. In fact, the growth in artisanal mining is attributed to the Structural Adjustment Plans of the 1990s, which increased poverty across the continent (Banchirigah 2006; Hilson and Potter 2005), decreased the farming incomes of small landholdings (Banchirigah and Hilson 2010; Bryceson 1996; Hilson and Garforth

2012), and consequently forced people to migrate to cities or overseas, and increasingly, to mining fields.

Figure 1-1100-years historical chart for (a) real gold price (inflation -adjusted) and (b) annual prices



Since then, this movement of workers to mining fields has only accelerated, with the emergence of new mining technologies and the implementation of new mining codes which now seek to regulate what has become the second greatest source of livelihood in rural sub-Saharan Africa, after farming, which it usually complements (Hilson 2016). The table below compares the number of persons engaged in the sector in 1999 (ILO) and more recent estimates. The population engaged in the sector has seen a ten-fold increase in some countries in the region.

Table 1-2 Estimated numbers of artisanal mine workers per country

|             | 1999    | 2014                |
|-------------|---------|---------------------|
| Guinea      | 40,000  | 300,000             |
| Mali        | 100,000 | 400,000             |
| Ivory Coast | 10,000  | 100,000             |
| Senegal     | 3,000   | No estimation found |

Source: ILO; Hilson and McQuilken 2014

Improved access to new technologies has also accelerated the process and has contributed to transforming what was previously seasonal labour into full-time employment. For instance, while there had been limited cell phone network coverage in Guinea outside the major cities in 2009 during my first field visit, most regions had access to cell phone networks in 2012, and to 3G/4G technologies in 2014, indicating improved communications in remote areas, including gold mining sites. Amalgamation methods that involved the use of mercury increased productivity but also increased health and environmental hazards. These methods had been unheard of in 2009, but were well known by 2014. Also, until very recently, all artisanal gold mining was mostly done using

handmade pickaxes; however, mining equipment of all sorts has become popular of late. According to the Malian Chamber of Mines, 500,000 metal detectors, 500,000 crushers, and one million motorbikes were imported from China to Mali in 2012. According to Belco Tamboura, Director of Communications at the Chamber of Mines in Mali, “Gold mining is no longer [done] with the hoe or the calabash (bowl). Gold panning is now done with excavators, crushers, dump trucks and chemicals,”<sup>4</sup> thus implying that there is more capital afloat in the artisanal sector now.

These changes led to an increase in the share of artisanal gold production in the total production of gold, which, according to recent estimates (Seccatore, et al. 2014) has reached 20%; so far, artisanal production had been considered negligible and is kept strictly out of the formal sector (and the taxation regimes of states). However, the latest generation of mining codes that were adopted by various countries across Africa after 2010<sup>5</sup> aimed to “formalize” the sector so that the state could tap into this potentially huge revenue source. This process recategorized the work of artisanal mine workers, which had been going on for centuries, as illegal (about Tanzania, see e.g. Fisher 2007; Tschakert 2009a); this can be read in the light of larger processes of “accumulation by dispossession” (Arrighi 2004; Harvey 2003) wherein various forms of property rights are turned into exclusive property rights, amongst others, through states’ changing definitions of legality.<sup>6</sup>

### **Artisanal mining labour and spatial mobility**

In spite of the injection of new capital, the semi-mechanization of segments of the artisanal sector, and the illegalization of informal work, artisanal gold mining remains a plausible occupation for hundreds of thousands of men who, like Sekou, leave their home-place, be it a village or town, and go to “try their luck” at the informal gold mining sites across West Africa. Their journeys, which are often transnational, involve major social and physical<sup>7</sup> risks, and often end up lasting for much longer than expected. These itinerant mine workers – who are named *kalayantigiw* after the long pickaxe which they use to excavate tunnels – travel between many mining sites, team up with other

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<sup>4</sup> Reuters, 27 May 2014, “Artisanal mining drives Mali gold exports up to 67.4 T in 2013”. <http://www.reuters.com/article/mali-gold-idUSL3N0OD2YU20140527>

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> The objectivity and stability of the categories “legal” and “illegal” are a longstanding topic of inquiry in anthropology, which instead sees them as processes of legalization and illegalization within specific contexts of power and politics (see Thomas and Galembe 2013). Given the context of normative pluralism, and considering the local, state, and corporate forms of governance within which itinerant miners circulate, I shall look at such processes not only in their relation to the state, but also in relation to local institutions and corporate practices of governance.

<sup>7</sup> For example, in the region of Bouré in Guinea, the local Red Cross reported 54 fatalities for the year 2011, which means that the mortality rate due to mining accidents was as high as 17% among the working and able male population. These rough estimates were calculated by relating Red Cross numbers with the 2014 census for the sub-prefecture of Kintinian – established in Decree D/2015/229PRF/SGG – which includes the village of Bouré, and cross-referring it with the mortality rate among men aged 15-64 years, using data from the Institut National de la Statistique.

workers, pool together resources while working in the shafts, and then divide the raw wins with their teammates and other associates (see Chapter 1).

Jeroen Cuvelier (2014, 4-5) perfectly summarizes the three major kinds of narratives used to explain the growth of the artisanal mining sector in the literature. Some authors emphasize “pull” factors and represent artisanal mining as an industry that attracts young men seeking quick money (e.g. Boeck 2001; Walsh 2003). Another group of scholars emphasize the role of “push” factors, wherein “becoming involved in artisanal mining activities is usually not a matter of choice but of necessity” (Ibid:4) (e.g. Bryceson and Jonsson 2010; Maconachie and Hilson 2011). Finally, a third group stresses that “since many of the inhabitants of these areas are already very familiar with working in the mines, it seems only logical that, in times of need, they become involved in ASM in order to stay afloat” (e.g. Geenen 2014; Hilson 2010). In this dissertation, I will not argue whether one or another factor prevails over the others. Instead, I contend that one’s role in the mining sector is age- and context-specific, which means that there are plural ways of “being a miner.” I have focused on one particular form of engagement, which is characterized by full-time work in the mining sector and which implicates regular travelling. This particular way of being a miner, which people refer to as *kalayantigi*, is not exclusive and does not reflect how the majority of mine workers function – i.e., complementing farm incomes with episodic incursions into the mines. Yet, it involves a certain expertise and is considered a valuable option, because despite its risks, it quite possibly offers access to greater incomes.

In a context where employment opportunities in both rural and urban areas have not stopped decreasing in more than 20 years, where overseas international migration routes are increasingly being closed, and where traditional sources of masculine value are on the wane, artisanal gold mining is not merely a means of subsistence, as I shall argue in this dissertation. It also seems to have opened up spaces for personal transformation, especially among unemployed young men whom the literature regularly labels as “in crisis” in light of the limited prospects they have for the future (Abbink and Van Kessel 2005; Durham 2000). The long journeys that mining requires stand in for the “adventures” that have historically been associated with the making of male personhood and initiation into adulthood (Bredeloup 2014) (see Chapter 4).

The adventurer, Bredeloup says, realizes himself by engaging with the “imaginary of game and predation” during which “dangers, the violence of competitors, and physical suffering are positively valued in the sense that they validate masculine identity” (2008: 293) (see also Andersson 2014; Hoffman 2011; Vigh 2006). One of the important points that Bredeloup makes is that alternative imaginaries may privilege “self-realization” over economic gains. This is a crucial implication which suggests that value can be freed from the limited realms of quantifiable desirability and utility, and, as proposed by Graeber (2005: Chap. XII), can instead be viewed more broadly as

“the way in which actions become meaningful to the actor by being incorporated in some larger, social totality – even if in many cases the totality in question exists primarily in the actor’s imagination”, that is, what people expect from their life in a specific cultural, social, and economic context, and how this is put into action. In other words, notwithstanding economic pressure, for many young men, moving out of the home-place is also a way of imagining alternative futures to those prescribed by the local economic context (i.e., working for the family). This argument aligns with the notion of the transnational social space which, according to Jackson, et al. (2004, 3) should not be understood as simply comprising the geographical territory of two nation-states, but rather as a concept that “includes not just the *material geographies* of labour migration or the trading in transnational goods and services but also the *symbolic and imaginary geographies*” that inform and inspire the choices of individual migrants. These ideas shall thus provide an entry point for understanding miners’ motives and reasoning (see Chapter 4).

### **Mobility and masculine aspirations in the cultural context of rural Mandé**

In the Mandé region, every person is said to have descended (to different degrees) from ancestors, who together with emperor Soundjata Keïta, supposedly founded the Empire of Mali in the twelfth century. These translate into a total of 20 ancestors with specific patronymics, each of whom are associated with a fictive line of descent along which “a highly complex, dynamic and flexible system of alliances is based on a wide variety of kinship and marriage relations” (Luning, et al. 2014). Patronymics are typically associated with a social structure that is based on occupations, which has often led commentators, particularly in the colonial era, to believe that Mandenka society was organized on the basis of a “caste system.” According to local theory,<sup>8</sup> Mande society is organized on the basis of *nyamakalaw*, which are relatively endogamous lineages of “blacksmiths, potters, leatherworkers, and bards that are accorded special but ambiguous social status<sup>9</sup> apart from the *horonw*, the class of farmer nobility” (Conrad and Franck 1995: 1).<sup>10</sup> Though a certain degree of flexibility is permitted in terms of which lineage one identifies with, the class structure does influence who one marries and who has access to land in rural areas.<sup>11</sup> On an ideational level, the most visible

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Soundjata epic, the relationships between the different occupational groups were codified in the Charter of Kurukan Fuga. There has been a renewed interest in the charter in recent years, which was formalized in a written form in 1998 during the assembly of Mandenka bards (Assemblée des griots du Mandingue), on the part of not only griots and traditionalists, but also politicians who refer to it to promote an essentialized conception of Mandé identity (Amselle 2013).

<sup>9</sup> In contrast to other “caste systems,” ambiguity regarding roles and positions is integral to Mandenka social structure. For example, *nyamakalaw* and their occult power play the role of mediators and balance the power of *horonw*.

<sup>10</sup> In certain regions, the *moriw*, or keepers of the Islamic faith who are in charge of spiritual work, are also seen as *nyamakalaw*.

<sup>11</sup> Historically, Mandenka rule extended over people rather than land. Therefore, relations and networks such as host-guests affiliations are extremely important, for they serve to organize access (rather than ownership) to land by categorizing people as first-comers and latecomers (Chauveau 2007; Chauveau, et al. 2004; Lentz 2013). Such relations may include obligations that different waves of relatively mobile populations owe hosts.

effect of this social structure is its emphasis on social harmony based on functional complementarity and hierarchy comprising patrilineal descent and patriarchal rules: between ages (as enacted in the roles played by age groups), sexes (as enacted in gender roles), and lineages (as enacted in patronymics).

In this context, status and positions are highly predetermined, thus allowing little room for personal aspirations beyond this framework. Compliance, which is exhibited by displaying expected behaviours publicly, validates the social person. As Brand (2001a) puts it, personhood is achieved through three different means: first at birth, by acquiring a name that carries social status; second, by “displaying the correct behaviour according to the category to which a person belongs” (2011, 18); and finally, since personhood is connected with the life cycle, “a man has to be circumcised, to get married, have children and grandchildren in order to achieve full personhood” (2011, 28). In contrast to the highly individualized (and very recent) notions of the person in north-western Europe and North America, where individuality is believed to precede relationships (Strathern 1992, 48–53, cited in Brand 2011:16), *mogo cè* (manhood in the Mandé) is overtly seen as the outcome of relations within collective processes. Personal aspirations should thus be read in relation to how young men position themselves within their web of significant others, especially elders in the family and classificatory brothers in the same age group.

The conflicts that may arise due to the tension between the pressure to conform to the ideal behaviour expected by society and the individual’s personal aspirations derived from other imaginaries and competing ethnoscapas, like those evoked in the gold mines and their abundant markets, can be analysed through the twin concepts *fadenya* and *badenya* (Bird and Kendall 1980). These concepts draw on the figure of the Mandé hero: they replicate the typical relations between classificatory brothers born to different mothers and are used in everyday talk to qualify and attribute different values to behaviours and actions. According to Jansen (1996), Mandé myths often recognize a tension between the individual and the group, but these two entities are not opposed to each other; instead, they intersect along the two axes of *fadenya* and *badenya*. The *fadenya*, because of the competition between collateral brothers, “is associated to centrifugal forces of disequilibrium: envy, jealousy, competition, self-promotion – anything tending to spin the actor out of his established social force field” (Bird and Kendall 1980, 15). However, the *fadenya* is not necessarily negative, as it allows for innovation and transformation, since the individual can act on his personal aspirations over the course of his travels, but it also entails risks such as disruption and destruction. In particular, it is highly valued as a masculine prerogative at certain life stages. In contrast, the “*badenya* is associated with centripetal forces of society: submission to authority, stability, cooperation, those

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As Luning, Jansen and Panella rightly note in the case of gold, principles of autochthony were introduced by colonial occupiers to stabilize populations spatially, and did not stem from historical modes of social organization (Luning, et al. 2014, 83).

qualities which pull the individual back into the social mass” (Ibid: 15), that is, obedience to norms. According to this perspective, the hero, or the adventurer, “works against the stabilizing and conservatives forces of his society” in order to “surpass the collective deeds of [his] predecessors and place [his] own name firmly in the clan’s records” (Ibid: 14). Young men in search of manhood are typically expected to display *fadenya* behaviours; however, this puts them in an ambivalent position, for they are expected to step out of the group to make a reputation for themselves while also fulfilling all the duties associated with the *badenya*. The *fadenya* and *badenya* can therefore be described as the two sides of masculinity.

Therefore, mobility and value can relate to each other in very different ways over a person’s life course. Value can mean the intangible outcomes of the journey, such as experience (e.g. Bredeloup 2008; Timera 2001); for instance, travel, like certain “rites of passage” (e.g. Cissé 1964; Doumbia 2001) is a step towards male adulthood, which points to *fadenya*-oriented behaviours. Value could also mean the tangible outcomes of mobility – for example, the ability to contribute to one’s family according to the different expectations placed on men at different phases in their lives, in which case it would reinforce *badenya*-oriented behaviours. Creating these different kinds of value may involve different sorts of “mobile livelihoods” (Olwig and Sorensen 2003), many of which rely on both longstanding (e.g. Amselle 1976; Rain 1999) and newly emerging practices of circular migration in neighbouring countries and possibly further beyond (Bakewell and De Haas 2007; Boesen, et al. 2014; Ndiaye and Robin 2010).

In this context, mining journeys can be *fadenya*-oriented in the sense that they help fabricate male personhood by replicating the cultural script of “adventure” (Bredeloup 2014) and gaining autonomy from the social structures of the village, or they can also be *badenya*-oriented in the sense that they may help the individual comply with filial duties by providing additional income to the *lu*. In general, they enable both, which is a source of tension and contradiction, as miners must negotiate both their mobile livelihoods as well as their obligations towards the *fabara*, the home-place.

### **Heterogenous relations of production within global supply chains**

*Badenya*-oriented behaviours are more closely related to the domain of reproduction than *fadenya*-oriented ones. In an agrarian political economy, both domains – production and reproduction – function within the same space. That is, the family lives in the village and works nearby. However, in the case of highly mobile artisanal miners, these work and residence spaces are separated.

Claude Meillassoux was one of the first authors to analyse the relationship between work mobility and the sexual division of labour in West Africa. In his book, *Femmes, Greniers et Capitaux* (1975), Meillassoux investigates how production and reproduction are managed in the context of circular migrations; he supposes – as in the case of itinerant miners – that both are spatially separated.

His main argument is two-fold. The first thesis of the book is that agricultural production induces a sexual division of labour in which women – on whom reproductive labour depends – are controlled by elder men<sup>12</sup> who, on their part, are dependent on the labour of women (productive and reproductive) for creating the next generation of producers while simultaneously producing grain.<sup>13</sup> The second thesis of the book is that circular migration, in contrast to emigration, helps in capital accumulation; he argues that migrant workers do not bear the costs of reproduction, as they are paid for by subsistence farming in the home area, which is carried out by women. As is apparent from the first thesis, this implies that women are doubly exploited. As critiques of Meillassoux have pointed out (e.g. Delphy 2013; Edholm, et al. 1982), his thesis relies on the idea that women exist only as a political means to be utilized by men for accumulation. Such a view raises two fundamental problems: first, that women are viewed as passive assets managed by elder men; and second, the focus on reproduction tends to ignore the fact that women are also productive agents. Though these critiques are important and will be taken into consideration in Chapter 7 the broader framework proposed by Meillassoux on how production and reproduction are managed in the context of mobile labour is apt for an analysis of miners' mobilities in relation to gold production and village (re)production.

Particularly important in Meillassoux' analysis is the concept of “double exploitation” – the idea that capitalism can be added as an extra layer onto existing social structures to extract profits, rather than it destroying these structures as it takes hold. In his analysis, Meillassoux showed that value was extracted from African workers not only in the form of surplus value (e.g. wage), but also in the form of a rent on labour for the costs of “reproduction” provided by relatives, women in particular, remained unpaid. This transfer of value from non-capitalist forms of labour to the capitalist sector reflects the location of artisanal mining labour in the supply chain of gold. Indeed, as is the case in the lower rungs of other supply chains (Tsing 2009), artisanal miners operate on their own, at their own expense, and create various cooperative structures whose workings are outside of capitalist direct intervention (e.g., wage labour, financialization, etc.). As Mezzadra and Neilson (2015) show, such “operations of capital,” which allow the extraction of a “rent” from social cooperation structures that are functionally separated from other segments of the supply chain, work precisely because they make sure these segments remain disconnected, which also implies that the status of the workers in these industries is highly precarious.

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<sup>12</sup> The concept of *fasiya*, which refers to the captation of the labour of male cadets and women will be described in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> This argument is made by contrasting agricultural societies, which depend on yearly cycles of harvesting and the storage of grain, to hordes of hunter-gatherers who find their daily subsistence without having to deal with storage issues. Thus, agricultural societies would be less reliant on the material means of production than on human reproduction itself, whereas hordes of hunter-gatherers would not face the necessity to control human reproduction, which allows for more egalitarian relations, including between the sexes (Meillassoux [1977] 2016).



Precariousness is in fact one of the most striking features of artisanal mining labour. It encompasses both forms of precariousness identified by Neilson and Rossiter (2008; see also Butler 2006): the precarious nature of the work termed as “precarity”, that is, for instance, the categorization of artisanal mining as an “illegal activity,” which makes it removable and disposable, and the precariousness of other aspects of artisanal miners’ lives, such as the life-threatening dangers associated with working in underground tunnels in artisanal mining sites. Miners’ mobility is thus both a cause and a consequence of their precarious working conditions. It distances them from local institutions that could potentially provide social security, while at the same time they seek to mitigate the uncertain economic conditions in rural areas by constructing a stable source of income for themselves in the mines – albeit by adopting a mobile lifestyle.

The precariousness of miners’ environments and their efforts to stay mobile<sup>14</sup> thus need to be analysed as an outcome of individuals’ agency in negotiating diverse inter and intrapersonal moral obligations and aspirations, but also as conditions that are produced, oriented, and limited by structural factors that, as I will show, build on logics of expulsion and on the role of informal artisanal mining in the larger circuit of gold production.

### **Systematic expulsions at the mining frontier**

Although it is conducted mainly in the margins of the formal sector, artisanal gold mining accounts for a significant share of the overall production of gold – as much as 20% of overall production (Seccatore, et al. 2014). Questions regarding the place of artisanal – and extremely mobile – labour in global production arise, which echoes Nicola Philip’s concern that informal labour is too often excluded from analyses of global production networks (2011; about the functional role on informality in the production of gold, see Verbrugge 2015).

As Verbrügge has recently argued (Verbrugge 2016), the “spatial fix” (Harvey 2001) of underground resources and massive capital investment, that is “the necessity that a certain portion of the total capital is literally fixed in and on the land for a relatively long period of time” (Harvey 2001, 115), are the determinant features of large-scale industrial production. Consequently, these generate and impede certain economic flows alongside the commodity chain. On the contrary, artisanal gold mining is extremely fluid and tends to contradict the spatial and legal boundaries of the formal sector. As Gilberthorpe and Rajak stress (2016), the enclave model that was proposed by Ferguson (2005) as a means of analysing contemporary mining, that is, the expulsion of persons from capitalized enclaves, tends to “replicate the very tendency to expunge from view the mobility of people and the

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<sup>14</sup> To draw on Bauman’s types of mobilities (Bauman 1996), itinerant miners’ mobilities are closer to that of “vagabonds” – “masterless” and “independent” but closer to the “push” end in the balance of motives – than to those of “tourists” who are driven by their consumption desires and therefore remain closer to the “pull end” in the balance of motives.

intricate web of social relations and material transactions that transgress these boundaries, revealing their very permeability despite state-of-the art security systems” (Gilberthorpe and Rajak 2016, 6). This critique is useful when discussing artisanal mining, as it calls for greater attention to be paid to the social networks and transactions operating at the margins, overlapping with the growing number of mining enclaves. In fact, while the enclave model of industrial mining suggests rather straightforward commodity chains that link well-defined mining areas with processing units and trade zones, informal artisanal gold mining, that occurs within or near the same spaces, involves complex, fluid, and changing networks composed of a great variety of actors through which artisanally produced gold circulates to reach, in the end, the same global markets as industrially produced gold.

In her latest book, Saskia Sassen (2016 [2014]) argues that this paradox could be read as a form of *expulsion*. She proposes that expulsion – which she interprets very broadly as encompassing physical expulsion from land (land grabbing), national territories (migration), and houses (house seizures), as well as social expulsion from labour markets (unemployment), society (social exclusion, incarceration), or essentially, from life (suicide and death) – is the most common defining feature of contemporary global capitalism. According to her, capitalism has moved from logics of incorporation to expulsion. This argument perfectly reflects the evolution of the mining sector in the last few decades, during which it has moved from being labour-intensive<sup>15</sup> to capital-intensive, thus rendering labour increasingly superfluous.<sup>16</sup> At present, capital-intensive mining operations work side-by-side with labour-intensive artisanal mining; however, while miners in the latter sector are excluded from the integrative structures of the industry, the product of their work is simultaneously integrated into the supply chain. Moreover, Sassen insists that “migration” should not be confused with “expulsion” in the context of land deals; this argument translates well to the case of itinerant miners as well. In her view, these processes of expulsions express the increasing uselessness for capital of large portions of the human population in a context where global capitalism mainly works through renewed forms of primitive accumulation, which she illustrates with examples from gold extraction (Sassen 2016: 240–245) and foreign land deals (Sassen: Chap. II).

However, in the case of gold, one could also argue that expelled labourers are not “useless”, because at the end of the chain, their informal work ends up complementing the industrial production and integrates into the same formal trade circuits. This argument was suggested by Boris Verbrügge, who highlighted the “functionality of informality” in the artisanal gold mining sector in the Philippines (2015), where the impediments to formalizing the sector facilitate the exploitation of

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<sup>15</sup> For an ethnographic account of labour in South African industrial gold mines in the mid-twentieth century, see Moodie 1999.

<sup>16</sup> For an ethnographic account of dismissed mining labour in Zambia, see Ferguson 1999.

informal labour. His view is interesting, since instead of contrasting the formal and the informal sector, Verbrügge proposes an integrated reading of their interconnections.

Sassen's interpretation of expulsion draws on the Marxian concept of primitive accumulation, an idea that has regained popularity through Harvey's reconceptualization of it in terms of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003); he uses the term to refer to what he describes as a prominent feature of neoliberalism – that is, the dispossession of material commons such as land. Mezzadra and Neilson (2015) extend the idea to immaterial commons, such as the value accrued from social cooperation. While the concept has been widely used to analyse processes of land dispossession, including land acquisitions by mining corporations (see e.g., Ayelazuno 2011; Bush 2009; Geenen 2014; Holden, et al. 2011), these processes are usually studied from the perspective of the "local" or "indigenous population," which is subject to "mining-induced displacement" with the territorial expansion of the mining industry (Owen and Kemp 2015). However, as Tania Li (2011) rightly argues in the case of agricultural land-grabbing, the perspective of labour is usually neglected in these studies; labour is usually composed of people who are not entitled to land and who, consequently, have little voice. Itinerant artisanal miners clearly fall into this category. Therefore, a better understanding of the processes of expulsion that drive miners' continuous movements is required.

Thus, though the relation between the artisanal and industrial sectors is usually framed in terms of conflict and competition (Hilson 2011), the informality and mobility of the artisanal miners may also be seen a structural component in the global production system, that is integrated into larger supply chains, and is largely managed on the ground by corporations through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) branches, which mediate the expansion of the mining frontier by offering benefits to the local population and to the artisanal miners who are already occupying the land through the channel of various "community partnerships." Indeed, itinerant miners operate at no cost and outside the framework of national and international regulations. However, it is a well-known fact that the informal and formal circuits of artisanally and industrially mined gold blend at a certain point, as for instance, in swiss refineries (Lindt 2016). It would thus be an empirical question to see whether and how the expulsion of itinerant gold miners goes hand-in-hand with the incorporation of their product into parallel or blended circuits of trade. Providing definitive answers to such questions is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis. However, one empirical way to answer this question is to track how the gold produced by itinerant mine workers and passes from the informal domain within which miners themselves are contained, to the formal one from which they are expelled.

## Researching gold journeys

This dissertation will therefore explore various forms of labour mobility in a gold-rich region that traverses national borders and which is the source of livelihood for a growing number of families across West Africa. I begin by asking three initial questions: How does artisanal mining integrate into the larger supply chain of gold and how is artisanal mining labour structured by its interaction with other segments of the sector? How are mining journeys experienced and organized in spite of the inherent uncertainty of mining terrains? Finally, what subjectivities arise from this lifestyle and what social spaces emerge from itinerant miners' journeys? By attempting to answer these questions, I propose to analyse miners' *gold journeys*, a phenomenon which is at the centre of the dissertation, and which represents their mobility in time and in space, in relation to the mobility of gold itself from the underground tunnels of West Africa to Swiss and U.A.E. refineries.

I use the concept of the journey as a heuristic tool to investigate all kinds of movements that underlie the production of gold. Since the places of production are not fixed and are constantly changing, I trace the lines created by miners' journeys and show that it is their meshing, that temporarily creates the spatial configuration of gold production. Therefore, studying the (im)mobilities of people and things existing in such precarious places requires mobile ethnographic methods (Büscher and Urry 2009) that are capable of adapting to the changing geographies of the gold mines. I thus track the movement of gold throughout the supply chain across different social spaces and locations, including those primarily navigated by gold miners. I also trace the movement of people both *through life*, i.e., miners' itinerancies in their search for gold, status, and recognition, and their movements *through space*, i.e., the localities, borders, and roads they traverse and the transnational spaces they produce.<sup>17</sup>

Contrary to a straightforward commodity chain that suggests relatively well-defined production nodes which correspond to relatively fixed and clearly identifiable places where the product is assembled, the concept of journeys suggests that miners do not follow one predefined path to reach a point, nor does the gold travel through pre-established routes. Instead, the networks across which it circulates en-route to its final destination in Switzerland or the U.A.E. are highly flexible. Here, the informality of miners' activities and their independent status, as opposed to wage-earners in the industrial gold mines, goes hand-in-hand with a relatively high degree of autonomy. Thus, miners have to navigate complex negotiations between their individual aspirations and adverse economic and structural conditions. To consider their mobility both as a movement through space and through life has the empirical advantage – as suggested by Gardner (2009) – that it links these apparently dissociated scales of analyses, i.e., the structural, socio-political, and cultural factors that

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<sup>17</sup> See Gardner 2009 for a reflection on the double movement through life and space.

influence their work and their individual agency at the micro level. To achieve this, a complementary method to participant observation consists to trace the biographies of people, by conducting narrative interviews about their journeys, and to trace the biography of gold by tracking its “social life” (Appadurai 1988). Finally, for the meso level of households and communities, a network lens is an extremely useful approach to account for the ways in which miners’ journeys are embedded in changing webs of relations.

In contrast to the popular narrative that miners are irrationally attracted by quick money, this study proposes that gold journeys provide families with a long-term source of income and offer alternative fields of values in a context of rapid economic and social transformation where conventional hierarchies (based mainly on age, gender, and lineage) are contested, and alternative ones, especially those concerning the construction of male adulthood, are experienced. The mobility of miners is hence not simply a response to poverty, but arises from complex identity needs and aspirations, which change over miners’ lifetimes and are historically rooted in Mandinka culture and lifestyles. I demonstrate that, despite the informal – and now increasingly illegal – nature of artisanal gold mining, itinerant miners rely on evolving social institutions and resilient social networks to perpetuate their mobile lifestyles transnationally, and to cope with the rapid changes induced by national policies and corporation-led governance. I argue that these reciprocities have emerged as a response to the continuous expulsion of miners by both states and corporations from the legal framework, national territories, and mining sites, while gold, the product of miners’ informal labour, is increasingly being formally integrated into global circuits of value. So, while itinerant miners have to work in an exploitative industry characterized by expulsions and the predatory incursions of mining corporations, they constantly strategize to optimize their chances, and are very far from being passive victims. Their movements and livelihoods are structured by social networks which are based either around their homes or friendships they have developed during their travels. These networks shape the social spaces they operate in, which are based on moral economies of exchange and hierarchy that transcend conventional boundaries based on local, ethnic, and national lines, and which permit them to cope with continuous expulsions.

### **State of research and conceptual framework**

The next three sections are based on the following premises: first, artisanal and industrial gold mining produce one another; secondly, the expansion of the mining frontier induces uncertainty in all aspects of life in mining areas and, as one of the consequences, new forms of expulsions to cope with; thirdly, the inherent precariousness of itinerant artisanal mining labour is managed through pre-existing, changing, as well as new social institutions that support the continuous moves of miners. I

look at some of the existing literature on these topics and propose a conceptual framework to address them.

### **Mining, supply chain capitalism and *expulsions*: bringing agency and subjectivity back in the picture**

Artisanal miners are not alone in their quest for gold. They co-exist with large-scale industrial mining companies whose functioning, as several scholars have observed (e.g. Ayelazuno 2011; Bush 2009; Geenen 2014), can be described as “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003) – they accumulate wealth by dispossessing livelihoods, i.e., by appropriating artisanal mining fields that were previously managed as a community resource at the local level, and by transforming them into state or private property through policies of formalization or land deals. As Arrighi states, one of the outcomes of this process is that “it releases assets, including labour, at very low cost, in some instances zero cost” (Arrighi 2004, 531), which is exactly what happens in the case of artisanal miners when industrial mines seize large portions of land and expell residents and itinerant workers; they chose to work on their own, “at zero cost,” in the informal artisanal gold mines located on the edges of large-scale mining enclaves that are now operating on lands that were previously mined artisanally. In line with the idea that various modes of production may articulate rather than replace each other (Elwert 1983; Meillassoux 1975), this thesis aims to demonstrate how the two sectors coproduce each other, at the cost of enabling a systematic process of expelling artisanal miners, and complement one another within the same supply chain. This theoretical framing suggests that miners’ systematic expulsions can be seen as articulating the artisanal and industrial sector. Then, in contrast to Sassen’s highly deterministic theory of expulsions, I wish to focus on agency and on the production of subjectivities in contexts of expulsion.

#### ***Gold mining, capital and labour***

New technologies have transformed the relations between labour and capital in the mining sector, which has resulted in a production system that is increasingly based on the physical and social expulsion of labourers. Large-scale mining (LSM) operations are no longer dependent on labour; for instance, in Mali, between 1985 and 2003, the entire industrial mining sector created only 3,500 direct jobs (Belem 2006), which is nothing compared to the nearly 400,000 miners working artisanally in the informal sector. Yet, the production system, like other circuits that indirectly employ informal labour (see Hickey and Du Toit 2013; Phillips 2011), integrates the artisanally extracted product into the global supply chain. This trend can be seen in anthropological studies on mining, as two articles in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* illustrate. Two state-of-the-art papers on the anthropology of mining were published in 1985 and in 2003. In the 1985 article, Ricardo Godoy (1985) describes mining in lesser developed countries as a labour-intensive activity whose

“most important requirement has been the procurement of an ample and reliable supply of inexpensive laborers” (1985, 206). His article shows that research back then largely focussed on the social organization and ritual life of relatively bounded mining communities that lived close to, and worked for, industrial mining companies, wherein labour was attached to relatively fixed capital.

Interestingly, nearly 20 years later, an article published in the same journal (Ballard and Banks (2003) added an extra phrase to its title, “*Resource War: The Anthropology of Mining.*” Published after the boom in the 1980s, this article focussed on the rise of large-scale capital-intensive industrial mining and the increasingly antagonistic relations between mining corporations and the “indigenous population”. The “mining communities” described in detail in the 1985 article, made of wage workers who lived next to the industrial mines, had disappeared by the time of the 2003 article, in favour of a focus on “local communities” (those living near large-scale operations who are negatively affected by it, i.e. loss of land, unemployment, environmental damage, etc.), which these studies claim to be produced in conditions of conflict by states and corporations (e.g. Jorgensen 1997; Luning 2012b). Labour does not seem to be a matter of concern anymore, for labour has in fact been replaced by heavy machinery in open cast mines, and mining corporations mainly operate in what Ferguson has labelled “territorial enclaves of mineral extraction” (Ferguson 2005, 378). In these contexts, where large-scale mining companies work alongside informal artisanal mining, the population, including the itinerant gold miners, are “managed” by mining companies just as they “manage” the other “side effects” (e.g., on the environment) of industrial mining through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) branches (Banerjee 2008; Jenkins and Yakovleva 2006). So, while processes of “mining induced displacement” (e.g. Hilson, et al. 2007; Owen and Kemp 2015) and dispossession have been extensively written about with regard to the “indigenous populations” (Li 2010a) living near industrial gold mining projects (e.g. Ayelazuno 2011; Bush 2009), there is little research on (artisanal) mining labour (except in Geenen 2014; Maconachie 2014) and on how industrial mining expansion shape miners’ mobilities.

Indeed, in the years after the second article was published in the *Annual Review*, the gold mining sector has seen some dramatic changes, especially with the spectacular rise of artisanal mining. This has translated into two different branches in the literature: one concerned with artisanal and small-scale mining (for comprehensive reviews see Hilson and McQuilken 2014; Werthmann and Grätz 2012) and one concerned with extractive capitalism at large (especially drawing on case studies of large-scale industrial extraction) with a particular focus on how these projects are seen locally (e.g., Filer, C., Macintyre, M., 2006, Jorgensen 1997, Luning 2012c, Golub 2014). The setting up of these large-scale mining operations produces “relationships of entanglement and disentanglement” (Dolan and Rajak 2016: 5) between corporations and “local populations” (not comprising the informal artisanal labourers who also occupy these spaces), which are usually

managed by corporations' CSR departments. Strangely though, these two strands in the literature hardly ever merge, as if artisanal and industrial mining are entirely separate sectors – though they do mine the same resources and possibly in the same places. Here, as Richardson and Weszkalnys (2014) argue, the materiality of resources plays an important role. While some resources like oil, uranium, or iron ore can only be extracted industrially or are only profitable when extracted this way, others like gold, diamonds, coltan, or 3T (tin, tantalum and tungsten) can be extracted using artisanal methods and have an exchange value that makes artisanal extraction “worth” the cost of production; this means that, in these cases, the two modes of production, the artisanal (informal) and the industrial (formal), potentially “articulate”, to borrow Elwert’s phrasing (1983), into the same supply chain. My aim is thus to examine the experiences of itinerant gold miners in relation to the parallel growth in large-scale mining. This should contribute to the broader field of anthropology of extraction wherein the artisanal and the industrial sectors are usually considered to be separate although they furnish the same supply chain.

### *Supply chain capitalism*

Anna Tsing (2009) argues that global capitalism and its interlinkages should be seen in terms of “supply chain capitalism”, which

refers to commodity chains based on subcontracting, outsourcing, and allied arrangements in which the autonomy of component enterprises is legally established even as the enterprises are disciplined within the chain as a whole. Such supply chains link ostensibly independent entrepreneurs, making it possible for commodity processes to span the globe. Labour, nature, and capital are mobilized in fragmented but linked economic niches; thus, supply chain capitalism focuses our attention on questions of diversity within structures of power” (2009: 148-149).

Her view is particularly apt for theorizing artisanal gold mining, wherein independent miners work on their own in the informal sector, “at zero cost” to borrow Arrighi’s phrase, while their product is simultaneously incorporated into the supply chain. By extending the analysis to twenty-first century global capitalism, Tsing offers an integrative framework that highlights how the precarisation of labour and the segmentation of the production process within supply chains allow for profit to be made on forms of “salvage accumulation” (Tsing 2015: 63) – i.e., through the transfer of value created outside of capitalist control, such as by cooperative structures among *kalayantigiw*, into capitalist markets. Drawing on examples as different as Walmart’s subcontracting practices and the Matsukate mushroom supply chain, she argues that firms amass value by not controlling the conditions under which commodities are produced, meaning that they accrue benefits from a hidden rent on labour and social cooperation. In her account on matsukate gatherers (2015), she examines in detail the translation processes through which value is produced, but only make passing reference to the mechanisms that ensure that the different segments of the supply chain stay separated from



each other. Mezzadra and Neilson Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), who also provide an analysis of global capitalism by looking at supply chains, and at extraction in particular (2017), explain the link between the general precarisation of labour and supply chain capitalism using the concept of “borders”, which they see as a tool that demultiplies labour – and in so doing precarizes it – and articulates global flows of labour and capital, rather than only obstructing them. Their wide understanding of “borders” – that includes all forms of legal, social, symbolic, and territorial boundaries – is useful for the present study, since, as I will argue, all kinds of borders are simultaneously at play in the mobile livelihoods of miners. As they state,

contemporary capital, characterized by processes of financialization and the combination of heterogeneous labour and accumulation regimes, negotiates the expansion of its frontiers with much more complex assemblages of power and law which include but also transcend nation states. Looking at the expansion of capital frontiers implies considering the proliferation of political and legal boundaries (Mezzadra and Neilson 2015: 6).

In the case of itinerant miners, this applies to the realm of legality from which they can be excluded or included, to the borders of mining leases within which they can be tolerated or from which they can be expelled, to fluctuating national borders and administrative boundaries within which they can be taxed and by which they are sometimes blocked, and to shifting social boundaries which determine their status as a local or a stranger due to which they can get access or are denied access to resources. One of the main issues they face in conducting their activities is thus developing social spaces that traverse boundaries from which they can be unpredictably expelled.

### *Agency and the productive effects of expulsions*

The existence of multiple borders means that one’s chances of being integrated into, or expelled from them, multiplies. Whereas Tsing focuses on the *system* of global supply chains, in her book, *Expulsion* (2016), Saskia Sassen looks at the *mechanisms* of accumulation that underlie extraction and which, she argues, can be interpreted as “moments of expulsion.” While capitalistic growth has long drawn on mechanisms of incorporation and consumption, recent studies have focussed on its use of renewed forms of primitive accumulation, of which expulsion is the most common feature. Echoing analyses on “surplus populations” (Li 2010b) and “human wastage” (Bauman 1999), she argues that an increasing number of persons are becoming dispensable and simply cease to exist in the accountancy of the system, meaning that they disappear from statistics, from maps, from social programmes, etc. Her view recasts mobilities that have been labelled as “migration” to show that they are the result of expulsions, and is a powerful explanation to processes of “invisibilisation” which fruitfully applies to artisanal mining labour – their mining settlements are not registered nor do they appear on maps (see Chapter 5), their labour force is excluded as much as possible from CSR compensation programmes in favour of so-called “locals” and the indigenous

population (see Chapter 9), and their accidents and deaths are excluded from statistics (see Chapter 8). However, though she suggests in her conclusion that the people who populate such spaces of expulsions do not in fact disappear and that they are also the foundation of what she terms “spaces of making” (2016, 296), very little is said in her book on the perspective of those at the heart of such a system of expulsion, neither on what are these “spaces of making” or what occurs inside them. By framing miners’ mobilities as being at the intersection of various kinds of expulsions – territorial expulsion from living and working locations, social expulsion from traditional agrarian fields of value, economical expulsion from formal circuits of production, and, at worse, expulsion from life because of hazardous working conditions – I also wish to respond to her call to “document and bring back some of these underground situations to surface” (2016: 296). This methodologically implies allowing more room for actors’ agency and to hence nuance the somewhat overdeterministic framework of expulsions.

I thus agree with Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) who suggest that analyses that focus on primitive accumulation, including Sassen’s theory of expulsions, are too narrowly centred on processes of exclusion, and they sometimes miss the productive effects that the expansion of capitalist frontiers may have, in terms of changing subjectivities and the emergence of alternative forms of incorporation. The precariousness of their worksphere indeed point to the importance of actors’ agency and their strategic use of such spaces. For instance, matsukate gatherers (Tsing 2015), who, like itinerant miners, make a living by picking the ground in changing locations, place a higher value on “freedom” than security, and see their everyday precariousness as the cost of that “freedom.” Similarly, Millar (2014), who studied dump wageless labourers in Rio, describes how they circulate through spaces of formality and informality and find suitable solutions to deal with their “precarious present” in the dump rather than enter into formal employment structures. By looking at expulsions from the perspective of the itinerant miners, I aim to focus on miners’ agency and the subjectivities produced by everyday uncertainty.

I shall argue that the subjectivities produced by temporal change are a defining feature of *kalayantigiw*’ ethos, and that they have constructed alternative institutions and forms of cooperation in contrast to traditional structures of authority associated with agriculture and village life (see Chapter 3). For instance, the transformation of agrarian cultures by the sudden access to cash, increased uncertainty, and the need to make ever longer journeys, has blurred notions of life stages (see Chapter 4) and modified “traditional” institutions of production and reproduction (see Chapter 2 and 6).

So, while on a structural level, miners’ mobilities lies at the heart of the production system and serve a way to articulate the various artisanal and industrial modes of production within the

chain, I also wish to make the case that among the miners, it produces new subjectivities and opens new fields of value.

### **A mobility lens on artisanal mining labour**

#### *Mobility and artisanal gold mining*

Although studies have shown that spatial mobility is a structuring feature of labour in the informal artisanal mining sector in West Africa (e.g. Grätz 2010; Werthmann 2009a), human movements as such have hardly been explored systematically in terms of their own specificities (the noticeable exceptions being Bryceson and Jonsson 2010; Jonsson and Bryceson 2009 in Tanzania; Grätz 2003 in Benin). At best, they are mentioned as part of the context and are broadly described either as “rushes” or as “poverty-driven migration” (e.g. Hilson 2009; Nyame, et al. 2009), which emphasizes, in neoclassical terms, either an irrepressible economic attraction (pull factor) or an irrepressible economic repulsion (push factor).

The literature on artisanal mining in West Africa focuses on the specificities of one or another mining site, in one or another administrative region, in one or another national context, but very little is said about the trajectories of the miners who circulate across these places, scales, and contexts. Most studies on artisanal mining adopt the “Malinowskian” concept of “the field as site” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), wherein a group is defined in terms of a single location (e.g., the mining “community” as it is often described) with little consideration for the transitive nature of encounters in these contexts or for the connections that people maintain beyond these mining sites. In other words, though studies acknowledge that miners are often engaged in translocal/national journeys for work (c.f. Cuvelier 2011; Geenen 2015; Grätz 2010; Werthmann 2009a), most studies assume a bounded conception of the local and/or the nation in their theoretical and methodological approaches. Such studies have a tendency to address “labour mobility” using the framework of migration studies, which often still reasons in terms of moving from place A to place B (Cresswell 2006), thus neglecting what happens in between; for instance, it fails to notice that an indefinite “transiting” has increasingly replaced “migration” (Bredeloup and Pliez 2005; Collyer 2007; Timera 2009), or that, for many people, mobility rather than a sedentary lifestyle is the norm (De Bruijn, et al. 2001) and is constitutive of “mobile livelihoods” (Duany 2002). Therefore, this study hypothesizes that mining labour could be better described across various scales by applying a mobility perspective to understand miners’ social and spatial trajectories.

#### *The value and timing of mobility in West Africa*

Anthropological literature on West Africa has established that mobility is a defining feature of West African societies, and that it strongly relates to the social construction of the person (Bilger

and Kraler 2005; De Bruijn, et al. 2001; Triulzi and McKenzie 2013). There are usually two ways in which mobility creates value for a man over his life course. The value may take the form of intangible outcomes such as the experiences gained through the journey (e.g. Bredeloup 2008; Timera 2001); for example, travel, like certain rites of passage (e.g. Cissé 1964), was considered a step towards male adulthood, which points to *fadenya*-oriented behaviours. Value could also take tangible form – for example, the ability to contribute to the material needs of one’s family according to the expectations placed on men at different phases in their lives, which rather points to *badenya*-oriented behaviours. This process of creating value may involve different kinds of “mobile livelihoods” (Olwig and Sorensen 2003), many of which rely on both long-standing (e.g. Amselle 1976; Rain 1999) and newly emerging practices of circular migration in neighbouring countries and possibly further on (Bakewell and De Haas 2007; Boesen, et al. 2014; Ndiaye and Robin 2010). These practices can be increasingly found in the artisanal mining sector, and they operate in parallel to the seasonal migration found in the agricultural sector.

In particular, the relation between mobility and age has been researched in light of the marginal position of young men in many sub-Saharan African contexts (e.g. Bjarnesen 2007; Timera 2009). Spatial mobility should then ideally go hand-in-hand with social mobility, but as Bjarnesen states, “Although the ambiguity of being young in contemporary Africa is manipulated well by some, others have the experience of being ‘stuck in youth’; of wanting to escape ‘the social moratorium of youth’ (Vigh 2006) where retracting patrimonial networks and declining labour markets make it almost impossible for the young to achieve the independence that is often associated with social adulthood” (Bjarnesen 2007, 12). Vigh has built a convincing conceptual framework to explain what he calls “social navigation” – being spatially mobile, tactically adapting to new contexts, and embracing everchanging objectives is seen as an alternative to spatial and social stagnation, which are associated with “social death” (2006, 45). A similar idea is found in Comaroffs’ (2001) note on “personhood,” where they stress that personhood is produced in African contexts by constantly forging new relationships, which, as they state, also implies constant mobility: “No living self could be static. Stasis meant social death” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, 271).

Artisanal mining sites not only offer miners possibilities for personal transformation, but also, more prosaically, they provide them a reliable income to sustain households’ declining livelihoods. Thus, in line with a large body of research that has demonstrated that labour migration is strongly related to the life cycle in West Africa, and specifically, that “it is a preoccupation of the young” (see Bjarnesen 2013, 24 for a discussion on labour migration and life cycle progression in West Africa), I believe that mining journeys are indicative of temporal change and cannot be understood independently of age; however, this relation needs to be investigated further. While labour mobility has usually been investigated through the framework of migration studies, where the “normal” pattern

is “migration at youth, possibly urban work at adulthood, and return to the home-place as an elder,” (Bjarnesen 2013a: 24-28), the ever changing context of the gold mines instead suggests that a mobile lifestyle implies continuous mobility rather than episodic migration; however, this raises the question of how miners reconcile their mobile lifestyle and their more stable or *badenya*-oriented aspirations? This supposes that mobilities are indeed plural and strongly related to age.

### *Towards an operational definition of mobility*

According to Mirjam de Bruijn, “the astounding degree of mobility in Africa makes one wonder whether it is indeed possible to understand the livelihood of large sections of the African population without taking into account the perspective of movement” (De Bruijn, et al. 2001: 1). While scholars of the “mobility turn” have invested time and energy in reinstating movement as an essential feature of social life in Europe and the US (Cresswell 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006), in sub-Saharan Africa, spatial mobility has always been considered the norm, considering the diversity of the “cultures of migration” practised in the continent (Klute and Hahn 2007). From this perspective, mining is just one among the many reasons why people move in West Africa, and it is regarded as one of many forms of making a living through a mobile lifestyle, wherein being mobile is the norm rather than the exception. This “normalization” has a clear advantage in that the role of mobility is not neglected in research on Africa, as has often been the case in Europe. However, considering only the normality of movement may undermine the power asymmetries that structure the relation between mobility and immobility (Adey 2006, cited in Schapendonk and Steel 2014); this topic, which has also been examined by previous mobility studies (for an overview see Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013), is worth investigating so as to understand itinerant miners’ trajectories in relation to their embeddedness in larger power structures, including the “bordering practices” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) of nation states and industrial mining corporations.

Studies usually differentiate between notions of (transnational) migration and mobility using political and legal definitions. Migration scholarship tends to be highly Europe-centric, which is reflected in the legal definitions used: the term “migrants” – or “transmigrants” when researchers intend to study the ties they maintain with their “home-place” – is usually used to qualify those who intend to move, or who have moved, overseas; in contrast, journeys within the continent, including cross-border ones, are seen as “mobility.” As De Haas has argued, these definitions are highly political and participate in the “myth of invasion” (De Haas 2008); they fail to take into consideration that 75% of all African “migrants” live in another African country, and that the African extra-continental emigration rate is the lowest among all world regions (Flahaux and De Haas 2016).

In legal terms, there is no clear definition of how long a person needs to stay at a place for it to be considered a “residence”, nor of the amount of time that needs to be spent in another place so

as to qualify a journey as “migration” or “a change of residence” (United Nations 1993: 1 in van Dijk 2001). For example, itinerant miners live in temporary spontaneous settlements next to the mining pits where they work. They live in these places for long periods of time, but they certainly do not consider these temporary forms of inhabitation their “home”. Rather than moving to settle in another place (immigration); this lifestyle of constantly being on the move is what studies on “migratory circulations”<sup>18</sup> (for a review of works see Hily 2009), led mostly by French scholars, have been documenting (e.g. Brachet 2009; Schmoll 2005; Tarrius 1992). “Migratory circulations” imply that there is no one place of residence and, like classic circular migrations, these practices are rooted in long-standing traditions in West Africa (e.g. Amselle 1976; Meillassoux 1975). While circular migration usually involves two well defined and relatively fixed places and either focus on the place of departure or the place of arrival, “migratory circulations,” in contrast, suggest continuous mobility and “cannot so easily be described within the frame of the relations between two nations” (Hily 2009, 24, my translation), nor in terms of “departure” and “arrival.” Instead, they focus on the in-between period.

The advantages of using the concept “mobility” over “migration” in studies on West Africa are clearly explained by Van Dijk et al. in the introduction to the edited book, *Mobile Africa* (2001, 9). According to them, migration is conceptually problematic for it does not account for those who move between different places without having one clear place of residence and because it does not include those for whom mobility is a way of life, in particular pastoralists or nomad groups (Van Dijk, et al.: 10), or by extension itinerant miners whose lifestyles are very alike contemporary forms of nomadism. Their approach goes beyond “sedentary metaphysics” (Malkki 1992) that either dismisses movements or sees them as merely linking two fixed locations. However, sticking only to physical movements in space would mean running the risk of neglecting the role of nation-states in such movements; this is problematic not only because of the obvious role national borders play in containing, preventing, or allowing certain forms of cross-border mobilities and not others, but also because national policies play an important role in rendering certain forms of work accessible to certain categories of people, or, as in the present case, of favouring mineral extraction in certain spaces and circumstances and preventing it in others. In other words, itinerant miners do not move freely throughout the continent; nations do indeed matter in some aspects, which may sometimes be overlooked in studies that examine the various way workers use their mobility to make a living in sub-Saharan Africa.

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<sup>18</sup> “Circulations migratoires” in French emphasize circulation (mobility) rather than migration (sedentarity), in contrast to the notion of circular migration that focus more on settled migration than on movements.

### *The transnational dimension of mining mobilities*

One way of bringing nation-states back into the picture without naturalizing them is to adopt a transnational perspective (Schiller, et al. 1995), i.e., to investigate social fields that are anchored in several nation-states, so as to go beyond “methodological nationalism.” As Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) have pointed out, the lives of transmigrants – those whose social life functions across national borders – call into question the nationalist framing of nation-states that the social sciences have taken for granted for so long by “ignoring” its constructed character, “naturalizing” it as a unit of analysis, and by consequently reproducing the “territorial limitations” of national borders in studies on migrations. Oddly enough, this approach has rarely been used in mobility studies on the African continent.<sup>19</sup> Though it is not explicitly spelled out, it seems that, among migration scholars, African postcolonial states are not considered “nations” enough in their own right for the migrations and mobilities which occur in between them to qualify as “transnational.” Two reasons can explain why the transnational lens is not used in studies on Africa, and both should be critiqued in my view.

First, the transnational perspective first made its appearance in migration studies conducted by European and US-based scholars in reaction to assimilationist theories and politics in Europe and the US (see Dahinden 2016). While these scholars sought to challenge methodological nationalism and drew attention to ties and connections that expanded transnationally beyond national borders, they did so mainly from within the framework of migration policies (Dahinden 2016) – Africans were considered “migrants” if they migrated to Europe or the US and as “mobiles” if their journeys were limited to within the continent. It is certainly true that migration policies are not enforced the same way between Africa and Europe as between African countries; however, it would be misleading to assume that borders therefore do not matter in Africa. Oliver Bakewell (2015), besides calling for more research on South–South migrations, states that despite the relatively recent and contested origins of national borders in Africa, “a large volume of scholarship on African borders has shown that they had been incorporated within people’s lives, shaping their livelihoods and movements – whether acting as barriers to trade or opening up new opportunities for arbitrage” (Bakewell 2015, 288). In addition to the effects that national borders can have on trade and employment, national politics of autochthony, for example in the Ivory Coast and Cameroon (Ceuppens 2005), or the difficulties that certain categories of people face during cross-border travel between countries (Choplin and Lombard 2010), can have clear effects in terms of enforcing dualistic definitions of insider and outsider that further shape human movements. Therefore, the connections made across

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<sup>19</sup> A noticeable exception being Bjarnesen’s work on “Wartime Mobilities in the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire Transnational Space” (2013) suggests that the question to be asked is whether or not, and to what extent, do national borders matter to social phenomenon to assess if a « transnational perspective » is useful.

these borders within the continent also matter and could therefore be looked at through a transnational lens.

Another reason why the transnational lens is not used is that the state is assumed to be absent from large portions of the land (Bayart 1990; Ferguson 2006), and hence, national boundaries would not be the most pertinent reference category with which to qualify movements. Such a view can be found in the body of literature that focusses on “translocalism” rather than transnationalism, and which seeks to focus more on the *trans*- than on the *-national*, arguing that the national referent is not necessarily the most salient (Brickell and Datta 2011), and that “localities” are better suited spatial references than nations to account for connections and transfers from a Southern perspective (see also Freitag and Von Oppen 2009). I agree with this view, though it may neglect the importance of states in shaping certain social processes, especially with regard to highly politicized issues such as labour policies, access to land and subsoil resources, or people’s movements. As de Sardan and Blundo have highlighted through their extended research on the “moral economies of corruption” and on practices of “real governance” in several West African countries (Blundo and De Sardan 2001; de Sardan 2004), governments in West Africa – at different scales – produce a greater number of laws than their counterparts in many part of the globe. So, even though the state may appear to be absent across large swathes of land, with the extension Europe’s borders into the African continent (e.g. Andersson 2014; Brachet, et al. 2011; Pian 2009) and with corporations’ own borders surging in this era of enclosure (Makki and Geisler 2011; White, et al. 2012), those in official positions of power have gained more capacity and opportunities to enforce laws rather opportunistically than systematically. For instance, public servants such as the Corps Habillés or P.D.G. (standing for Police, Gendarmerie, Douane<sup>20</sup>) can determine individuals’ access to social and material resources for they organize all sorts of patron-client relations within a nationally-based framework; national policies to formalize the artisanal sector are a good example of the indirect presence of the state, whose agents act as catalysts who determine how access to resources is distributed and to whom.

Itinerant miners do not conform to the traditional pattern of transnational migration documented in the 1990s, where migrants from the periphery settled in another country in the core and maintained social and symbolical ties with significant others in their home country. Rather, they practise a form of transnational mobility, where different social spaces share complex relations, and some of which, like the *fabara*, are rooted locally, while others, like mining spaces, expand across various boundaries, including national borders, and are rarely stable. As Dahinden puts it, a transnational perspective suggests alternative epistemologies and methodologies that are especially well suited for addressing the “conditions, tensions, contradictions and constraints of transnational living and politic”; these tensions and contradictions affect the ways in which miners negotiate their

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<sup>20</sup> P.D.G. is the French acronym for CEO, which has been revised as Police, Douane (Customs), Gendarmerie.



mobile livelihoods and their obligations towards the *fabara*. In her words, “applying a transnational perspective means to adapt an explicit de-nationalized epistemological stance and concomitant particular methodologies in order to investigate cross-border social phenomenon created by non-state-actors and to theorize them (Dahinden 2016: 9).

As Dahinden points out, the implications are not only theoretical but also methodological, for they allow one to avoid methodological nationalism by adopting a non-groupist approach (Brubaker 2002); by overcoming a sedentarist bias and adopting mobile methods of enquiry (Büscher and Urry 2009); and by focussing on effective social relations, i.e., by adopting a relational and social network lens (Dahinden 2005a). These points have guided the research process for this study and shall be discussed in the methodology section.

### **Risk, Institutions, social networks and social spaces**

Mining journeys, which are far more dependent on chance than agricultural production or wage labour, feature a strong tension between personal ambitions and moral obligations towards the family. For these reasons, I wish to consider households’ economics while allowing room for the aspirations of miners at large. Thus, I use the twin concepts of *fadenya*-oriented and *badenya*-oriented behaviours to stress the interlinkages between self-realization (*fadenya*) and one’s obligations to the group (*badenya*). I propose to do this by taking into consideration rationalities other than exclusively economic ones in my study of miners’ motives, as well as by investigating the changing roles of institutions in reducing risk in the constitution of livelihoods.

### ***Approaching mining mobilities through institutions***

Given the extreme uncertainty, high risks, and unlikely returns associated with mining gold, neoclassical explanations of push and pull economic factors are not very satisfying since the “risks” are most likely going to supersede potential returns. By framing miners’ mobilities as labour migration (see e.g. Nyame, et al. 2009), neoclassical economics emphasizes individual agency and argue that individuals seek to maximize their “utility” (Ravenstein 1889, 286, cited in Piguet and De Coulon 2010)(Ravenstein 1889: 286, cited in Piguet and De Coulon 2010: 4). Yet, neither rational choice nor pure individualism explain the choices made in these contexts wherein individuals see these decisions as bets that possibly offer hope for improvement; in these situations, the individual sees his “well-being” as not only his own personal gains, but as inclusive of other family members. Without questioning the “poverty-driven” nature of this activity (Jennings 1999), miners’ stories tend to invalidate explanations based on the image of fully rational, perfectly informed, self-interested “homo economicus”. The question is thus how and what institutions exist and are developed to create a certain stability in contexts of uncertainty and continuous movement?

New institutionalism (Ensminger 1992; Haller 2002b) offers a way to approach choices in contexts marked by high uncertainty while still acknowledging rationalities beyond self-interest. It discards the assumption that rules, in this case, institutions, are central to economic decisions and thus suggests a conceptual alternative to the rational individual human being (Haller 2007:9). Based on the rational choice paradigm, Ensminger (1992) proposes that institutions should be seen as the “rules of the game” which structure human interactions: thanks to rules, formal or informal ones, individuals reduce transaction costs and thus risk. This theory is particularly apt for studying situations which feature collectively-used resources; and thus, it can be applied to institutions that manage land tenure and access to underground resources at the local level in West Africa (Peters 2013). In her book, *Governing the Commons* (2015), Elinor Ostrom showed how local communities were able to develop institutions that allowed a sustainable and profitable use of common-pool resources in the long term. In doing so, she questions the view that the market is an optimal institution as well as the imposition of government rules and taxes to manage “non-private” goods and resources.

Based on similar theoretical underpinnings – i.e., the rational choice paradigm and the rejection of “homo economicus” – Ensminger adds a historical dimension to our understanding of institutions. Rational choice theory cannot account for power asymmetries, inefficient economic behaviours, or the development of new institutional constraints. However, in Ensminger’s framework, the functions of an institution – or the institution itself – can change or disappear according to internal and external factors.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Ensminger’s model is well suited to explain recent changes in the mining sector (see e.g., Niederberger and Haller 2016) where, as described earlier, the expansion of the industrial mining frontier has changed power imbalances that have in turn had an impact on the artisanal sector. Long standing institutions that used to regulate access to land resources, for instance *tutorat* (integration of foreigners) and *fasiya* (hierarchy that prefers elder males), have been affected and contextually transformed.<sup>22</sup> By describing institutions from the perspective of the itinerant miners, this thesis will side-step dichotomic and normative conceptions of the “formal” and the “informal” to acknowledge the “normative pluralism” (Chauveau, et al. 2001; Olivier de Sardan 2011) of mining spaces, and it will trace the continuities and discontinuities within the institutions on which itinerant miners’ mobile livelihoods rely.

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<sup>21</sup> In her model, Ensminger identifies four endogenous aspects of institutions: formal and informal rules, ideologies, bargaining power, and organizations that mutually influence each other. These four aspects are also influenced by external factors such as population changes, changes in the socio-political structure and the natural environment, and technological changes, which altogether impact what Ensminger calls “relative prices.”

<sup>22</sup> See the next chapter for more on institutions in the informal artisanal gold mines.

### *Social networks and transboundary social spaces*

As Nee and Ingram state, “an institution is a web of interrelated norms – formal and informal – governing social relationships” (1998: 19). The financial unpredictability of artisanal mining is managed through support networks along which norms, shared affiliations, and institutional rules circulate. These networks either revolve around the “home” or the transboundary social spaces across which artisanal miners travel and within which they share identities that do not align with sedentarist and nationalist assumptions about home.

In the Mandenka-speaking world, where mobility is fundamental component of everyday life, the concept of *fabara*, which literally means the “home-place” (the father’s place), reflects the multiple meanings that home and belonging can have; these potential meanings have been extensively investigated by transnational scholars in other contexts (e.g. Gardner 1995; Levitt and Waters 2002; Olwig 1997). Compared to the European notion of home, the *fabara* is both a physical place and a social construction related to history, lineage, and identity (Kenny 2011). Being attached to a home-place does not mean that one resides in a particular physical place, nor does it mean that it cannot change with people’s movements. It is important to note that social recognition is still strongly linked to the institution of *fabara*, whose virtual extension in space functions as a means to minimize families’ risk by perpetuating interdependencies and obligations among members who are scattered in different regions. Thus, people may move for work, agriculture, adventure, study, religion, or other reasons (De Bruijn et al. 2001), and they may live in a place other than the *fabara*, sometimes for their entire life, and even for generations; however, they remain tied to the *fabara* as far as personhood is concerned. These ties are thus not only symbolical, but are expected to be performed – for instance, by participating in specific life course events (e.g., circumcision of children, burials) or by remitting money or participating in village associations set up in urban centres. Such attachments obviously come with a certain ambivalence – the notion of “choice-within-constraints” as used in new institutionalism (Ingram and Clay 2000) – for just as men are encouraged to leave the *fabara* to seek work elsewhere and financially support their families, especially during the dry season, they are also expected to return at certain moments, to participate in cultivation, as well as to engage actively in the social life of the *fabara*. Hence, miners’ mobility does not mean that they are entirely cut off from the *fabara*; instead, their precarious journeys are often (paradoxically) undertaken to financially support the *fabara* and provide it a source of stability in line with local ideologies of harmony and permanence.

Whilst miners take risks in the gold mines to provides a certain security to the “home place” – a common pattern in transnational migration – a mobility perspective mainly questions how and through which institutions miners themselves secure their own mobile lifestyle while on the move. Since social security is not furnished by the state but by community-based institutions from which

miners are temporarily disconnected during their journeys, the lens of social networks will be especially useful to analyse the alternative social spaces miners create while on the move, i.e., “the spaces of making” in the context of continual expulsions (Sassen 2016). A systematic empirical study of support relations in the everchanging geographies of the gold mines will call into question assumptions in the literature regarding the territorial anchorage of networks (e.g. Haug 2008; Hily 2009; Tarrus 1993). In the elusive environment of the mines, where places have a very short-term existence, itinerant miners use resilient social networks to access the necessary resources to sustain themselves and to protect themselves while on the move, especially during episodes of vulnerability. The moral economies on which miners depend for support and security are thus sustained by institutions and reciprocities that are embedded within these social networks; therefore, these networks must be empirically analysed to qualify the transboundary social spaces in which they function. I shall argue that, in a context where one needs to be able to cope with continuous expulsions, these alternative social spaces are the necessary counterpart of miners’ adverse incorporations into the global economy.

## **Construction of the field of study: the transnational spaces of artisanal gold mining in West Africa**

### **Doing ethnography, co-constructing knowledge**

Since the beginning of my research, my aim was to conduct a relatively “classic” ethnographic study, which I believed would be defined mainly by sustained and daily interactions with the main actors – the itinerant gold diggers – over the long term. As Graeber puts it, “when one carries out an ethnography, one observes what people do, and then tries to tease out the hidden symbolic, moral, or pragmatic logics that underlie their actions” (Graeber 2004: 11-12). This is a definition that I find especially appealing for it suggests the construction of models directly rooted in the everyday lives, practices, and perspectives of the persons studied rather than in external theoretical models to be tested. In the course of my fieldwork however, I found myself “making order” in what I was taking part in, observing or being told, and thus tried to concentrate on building a model of understanding based upon existing concepts that my informants were themselves using in their everyday conversations.

To do so, I follow Geertz’ view according to whom “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, culture [being] those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of laws but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (1973: 270 cited in Martin 1993: 214). Notions such as “courage”, “adventure”, or “luck” are for my informants no heuristic metaphors, but notions they use to describe and talk about their activities and everyday lives, which I have then used as heuristic tools. As an anthropologist, I believe that my task

is mainly to observe how they use such concepts, ask them to clarify their usage, identify related practices, and progressively try to unpack what “mental realities” (Godelier 1984) or “representations” (Jodelet 2003) they underlie. In doing so, I was inspired by the work of Geslin (1999; 2002) in the field of the anthropology of techniques, wherein he states that the best tool of anthropological enquiry is undoubtedly the reflexivity of informants upon their everyday actions, and, more broadly I would add, upon their lives and past experiences. From this perspective, the premises on which I base my arguments were constructed together with my interlocutors, especially Sandaly, Kalou, and Jah, with whom I regularly shared and discussed my interpretations, and so they are based as much as possible on their own “local knowledge” (Geertz 2000[1983]).

My ethnographic work relies heavily on Geslin’s “anthropotechnology approach” (1999) which orients anthropological engagement towards “technical systems”; similarly, I consider artisanal gold mining and the social institutions that are embedded within it as one such sociotechnical systems. As a general stance, I followed Godelier’s materialist view and sought to approach the technical system of artisanal gold mining as a product of both mental realities (“l’idéal”) and material realities (“le matériel”) beyond the Marxist divide between infrastructure and superstructure, in which the latter was considered only a translation of the relation between production and infrastructure (Godelier 1984). Godelier (2007) argues that in any (production) relationship between humans, as well as between humans and non humans, there is an ideological component embedded, even in the apparently most material relations. In other words, ideas stem from engagement with the material world and result in constructed representations of reality – like Geertz’s webs of meanings – and thus *make* the material world in which (production) relations operate. In clear, first there is the material (physical) world, i.e., the gravel and earth the miners touch and dig in; second, this is organized through ideas or mental realities, i.e., the classifications between what are the living and non-living that populate the underground ; third, this is in turn symbolically institutionalized, i.e., by naming it and instituting rules of access to certain categories of people, which eventually constitute the reality of the actors of the sociotechnical system.

As advocated by Geslin (1999), I began my ethnographic enquiry by focusing on the technical aspects of artisanal gold mining with the idea of reconstructing from them the “cadre idéal”, the mental realities that underlay miners’ activities. To do so, I lived several months in Koundiana koura, a Guinean village surrounded by artisanal gold mines which I mentioned in the introduction, and accompanied Jah, a full time gold miner who accepted to host me, in his everyday activities during this time. By questioning in work situation, for instance, who digs, where and what one digs, with whom and with what tools, my informants would also tell me about the social hierarchies at stake among them, how they conceive their environment, and about the social institutions that regulated their access to it. Doing this requires time of course, for I had to first grasp the very technical aspects

of gold mining, i.e. related to gold's materiality, and the very social ones, i.e. related to institutions of access, when following this approach. I am therefore grateful to the friends and informants who patiently allowed me to accompany them as an apprentice during their daily activities. Thus, according to the typology proposed by Soule (2008), I was more an "observing participant" than a "participant observer", for my skills and abilities remained quite limited in terms of mining gold.

In the complex reciprocities at stake during the research (and until now through Messenger and Skype), I was thus dependent on the few persons who could facilitate my integration, or on the contrary, limited what was shown to me and/or explained. In the context of rural West Africa, the dependency was greater because I relied on my hosts for practical matters such as a place to stay, travel in remote areas, and communicating with others who may have an interesting viewpoint on the topic. These relations are highly codified and comprise their own power balances, in addition to the one between me, as the researcher, and the informants or co-researchers. In such circumstances, I found that the best way to ensure that I have access to "good information" was to enter into a few strong and sustained reciprocities, and my few informants gave me the status of brother (Sandaly) or friend (the others) or *patron* with other few informants with whom I worked episodically, i.e. in mining sites where I had no previous contact. I thus had to comply with all sorts of expected social and material exchanges either as a fictive member of a family, or of a clique, or as an employer.

Such exchanges could be of different kinds. I would, for example, contribute materially to my *tuteurs*' expenses by bringing large bags of rice from town, by transporting family members between towns and villages by bike when on my way, and by contributing financially to episodic needs such as children's education, healthcare expenses, or funerals. I kept maintained these reciprocities, at least those concerned with ritual events such as funerals, also when I was back in Switzerland between field visits and afterwards, thus performing the role of a family member or a friend according to the relation. I also episodically sent money in case of unexpected events, such as illnesses and accidents, to some of my informants who were in vulnerable situations, while in contrast I also received (small amounts) of money from other wealthy ones when they chanced upon good mining operations to which I had partially participated.

With Sandaly, our collaboration was formally monetized once I started receiving fieldwork subsidies from the University of Neuchâtel for conducting fieldwork; this monetization took the form of a salary for his collaboration when we conducted research together. These sustained reciprocities were uneven of course, especially considering that I was in a position to provide a salary and become a patron while I was simultaneously a learner dependent on Sandaly's advice and knowledge about artisanal gold mining. Each relationship implied different arrangements according to different material possibilities and relative social positions. For instance, in other close relations, such as with Mahmady or Kalou, who had much greater financial means, I would stick to a position of guest, and

either accept invitations or share expenses. These different forms of exchanges illustrate different power balances between my friends–informants and me, as well as our mutual acknowledgement of these ties of interdependence that link us in specific situations. What I wish to point out is that these power relations exist and structure any kind of interaction – especially those of enquiry (Bourdieu, et al. 1993) – and especially when such disparity in terms of material means are involved. However, in the Mandenka-speaking context, these relations are particularly explicit; seniority and patron–client relationships are institutionalized and are visibly enacted in everyday interactions. I have thus found myself playing different roles that contribute to producing different kinds of discourses and interactions, or “data”, thus shedding light on the diverse perspectives associated with the social position I found myself in, in relation to my informants: always as a student researcher, yet often doubling as an apprentice, a guest, a friend, a fictive family member, a patron, a client, a wedding photographer and video-maker, a tourist, and in few occasions, a “professional researcher”. In general, I interpret my relation with Sandaly, Kalou, Jah, Namori, and Felix, with whom I spent lots of time over the last five years, with whom I lived, travelled, shared meals, and slept in their houses and their tents in mining settlements, with whom I maintained regular contact and spoke via phone from Switzerland and West Africa, and with whom I spoke about intimate matters, as friendship sustained by convergent interests; I am hence very grateful for their friendship during these years without I would never have achieved this study.

By way of closing this section, I wish to return to my initial desire to do a “classic” ethnographic study. There is probably no such “classic” ethnographic study, for every ethnographic research study – every “fieldwork” – is necessarily unique because it draws on particular relationships, interactions, friendships, and unexpected events that take place at specific moments over the life course of both the researcher and the participants. Nevertheless, though ethnographic methods are not well suited for replication, the co-construction of ethnographic data through everyday interactions and their further interpretation still aims at providing a “model” of understanding. To do this in a credible way, the researcher needs to set up and make explicit a series of guidelines that frame the study (Mukamurera, et al. 2006). In this section, I will explain the kind of “material” that framed my ethnographic enquiry, as well as the guidelines that I set up to make these peculiar experiences meaningful. In a second step, I will come to other methods that I have borrowed so as to triangulate (Flick 1992) my findings, not only by mixing perspectives but also methodologies.

### **The material: working with stories**

Participant observation was my main source of information for the research. I now briefly come to the “stories” that form the main type of material that was generated while doing ethnography. Indeed, co-presence and sustained interactions imply listening to, and often participating in, all kinds

of stories that people tell themselves and tell each other. As Gardner explains, “narratives [i.e. the content of a story] are first and foremost stories, and it is through storytelling [i.e. the act of narrating a story] and the host of genres in which they are packaged that we convey our most personal experiences and memories, that we build meaning and construct identity” (Gardner 2002: 2). Besides, not only people tell stories; states or corporations also do so, as will be seen in Chapter 9 and 10 which address the relations between industrial mining companies and artisanal gold miners. Though they may be of a different kind, these narratives also imply moral registers which participate in the webs of meaning that individuals are embedded in.

### *Everyday conversations, life stories, myths and PR narratives*

I make a major difference between what I call everyday conversations, which contained pieces of stories that I noted in my note books, and life stories, which were narrated, often in the form of recorded interviews, during which interviewees overtly took a storyteller stance and related in a more consciously constructed manner their engagement and journeys in the mining sector. Everyday conversations should be read in relation to their context, especially in view of the intentionality they suggest and in view of how the speech is deployed and authorized. In the artisanal gold mines, the stories told by miners regularly include narratives of new discoveries, luck and bad luck, and risk-taking and accident. Such stories also are displayed in the coffee places and feed everyday discussions which inform the structuring of the representations of certain categories of people. Therefore, as Gardner suggests, they shall be indexed in terms of age, place, and gender (2002, 21). For example, as Chapter 4 seeks to show, stories of risk-taking are a common trope among young male miners temporary dislocated from their home-place; such stories reveal young miners’ aspirations – how and where they imagine their future – and also how they position themselves in relation to their elders in the gold mines and in their home-places.

Practically, portions of life stories were collected in a more systematic way in accordance to Andreas Witzel’s approach in “Problem Centred Interview” (2000), which I turned into “journey centred interviews”. After explaining my interest in how people make a living in the gold mines and the role of mobility in their livelihoods, I began the interviews with an open narrative question (“Can you narrate to me how you started mining and explain to me your journeys until you arrived here?”) to let the interviewees construct the sense of their own stories, which further allowed me to reconstruct their life histories. As Bruner puts, telling a story is an “intentional state entailment” which needs to be interpreted in its indexicality, normativeness, and canonicity; the form it takes most commonly in the Mandenka-speaking context is the epic<sup>23</sup> (see Jackson 2002, Chap. IX;

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<sup>23</sup> Such plots cannot be totally separated from existing “narrative genres” such as epics and foundational Mandenka myths, to which people often refer by displaying fictive genealogies and making joke on them. Mandenka myths, which all draw from the epic Soundjata (at least three written versions have been popularized



Bredeloup 2008; Anderson 2014). Once their narration was over, which usually took between 20 minutes to one hour, I asked a few questions to clarify some points and passages, and built on this by bringing in topics from the interview grid that had not yet been breached, but which I wished to cover with my interview partners (see interview grids in the annexes). These accounts are often ambivalent for experiences and emotions rarely fit pre-established categories of thinking.

Yet, as Gardner (2012) rightly notes, not only individuals tell stories. States and corporations do so as well. As she suggests, mining companies construct a public image for themselves through PR statements, and this media material is not more or less true but surely tells other stories, which implies the promotion of often competing alternative moral registers. The rise of CSR in the mining sector has led to the perpetuation of countless narratives on companies' relations with the "environment", the "local population", and the "state" in the struggle to legitimize their presence and profits. As Kirsch has demonstrated Kirsch (2014: IV), these narratives mainly draws upon what he calls "corporate science", whose main function has been to popularize corporate oxymorons such as "sustainable mining" to anticipate and face their critics. Since this material has played an increasingly important role in shaping the relations, between companies, local populations, and itinerant miners, among others in justifying practices of expulsions, I will consider them as just as another kind of narrative (see chapter 9) in their "indexicality", "normativeness", and "canonicity" (Bruner 1991).

### *The languages of miners' stories*

To collect and analyse stories, I first needed to get access to them, which in a Maninkakan–Bamanakan speaking context, is far from easy for a non-speaker like me.<sup>24</sup> There are also many other subtle barriers, e.g., trust, which I have certainly been confronted with and that I may not have even noticed in many occasions. I first wish to mention here some of the very practical limits of language barriers.

While fluent French speaking is rather uncommon in rural areas, it is not so rare among mine workers who have travelled to neighbouring countries where French, or possibly English, is widely used to communicate. For example, while communication was quite limited in the village context of

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by Kamissoko and Cisse (1991), Jansen (2001), and Niane (1960), perpetuate organizational principles and ideas on gender, age, personhood, journeys, and the life cycle that contribute to structuring personal narratives. I am certainly not trying to artificially trace continuities or essentialize them to attribute them a deterministic strength to Mandenka foundational myths. Yet, notions such as "adventure", "home-place" (fabara), "masculine individualistic behaviour" (fadenya), and "masculine group-oriented behaviour" (badenya) are often argued and explained in reference to such myths and in reference to Mandenka heroes with whom people share fictive filiation. They are thus part of a narrative framework that convey moral principles based on a certain, yet often ambivalent, idea of the good as chapter three and four illustrate.

<sup>24</sup> My understanding remained limited to identifying recurring words, expressions and meanings, and to manage my everyday needs (buying food and cigarettes, getting water, counting any paying stuff, introducing myself, asking technical questions about the excavation process) but unfortunately never allowed me to have real discussions with totally non-French or English speaker.

Koundiana Koura, except when I was with Jah or Felix who had extensive travel experience, I could easily communicate with Kalou's co-workers in the cosmopolitan context of mining settlements, because most of them spoke rather fluent French, and also because they were patient and kind enough to speak it with me.

During the course of the research, I had the chance to work with Sandaly Kourouma, who, besides being an "expert" on gold mining issues in Guinea because of his past experience as a small-scale gold trader and thus a decisive informant, also served as an interpreter and research assistant during several field visits. Our collaboration turned out to be very stimulating, for our interview technique was constantly improved from one interview to the other based on our respective observations and our increasing ease in moving across the grid and making our questions more precise along the research<sup>25</sup>. Despite the inherent limits of translation, I believe that working with Sandaly Kourouma throughout the research process helped considerably minimize the loss of information due to the language context of the interview. Indeed, we discussed most of my interpretations during the research, and Sandaly was aware of the topical issues that needed to be addressed, many of which were raised by him in the course of our discussions. Consequently, when a new topic was brought up, or when divergent interpretations emerged on the basis of the narrator's story, Sandaly would usually notice it and inform me, so that we could come back to the topic at the end of the interview. Besides, the most influential topics that have guided the research were initially rooted in my own observations and participation in the everyday activities of French-speaking informants with whom I could easily interact, e.g. the first months spent in Koundiana Koura with Jah or further travels with Kalou and his team mates. Finally, most ideas and interpretations were written up in the form of memos and then cross-checked; they were often refuted or clarified through discussions with Sandaly, and later, in conversations with other informants.

I now move to one recurring form of narrative within miners' stories, which revolved around themes such as adventure and suffering. I briefly pause on the latter, which, I realized, had come through the back door while I had implicitly favoured the former in selecting and arranging my ethnographic material.

### *Beyond the story of the "suffering miner"*

When I started writing the dissertation, I realized that all sorts of tough topics like poverty, violence, and death were present in my field notes and recordings, and that I had hardly ever explored

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<sup>25</sup> For example, we switched from a system of simultaneous translation, which was disturbing for the interviewee and too demanding for Sandaly, to a system of "narrative blocks" that respected the way particular sequences fit together in interviewees' stories. Of course, though we did our best to adapt to the circumstances, I admit that I certainly lost many nuances that an uninterrupted narrative flow in a single-language interview would have permitted.

these ideas while speaking with friends or academics about my fieldwork; indeed, they were much more present than I had expected in view of my own subjective feelings and impressions after several field visits over more than five years. I also realized that I was not comfortable writing about these topics though they formed a sizeable part of my material.

First, I became aware of my own uneasiness with these topics because of the comments that I received in the beginning of my research. When, in between fieldwork episodes in Switzerland, I told people that I was studying the mobility of gold diggers, I often encountered fixed and clear images that my interlocutors in Switzerland associated with the artisanal mining sector: a sort of hell where miners, preferably children, deprived of any agency, would work like slaves for an exploitative boss at best or under the threat of an armed militia. These recurring images, which movies like *Blood Diamond* have largely popularized, were regularly presented to me as facts that I was expected to confirm. In reply to these questions, I had to first state that, in *my* experience, there were usually no militaries involved; that children (not youth) were never allowed to enter tunnels; that in contrast to Sierra Leone or Liberia, there had not been sustained armed conflicts either in Guinea, Mali, or Senegal lately and that whenever it happened it was not in the region where I was doing my fieldwork nor in gold-rich areas; that young miners often enjoyed their independence and felt anything but exploited; and that, though work conditions were harsh, they often associated a certain “freedom” with gold mining compared to their lives back in their home villages. Telling these observations against dominant belief was sometimes, I felt, interpreted as dubious by my interlocutors. I thus found myself in a strange situation, very similar to that described by Robbins (2013), whose Urapmin hosts were constantly seen as “people who suffered” by fellow academics, which, as he says, was “an interpretation that never felt true to [his] experience.”

In contrast, when I read my field notes again and listened to the recorded life stories and interviews I had conducted with Sandaly, I also realized that out of the 28 journey interviews, 21 referred – at least once – to the death of a friend, a co-worker, or a parent in the context of the mines in the course of their mining journeys; observations that I had apparently eluded in my field notes. Since the interviews had started with open narrative questions, the topic had not been brought up by me or Sandaly, and consequently, can be legitimately interpreted as an important component of miners’ stories. These episodes were part of the usual plot of miners’ stories, and they hint at a form of structural violence. As Robbins argues in his article “Beyond the Suffering Subject” (2013), anthropology has tended in the last few decades to replace the study of difference, with the analytical distance it allowed, with an emphasis on the “suffering slot”, which, through empathic connection, made “trauma” the bridge between cultures – or the “empire of trauma” as Fassin called it. My aim in this dissertation is not to (over)emphasize such topics, which would not do justice to the narrated experience of miners who were more concerned with fulfilling their aspirations than with coping

with trauma. However, accidents, death, and suffering were also components of their lived experience and shall not be simply put aside for they may convey a miserable picture of miners' lives.

It is striking that these dimensions have not been addressed in a significant number of anthropological studies on artisanal gold mining in different part of the Global South. My hypothesis is that scholars purposely overlook suffering to avoid miners' victimization and to acknowledge the role of artisanal mining in terms of economic development. Another striking way in which way discussions about work conditions are avoided is by emphasizing "environmental issues" (i.e., mercury emissions, deforestations, etc.), which underlies calls to "formalize" the sector, rather than "social ones". In my experience, shaft collapses were a part of everyday life in gold mining settlements, and though I have certainly neglected the omnipresence of these dramatic incidents when I was doing fieldwork, possibly because I was not at ease dealing with it, my field notes and recordings brought it back to me when I started analysing

I thus wish take a position that I hope close to the one adopted by Robbins in his research on time, change, and hope, which focuses on "how people come to believe that they can successfully create a good beyond what is presently given in their lives" (2013: 458). I hope that my ethnographic account will not be read as contributing to the victimization of the miners whom I have lived with and who consistently work to improve their lives in often original and unexpected ways.

### **The "fieldwork": working with mobile people**

One of the peculiarities of my field research was its multi-sited and itinerant feature. Since I had chosen to focus on the mobile lives of miners, I had consequently decided that their movements and relationships within their field of activity, rather than within the boundaries of a mining site, would delineate the "fieldwork". This may sound obvious, yet it implied a series of practical choices and eventually some difficulties and limits. By choosing to follow artisanal miners in their journeys and by not "sampling" the informants in a "groupist" way (Brubaker 2002), for example on the basis of any alleged identifications (national, local, ethnic, etc.), but just by their self-identification as full-time gold miners, I hope to have, at least partly, overcome the "local" obsession with supposedly bounded spatial entities, of which, for example, the village is the archetype.

The dimension of mobility (of people, knowledge, or gold), which is somehow intrinsic to the sociotechnical system of artisanal gold mining, is at the core of my research interest; I rapidly oriented myself towards a so-called "multi-sited" (Falzon 2016; Marcus 1995) and "itinerant" (Schapendonk and Steel 2014) methodology. Indeed, I realized during my first field visit that most of Jah's co-workers in Koundiana were mobile workers who came from different regions and countries. Since their travels and the experience they had gathered in the mining camps seemed to

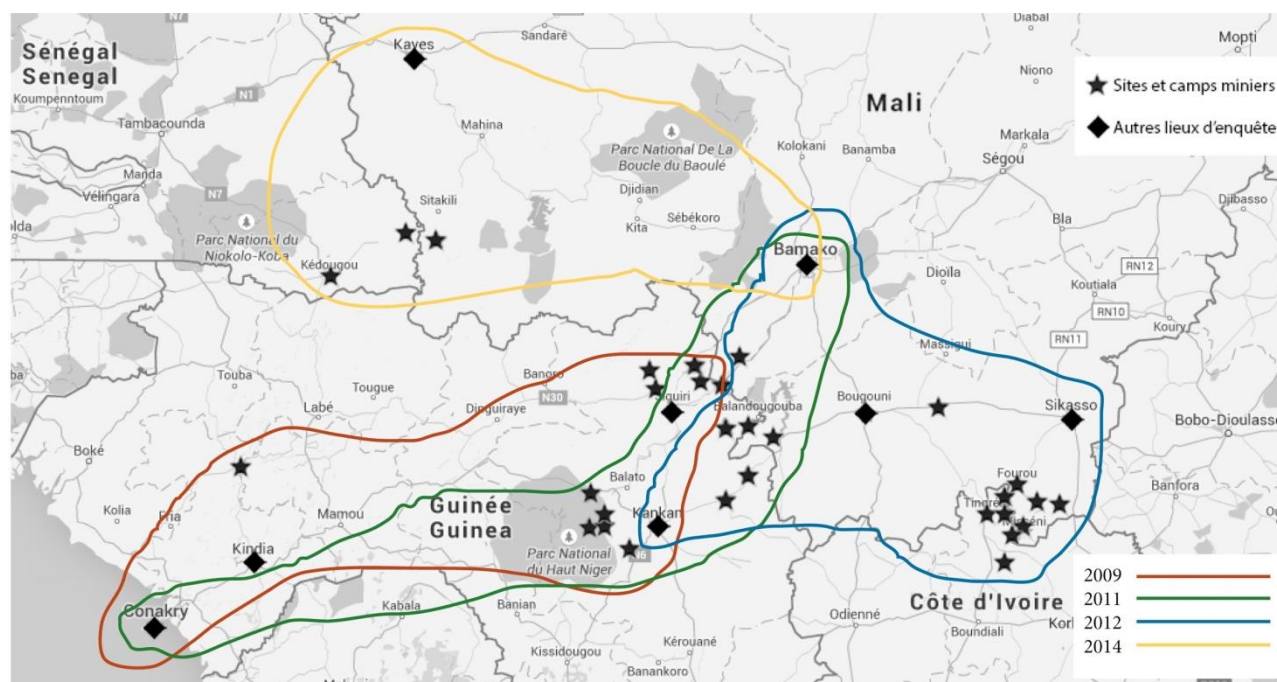
constitute the most important part of their everyday lives – aside from the time they spent working in the mining sites – I wanted to extend my ethnographic enquiry to these other sites and to what occurred in between. In his seminal article, Marcus (1995) establishes two ways of contextualizing the local in terms of the “world-system”. The first is to document the relations between one localized “field” site and the global level, and the other, the so-called “multi-sited” approach, consists of “tracking” people, things, knowledge, and rumours in the world-system. In his view, investigating several places is not important as such, which comparative studies also do, but that the relations between localized fields become the focus and ends up constituting the field of enquiry. In the present case, the different ways of “tracking” these relations constituted the field of enquiry. To borrow from Marcus (1995: 105–113), I have *followed the persons* by accompanying gold miners in their itinerancies or by joining them in the different mining sites to which they had shifted between my episodes of fieldwork. I have also *followed the biography* by conducting narrative biographic interviews with miners from different social backgrounds and origins. And finally, I have *followed the thing* by tracing the routes that gold follows along the commodity chain starting from the lateritic subsoil of West African gold mining sites, to the routes and networks of trade that link them to Bamako, and eventually to the traders in Switzerland that import artisanally produced gold – though at a more anecdotal level at this end of the chain.

From a mobility viewpoint, itinerant miners can be defined as “transnational mobiles” (Dahinden 2010b). Their transnationalism, though closer in its motives to those of “vagabonds”, as Bauman has systematically established in his typology of mobile identities (1996), is analytically similar to the one of the transnational elites researched by Hannerz (1996) because they are *continuously on the move* as opposed to the two-countries-migration model which constitutes the foundation of the transnational turn in migration studies (Schiller, et al. 1995; Vertovec 2009). Though they do not really fit the frame of migration studies in terms of this definition, their state of continuous mobility calls for a transnational approach to account for the fact that their lives extend past the “national container” that social sciences have long reproduced in research designs characterized by “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002).

To overcome this limit in practice, I have tried to implement the approach by being mobile myself (for more on mobile ethnography see Büscher and Urry 2009: 103–105; for a case study using “itinerant ethnography” see Schapendonk 2012), i.e. focused on the trajectories – both in time and in space – of individuals. Instead of a single long-term field study, I embarked upon several episodes of fieldwork that lasted between two and six months each, which had the clear advantage to let me cover a larger temporal and spatial span than if I had remained a definite amount of time in one location. While I was in Switzerland in between, my informants were largely on the move, which meant that it was relatively difficult for me to find them again following each field visit,

especially since gold mining sites are often relatively distant from urban centres and, at least at the beginning of the study, most of these areas had no network coverage. Attempts to organize field visits, for instance by anticipating if it would be easier to arrive in Conakry, Bamako, or Dakar, often turned out to be unproductive because of how unpredictably and quickly my informants moved. For example, in 2014, I had decided to take a plane ticket to Bamako instead of Conakry because I had planned to join one of my informants and his team in Selingue (Mali). During the three weeks between my booking the plane ticket and my arrival in Bamako, the site had been closed and most of the team had moved to the Kedougou region in Senegal. In general, besides the particularly badly timing of this situation, and in addition to the cost of transport and the amount of time spent travelling, I had to deal with visa issues as well. While my informants could move across borders within the ECOWAS, I had to comply with migration regulations, which implied the expenditure of more time and money. The below map shows the locations where I conducted my field research and the corresponding fieldwork episodes.

Figure 1-2 sites of field research



In addition, informants did not follow the same patterns of movements; some were extremely mobile while others were not. Neither were they heading to the same destinations. It was thus impossible to follow them all simultaneously. I have hence chosen to move with Kalou and his team who were more mobile, and I visited other informants in their regions of activity when they were present; I maintained regular phone contact with all informants at all times. The table below shows the informants with whom I spent time at different stages in the research. By “visit”, I mean a few

days' visit, and by "intensive" I mean everyday interactions – usually living together for over at least two weeks

*Table 1-3 Main informants*

| Main informants | Year of fieldwork |           |           |           |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                 | 2009              | 2011      | 2012      | 2014      |
| Sandaly         | Visit             | Intensive | Intensive | Intensive |
| Jah             | Intensive         | Visit     | Visit     | Not seen  |
| Kalou           | Visit             | Intensive | Intensive | Intensive |
| Felix           | Intensive         | Visit     | Visit     | Not seen  |
| Namori          | Unknown           | Intensive | Intensive | Visit     |

In spite of the numerous practical issues of the multi-sited approach, among which Hage (2005) mentions for example jet lag, physical exhaustion, and costs, it gave me the opportunity to extend my ethnography to the "in-between phase" of journeys (Du Toit 1990, 308) rather than be limited to either places of "origins" or "destinations". It also allowed me to spend time with my informants in a number of different contexts that are all part of their lives – i.e., in their contexts of work in the mining sites, their contexts of temporary residence in the mining settlements, and their familial contexts in their home villages. From this stance, "multi-sitedness" allowed for multiple perspectives on itinerant miners' lives; for example, my discussions with Kalou's family made clear the expectations his relatives had for him, while he would rather stress the adventurous and individualistic motives that drove his journeys in the context of the mining sites. Finally, multi-sitedness conceptually suggests "multiple" sites, which, as Hage argues, contradicts the anthropological conception of the field site. Talking about his research among the Lebanese diaspora, Hage says, "If we are to maintain a concept of the site as something one has to spend an inordinate amount of time and labour on in order to become familiar with, then I was not studying a multi-sited reality. I was studying one site: the site occupied by the transnational family. It was a globally spread, geographically non-contiguous site, but it was nevertheless one site" (Hage 2005: 466). Similarly, although my research extended to multiple locations, I consider it as forming one common site – the one of artisanal gold miners' social spaces.

### **The "sample": itinerant male gold miners in West Africa**

As mentioned earlier, the "sample" constituted a number of persons who had different statuses as possible sources of information. The five key, informants that I already mentioned and whom I will present below, were the most regular sources of information during the study. In addition, I conducted countless informal "ethnographic interviews" with all sorts of actors who were more or less directly involved in the artisanal gold mining sector (miners, local authorities, traders, spouses, administrative authorities, etc.). These interviews were usually not recorded, but I noted down these

many exchanges in my field notes. My third source of information was the 28 recorded “journey interviews” which were transcribed and subsequently analysed with the help of the software Max QDA, which I could use to organize the material according to thematic codes and categories (Saldaña 2015); after elaborating a first very broad and global analysis, I formulated topics and questions that I analysed successively and which eventually resulted in separate chapters. Finally, I also conducted 58 network interviews with experienced itinerant miners on their support relations who had helped sustain their mobility during their careers as miners; these are described in Chapter 8.

### *Presentation of the main informants*

Sandaly:

I was introduced to Sandaly by a friend and colleague of Philippe Geslin who had studied with him. Sandaly belongs to a *numu* (smith) lineage based in the region of Kankan. He ran a jewellery workshop in Conakry where several younger brothers worked and were trained and to which he commuted from his home region. Before that, Sandaly had worked as a gold trader when he had been a younger man, travelling to dozens of informal mining sites to buy gold that he then sold in Siguiri; this provided him with a deep and reliable knowledge of the gold sector in the region and with a network of other smiths and traders who were still active in the sector. Sandaly lives in Conakry with his wife and children most of the time and regularly travels to Kankan and Siguiri where most of his relatives live.

Jah:

Jah was my *tuteur* in Koundiana Koura. I met him when I first visited Koundiana Koura with Sandaly in 2009, and I then agreed to spend five more months with him at his place. Jah is an experienced, relatively older man (45 years old when we met) of Guinean nationality, whose family is based in Siguiri and who had lived for many years in the capital city before starting his mining career in the mid-1980s. After travelling extensively across West Africa for more than 20 years, he had settled down with his wife and their son Madou in Koundiana Koura in 2007. Jah was thus treated as a “foreigner” in the village, but his extensive experience in mining techniques was recognized by the “locals” who frequently consulted him about their ongoing wells and often invited him to participate in their operations. He was married to a second spouse in 2013.



Kalou:

I met Kalou during my stay in Koundiana Koura; he had arrived from neighbouring Mali with a clique of other miners with whom he had started digging two deep shafts in a mining site close by that had been attracting lots of people in 2009. Kalou had been 32 years old when we had met first, and by that time, he had already accumulated ten years of experience working and travelling in mining areas in West Africa. He was from the Siguiri area (Guinea), but he had never worked there, but had several years of experience mining gold abroad. He was married and had two children in Siguiri where most of his relatives lived, but he himself hardly spent any time in town. Kalou typically conformed to the figure of the full-time itinerant gold digger and had extensively travelled all across West Africa. Besides Maninkakan, he spoke very good French and had mastered English. Over the course of this study, I travelled with him and his clique to many locations in Guinea, Mali, and Senegal, and also regularly visited his family in Siguiri.

Namori:

I first met Namori through Kalou in the Kangaba region in Mali and later travelled with him in eastern Mali (Sikasso area) and Ivory Coast. He was from the Daloa region in Ivory Coast, and his wife and three children stayed there with the rest of the family. Namori had been nearly 40 years old when we first met in 2011, and he had started work in the mining sector relatively late compared to Kalou or Jah. He had turned to the mines after having lost his job in the local administration during the 2010 conflict. Namori was highly educated compared to other gold miners and clearly saw his travels in Mali, Ivory Coast, and Senegal as a transitional phase before settling back in his home region with his family.

Felix:

I met Felix in Koundiana Koura where he had rented a hut next to mine. Felix had been 30 years old when we met in 2009. He had left his home-place in Nigeria four years earlier with the idea to migrating to Europe, but the plan had not worked out as expected. He had entered the mining sector after having lost all his savings and had since then travelled across Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea and had worked in several mining sites. He was single and, though he had often contemplated the idea of “returning home”, he had decided that he would not do so before accumulating enough to have a “situation” [enough to invest in a productive occupation] there.

### *Presentation of the interviewees*

In addition to the long-term relations I had cultivated with the aforementioned five persons, I conducted 28 “journey interviews”. I followed Glaser and Strauss’s (2009) principle of theoretical

saturation to define when to stop researching new participants to interview. Apart from recorded interviews with administrative and local authorities, all the other interviews – the “journey interviews” – were conducted with itinerant gold miners, whatever their age, experience, nationality, or ethnic affiliation. The only criteria was that they qualified themselves as *kalayantigiw*, meaning that they had a certain degree of expertise in mining gold that was recognized by peers and that they were – at least at the moment of the interview – fully engaged in mining gold, meaning that they had professionalized their activity full-time in contrast to seasonal workers who, during the dry season, constitute a greater share of the overall workforce.

I had met most of them through networks of friends and co-workers in the artisanal mining sites, and yet, I also voluntarily tried to cover the widest range of cases (in terms of experience and place of origin among others) as recommended by Becker (2002). A map the network of main informants, regular participants, including interview partners, can be found in the Annexes (see Appendix VIII)<sup>26</sup>.

### **Outline of the dissertation**

The dissertation is composed of four main groups of chapters. The first part of the dissertation (Chapters 1 and 2) sets the contextual and historical background for the rest of the thesis, locates labour within the gold production supply chain that spans from West Africa to Switzerland and the UAE, and traces how the artisanal and industrial sectors co-produce one another. The second part (Chapters 3 and 4) establishes the link between expulsions from “traditional” fields of value, precarious lifestyles in the mining sector, and the aspirations of young men. The third part (Chapters 5 to 8) analyses the unstable territories of circulation produced by continuous expulsions in terms of miners’ subjectivities, the transformation and emergence of institutions, and social networks of support. The fourth part (Chapter 9 and 10) zooms into an extended case study that involves itinerant miners, the local population, and a mining company, and it analyses the role of corporate social responsibility programmes in the management of artisanal miners’ expulsion. They investigate how local labour processes intertwine with global dynamics of incorporation and expulsion in the global production system of gold. The last chapter is a conclusion where the main themes are discussed transversally.

Altogether, these chapters propose that artisanal miners’ expulsion-induced mobility articulates the working of the artisanal and industrial mining sectors simultaneously, alongside the

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<sup>26</sup> It indicates their main characteristics in terms of role in the production system, nationality, and current locations when we met. The map is obviously not exhaustive; many other discussions and encounters occurred in the course of the ethnography, many of them were summarized in few notes and are not listed here. Besides, the 57 network interviews are not listed in the map either to improve readability. Network interviews were conducted randomly in 6 mining sites in Guinea and Mali; chapter 9 describes the methods in more details.

expansion of the gold mining frontier. By insisting on the productive role of “expulsions”, I argue that itinerant miners are not passive victims and instead actively and strategically construct transboundary social spaces – across national borders and social boundaries – from which they can expect a relative security despite the precarization of their environment led by the acceleration of extraction.

# **PART ONE**

## **Disentangling gold circuits of production**

# Chapter 1: Gold, labour, and the coproduction of artisanal and industrial mining spaces in West Africa

## 1.1 Introduction: “Guinea is the richest country in West Africa”

In 2011, the newly elected Guinean government was preparing to release the first draft of its new mining code, which was revolutionary in two aspects – it aimed to strengthen the role of the state and to improve the transparency of mining contracts.<sup>1</sup> Until then, the process of contract allotment had been rather obscure and supposedly corrupt; a trend that the Alpha Conde government was determined to reverse, so as to ensure that a greater share of revenues from the extractive sector go to the country’s coffers. When I met Divisionnaire Fofanna, who was in charge of the artisanal sector at the Ministry of Mines and Geology in the administrative city of Kaloum in Conakry, he welcomed me into his large office whose walls were covered with geological maps of the country’s enormous mineral deposits, and opened with a speech that began with a declaration common among Guineans: “Guinea is the richest country in West Africa.” For the next 15 minutes, and before I could ask any questions, I was made to listen to a lecture on the new turn in mining politics, whose line of argument was the following: Guinea is a resource rich country; better contracts with mining corporations, and a formalizing of the artisanal sector whose entire revenues escape taxation, would allow the state to procure a greater share of revenue and develop the country’s infrastructure. The absurdity of Guinea’s poverty was a topic of everyday discussion, not just in ministries, but also in the popular areas of Kapporo where I spent most of my time at the jewellery workshop with Sandaly’s brothers. *Le scandale de la Guinée* (the scandal of Guinea) was a common phrasing that almost everyone used to depict Guinea’s economic situation.

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<sup>1</sup> This new trend should be understood in light of the turn to “new extractivism” (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014) in Latin America, which Gudynas defines as “the activities that require to remove important volumes of natural resources, without processing them (or to a very limited extent) and which are intended to direct export” (2010, my traduction). It has long taken the form of “predatory extractivism”, which is still the most dominant form of mining in West Africa, and occurs at significant scale for the benefit of corporations, with little concern for its social, environmental, and climate impact. In the “post neoliberal” context, and the return of the state (e.g., liberal left and nationalist left governments in Latin America) in the arena, “new extractivism” is generally understood as a national development project essentially based on the extraction of mineral resources. The efforts of West African governments to maintain control over revenues from the extractive sector, which can be clearly seen in their most recent mining codes, can thus be considered a continuance of Latin American politics toward their extractive rent.

Paradoxically, despite Guinea's apparent wealth, the country was ranked 182<sup>th</sup> – and Mali 179<sup>th</sup> – out of 186 countries by the UNDP Human Development Index in 2015;<sup>2</sup> in other words, most of my interlocutors came from countries that were among the poorest in the world. However, most Guineans are well aware of the richness of their subsoil and the rapidity with which it is being mined; extractive industries constitute 95% of the country's export earnings.<sup>3</sup> Guinea was the first African exporter of bauxite and is estimated to have the world's largest reserve. It is also the fifth largest African producer of gold and the eighth largest African producer of diamond; its iron ore production is rapidly increasing. Although Mali is less dependent on the extractive sector, which constitutes 66.6% of its export revenue, it is more focused on gold of which it is the third largest African producer according to export data<sup>4</sup> and has unexploited reserves of uranium, oil, and gas in the northern parts of the country. This dramatic contrast between a country's natural resources and its recorded wealth has now entered common parlance in the form of a theory called the "resource curse" (see Ross 1999 for a critical discussion of the notion). According to Collier (2007), who popularized the notion of "natural resource traps," massive resource rents jeopardize democracies and favour autocratic regimes that maintain themselves at the expense of the population, i.e., the massive inflow of foreign currency into one economic sector alone renders the other sectors, on which the population may rely, less competitive (this is known as the "Dutch disease"); it also renders investment in human capital less essential. Finally, Collier argues, it undermines democracy because voters are bribed with public money. In short, the resource curse theory states that the richer a poor country is in resources – especially oil and minerals – the greater the likelihood of economic stagnation, corruption, political instability, and even armed conflict. It should be stressed, however, that the theory only applies to countries of the so-called "global South", and does not apply to countries of its believed counterpart, "the global North" like Norway, Scotland, Canada, or the USA. This view has been widely criticized by other academics (e.g. Lahiri-Dutt 2006; Watts 2004) who stress that though there certainly is a correlation, this does not necessarily indicate causation. Indeed, the resource curse theory is highly problematic because it sees the curse as endogenous to the country – i.e., the result of poor governance and predation from within the country and ignores the impact of external factors, such as transnational corporations and international financial institutions. As Watts (2004) argues, in all of the scholarship on resource politics, transnational companies (which typically work in conjunction with the state), and the forms of capitalism that enslave extraction engenders, have been totally invisible. Consequently, it is more likely that the "curse" is a consequence of imperialist politics, notably of accumulation per dispossession, as Harvey (2003) argues, rather than solely being the result of the inconsistent management of natural resources by political elites in the South. Without

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<sup>2</sup> "International Human Development Indicators", UNDP, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries>.

<sup>3</sup> USGS Mineral Yearbook (2011)

<sup>4</sup> The numbers eventually balance out, however, since large amounts of gold produced by artisans in neighbouring countries are exported from Mali. See article in *Jeune Afrique*: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/340569/economie/mali-revoit-a-hausse-production-a-70-tonnes-dor-2015/>.

delving into the details, what is striking about Mali or Guinea is that, currently, natural resources are thought to hinder “development” and increase inequalities rather than wealth, as one would logically expect.

Yet, the inhabitants of these regions do not wait for the government to grant them access to revenues from gold, which rose, according to Comtrade (the UN statistical database on international trade), from USD 29 million in Guinea and USD 16 million in Mali in 1997 to USD 973.7 million in Guinea and USD 1,7 billion in Mali in 2012.<sup>5</sup> Instead of remaining mute witnesses to the acceleration of industrial mining in these countries, many – on whom this dissertation focuses – have ventured out on their own, using their hands, pickaxes, and basic machinery to unearth, as “artisans”, a share of the underground gold reserves. Studies that apply the resource curse theory interpret this massive movement of people through the notion of the “poverty trap” (Sinding 2005; for a critique, see Hilson 2009). At this relatively small scale, the theory assumes that the poor invariably migrate to artisanal gold and diamond mines, but they get trapped in cycles of exploitation that maintain them in continuing poverty; they typically abandon their regular occupations, mainly in agriculture. In contrast, there are others who suggest that artisanal mining has the potential to drive great development at the local level and could provide relief to households under economic stress due to low agricultural production.

However new this context may sound, gold deposits have existed long before modern states and corporations, and they have been exploited artisanally for centuries. What has changed dramatically is the pace and intensity of the extraction. In this chapter, I wish to examine the continuities and discontinuities in the contextual and historical narrative of these mineral-rich countries. I will investigate and roughly situate the work of itinerant artisanal gold miners, both by defining it in terms of labour and by placing it in the global context of gold production. To do so, I shall start with a brief overview of the organization of labour in the artisanal mines, and provide some working definitions. Then, I will take a look at the structure of the extractive sector in these countries and provide a general image of how the two segments of gold production – artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) and large-scale mining (LSM) – cohabit, and how their respective spaces may overlap, to delineate the possible consequences of the segmentation of space in view of itinerant miners’ mobility. I will thus highlight discontinuities by addressing the changes that arose with the emergence of what (McGovern 2015) calls “fast capitalism” in Guinea (and neighbouring countries), especially concerns related to the crisis in agriculture, dispossession of lands, and increased access of new consumers to low-cost technologies. Finally, I will also shed light on continuities and trace the history of gold extraction in the region. My aim is not to provide a full historical account of such a vast area, but rather to show that the dominant “resource curse” narrative

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<sup>5</sup> Source: Worldbank, World Integrated Trade Solution Software: <http://wits.worldbank.org/> (July, 10. 2017)

only accounts for what is a relatively recent phenomenon which can be located within the dual development of the gold supply chain into two “sectors”; the artisanal (and informal) one and the industrial (and formal) one.

## **1.2 The organization of artisanal gold mining labour in the Mandenka speaking area**

Artisanal gold mining (ASGM) can be described as, “informal mining activities carried out using low technology or with minimal machinery”, according to the seminal global report on artisanal and small-scale mining (Hentschel, et al. 2002). However, in the absence of a common definition, scholars characterize ASGM through its key features as opposed to industrial large-scale mining. After reviewing existing definitions, a report of the Swiss agency for cooperation defines it as such:

ASGM is usually a spontaneous self-organizing social system, while industrial mining is planned and centrally coordinated. Artisanal miners engage in mining to earn a living, while industrial mining is driven by corporate economic considerations. Miners focus on industrially not economic small high-grade mineral deposits in ‘open access’ condition, and employ a ‘common pool resources’ management approach. ASGM is an important source of local income and often drives local development. Low technologic levels, at the budget of rural communities, have however serious consequences on health, safety and environment. The widespread use of mercury is a matter of global concern. Legal frameworks (or their absence) and economic interests of power groups force ASGM in many countries into the informal sector. (SDC 2011: 4)

Despite the tendency to speak of artisanal mining as a homogenous sector composed of poverty-driven miners, a closer look at the organization of labour suggests that ASGM is highly heterogeneous. Not only do the roles, activities, and types of mineral vary, the profiles of persons involved in the industry also greatly differ, not only in terms of financial means, as the experience of capitalization in other countries that have an intensive ASGM sector like Brazil, the Philippines or Suriname suggests (Verbrugge 2016), but also in their capacity to move to promising sites and thus make use of territorial advantages (e.g., loose legislation, advantageous work agreements, etc.). Second, not only people, but ideas (i.e., embodied in technologies) and capital (i.e., increasing capitalization of ASGM) also move along miners’ routes. In this section, my intention is to describe the main features of the organization of labour in the artisanal gold mines located in Mandenka-speaking areas by paying attention to mobility, age, and gender as stratifying factors of the ASGM organization of labour.



### 1.2.1 Organization of labour in the artisanal gold mines

I use the term “truly artisanal”<sup>6</sup> in reference to the socio-technical system of wells and tunnels used in this region, whose extraction techniques date back to the Middle Ages (Knapp, et al. 1998); it requires no tools other than a pickaxe and a bowl and relies on a labour system based on individual cooperation. In this context, I use the terms “miners” or “artisanal mine workers” interchangeably to refer to any person directly involved as an independent agent in the work of extracting gold artisanally (i.e., not involving investors or traders), regardless of age, gender, or their specific role on a team. Artisanal miners are independent workers who join together to dig for gold; the amount they make depends on the quantity of gold they extract and on their collective sharing agreement. The activity is almost entirely informal, in the sense that the state does not effectively regulate the workers in the ASGM industry or their earnings, and it is by far the most common form of production. I would like to draw attention to another form of organization of artisanal labour, where workers operate in open pits. This system relies on systems of sponsorship and wage labour and mine workers usually do not have direct access to the gold. This second form of artisanal production, which often implies legal titles and a certain degree of formalization, is far less common and will not be addressed in detail herein. “Truly artisanal” mining is by far the most popular mode of extracting gold in Mali and Guinea, where a lower degree of mechanization (and seemingly capitalization) has been achieved as compared to other countries – for example, Ghana or Burkina Faso – that have also experienced a boom in ASGM (e.g. Ferring, et al. 2016; Werthmann 2012). In Mali and Guinea, low capitalization exists along with a relatively horizontal organization of labour, which I describe below.

In general, the extraction of gold is organized according to the following steps (the next chapter provides more details on the extraction processes). If a landowner, usually a member of the principal lineage or one of its segments (clans) who are considered one of the “first comers” to the land (see Lentz 2013), agrees with the village authorities, i.e., the council of elders, lines will be traced upon his piece of land so that all recognized village autochthons can apply to take charge of excavating one of the one-metre wide shafts located every five meters along the line (see Image 1). Those who do so are given the title of *nyado* (owner, intermediary) and are responsible for hiring four diggers – usually young men from neighbouring villages with little or no experience in tunnelling – whom they will support during the excavation of the initial well until they reach the deposit, which is usually 10–40 metres deep. The actual tunnelling and excavating of gold-rich ore is then undertaken by other

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<sup>6</sup> In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where gold is extracted in pits rather than in wells and galleries, Geenen (2016) uses the term “truly artisanal” to distinguish these operations from mechanized and semi-mechanized ones. In the case of Guinea and Mali, semi-mechanization uses the same circuits of distribution as labour in the “traditional system” and is not necessarily a criterion of differentiation. Instead, open pits, which require capital investment on the workforce as opposed to the associative system of wells and galleries, imply a different organization of labour, and consequently, different values in the work.

miners, called *kalayantigiw*<sup>7</sup>, who often travel extensively and exchange their labour in different shafts and mines for a share of raw ore.

Picture 1-1 Lines of shafts in Fatoya (Guinea)



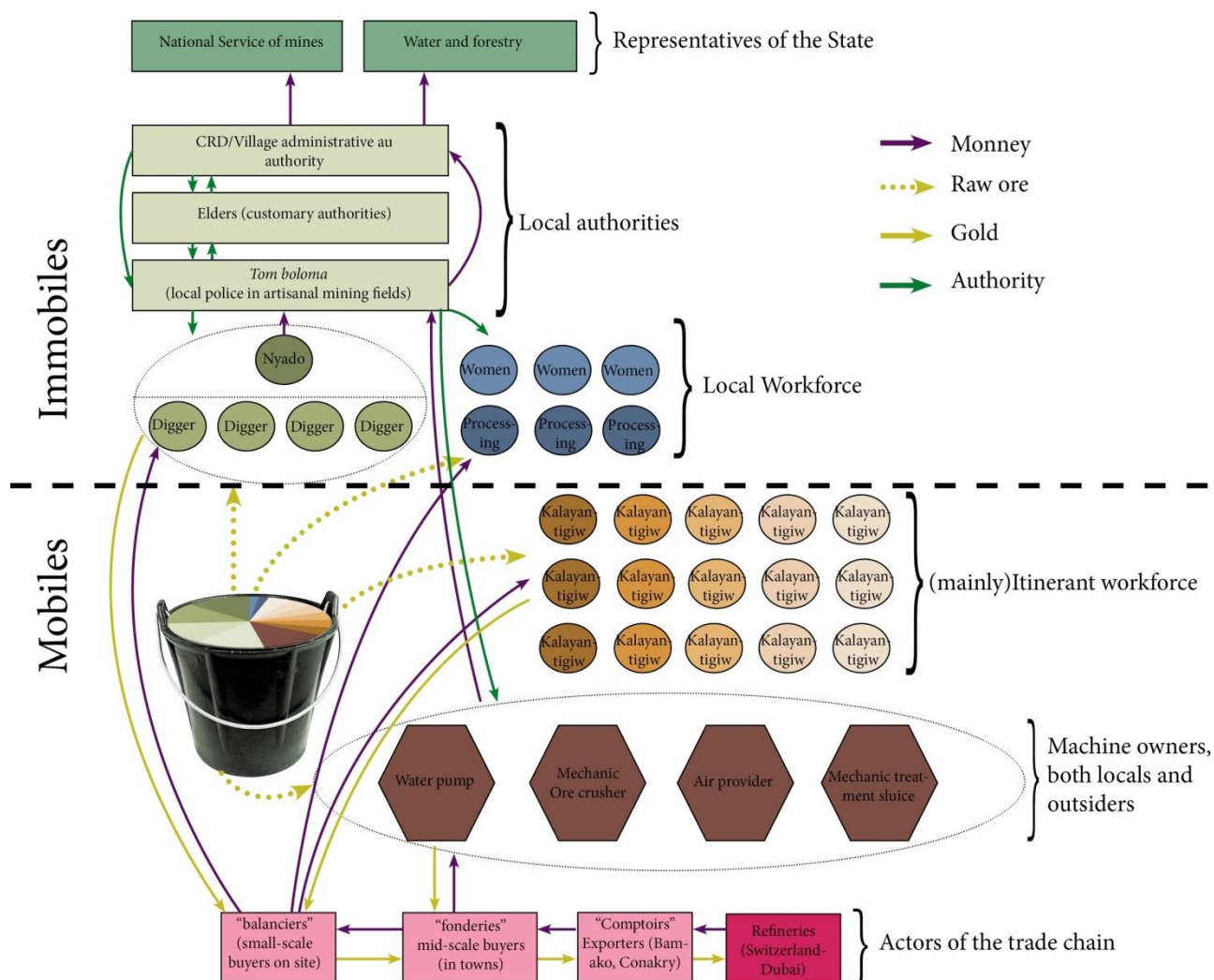
Mandenka-speaking workers from Guinea and Mali constitute an important itinerant workforce of *kalayantigiw* in most West African countries. For example, in southeast Senegal, where the gold mining industry has been booming for a decade, most workers are from the neighbouring countries of Mali and Guinea, while shaft owners are mostly Senegalese. Such patron-client relationships, based on local-stranger dynamics, can be observed on different scales throughout the continent and usually imply a division between local residents, who can make claims on the land, and temporary itinerant workers, who have different degrees of specialization. While the former rely on a yield economy, the latter rely on an economy of capture, which implies frequent migration to new places. In other words, landowners or *nyadow* often do not have the necessary skills for mining gold, and therefore, need to associate with the *kalayantigiw* (independent itinerant miners). Finally, women, who compose 50% of the workforce in West African mining sites, take care of most of the surface operations related to ore processing (Hentschel, et al. 2002). For them, gold mining is a way to access a (small) cash income independent of the domestic labour that confines them to their husbands' villages. Depending on various factors such as age, status, and gender, people are mobile

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<sup>7</sup> *Kalayantigiw* literally means “holders of long pickaxes,” which are tools that experienced gold miners employ for tunnelling.

to different degrees, which strongly determines their employment options in the sector. From this view, mobility (or a lack thereof) appears to be a relevant segmenting factor in the ASGM labour market (see Figure 1-1).

Figure 1-1 Production network for one bucket of raw ore in the "traditional" ASGM industry in Mali and Guinea



In sum, labour is organized along two main axes in the Mandenka-speaking regions of West Africa. The first is the local-stranger axis, which allows individuals to lay claims to different work positions (for strangers) or to management and investment positions (for natives). The second is the gender axis, which correlates with surface (processing and washing work mainly done by women) or underground positions (extraction work exclusively done by men). This matrix determines workers' potential income in relation to their mobility, and consequently, determines the work options available to individuals in the informal ASGM labour market. For instance, workers can move from a position of low income potential in the casual labour force (*solikurunitigw*,<sup>8</sup> who are

<sup>8</sup> It literally means "holders of the small pickaxe", which is the tool casual workers use for surface work.



local men and women engaged in casual labour) to one with a high income potential as an itinerant miner (*kalayantigiw*). Each party involved in the production process (diggers, *kalayantigiw*, *nyado*, women processing the ore, and possible machine owners) gets an individual share of the extracted raw ore, which is laid in different piles on the ground (see Picture 1-5; see Figure 1-1 for the global production network), thus maintaining an element of chance in terms of what their final income (actual gold extracted) will be<sup>9</sup>.

Picture 1-2 Excavation of the vertical well to the deposits (Kintinian, Guinea)



Picture 1-3 Access well from deposit level (Mandiana, Guinea)



Secondly, status – especially in relation with age – strongly determines whether people who are likely to move will do so or not. Young men, for instance, are unlikely to obtain management positions since land is owned along adelpic rules of succession.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, they may prefer a mobile career in gold mining away from home, rather than being limited to basic excavation work that pays little. Besides, temporary mobility (often referred to as “aventure”, see e.g. Bredeloup 1994; Bredeloup 2014) is an expected step in the life course of young men in their transition to adulthood – a topic that shall be discussed in Chapter four. Conversely, older men who have access to land and control the labour of their cadets will prefer not to move and would rather “invest” locally by supporting a team of itinerant miners.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This peculiar form of cooperation will be analysed in the next chapter using the notion of moral luck.

<sup>10</sup> The adelpic system is one of seniority among classificatory brothers, which systematically fosters elder brothers over their cadets, and concentrate the family’s wealth in the hand of one head of household.

<sup>11</sup> Chapters 3 and 4 address these issues related to mobility and personhood.

Picture 1-4 Kalayantigi cutting pieces of quartz rock in the horizontal tunnels at the deposit level (Mandiana, Guinea)



Among young women, mobility is less an option. They are likely to take up processing work in local mines so that they can continue their work in the domestic sphere on the side. Older women may either “invest” in financially supporting a team of itinerant miners or by hosting them, according to the institution of *diatiguia* (“tutorat”),<sup>12</sup> thus exchanging material support (food and shelter) for the labour of itinerant miners. By monetizing the traditional *diatiguia*, some women have accumulated great amounts of money by extracting wealth from the labour of the young men they host.<sup>13</sup> Labour in the ASGM sector in West Africa is thus mainly performed by a mobile workforce composed of itinerant gold miners who have no claims over the land and are consequently dependent on so-called natives for material support. These locals conversely “own” the land, manage the labour force, and invest in mining.

Yet, as Luning et al. (2014) have demonstrated, autochthonic claims on land in mining area are a relatively recent phenomenon that can be traced back to the attempt of the colonial administration in the early XX<sup>th</sup> century to immobilize the workforce of the artisanal mines. Before that, labour mobility was totally detached from the recently invented “land ownership” and rather

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<sup>12</sup> See Chauveau (2007) for a detailed description of the institution. Tutorat is a convention that gives its beneficiaries land tenure rights at the price of continuing gratitude and allegiance toward the owner, which usually takes the form of transferring a part of the agricultural revenues to the tuteur. Chapter 6 addresses its working in the artisanal gold mines.

<sup>13</sup> Chapter 7 will analyze gendered agreements between men and women in situations of work mobility.



plugged into seasonal systems of exchange and hosting that have perpetuated in parallel. I now move to the different ways in which labour is controlled in the ASGM sector.

Picture 1-5 Surface level (Papara, Côte d'Ivoire)



### 1.2.2 Major institutions regulating labour in ASGM operations

As suggested above, although the sector is informal, it relies on stable social institutions that grant it access to resources and help organize labour. These institutions are relatively loose and are mainly adapted extensions of long-standing agrarian institutions, which I will describe briefly.

First is the institution of the *diatigiua* or *tutorat* (in French), i.e., the local-stranger dynamic, wherein the natives retain control over the land and the workforce is mainly composed of strangers. Chauveau et al. (2006) undertook a comprehensive review of the institution across West Africa in the context of increasing land sales. They found that the *tutorat* is the most popular form of non-market land rights transfers; in a rural context characterized by abundant land and a small population, this illustrates a desire to control men and manpower rather than retaining exclusive control of land resources. They define it so:

The term “tutorat” covers the reciprocal social relations that develop when a “stranger” (or group of strangers) and his family are received into a local village community for an indeterminate period, which may span several generations. Transfers are effected through

the assignment of land rights between a “customary landowner” (referred to below as a “tuteur”) who is either a native (an “autochthon”) or someone who holds some prior control over the land, and his foreign “guest/visitor” (referred to below as a “stranger” – in this specific sense, and not in the general sense of an outsider, as he immediately acquires lasting status within this category) (Chauveau et al. 2006: 19–20).

In the moral economy of agrarian West Africa, receiving strangers is considered necessary for the wider reproduction of the community. In the case of artisanal gold mines, the presence of subsoil resources has created an accelerated version of the *tutorat*, wherein local residents find the presence of itinerant miners useful, since their role in the workforce and their expertise allow the natives to profit from the gold mined from their subsoil. Instead of accessing resources for an “indeterminate period,” *kalayantigiw* are granted access to the shafts by the *nyadow* in exchange for a share of the ore they bring to the surface.

Second is the institution of *fasiya*, i.e., the gendered and generational hierarchy by which labour is organized, wherein elder males control the labour of youngsters and women. Meillassoux summarized the main points of the system as a “scheme polarized around the figure of the dean [“fa” is the father, or the eldest father in classificatory kinship]” wherein “as [the] last living representative of past producers, he is the one to whom all active producers owe their product. He is the ones who receives the entire grain, which he stores, manages, and redistributes among members of the community” (2000: 41, my translation). Though monetization and individualization have transformed these relationships, they still play a role in families; e.g., young diggers often work for their fathers, and in teams for other classificatory elders through the *koroya*, which is a variation of *fasiya*.

So, third is the *koroya*, where the general principle of seniority, as seen in *fasiya*, is applied to fictive kinships – for example, the relationship between masters (occupying the position of elders) and apprentices (occupying the position of youths), wherein masters offer knowledge and recognition to their apprentices in exchange for labour. Although these master-apprentice relationships usually imply durable reciprocity, they are more fragile in the context of gold mines; with the sudden accumulation of wealth, apprentices may revise the ties that bind them to their masters.

Labour management measures are usually rooted in fairly robust institutions, but miners operate independently through cooperative systems that they can break at any moment. The aforementioned institutions are not fixed, but represent an agreement that can be contested depending on the contextual balance of power. For example, in emerging mining sites that have not attracted large numbers of workers yet, *nyadow* positions may – in contrast to the rule explained above – be given to “strangers”, provided they can afford to support a team of diggers. A sudden change in an individual’s fortune, as the case of lucky strikes, may also transform *fasiya*-based power dynamics

within families, as Chapter 4 will show. In such cases, youths may attain autonomy faster than if they were to go through all the steps in the Mandenka agrarian age group social structure. In general, compared to traditional agrarian system, labour organization within gold mines tends to be more horizontal – artisanal miners can access wealth swiftly and unpredictably, which can, in certain cases, improve their bargaining power when dealing with traditionally recognized authorities.<sup>14</sup> This causes miners to associate artisanal gold mining with a certain sense of freedom, since the institutions of labour control are comparatively loose and offer room for contestation.

Itinerant miners value their relative “freedom” and the direct access to a cash income, which those employed in the local casual workforce and in farming sector do not have. However, such a perspective should also take into account the occupational hazards involved in underground tunnelling and ore excavation. Table 1-1 shows that there were 44 fatalities in mining sites in Bouré in 2011,<sup>15</sup> and this does not include non-lethal accidents. To put these figures in perspective,<sup>16</sup> fatalities due to mining activities represent as much as 14.9% of all deaths among men between the ages of 20 and 50 (miners or not).<sup>17</sup> Besides, provenance also indicates a big discrepancy between “natives” and “strangers,” since 36 out of the 44 workers were not native or long-term residents of the Bouré area, but were itinerant workers temporarily operating in the region.

Besides, since itinerant gold miners represent the very bottom of the supply chain in the ASGM industry, their incomes are highly dependent on fluctuations in gold prices. They are indirectly connected to global markets because they are the first to deal with changes in prices; changes are experienced very concretely since miners are not paid fixed wages, but are given a share of the raw material, the value of which depends on the quantity and purity of the gold. For them, price fluctuations mean income fluctuations, regardless of the time and effort and they spend in extracting the gold. As producers in the gems and precious metals markets, they engage in a form of small-scale “extractivism;” they depend entirely on gold extraction for their livelihood, which is possible because of the peculiar materiality of gold. Indeed, contrary to gas or oil,

*Table 1-1: Fatalities in Bouré’s artisanal mining sites (2011); collected from local police and local Red Cross reports (Names have been erased. The places of origin reflect if deceased miners fell in the category of “local” or “strangers”, most probably itinerant tunnel workers)*

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<sup>14</sup> The next chapter argues that one way to maintain a certain level of stability in the system relies on a peculiar moral economy that flattens conventional relations of authority by recognizing individual luck in all stages of production.

<sup>15</sup> In a note by the Red Cross committee in Siguiri, more than 200 fatalities are recorded for the areas of Bouré and Doko in 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Ministère de la Santé et de l’hygiène publique de Guinée, 2012

<sup>17</sup> This (very rough) estimation is based on the calculated mortality rate for the administrative region in the 2012 Enquête Démographique et de Santé et à Indicateurs Multiples (EDS-MICS-IV). Numbers for the prefecture of Siguiri were proportioned to the population of the district of Kintinian (Bouré area) according to the Census of the Institut National de la Statistique RGPH3 (Recensement Général de la Population et de l’Habitat, 2014).



| date      | Lieu      | Born        | Age    | Familial | Status                                    |
|-----------|-----------|-------------|--------|----------|-------------------------------------------|
| 03.01.11  | Bida      | Siguiri     | 29     | married, | 1 child                                   |
| 09.01.11  | Bida      | Dalagbè     | 27     | married, | 2 children                                |
| 09.01.11  | Doko      | Fallando    | 27     |          |                                           |
| 14.01.11  | Balato    | X           | X      | married, | 4 children                                |
| 18.01.11  | Kintinian | Faranah     | 25     | married, | 1 child                                   |
| 18.01.11  | Kintinian | Nogassola   | 38     | married, | 1 child                                   |
| 05.02.11  | Balato    | Kerouane    | 35     |          |                                           |
| 05.03.11  | Bida      | Fandjo      | 28     | married  |                                           |
| 24.03.11  | Doko      | Faranah     | 45     | married, | 7 children                                |
| 19.04.11  | Fatoya    | Kouroussa   | 25     | married  |                                           |
| 27.04.11  | Bida      | Kouroundjc  | 26     | married, | 1 child                                   |
| 21.04.11  | Balato    | Dabola      | 25     |          |                                           |
| 14.05.11  | Manimbo   | Soumbarak   | 34     | married, | 4 children                                |
| 14.05.11  | Manimbo   | Soumbarak   | 25     | décédé   | sur la moto pour l'hôpital                |
| 14.05.11  | Manimbo   | Kinieba     | 25     | married, | 1 child décédé sur la moto pour l'hôpital |
| 15.05.11  | Fatoya    | X           | X      |          |                                           |
| 16.05.11  | Fatoya    | Bougouni    | 18     |          |                                           |
| 16.05.11  | Fatoya    | Kerouane    | 18     |          |                                           |
| 16.05.11  | Balato    | Kerouane    | 35     | married, | 1 child                                   |
| 17.05.11  | Fatoya    | Mamou       | 35     |          |                                           |
| 18.05.11  | Sekela    | Sindoo      | 35     | married, | 3 children                                |
| 18.05.11  | Fatoya    | Kouroussa   | 53     | married, | 5 children                                |
| 20.05.11  | Balato    | Kissidougou | 35     |          |                                           |
| 20.05.11  | Balato    | Kissidougou | 25     |          |                                           |
| 20.05.11  | Balato    | Kankan      | mineur |          |                                           |
| 04.06.11  | Fatoya    | X           | X      |          |                                           |
| 05.11.11  | Kintinian | Faranah     | 25     |          |                                           |
| 05.11.11  | Kintinian | Macenta     | 28     |          |                                           |
| 05.11.11  | Kintinian | Norasoba    | 27     | married, | 1 child                                   |
| 27.11.11  | Namandoul | Siguiri     | 37     | married, | 4 children                                |
| 03.12.11  | Fatoya    | Norasoba    | 19     |          |                                           |
| 06.12.11  | Fatoya    | Balato      | 30     |          |                                           |
| 24.12.11  | ?         | Norasoba    | 30     | married, | 1 child                                   |
| Date lost |           |             |        |          |                                           |
|           |           | Kintinian   | 32     |          |                                           |
| 2011      |           | Kintinian   | 45     | married, | 4 children                                |
| 2011      |           | Kintinian   | 28     | married, | 1 child                                   |
| 2011      |           | Gueckedou   | 31     |          |                                           |
| 2011      |           | Kintinian   | 41     | married, | 2 children                                |
| 2011      |           | Dabola      | 45     | married, | 5 children                                |
| 2011      |           | Dinguiraye  | 40     | married, | 2 children                                |
| 2011      |           | Kanakan     | 37     | married, | 3 children                                |
| 2011      |           | Kankan      | ?      | married  |                                           |
| 2011      |           | Balato      | 30     |          |                                           |

the high market value of products like gold and diamond, combined with the possibility of extracting them using non-mechanized methods, renders labour-intensive artisanal production still viable alongside industrial, capital-intensive production. However, this labour force, whose work essentially gets done outside the legal framework, has no protection against foreseeable hazards. Miners operate “on their own,” with the support of the social institutions described above, at the bottom of a larger supply chain – this is congruous with what Meillassoux (1975) defined as “over-exploitation,” or the capacity of capitalism to make additional rent from pre-existing social structures without destroying them.<sup>18</sup>

The next section describes the development of two overlapping and complementary spaces in the gold production industry: the formal industrial mining space and the informal artisanal one. It is argued that the territorial fixity of industrial mining operations and infrastructures largely determines the territories of circulation, in which artisanal miners make a living on the move.

### **1.3 West Africa’s gold in the world’s production**

In 2014, the world production was shared between large-scale industrial mines that produced 2,587.2 tonnes of gold (59%), while 646.8 tonnes were produced in the ASGM sector (15%), and 1,175.9 tonnes (26%) were recycled. While LSM, which is a highly capital-intensive industry, employs very few people, it produces 80% of the gold. In contrast, artisanal mining of gold and other minerals provides livelihoods for more than 100 million people worldwide, and, in most West African countries, ASGM gold is estimated to count for 20% of the gold extracted yearly<sup>19</sup>. In a 2007 study, the FIDH (2007) estimated that large-scale industrial mining provides jobs for 12,000 persons in Mali; most of them being expatriates from western countries. In contrast, it is estimated that 360,000 persons depend on artisanal gold mining in the country (Seccatore, et al. 2014). The ratio is similar in Guinea where ASGM workers are estimated between 200 000 and 300 000 whilst LSM (including other mineral than gold such as bauxite and iron) employ less than 10 000 people see table 1-2). In terms of production, the situation can change very quickly because of the political and

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<sup>18</sup> However, since Meillassoux’ analysis, production networks have become more complex with the generalization of heterogeneous supply chains; the boundaries between the formal and informal sectors are tenuous (Philipps 2011), which allows the two systems of artisanal and industrial extraction to work in parallel to one another. Miners work independently, outside of most legal and formal labour structures, and are at the bottom of a global production chain that stretches into extremely high value circuits in global markets. The next chapter considers in detail the gold supply chain and its capacity to invisibilize the labour of the artisanal sector.

<sup>19</sup> World Bank web page about Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/extractiveindustries/brief/artisanal-and-small-scale-mining>.

economic context. For instance, artisanal gold production in Mali dropped from 20.4 T in 2013 to 7.4 T in 2014.<sup>20</sup>

*Table 1-2 Gold production and employment in the ASGM and LSM sector*

| <b>Country</b>       | <b>total<br/>production<br/>(tonnes)</b> | <b>ASGM<br/>(tonnes)</b> | <b>LSM<br/>(tonnes)</b> | <b>employment<br/>ASGM</b> | <b>employment<br/>LSM</b> |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Mali (2014)</b>   | 53.2                                     | 7.4                      | 45.8                    | 350,000 –<br>400,000       | 12,000                    |
| <b>Guinea (2011)</b> | 23.5                                     | 5                        | 18.5                    | 200,000 –<br>300,000       | 6,000–10,000              |

Sources: FIDH (2007), World Gold Council<sup>21</sup>, Instat-Mali<sup>22</sup>, Seccatore et al. 2014

Despite the large numbers of people involved in artisanal gold mining, the legal status of the activity is often disputed, particularly in the context of revising mining codes. The whole sector is usually referred to as “informal”, and with increasing policies of formalization, the activity itself often results being labelled “illegal”. This is because mining laws have been mainly designed for industrialized LSM mining to promote foreign investment and increase tax revenues. Since ASGM smallholders are not capable of meeting these requirements, they continue to function informally, which enhances artisanal miners’ vulnerability in terms of labour and favours their recurring expulsion from the places where they operate. In the next section, I address the general context of reforms which led to the ASGM and LSM systems of gold production, in particular, the segmentation of space that such reforms have produced. I aim to examine the legal aspects artisanal miners encounter while earning their mobile livelihoods, crossing different kinds of territorial boundaries, such as the mining leases of mining companies, or the national borders of nation states. But first, I will begin by briefly retracing how these two spaces emerged.

### **1.3.1 The parallel development of artisanal and industrial gold mining**

Large-scale mining, as it has developed now, basically relies on massive foreign investments in temporary infrastructure for massive extraction over relatively short periods. History shows that the trading destinations were not so different in the past, yet the process of extracting the entire product and all revenues is the major change with modern methods. In the Middle Ages gold exports from the Bouré and Bambuk across the Sahara were already the major sources for bullion worldwide. According to Messier (1974), through gold trade, West Africa was intensely connected to the world economy, but maintained a core position in the terms of exchange; a position that permitted the

<sup>20</sup> According to the Malian Chamber of Mines, the drop must be understood in relation with the extraordinary spike in 2013 due to the introduction of metal detectors in the artisanal sector and the enforcement of mining titles in 2014, which led to the dismantling of several large artisanal mining sites. Other causes such as the conflict in the north of the country are also mentioned (Diallo for REUTERS 08.04.2015).

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.gold.org/statistics>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.instat-mali.org/>

consolidation of the empires of Mali and Ghana, through the taxation of gold in the producing regions.

Later, contrary to East and South Africa, the colonization of West Africa did not lead to an investment in capital in gold mining, since mining in that region required mechanization. While the territories in East and South Africa allowed for the development of colonizing states through intensive industrial mining that also employed a massive local workforce, in Mali and Guinea, no such development occurred because of the cost of mechanization as well as the distance of traditional mining regions from coastal centres (Soumah 2010). Contrary to South-Africa or Ghana where an industry developed under the colonial occupation, the French colonizers did not invest any infrastructure to mine gold. Instead, they intended to regulate the already existing artisanal production, amongst other by fixing the populations of gold-mining regions in order to control the supply chain and impose their prices without having to install heavy machinery in remote areas (Luning, et al. 2014) – a strategy not so different that of current refining companies that acquire artisanally mined gold and resell it on global markets once purified and melted. As a result, gold mining methods stayed almost unchanged, and gold production remained at a relatively low level, since it was only the seasonal work of farmers with small landholdings during the dry months. Thus, it was only recently, with the spike in gold prices in the 1980s and growing demand since the 2000, followed by a second increase along with the 2008 financial crisis, that gold started being a major product for export for West African states. The first industrial operations started in 1985 in Mali and in 1995 in Guinea, along with the fiscal incentives implemented by the new legislations that will be discussed further. At that time, however, artisanal gold mining was still hardly regulated in the mining codes, although the activity was growing in importance. Now, current numbers show that the volume of exported gold has multiplied five times in less than ten years in most West African countries (Seccatore, et al. 2014), which is the result of an extractivist model of development that many countries have followed.

Every new large-scale mining project is now likely to be situated in locations that were so far occupied by artisanal mine workers and managed by neighbouring villages authorities. This process, like other segments of the extractive industries that have been accused of land grabbing, has been analysed as being a primitive form of accumulation per dispossession (Ayelazuno 2011; Li 2010b). For the resident population, these two opposite developments of ASGM and LSM also mean opposite consequences: either additional revenues for the villages that use a common pool of resources to manage artisanal mining sites, or dispossession of land and possible displacement when these sites are granted LSM titles. For the itinerant gold miners, this means that most of their work happens on the edges of industrial operations, and when this is not the case, they are prone to be expelled to make room for the development of the large-scale operations of mining corporations, which is a major

driver of their mobility. From this point of view, I insist to consider miners' mobility not only with regard to the alleged attractiveness of certain sites over others, but also in view of their reasons for continuously leaving their temporary work locations. Such a context thus plays an important role in attracting, or in contrast, repulsing, itinerant miners from certain places depending on whether their activity is welcomed, tolerated, or prohibited; something that can change rather quickly.

### **1.3.2 Neoliberal enclaves and the segmentation of space: Itinerant miners across the territorial boundaries of states and corporations**

The liberalization of the mining sector in West Africa since the 1980s came along with the successive adoption of different mining codes. The inputs – as well as the pressure to follow these inputs – for such changes in regulations have always come from the international financial institutions (IFIs) that have been regulating global capitalism since then. Indeed, as James Ferguson (2006) noted ten years ago, just as the rush for primary raw material was starting, “the latest round of worldwide capitalist restructuring has left little or no place for Africa outside of its colonial role as provider of rough material”. Indeed, neoliberal policies, in particular those concerning the extractive industries, were built upon a colonial order that now shapes the landscape of gold mining spaces, in particular, the relations between states, populations, including artisanal miners, and mining companies.

Most scholars agree that neoliberalism emerged in Africa as a word, a doctrine, and a practice in 1981 with the publication of the World Bank report, *Accelerated development in sub-Saharan Africa: An agenda to action*, which recommended lowering government control of the economy (Harrison 2010). Since then, most policies in the continent have been determined by the idea that development is synonymous with rapid marketization; in the case of mineral extraction, potentially rich underground resources should, in this view, be sold to the highest bidder and countries should compete – through their mining codes – in the sale of their land. For example, the standardization of mining legislations is encouraged across countries of the same region, so that transnational mining companies such as AngloGold Ashanti or Randgold, to cite only the biggest in study, can deploy the same infrastructure wherever this environment is geographically located. Laws and policies – such as the revision of mining legislations – are enforced through the practice of incentive and punitive measures (2010) ranging from the cutting of credit lines to the cutting of development aid. This means that, in the neoliberal order, countries are forced to open their economies to western influence; even though core countries maintain a form of protectionism in their own economies. So, the main result has been the systematic elimination of the state in this industry during the last 30 years, and this has led to the development of a landscape in which the presence of the state barely extends to the boundaries of the capital cities. Out of this limited scope, two types of mining spaces coexist: artisanal mining spaces and industrial mining spaces.

In the territories where most of the population lives, the process of decentralization has put in place small administrations that are disconnected from their centres. There, new gold mining deposits – not necessarily dense enough for mining companies – can be discovered at any moment, and hundreds to thousands of more or less experienced mine workers flock there to try to get lucky in the hand-dug tunnels. Scholars attribute the rise in artisanal gold mining to the destructuring effect of structural adjustment plans on the economic fabric of the rural population who increasingly engage in this kind of hazardous work as a consequence of a general tendency of deagrarianization (Banchirigah 2006; Bryceson, et al. 2013a; Hilson and Potter 2005). The sites are managed by the local authorities with little regard for the implementation of mining legislations, for instance, in the attribution of specific territories (“corridors”) to artisanal mining, or in the registration of miners and buyers in the licensing system. As the first section of this chapter has shown, this doesn’t mean that gold extraction is chaotic; on the contrary, in spite of its “informal character”, the production system relies on well-defined rules and practices of “real governance”<sup>23</sup> (Olivier de Sardan 2011) a proper moral economy in which the product of the extraction integrates lineage networks and is partly used for community expenses.

Large-scale mining operates through what has been described elsewhere as “enclave development.” Companies set up operations on land that they have leased on industrial exploitation permits and expel the artisanal miners and residents who had been living there previously.<sup>24</sup> There are certain variations in the model due to the materiality of gold, i.e., it is possible for two systems of extraction to function in parallel in this sector, as compared to the oil mining industry, where the model first emerged. Ferguson (2005) has shown that in the case of oil extraction in Angola, the industry imports everything, including labour, equipment, and material, which means that neither the money nor the extracted material ever touch the soil of the country, except in the extraction enclaves. These enclaves are often secured by private security companies, or as is the case of the Guinean industrial gold mines, by the army, which acts as a remunerated private agent. Large-scale mining

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<sup>23</sup> When speaking of “governance” in this dissertation, I use De Sardan’s (2009) understanding of “real governance,” in opposition to the official rules of the state. His understanding avoids replicating culturalist conceptions founded on the belief in the existence of two separate sets of rules, the “traditional” – and informal – rule opposed to “modern” – formal one – of the state. “‘Real governance’ is indisputably infused with numerous neopatrimonial, clientelist and informal characteristics. But it is not homogenous. It is composed of multiple dimensions, some convergent and others contradictory; it is also the product of local, sectoral and individual microdynamics; and lastly, it faces on every front a pluralism of forms of action.” (ibid, 4). By real governance, De Sardan refers to the effective “rules of the game” between heterogenous actors within one specific arena.

<sup>24</sup> As Ferguson (2005) notes, large mining projects often means allotting “uninhabited land” to transnational companies; by “uninhabited land”, one should understand that the population has usually been displaced (378–379). Several analyses take this as a starting point to understand contemporary mineral extraction as a form of primitive accumulation, or accumulation by dispossession (Ayelazuno 2011; Harvey 2003; Li 2010a). Robert Nugent’s (2007) movie *End of the Rainbow* illustrates such processes particularly well; it documents the installation of the Société Minière de Diringuaye in Guinea and focuses on the displacement of the resident population and related conflicts.

enclaves are designed such that there is minimal contact with the local or surrounding population, including artisanal miners; in the case of gold extraction, this is usually impossible given that people live and work in these same spaces. When the spaces of ASGM and LSM overlap, relations are often mediated through corporate social responsibility schemes that claim to aid local communities, as will be shown in Chapter 10 and 11 (for an overview of the range of conflicts induced by large scale mining, see Niederberger and Haller 2016).

Mining companies are usually granted 20 to 30-year leases in places where gold was mined artisanally for centuries at a relatively slow pace as a means to complement agricultural livelihoods, especially in periods of great stress. These companies operate in more or less gated territories with minimal interaction with the state or the local population which are managed through their CSR branches (see Chapter 10 and 11). In fact, the infrastructure speaks for itself. In Kintinian, Guinea, for example, roads have been built by the company and for the company between the pits and the plant, and between the plant and the Siguiri airport, which is a state-owned infrastructure that only operates flights on behalf of the gold mining company. In contrast, the rest of the city – where people actually live – has no paved roads except for in its principal axis. Expatriate employees working for the mining company live in gated barracks on site, and local employees are driven every day from Siguiri to the site in company buses. All around Siguiri, villages – which happen to be located within the area leased to the company – have opened or reopened their own informal artisanal mining sites. As the head of Doubaya justified, “If we don’t take it now for us, soon the S.A.G. [the mining company] will take it;” this statement illustrates that ASGM activity is not new, but has accelerated concomitantly with the growth of industrial gold mining. Read through the lens of the “prisoners’ dilemma” – i.e., mutual loss or increased productivity through competition in the absence of a consensus between parties – it can be seen that the growth in artisanal mining is not just a means to access quick revenues – locals could have tapped into this wealth for decades – but it reflects an anxiety about losing out on revenues in the near future. For example, this pattern can be seen very clearly in Koundiana (Guinea), as I depicted in the introduction: artisanal mining started booming in 2006, just as the first mining company began prospection work in the area. Ten-metre wide lines, the marks left by the exploration work, still scar the land around the villages between Koundiana and Konkoi, which has now been under lease for exploration for nearly ten years, but has not been mined industrially so far.

### **1.3.3 Mining codes and the bordering of mining spaces**

With the increase of export of gold and other minerals from West Africa during the last 20 years, most African countries have adopted new laws or have totally revised their mining codes. The trend not only concerns Africa, as more than 110 countries have changed or replaced their mining laws worldwide. In general, they have deregulated the sector, liberalized work policies, and lowered

taxes and royalties in order to attract direct foreign investments (Besada and Martin 2015). In Africa, Campbell (2009) has identified three generations of mining codes, the newly adopted ones being the fourth generation.

The first changes, as in the case of Ghana, were adopted in the 1980s under the pressure of the International Monetary Fund, and mostly consisted of provisions to lower taxes and regulations in favour of foreign investments. The second generation began in the 1990s, as in the case of the Guinean 1995 mining code. Reforms were driven by the same liberal agenda, but additionally aimed to lay down certain responsibilities for mining companies, in particular towards the environment and the local population, and included a few articles on artisanal mining. Companies increasingly integrated policies of corporate social responsibility into their operations, yet these have often had poor, or even negative results among the population they were targeting (e.g. Banerjee 2008; Bolay 2014; Frynas 2005). The third generation started in the end of the 1990s, as in the case of the Malian 1999 code, and were basically a mix of liberal measures and instalment exemptions but included more taxes on profits. The fourth generation is currently emerging. For instance, Guinea adopted a new mining code in 2011, Mali in 2012, the Ivory Coast in 2014, and the Senegalese code is currently being reformed. According to Besada and Martin (2015), the fourth generation of mining codes promote a “more responsible capitalism” by integrating demands from the so-called “civil society”, namely NGOs such as the Alliance for Responsible Mining, the industry through the International Council on Mining and Metals, and government initiatives like the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (ITIE). But most of all, they also tend to consider the artisanal sector an integral component of the mining industry, as evidenced by the numbers of law articles devoted specifically to artisanal and small-scale mining whereas this segment of the industry was simply eluded from the mining codes prior to 1995, though the industry already provided subsistence to thousands of families back then. By legislating the artisanal sector which, so far, was ruled only by local institutions, the new codes created new boundaries of legality and illegality in which most of the activity was de facto placed on the side of illegality.

As the table below shows, the latest generation of mining codes have made several changes in the types and durations of permits that can be granted. In the LSM sector, exploitation permits are usually granted for relatively long periods (between 20 to 30 years), except in Senegal where the new code will probably follow the same trend, and research permits can be renewed for periods of at least seven years. On the other hand, ASGM permits do not exceed two years. This new legal framework clearly categorizes artisanal miners as illegal elements because they would not be able afford to enter the ASGM licencing system – the costs and administrative barriers are too great for such small plots held for so little time. Additionally, nearly all the land is already under LSM mining leases (see Table 1-3 below for a comparative overview of LSM and ASGM permits).



Table 1-3: Main characteristics of the mining codes in the study

| Industrial mining                                                                                  |                                      |                                                   |               |                                                  |                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Country, year of adoption of the mining code                                                       | Validity of research permit          | Validity of exploitation permit                   | Royalties     | Other fiscal agreements                          | Share of the state                               |
| <b>Ivory Coast</b> , 2014 (decrees missing for implementation)<br><br>replacement of the 1995 code | 4 years, renewable twice for 3 years | 20 years, renewable every 10 years                | no decree yet |                                                  | 10 % + optional acquisition up to 15% additional |
| <b>Mali</b> , 2012<br><br>replacement of the 1999 code                                             | 3 years, renewable twice for 2 years | 30 years                                          | 3%            | Fiscal exemption of most taxes, customs, and VAT | 10 % + optional acquisition up to 10% additional |
| <b>Guinea</b> , 2011<br><br>replacement of the 1995 code                                           | 3 years, renewable twice for 2 years | 25 years                                          | 3%            | Fiscal exemption of most taxes, customs, and VAT | 15 % + optional acquisition up to 20% additional |
| <b>Senegal</b> , 2003 (in revision)                                                                | 3 years, renewable twice for 3 years | 5 years, renewable until depletion of the deposit | 3%            |                                                  | 10 % + undefined optional acquisition            |

| Artisanal and small-scale mining                                                                   |                                                                                               |                                       |                                                                                           |                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Country, year of adoption of the mining code                                                       | Authorized persons                                                                            | Authorized spaces                     | Limits of concession                                                                      | Validity of exploitation permit                                            | Other meaningful provisions                                                                                                                              | Transport and trade                                                                                                              |
| <b>Ivory Coast</b> , 2014 (decrees missing for implementation)<br><br>replacement of the 1995 code | Nationals or at least 50% of national capital                                                 | Land attributed to mining (corridors) | artisanal mine: 0–25 ha, no chemicals nor dynamite<br><br>Small mine: 25–100 ha           | artisanal mine: 2 years<br><br>Small mine: 4 years and renewable           | Mining fields must not hamper irrigation and agriculture; leases are granted after consulting village authorities                                        | No decree yet                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Mali</b> , 2012<br><br>replacement of the 1999 code                                             | not available                                                                                 | not available                         | not available                                                                             | not available                                                              | not available                                                                                                                                            | not available                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Guinea</b> , 2011<br><br>replacement of the 1995 code                                           | Nationals or 100% national capital, or foreigners whose countries have a reciprocal agreement | Land attributed to mining (corridors) | 1/2 ha; max 15 m deep for galleries and max 30 m deep for open shafts                     | 1 year and renewable                                                       | Land cannot be attributed to industrial mining if, and as long it is, already subject an artisanal lease; sites must be rehabilitated after exploitation | Acquisition of gold is limited to authorized "balanciers"; Export is done through the intermediary of the Bureau d'Achats Agréés |
| <b>Senegal</b> , 2003 (in revision)                                                                | No specific disposition, open to foreigners                                                   | Not specified                         | 50 ha both for artisanal and small mines; no more than 15 metres deep for artisanal mines | Artisanal mine: 2 years and renewable<br>Small mine: 3 years and renewable |                                                                                                                                                          | Not specified                                                                                                                    |

Sources: National mining codes

Research permits: In reality, large portions of the territory have been allotted to corporations under one of the two types of permit. Since the government grants mining companies research permits, huge (yet) unexploited portions of the countries' underground reserves are under the possible control of mining companies. These companies are often junior companies whose main objective is to market themselves in order to be acquired by larger investors (see e.g., Luning 2014). What really happens in fact is that there is a multiplication of permits and companies, most of them being speculative junior companies that bet on land acquisition without necessarily having the mean nor the intention to exploit deep deposit. Since they do not physically exploit deposits, they are usually not visible to human eyes; but they can turn their research permit into an exploitation permit swiftly, and seize the land under lease for gold extraction, sometimes with relatively basic mechanized technologies limited to surface deposits. Among juniors, a common strategy is to clandestinely exploit surface deposits by hiring an artisanal labour force employed on wage for the time of the permit duration.

One consequence of this financialization is also to accelerate the possible changes on the ground depending on acquisitions and on strategies of larger groups.

Exploitation permits: Once an exploitation permit is granted, their validity runs for long periods of time. In such cases, it is usually only a small portion of the entire leased land which is industrially exploited. However, while the rest of the land may not be mined industrially, and is therefore not visibly privatized (i.e., no fence or visible infrastructure), it can still become so at any moment if the owning corporation decides to undertake new operations. Villages in such areas are thus prone to be displaced, usually with compensation for the established “natives” as part of the corporate social responsibility programmes of the companies, which most codes have imposed as prerequisite for any mining project. When no villages are present in the area, informal artisanal mining sites frequently emerge. Since their existence is not formally recognized, the expulsion of the artisanal mine workers who live and work there occurs outside of any compensation agreement.

ASGM permits: Although they exist on paper now, which indicates government recognition of the growing importance of ASGM revenues and the perceived need to formalize the sector, such permits are in fact hardly distributed. Artisanal gold miners work on their own, and they cooperate in artisanal mining sites through complex systems of reciprocities; but, as individuals, they cannot meet the criteria to enter the licensing system. Besides, such short-term leases (between one and two years) do not fit the dominant system of artisanal extraction described earlier in this chapter, which builds on the cooperation of hundreds of individuals rather than on the employment of a wage workforce by a centralized entity that might consider formalizing its activities. In addition, since most of the land has already been attributed to corporations, there is hardly any remaining space for so-called “ASGM corridors” as foreseen in the law. Therefore, currently, most artisanal gold production is done outside the legal framework.

The major changes in the latest generation of mining codes can hence be summarized as being of three kinds: first, a greater participation of the state in the industry, both through levying a share in LSM and through efforts to recognize and formalize ASGM; then, more consistent regulation of the ASGM sector which places artisanal miners in illegality although it is not systematically enforced; and finally, increasing the pressure on mining companies to take responsibility for the effects of the industry on the environment and the local population, including the artisanal miners. So, companies are forced to interact with the artisanal miners<sup>25</sup> with whom they are often in competition for the same spaces – though companies usually have the advantage of being backed by

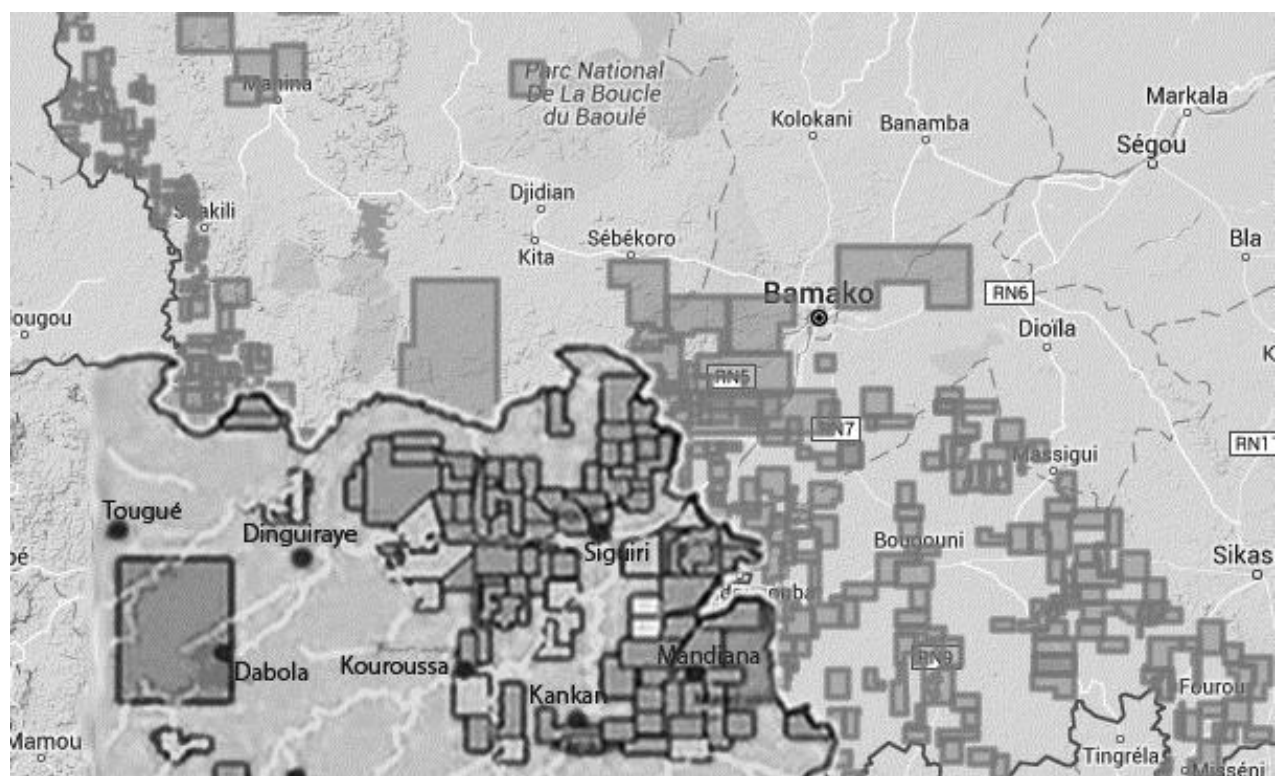
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<sup>25</sup> See for instance the joint recommendations of the World Bank and mining lobby ICMC. The document proposes tools for “conflict resolution” within the framework of a social return on investment analysis, that is a cost-benefit approach to conflict. Franks, et al. (2014) highlight that professionals from the extractive industries are sensitive to the financial value at stake when conflict erupts with local communities.

the law. For their part, artisanal miners are increasingly pressured to enter the licensing system, which not many of them have the means to do, because of the uncountable social, administrative, and financial barriers that come with such a procedure.

As a consequence of the push to formalize the ASGM sector, artisanal miners are increasingly being considered “illegals”; their activity takes place in spaces that are most likely considered private territory, since these areas are covered by research or exploitation permits. This phenomenon has also been observed in other similar contexts (e.g. Fisher 2007; Tschakert 2009a). In Guinea, for example, mining leases covered nearly half the entire administrative territory of upper Guinea (Haute Guinée) in 2014 (see Figure 1-2); this meant that anywhere a person stood, the odds of being on the land of a mining company territory was one in two. In fact, every new large-scale mining project would most likely be set up in locations that were previously occupied by artisanal miners and managed by neighbouring village authorities.

*Figure 1-2 Overall titles for Upper Guinea and southern Mali, as of 2014*



Sources: Ministry of Mines of Guinea, RevenueDevelopmentFoundation.org

To sum up, with the implementation of neoliberal policies (removal of the state and attractive conditions for transnational mining companies), two spaces have been produced for the extractive industry. The first are the ASGM spaces, which had existed previously, but have risen in number with the spike in gold prices. They are labelled at best informal and at worst illegal, provide hardly any direct income for the state, and are managed on the ground by local authorities on the basis of long-standing “customary” rules and most often escape the tax system. Since most of the land is

already covered by lease agreements mainly with junior mining companies, these spaces can be declared “illegal” at any moment. And alongside these spaces are the LSM spaces, which are not very visible unless they are at the exploitation stage. In these spaces, companies are granted formal rights, and enclaves depending of the same mother company are interconnected beyond national borders, but with minimal contact with the so-called “host” country. This “spatial segmentation” (Harrison 2010) does not however restrict people from moving across these different spaces. The boundaries that separate ASGM spaces from LSM spaces are not visible, often overlap, and only become real under certain circumstances, such as conflicts over underground resources. Most of the time, itinerant artisanal gold miners live, work, and travel within and across these territorial boundaries without even noticing them until they get removed from them.

In their journeys from one artisanal mining site to the other, they also move across another type of territorial legal boundary, much more visible by contrast, which is that of nation states and their internal administrative divisions. The next section will discuss the role of national boundaries upon miners’ mobility.

#### **1.3.4 National borders and administrative boundaries within the ECOWAS**

The second kind of territorial boundaries artisanal miners are prone to cross are that of nation states. In their search for gold, national borders are not a limit to their movements. Miners participate in the continuous flow of men and women – adventurers, traders, and students among others – who travel across the continent for many different purposes that are not necessarily linked to settling down. As Choplin and Lombard (2010) put in their study about the “routes” between Senegal, Mauritania, and Mali, contemporary African migration is not just a continuity of long-standing practices; “itineraries change according to the transport offer and the attractiveness of different regions” (Choplin and Lombard 2010, my traduction). In the last 20 years, one of the major institutional changes related to the circulation of people in West Africa has been the adoption of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The ECOWAS was founded in 1975, with the aim of promoting the economic integration of the region. The difficulties faced in implementing the treaty have been widely discussed. These issues have often been linked, in the beginning, to the divergent ideologies and state projects among the recent postcolonial states (Afani 2013). Its limits became even more apparent with the adoption of the protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment in 1979, which resulted in several waves of mass expulsion in 1983 and 1986 of all foreigners in the main immigration centres, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast. Despite two revisions in 1993 and 2003 to facilitate the free movement of people between states, most countries have remained ambivalent and reluctant to

modify domestic laws and policies, especially when their labour market was considered sensitive (Konseiga 2005). Currently, all visas have been suppressed among state members, a so-called “green passport” is supposed to allow for the free movement and migration of persons between countries, and as most residents do not necessarily have a passport, a “card of travel” (*carnet de voyage*) can be obtained and allows for the same as a green passport within the ECOWAS. Among my informants, hardly any had a passport, but some had an identity card and fewer a card of travel.

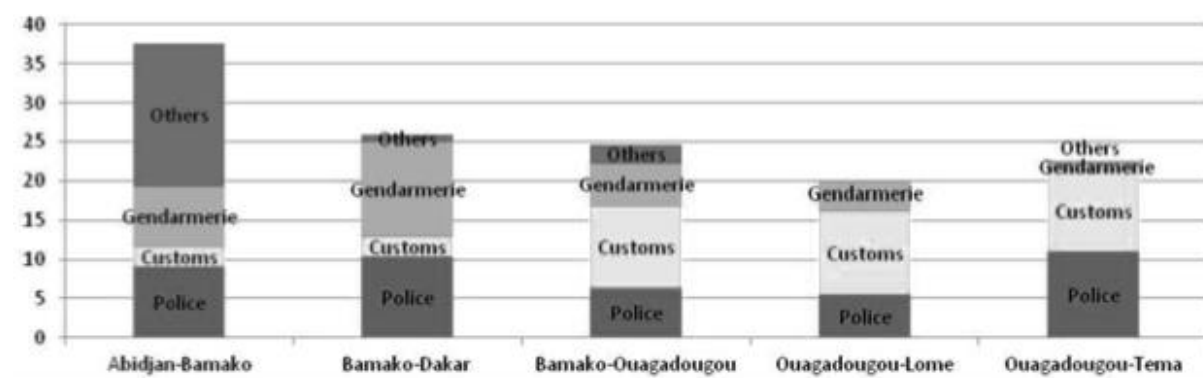
As Ceuppens and Geschiere have noted (2005), the push for national citizenship has been increasingly drowned out by autochthonic claims that manifest themselves through the exclusion and expulsion, sometimes in a violent manner, of supposed allochthons, “fake autochthons”, and all kinds of strangers.<sup>26</sup> In fact, according to Adepoju (2006), despite the efforts of states to implement the protocol, there is a simmering hostility and xenophobia against immigrants. This tendency shall however not overshadow the very fact that Africa is the continent with the highest rate of international migration that also originates in the same continent (Bakewell 2009). Hence, even if immigrants are not completely accepted in the different “national containers”, the current volumes of people on the move suggests that there are no significant barriers. As we will see, circulating people within West Africa are not at risk of being stopped or expelled, but rather, face everyday small hindrances and a general vulnerability.

In a 2012 study commissioned by the African Development Bank, Habbiba Ben Marka (2012), tried to gather data on the concrete barriers to regional economic integration within the ECOWAS by surveying travellers and transporters at border posts and checkpoints along the main corridors. The study shows that along the routes that miners often take, such as the Abidjan-Bamako journey, there are 37 controls; there are 26 such points on the Bamako-Dakar journey and 24 on the Bamako-Ouagadougou route (see Figure 1-3).

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<sup>26</sup> For instance, the politics of so-called “ivoirité”, or national preference in the Ivory Coast were contradictory with the protocol. These discourses are widely diffused and supported in the public sphere; for instance, the Ivorian 2010 hit by Collectif Zouglou, which was heard in all mining settlements at that time, encouraged fans to “like foreigners but always prefer ivorians”.

Figure 1-3: Average number of controls per trip by different services



Source: Ben Barka, 2012

These numbers, which also reflect my own experiences of travel during my fieldwork, show that the political context clearly matters, as in the case of the Abidjan-Bamako route in which the “others” mainly include the “Forces Nouvelles” who were operating in the north of the Ivory Coast at the time of the study.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the loss of time, which was not one of the main concerns for informants, checkpoints and border posts are associated with potential rackets and small bribery. Although the practice, which highlights the “straddling” strategies (Bayart, et al. 1997) of officials who merge positions of power with accumulation, is largely institutionalized and usually taken care of by the drivers, they can turn into continuous harassment for non-nationals. For instance, Guinean miners with whom I was travelling in Mali were often asked to pay more than the usual “passage” other Malian passengers were requested to pay at checkpoints, which for them came included in the ticket and was managed by the driver. In contrast, a Nigerian mine worker explained to me in 2010 that he found Guinea attractive since there was no local state control over the artisanal mines, but, on the contrary, there were uncountable checkpoints along transits routes in the country that caused him such loss of money that he simply avoided travelling there. Other studies have indeed reached similar conclusions concerning the effectiveness of the protocol, and have highlighted in greater detail how national citizenship was linked to bribery costs during travel (e.g. Brachet 2005; Choplin and Lombard 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Several sociopolitical and sanitary events have come into play with the growing attractiveness of specific routes or regions, according to the changing accessibility, risk, and price of the journey; amongst others the 2008 coup in Guinea and the junta transition (2008–2010), the attempted coup in Guinea (2011), the conflict in north Mali and the coup in Bamako (2012–), the political crisis in Ivory Coast (2010–2011), and the Ebola outbreak in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (2014–2015). All these events impact in different ways the attractiveness of a certain route instead of others as a consequence of border closures or increased militarization along certain axis.

## 1.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, I note that, legally, people are indeed free to move between regions and countries. However, this notion of “free movement” should be read in view of how people experience journeys and what motivates them to move. Two observations support the idea that foreigners, especially from the lower classes – such as itinerant miners – find themselves in a vulnerable position during their journeys. First, there is the general climate of suspicion regarding immigrants, often mixed with other identifiers such as ethnic affiliations, which renders them prone to all kinds of “tracasseries” when they interact with state representatives (rackets are the most common). Second, most miners come from rural and rather poor regions; they are not necessarily used to cross-border travel and don’t have a strong habitus of dealing with state authorities. Moreover, they may not necessarily have the means or the know-how to access official documents that can help them avoid rackets.<sup>28</sup> Hence, itinerant miners are in a position of double vulnerability in the mining spaces they move through and the territorial boundaries they cross, at least at the beginning of their career, before they acquire proper “mobility skills” (Tarrius 1992). Within the frame of nation-states, their status as foreigners – if they work in another country – makes them vulnerable to rackets and bribery during journeys. In mining spaces, the informal nature of their work from the perspective of the state makes them lawfully removable from most of the places where they operate.

The precariousness that characterizes miners’ movements at the bottom of the supply chain (i.e., when workers are blocked or removed, by or across different kinds of borders) strongly contrasts the movement of their product (gold) to refineries based in Switzerland and Dubai, even though both sets of movements are two sides of the same production system. The next section traces the journey of gold further along in the supply chain in an attempt to illustrate how it passes from the realm of informal work and illegal extraction to formal markets.

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<sup>28</sup> Chapter 5 expands on the notion of mobility as a skill to explore the skills required to maintain a mobile way of life and how to acquire them.



# Chapter 2: Gold and its transformation through the supply chain

## 2.1 Introduction: merging the formal and informal circuits

One of the paradoxes of artisanal gold mining, which also occurs in other supply chains that feature informal production, is that informally produced material inevitably merges with formalized production chains further along in the process (Phillips 2011). Fold, et al. (2014) made a similar observation in reference to the gold mining industry in Tanzania. According to them, “the division of formal and informal ASM is, however, dissolved in the marketing chain where trading channels are intertwined.” They add that, “the actual production is illegal in the sense that mining is taking place on land not licensed to the operators but trading channels are entangled so it is hard to distinguish the two sectors in the downstream segments of the ASM chain” (2014: 128). This is a typical feature of what Tsing (2015) describes as “salvage accumulation,”<sup>1</sup> i.e., the conversion of the non-capitalist forms of value of “raw” material, extracted and managed by independent actors who handle their work and subsistence, into commodities in the formalized global markets.

In this chapter, I will shift the perspective of the study in order to tackle the paradox of informality in the global circuits through which gold produced in West Africa circulates. I propose to do so by empirically tracing the journey of a gold particle from a stall in a local Guinean market and documenting its “social life” all the way to Bamako and Dubai (Appadurai 1988). I aim to illustrate the working of the supply chain and the relative disconnect between the different segments in the circuit, especially the labour segment, on which this thesis focuses. This will help me locate artisanal mining labour within the broader framework of the supply chain by which gold is moved from the informal to the formal sector. This movement of artisanally-produced gold within the chain reflects the increasing illegalization of labour on the one hand and the increasing legalization of trade on the other. While the previous chapter shed light on the illegalization of ASM labour, this one focuses on the legalization of trade. The overall argument in this chapter is that gold is purified both materially (through material transformation procedures) and symbolically (through qualification procedures), due to which labour remains invisible and alienated from gold. Thus, this situation appears to confirm Tsing’s (2013) argument, that commodities in contemporary capitalism are made

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<sup>1</sup> According to Phillips, such configurations can be called “adverse incorporation” when they “generate and reinforce diverse forms of vulnerability and poverty among groups of poor workers” (Phillips 2011: 383). His view strongly echoes Tsing’s (2015) argument about the precarious effect of “supply chain capitalism”, which works thanks to its disruption between heterogeneous spaces wherein differences, i.e., based on local institutions, are maintained so that local forms of self-exploitation and super-exploitation are put together. Instead of using wage labourers, it relies on independent contractors and thrives on the private appropriation of once common resources.

across “sites of difference”, which often take the form of assessment work in the commodity chain; work of qualification which “blocks gift-like social relations” (Tsing 2013: 23) such as the forms of social cooperation that miners perform to extract gold (see Chapter 3), so as to transfer value created out of capitalist relations into capitalist value.

I differentiate the segments of the supply chain according to the successive transformation and assessment phases gold passes through. In order to do so, I draw on Barry’s concept of “zones of qualification” (2006), or the existence of spaces that reduce differences in technical practices, procedures, and forms, or which establish common standards. I contend that these spaces – each based on “gift-like” social relations and a proper moral economy – ensure that the segments of the chain remain separate, but permit the passing of gold between them using specific “socio-material” procedures (Müller 2015) that transform it into a legally tradable and standardized commodity. This warrants special attention to be paid to the materiality of gold and the procedures that transform it physically and ideationally. Indeed, as Richardson and Weszkalnys (2014) summarize, “natural resources” are not “naturally” resources; substances are produced as “resources” conceptually as well as in actuality. The qualification of gold as a “resource” is a result of disputes and controversies (Barry 2013; Latour 1991) on the properties of the substance, which illuminate their multiple meanings and ontologies. In the case of ASGM gold, this means, for example, that gold is many things simultaneously. It is a geological item found in various types of soil that have different primary or secondary deposits, diverse grades of purity, and varying physical forms. Gold is also a chemical element with a peculiarly high density (19.30 g/cm<sup>3</sup>), different liquid or solid states, and a relatively low melting point (1064°). It is a fluid item that can be possessed by the spirits of ancestors, and is protected and displaced by djinns (see Chapter 3). Sometimes, gold is a developmental and humanitarian issue debated by policymakers and NGOs, or a resource that can be exchanged in different forms (powder, *doré*,<sup>2</sup> bullion, and coins) in different markets. Lastly, gold is a banking vehicle used to make payments or support physical and virtual transactions across the globe. The meanings and uses associated with gold all depends on the “zone of qualification” where it is located. In each of these non-exhaustive contexts, different qualities and properties are attributed to gold, which is the result of a consensus between the various actors in the zone.

## 2.2 Some elements of context

In Guinea, until 1996, the Central Bank (Banque Centrale de Guinée, BCG) was supposed to operate as a *comptoir* and sole buyer and exporter of gold in the country. The bank, through its branch in Kankan, would buy gold from small and mid-scale traders operating in the region. At the end of the Lansana Conte reign, a massive corruption scandal revealed that local and regional Banking

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<sup>2</sup> *Doré*, “golden” in French, is the name artisans give to produced ingots.

traders and agents had falsely titled the carat rate<sup>3</sup>, which finally led to the closure of the BCG in Kankan and the complete redirection of gold production into the already dominant informal system. With the rise of artisanal gold mining in areas that were not yet exploited, and partly from the redirection of Guinean gold toward exporters based in Bamako, the capital city of Mali grew in prominence as a hub for gold trading. The geographical location of Bamako at the centre of several simultaneous “rushes”, as well as its good road and plane connectivity, also contributed to it becoming a major hub for gold in the region (see e.g. Mbodj 2011).

Gold exports are mainly directed to Switzerland, where still 70% of the world’s overall production is refined for the industrial, jewellery, and banking sectors, and Dubai. However, in the last few years, this quasi-monopoly has been challenged by the emergence of new actors, especially from the countries of the Gulf, Russia, and China (Lindt 2016). A recent report by the NGO, Human Rights Watch, indicated that Switzerland was the primary importer of Malian gold and bought at least 36 million USD worth gold in 2010 (HRW 2011, 75). This represented roughly 20% of the total value (236 million USD) of gold imported from Mali according to Swiss customs<sup>4</sup>, which coincides with estimations of the mean share of artisanal gold in the global production (Seccatore, et al. 2014). Along its journey from the mining shafts where it is extracted to the refineries where it is made into 99.99% pure bullion, gold regularly changes form and consistency, endorses different meanings and values, and is frequently attributed with new properties, yet ends in a standardized form out of refineries.

All the gold does not fly directly to Switzerland. Ibrahim, a friend in Conakry who mainly exports gold from the Guinea forest region, Liberia, and Sierra Leone to Dubai, described to me a business model very similar to the one depicted by Blore in the DRC (2016) wherein small-scale exporters often use gold as a banking vehicle and make most of their profit on the transactions it enables rather than on its proper market value. So, Ibrahim, who mainly traded in precious stones, had made a few trips from Conakry to Dubai to sell gold there and ship goods back to Guinea from the UAE, which is where he makes profit, i.e., on the goods rather than on the gold. According to him when the quantity is small enough, gold is just smuggled by being transformed into pieces of jewellery so that it does not need the certification of the Bureau National des Exportations (BNE). Sandaly, who owns a jewellery workshop, confirmed that he is often solicited for this kind of service: “People don’t have enough to buy gold jewellery anymore. Even for weddings we make everything in silver. Now, if someone asks you for big golden jewels, it’s nearly always for exporting to Dubai.” Yet, as Ibrahim insisted, it is not very hard to do it properly, with the required paperwork, at the

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<sup>3</sup> The « Carat » is the degree of purity of gold or of a gold alloy. It is measured according to the relative density of gold compared to 100% pure gold. In addition to the quantity (weigh) the purity (carat) – at least its estimation – also determines the price to be paid in a transaction.

<sup>4</sup> Swiss Customs website: <https://www.swiss-impex.admin.ch/>

BNE. In his case, he had just recently travelled to Dubai with a “small amount” of 800 grams<sup>5</sup> that he used to pay for goods to be shipped back in Conakry. As a *commerçant* (a trader), he said he earned his profit on the goods, and that the gold as such is not really his business. So, a *comptoir* in Conakry would take care of getting the gold titled and certified for export by the BNE. Then he would travel by plane to Dubai, carrying the bars in his hand baggage, and sell them directly at one of the many registered buying offices located right in the airport in Dubai. The details of the transactions would have already been agreed upon before he left Guinea. For quantities exceeding one kilogram, *comptoirs* in Conakry would organize for the gold to be transported from their office to the plane with a group of gendarmerie and policemen, ironically called “anti-fraude”, who provide security services for around 1,000,000 francs guinéens (around 100 euros).

These few examples confirm that the Dubai customs officials are less concerned than Switzerland about the provenance of the product (Blore 2015), and that the infrastructure inside the airport complex makes it easier for West African traders who deal in relatively small quantities to exchange their gold. However, these alternative routes, which remained used by Guinean small-scale traders, are less common than the passage through Bamako which is undoubtedly the regional centre for exporting gold worldwide.

## 2.3 The four zones of qualification along the supply chain

I now return to gold particles and the successive socio-material transformations through which the supply chain links the precarious spaces of artisanal extraction with the prosperity of the refining industry, starting from the artisanal mines in West Africa to the refineries in Switzerland and the gulf.

### 2.3.1 Buying and amalgamating gold powder: organic qualifications

Like Sandaly, Mahmady is a *numu*<sup>6</sup> (a smith) whose father was a renowned jeweller who possessed the secrets of how to melt and work gold with precision and who also knew how to deal with its ambivalent nature.<sup>7</sup> When Mahmady was a young man, he and his father left to Monrovia in Liberia. While his father was working with jewellery, Mahmady started working for a gold buyer in Monrovia where he learnt the business. He would receive a certain amount of money, travel to the artisanal mining sites to buy gold with that sum, and bring the gold back to the wholesaler. With the

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<sup>5</sup> The bars he travelled with represented around 33,000 euros at that time in 2013.

<sup>6</sup> In the *nyamakala* (caste-like) social structure (See Conrad and Frank 1995), they are both affiliated to occupational specialist families of smiths.

<sup>7</sup> See Werthmann on the “bitterness” of gold (2003a); similar notions apply to gold in the Mandé region where *sano* (“gold”), literally means both “gold” and “purity”, and thus calls for cautious handling to avoid pollution. This can imply negative consequences for those who do not handle it properly (by ritually paying tribute to its ontological association with ancestors’ spirits). The next chapter addresses local conception of gold in greater details.

intensification of the conflict in the 1990s, Mahmady returned to Kankan (Guinea) already having an important set of contacts in Liberia, and with a solid grounding in trading gold. From there, he kept on travelling to Liberia from where he would buy gold at a “very good price” since, according to him, “at that time people were not even looking for a high price; if you said today it’s 20 for the gram no one would argue, not like in Boure where people are much aware of the differences of gold. You just say that this is today’s price ... one, two, three times, finished. No discussion. But here people know about gold for long and they will argue.” Basically, Mahmady seems to have benefited from trading with communities in a frontier-like region that were unfamiliar with gold, which allowed him to buy low carat gold at a low price. He justifies the low price that was paid by saying that it partly reflected the low carat of gold and the processing work it implied, the long journey it took to get it from Kankan, and the fact that he was amongst the first one to provided them with mercury (see Pictures 2-1 and 2-2 below) to amalgamate their small quantities.

Though certainly harmful from a health and environment point of view, mercury helped improve the productivity of the diggers from whom Mahmady bought gold. It helped him secure regular quantities from the diggers despite not being a local, and it also guaranteed him a partly refined product. Despite the low carat of the gold, Mahmady would thus make a greater profit from investing comparably less in such “low quality gold” compared to what he would have made by investing the same in “high quality gold”.

*Picture 2-1 Mixing the heavy sands containing gold with mercury*



*Picture 2-2 Burning the mercury-gold amalgam to recover the gold*



The success of Mahmady thus seems to be partly due to the “frontier” aspect (Grätz 2004) of the mining sites where he started doing business. People were simply not familiar with the metrics

of gold, i.e., the possible variation in gold purity in its raw form. Compared to some historically exploited areas in Guinea and Mali, the workers at these sites had limited knowledge of how “qualities” would matter further along the circuit, or the means or infrastructures required to measure it. According to Mahmady,

“They see gold and they equate the weight with money. Me, I see gold and I know there are different sorts (speaking of different grades of purity) ... I know that in Bamako the price won’t be the same for 23K<sup>8</sup> compared to 16K. At that time, it was hard to stay informed of the prices in the world market. There was a price given by the Banque Centrale in Kankan every Friday on the basis of 22K. They made it public so the people in the area knew it as well, but in the forest, they did not.”

To the gold diggers, he explained that the “gold in the forest [was] of lower quality than it [was] in the plains or the hills”, implicitly referring to the mineral properties of the gold – its “organic nature” as Escobar puts it (1999). As a comparison Mahmady continues, “mangos in Fouta are not the same than those from the forest”, thus metaphorically referring to geological features of the deposit – in this case, primary deposits of relatively low purity mixed with other metals. My first impression then was that Mahmady was somehow cheating them. This was not the case, he explained to me later. In his eyes, his expertise allowed him to pay the rate he had fixed, not to mention the additional work of processing and cleaning that would be needed afterwards, plus the extra work of going there rather than somewhere in his own home region and constructing relatively durable relations. Besides, he was not the only buyer and thus needed to maintain a level of trust with the miners. Indeed, as I would witness many times with other buyers in Koundiana, Kokoyo, and Koundian, artisanal miners tend to sell their gold to the same buyers with whom they build relations of trust, help, and dependence, and thus can get support from them in times of need.

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<sup>8</sup> K=carat

Picture 2-3 Balanciers or small-scale buyers in the mining site of Kouban Koura



Picture 2-4 Weighing the gold with a hand weighing-scale



Mahmady had thus placed himself at a junction between two zones of qualification. He was qualifying the gold in terms of its organic properties according to its association with a specific place of extraction and its form and appearance, which were criteria that were considered acceptable by the gold diggers; besides he would also enter into relations of support with some of them and acknowledge risk, hard work and episodic stress on subsistence. Then he would, with a manual scale, come up with a price per gram according to his own assessment of its market value with metrics qualifications (like other traders, he knew the average carat of the gold extracted from the site). In addition to physically transforming the gold from raw powder into a scalable one-piece amalgam, he enabled the passing of the gold from an organic qualification, of more or less good quality plus its specific conditions of extraction, to a metric qualification. As for any other small-scale buyers at the mining site, the hand weigh-scale (see Pictures 2-3, 2-4 above) was also a defining tool for qualifying the decigrams of ore with a price. Thus, throughout the transaction, Mahmady was also adding new properties in terms of carat, weight, etc. that, on site, could not be measured directly in those terms yet.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.3.2 Cleaning, purifying, titling: metric qualifications

The next step in the chain is the making of artisanal bars, and the measurement of their carat using a densimetric scale. These tools were relatively rare until Chinese-made scales became more easily available over the last five years. These activities are often done by other operators, the owners of *fonderies* (melting and weighing places), who accumulate gold from smaller traders and provide additional services such as nitric purifying, and the melting of gold into small bars. In Siguiri, which

<sup>9</sup> As I have mentioned, artisanal miners have no means – and usually lack the knowledge – to convert raw gold into a price other than as a function of its weight. Purity is then evaluated mainly as a function of its form and appearance, while quality includes still other information such as how far it is located from processing centres and how much work it needs to be cleaned.



is a bigger hub for gold than Kankan, several blacksmiths started converting their workshops into *fonderies*, one of which was owned by a jeweller friend of Sandaly. Gold from Boure and the whole sub-region (including most of the southern mining areas) was being melted and scaled there. All day long, small-scale buyers would flock there with the amalgamated gold powder they had bought and aggregated from different sites in Guinea and Mali; they usually had relatively precise expectations for the carat worth of the gold, which would be measured through densimetric weighing.

*Picture 2-5 Nitric purifying*



*Picture 2-6 Hammering into a thin bar for weighing*



The first time I had been there, it was thought to be an obscure process, which traders themselves saw as part of their “secret”. The game between small traders and mid-scale ones in charge of making the bars was to build trust while simultaneously holding back a part of their expertise in the process; trust implied amongst others durable relations between both, personal loans, as well as possible cash advances for greater acquisitions. In contrast, now that they had cell phones that provided them access to the internet and to built-in calculators, small-scale traders could cross-check the metrics and calculations of their counterparts. There were no more “secrets” in the calculations, yet traders maintained their control on the material process by providing and controlling access to the needed infrastructure (centigram densimetric scales, ovens and crucibles, nitric acid and pans) for the process.



Picture 2-7 Densimetric weighing in a water bucket and titling of the thin gold bar (picture: Marion Bernet)



After first eliminating as much impurity as possible from the amalgamated gold using nitric acid (see Picture 2-5 above), the “purified” amalgamated gold of each trader is hammered separately as long as necessary to obtain a thin gold bar as it is believed that any residual “air” or impurity would lead to a false density reading<sup>10</sup> (see Picture 2-6 above). The carat is calculated by comparing the density of the alloy with its purity and looking up the resultant figure on a table (see Pictures 2-7 and 2-8 below). The weight, density, and carat of the gold are written on a piece of paper and signed by the person responsible for the measurement which most often is also the buyer who will pay the mid-scale trader. The price is usually slightly below the LBMA rate. Though it is produced in the so-called informal domain, these pieces of paper serve as warranties for exporter-wholesalers in Bamako, who recognize the informal foundries in upper Guinea or Mali. In this way, they deal directly with the foundry – and not the casual traders operating in between – if they observe a gap in measurements or have any query.

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<sup>10</sup> Density (which gives the carat which gives the purchase price) is measured by measuring the weight of displaced water once the bar is submerged in it. Consequently, it is crucial for the buyer to reduce its volume as much as possible.

Picture 2-8 Table of equivalences (Picture: Marion Bernet)

| 24 CARATS      |                | 22 CARATS      |                | 20 CARATS      |                | 18 CARATS      |                | 16 CARATS      |                | 14 CARATS      |                | 12 CARATS      |                | 10 CARATS      |                |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS | DENSITE CARATS |
| 19,3           | 24             | 18,71          | 22,50          | 18,00          | 21,00          | 17,32          | 20,00          | 16,60          | 19,00          | 15,88          | 18,00          | 15,00          | 17,50          | 14,00          | 16,00          |
| 19,2           | 23,75          | 18,65          | 22,30          | 17,94          | 20,80          | 17,24          | 19,80          | 16,50          | 18,80          | 15,80          | 17,80          | 14,90          | 16,50          | 13,90          | 15,50          |
| 19,1           | 23,50          | 18,59          | 22,10          | 17,88          | 20,60          | 17,18          | 19,60          | 16,40          | 18,60          | 15,70          | 17,60          | 14,80          | 16,30          | 13,80          | 15,30          |
|                |                | 18,53          | 21,90          | 17,82          | 20,40          | 17,12          | 19,40          | 16,30          | 18,40          | 15,60          | 17,40          | 14,70          | 16,10          | 13,70          | 15,10          |
|                |                | 18,47          | 21,70          | 17,76          | 20,20          | 17,06          | 19,20          | 16,20          | 18,20          | 15,50          | 17,20          | 14,60          | 16,00          | 13,60          | 15,00          |
|                |                | 18,41          | 21,50          | 17,70          | 20,00          | 17,00          | 19,00          | 16,10          | 18,00          | 15,40          | 17,00          | 14,50          | 15,80          | 13,50          | 14,80          |
|                |                | 18,35          | 21,30          | 17,64          | 19,80          | 16,94          | 18,80          | 16,00          | 17,80          | 15,30          | 16,80          | 14,40          | 15,60          | 13,40          | 14,60          |
|                |                | 18,29          | 21,10          | 17,58          | 19,60          | 16,88          | 18,60          | 15,90          | 17,60          | 15,20          | 16,60          | 14,30          | 15,40          | 13,30          | 14,40          |
|                |                | 18,23          | 20,90          | 17,52          | 19,40          | 16,82          | 18,40          | 15,80          | 17,40          | 15,10          | 16,40          | 14,20          | 15,20          | 13,20          | 14,20          |
|                |                | 18,17          | 20,70          | 17,46          | 19,20          | 16,76          | 18,20          | 15,70          | 17,20          | 15,00          | 16,20          | 14,10          | 15,00          | 13,10          | 14,00          |
|                |                | 18,11          | 20,50          | 17,40          | 19,00          | 16,70          | 18,00          | 15,60          | 17,00          | 14,90          | 16,00          | 14,00          | 14,80          | 13,00          | 13,80          |
|                |                | 18,05          | 20,30          | 17,34          | 18,80          | 16,64          | 17,80          | 15,50          | 16,80          | 14,80          | 15,80          | 13,90          | 14,60          | 12,90          | 13,60          |
|                |                | 17,99          | 20,10          | 17,28          | 18,60          | 16,58          | 17,60          | 15,40          | 16,60          | 14,70          | 15,60          | 13,80          | 14,40          | 12,80          | 13,40          |
|                |                | 17,93          | 19,90          | 17,22          | 18,40          | 16,52          | 17,40          | 15,30          | 16,40          | 14,60          | 15,40          | 13,70          | 14,20          | 12,70          | 13,20          |
|                |                | 17,87          | 19,70          | 17,16          | 18,20          | 16,46          | 17,20          | 15,20          | 16,20          | 14,50          | 15,20          | 13,60          | 14,00          | 12,60          | 13,00          |
|                |                | 17,81          | 19,50          | 17,10          | 18,00          | 16,40          | 17,00          | 15,10          | 16,00          | 14,40          | 15,00          | 13,50          | 13,80          | 12,50          | 12,80          |
|                |                | 17,75          | 19,30          | 17,04          | 17,80          | 16,34          | 16,80          | 15,00          | 15,80          | 14,30          | 14,80          | 13,40          | 13,60          | 12,40          | 12,60          |
|                |                | 17,69          | 19,10          | 16,98          | 17,60          | 16,28          | 16,60          | 14,90          | 15,60          | 14,20          | 14,60          | 13,30          | 13,40          | 12,30          | 12,40          |
|                |                | 17,63          | 18,90          | 16,92          | 17,40          | 16,22          | 16,40          | 14,80          | 15,40          | 14,10          | 14,40          | 13,20          | 13,20          | 12,20          | 12,20          |
|                |                | 17,57          | 18,70          | 16,86          | 17,20          | 16,16          | 16,20          | 14,70          | 15,20          | 14,00          | 14,20          | 13,10          | 13,10          | 12,10          | 12,10          |
|                |                | 17,51          | 18,50          | 16,80          | 17,00          | 16,10          | 16,00          | 14,60          | 15,00          | 13,90          | 14,00          | 13,00          | 13,00          | 12,00          | 12,00          |
|                |                | 17,45          | 18,30          | 16,74          | 16,80          | 16,04          | 15,80          | 14,50          | 14,80          | 13,80          | 13,80          | 12,90          | 12,90          | 11,90          | 11,90          |
|                |                | 17,39          | 18,10          | 16,68          | 16,60          | 15,98          | 15,70          | 14,40          | 14,60          | 13,70          | 13,60          | 12,80          | 12,70          | 11,80          | 11,70          |
|                |                | 17,33          | 17,90          | 16,62          | 16,40          | 15,92          | 15,60          | 14,30          | 14,40          | 13,60          | 13,40          | 12,70          | 12,50          | 11,70          | 11,50          |
|                |                | 17,27          | 17,70          | 16,56          | 16,20          | 15,86          | 15,40          | 14,20          | 14,20          | 13,50          | 13,20          | 12,60          | 12,30          | 11,60          | 11,30          |
|                |                | 17,21          | 17,50          | 16,50          | 16,00          | 15,80          | 15,20          | 14,10          | 14,00          | 13,40          | 13,00          | 12,50          | 12,00          | 11,40          | 11,00          |
|                |                | 17,15          | 17,30          | 16,44          | 15,80          | 15,74          | 15,00          | 14,00          | 13,80          | 13,30          | 12,80          | 12,30          | 11,80          | 11,20          | 10,80          |
|                |                | 17,09          | 17,10          | 16,38          | 15,60          | 15,68          | 14,80          | 13,90          | 13,60          | 13,10          | 12,60          | 12,10          | 11,60          | 11,00          | 10,60          |
|                |                | 17,03          | 16,90          | 16,32          | 15,40          | 15,62          | 14,60          | 13,80          | 13,40          | 12,90          | 12,40          | 11,90          | 11,30          | 10,80          | 10,40          |
|                |                | 16,97          | 16,70          | 16,26          | 15,20          | 15,56          | 14,50          | 13,60          | 13,20          | 12,70          | 12,20          | 11,70          | 11,10          | 10,60          | 10,20          |
|                |                | 16,91          | 16,50          | 16,20          | 15,00          | 15,50          | 14,40          | 13,50          | 13,00          | 12,50          | 12,00          | 11,50          | 11,00          | 10,40          | 10,00          |
|                |                | 16,85          | 16,30          | 16,14          | 14,80          | 15,44          | 14,30          | 13,40          | 12,90          | 12,40          | 11,90          | 11,30          | 10,80          | 10,20          | 9,80           |
|                |                | 16,79          | 16,10          | 16,08          | 14,60          | 15,38          | 14,20          | 13,30          | 12,80          | 12,30          | 11,80          | 11,20          | 10,60          | 10,00          | 9,60           |
|                |                | 16,73          | 15,90          | 16,02          | 14,40          | 15,32          | 14,00          | 13,10          | 12,60          | 12,10          | 11,60          | 11,00          | 10,40          | 9,80           | 9,40           |
|                |                | 16,67          | 15,70          | 15,96          | 14,20          | 15,24          | 13,80          | 12,90          | 12,40          | 11,90          | 11,30          | 10,70          | 10,10          | 9,50           | 9,10           |
|                |                | 16,61          | 15,50          | 15,90          | 14,00          | 15,16          | 13,60          | 12,70          | 12,20          | 11,70          | 11,10          | 10,50          | 9,90           | 9,30           | 8,90           |
|                |                | 16,55          | 15,30          | 15,84          | 13,80          | 15,08          | 13,40          | 12,50          | 12,00          | 11,50          | 10,90          | 10,30          | 9,70           | 9,10           | 8,70           |
|                |                | 16,49          | 15,10          | 15,78          | 13,60          | 14,96          | 13,20          | 12,30          | 11,80          | 11,20          | 10,60          | 10,00          | 9,40           | 8,80           | 8,40           |
|                |                | 16,43          | 14,90          | 15,72          | 13,40          | 14,88          | 13,00          | 12,10          | 11,60          | 11,00          | 10,40          | 9,80           | 9,20           | 8,60           | 8,20           |
|                |                | 16,37          | 14,70          | 15,66          | 13,20          | 14,82          | 12,80          | 11,90          | 11,40          | 10,80          | 10,20          | 9,60           | 9,00           | 8,40           | 8,00           |
|                |                | 16,31          | 14,50          | 15,60          | 13,00          | 14,76          | 12,60          | 11,70          | 11,20          | 10,60          | 10,00          | 9,40           | 8,80           | 8,20           | 7,80           |
|                |                | 16,25          | 14,30          | 15,54          | 12,80          | 14,70          | 12,40          | 11,50          | 11,00          | 10,40          | 9,80           | 9,20           | 8,60           | 8,00           | 7,60           |
|                |                | 16,19          | 14,10          | 15,48          | 12,60          | 14,64          | 12,20          | 11,30          | 10,80          | 10,20          | 9,60           | 9,00           | 8,40           | 7,80           | 7,40           |
|                |                | 16,13          | 13,90          | 15,42          | 12,40          | 14,58          | 12,00          | 11,10          | 10,60          | 10,00          | 9,40           | 8,80           | 8,20           | 7,60           | 7,20           |
|                |                | 16,07          | 13,70          | 15,36          | 12,20          | 14,52          | 11,80          | 10,90          | 10,40          | 9,80           | 9,20           | 8,60           | 8,00           | 7,40           | 7,00           |
|                |                | 16,01          | 13,50          | 15,30          | 12,00          | 14,46          | 11,60          | 10,70          | 10,20          | 9,60           | 9,00           | 8,40           | 7,80           | 7,20           | 6,80           |
|                |                | 15,95          | 13,30          | 15,24          | 11,80          | 14,40          | 11,40          | 10,50          | 10,00          | 9,40           | 8,80           | 8,20           | 7,60           | 7,00           | 6,60           |
|                |                | 15,89          | 13,10          | 15,18          | 11,60          | 14,34          | 11,20          | 10,30          | 9,80           | 9,20           | 8,60           | 8,00           | 7,40           | 6,80           | 6,40           |
|                |                | 15,83          | 12,90          | 15,12          | 11,40          | 14,28          | 11,00          | 10,10          | 9,60           | 9,00           | 8,40           | 7,80           | 7,20           | 6,60           | 6,20           |
|                |                | 15,77          | 12,70          | 15,06          | 11,20          | 14,22          | 10,80          | 9,90           | 9,40           | 8,80           | 8,20           | 7,60           | 7,00           | 6,40           | 6,00           |
|                |                | 15,71          | 12,50          | 15,00          | 11,00          | 14,16          | 10,60          | 9,70           | 9,20           | 8,60           | 8,00           | 7,40           | 6,80           | 6,20           | 5,80           |
|                |                | 15,65          | 12,30          | 14,94          | 10,80          | 14,10          | 10,40          | 9,50           | 9,00           | 8,40           | 7,80           | 7,20           | 6,60           | 6,00           | 5,60           |
|                |                | 15,59          | 12,10          | 14,88          | 10,60          | 14,04          | 10,20          | 9,30           | 8,80           | 8,20           | 7,60           | 7,00           | 6,40           | 5,80           | 5,40           |
|                |                | 15,53          | 11,90          | 14,82          | 10,40          | 13,98          | 10,00          | 9,10           | 8,60           | 8,00           | 7,40           | 6,80           | 6,20           | 5,60           | 5,20           |
|                |                | 15,47          | 11,70          | 14,76          | 10,20          | 13,92          | 9,80           | 8,90           | 8,40           | 7,80           | 7,20           | 6,60           | 6,00           | 5,40           | 5,00           |
|                |                | 15,41          | 11,50          | 14,70          | 10,00          | 13,86          | 9,60           | 8,70           | 8,20           | 7,60           | 7,00           | 6,40           | 5,80           | 5,20           | 4,80           |
|                |                | 15,35          | 11,30          | 14,64          | 9,80           | 13,80          | 9,40           | 8,50           | 8,00           | 7,40           | 6,80           | 6,20           | 5,60           | 5,00           | 4,60           |
|                |                | 15,29          | 11,10          | 14,58          | 9,60           | 13,74          | 9,20           | 8,30           | 7,80           | 7,20           | 6,60           | 6,00           | 5,40           | 4,80           | 4,40           |
|                |                | 15,23          | 10,90          | 14,52          | 9,40           | 13,68          | 9,00           | 8,10           | 7,60           | 7,00           | 6,40           | 5,80           | 5,20           | 4,60           | 4,20           |
|                |                | 15,17          | 10,70          | 14,46          | 9,20           | 13,62          | 8,80           | 7,90           | 7,40           | 6,80           | 6,20           | 5,60           | 5,00           | 4,40           | 4,00           |
|                |                | 15,11          | 10,50          | 14,40          | 9,00           | 13,56          | 8,60           | 7,70           | 7,20           | 6,60           | 6,00           | 5,40           | 4,80           | 4,20           | 3,80           |
|                |                | 15,05          | 10,30          | 14,34          | 8,80           | 13,50          | 8,40           | 7,50           | 7,00           | 6,40           | 5,80           | 5,20           | 4,60           | 4,00           | 3,60           |
|                |                | 14,99          | 10,10          | 14,28          | 8,60           | 13,44          | 8,20           | 7,30           | 6,80           | 6,20           | 5,60           | 5,00           | 4,40           | 3,80           | 3,40           |
|                |                | 14,93          | 9,90           | 14,22          | 8,40           | 13,38          | 8,00           | 7,10           | 6,60           | 6,00           | 5,40           | 4,80           | 4,20           | 3,60           | 3,20           |
|                |                | 14,87          | 9,70           | 14,16          | 8,20           | 13,32          | 7,80           | 6,90           | 6,40           | 5,80           | 5,20           | 4,60           | 4,00           | 3,40           | 3,00           |
|                |                | 14,81          | 9,50           | 14,10          | 8,00           | 13,26          | 7,60           | 6,70           | 6,20           | 5,60           | 5,00           | 4,40           | 3,80           | 3,20           | 2,80           |
|                |                | 14,75          | 9,30           | 14,04          | 7,80           | 13,20          | 7,40           | 6,50           | 6,00           | 5,40           | 4,80           | 4,20           | 3,60           | 3,00           | 2,60           |
|                |                | 14,69          | 9,10           | 13,98          | 7,60           | 13,14          | 7,20           | 6,30           | 5,80           | 5,20           | 4,60           | 4,00           | 3,40           | 2,80           | 2,40           |
|                |                | 14,63          | 8,90           | 13,92          | 7,40           | 13,08          | 7,00           | 6,10           | 5,60           | 5,00           | 4,40           | 3,80           | 3,20           | 2,60           | 2,20           |
|                |                | 14,57          | 8,70           | 13,86          | 7,20           | 13,02          | 6,80           | 5,90           | 5,40           | 4,80           | 4,20           | 3,60           | 3,00           | 2,40           | 2,00           |
|                |                | 14,51          | 8,50           | 13,80          | 7,00           | 12,96          | 6,60           | 5,70           | 5,20           | 4,60           | 4,00           | 3,40           | 2,80           | 2,20           | 1,80           |
|                |                | 14,45          | 8,30           | 1              |                |                |                |                |                |                |                |                |                |                |                |

Picture 2-9: Artisanal gold bar with hand written certification (Picture: Marion Bernet)



### 2.3.3 Paperwork for *dorés*: legal qualifications

Later, the travel to Switzerland or Dubai usually includes transiting through Bamako in Mali. There, mid-scale buyers sell their product to a few wholesalers – around ten – involved in international gold trading. In 2012, I was introduced to one of them, Diabi, by one of Sandaly's *siaki* (jeweller) brother who was himself involved in the business of gold. Many changes had occurred with the change in government, I was told, and hardly any of those who were doing business two years ago were still active, including Samba, who before the *coup*, was said to manage the largest export businesses of artisanally mined gold from Bamako. Diabi was thus of the new generation of exporter.

His office was situated in the centre of Bamako, close to the central mosque and the market as well as the customs office (Direction Nationale des Douanes) and just blocks away from the streets where informal currency buyers congregated. It was surrounded by two police stations and had one gendarmerie post within a 500-metre radius. The building was occupied by a number of other businesses and, since Diabi was busy talking with several sellers in his office, we were told to go to the neighbouring building and visit the ovens used for the moulding. The stairs of the crowded building were mainly occupied by children and women apparently resting after their labour at the



market. On the rooftop were three large ovens (see Picture 2-10 above). Only one of them was active, yet it produced a terrible heat. Of the three young men that stood there, one of them was busy loading a *creuset* (a ceramic-recipient for melted gold) with several thin artisanal bars into the oven. It was covered with borax to facilitate the melting process (see Picture 2-11 below). Once in its liquid form, the gold was poured into an ingot-shaped crucible (see Figure 2-12 below). To the side, I could count five artisanally made *dores* lying next to a bowl of water. Given their size (that of the melting crucible), each must approximately weigh one kilogram, which suggests that the value of gold on the top of this crowded building was at least 200,000 USD. Once the operation was finished, the two other young men came back with us to speak to Diabi in the next building, with one of them carrying the newly made *dores* in a small sports bag.

Picture 2-10 Ovens at Diabi's



When asked about the working of his business, Diabi explained that his *comptoir* is controlled by the authorities, meaning that he has acquired a certification from the Direction Nationale de la Géologie et des Mines, which authorizes him to title, sell, and buy gold. Materially, he would more or less do the same as what founders had done before, i.e., aggregating small quantities in larger ones and calculating their carat, yet by being authorized to do international trade by the National Direction of Trade and being thus eligible to fill a form of “intention of export”, he would add a legal layer the properties of gold and make it enter the formal sector. This second task is an important part of his job. According to him, lots of what he buys comes from Mali, but almost as much from Guinea and

from Senegal, from where it is seemingly harder to export<sup>11</sup>. During our conversation, sellers repeatedly dropped in one after another, gave Diabi's employees their artisanal bars with the handwritten papers of the *fonderies* attached, had them weighed again, and after their carat were quickly verified, were paid in euros, dollars, or CFA according to their preference. The legal part is quite straightforward according to Diabi, since he ships gold every week to Dubai. Since he has to comply with customs authorities and the Ministry of Mines and Geology, he describes his work as being an intermediary for his customers; boasting that he could have gold retitled quickly within "internationally recognized standards" because of efficient contacts in the bureaucracy. This means that the carat and weight is certified by customs authorities using a supposedly more efficient technology and is then provided with official paperwork. As I suggested earlier, the zone of qualification in which small and mid-scale traders as well as West African wholesalers organize and secure their transactions through networks of inter-knowledge certified by handwritten endorsements ends when it comes to bureaucracy and the international legal apparatus.<sup>12</sup>

Diabi mainly operates as a *comptoir*, i.e., adding a legal qualification to the numerous other properties of gold, by adding legal or official paperwork to the transformation of artisanal thin bars into one kg *dores* ready for export. Yet, he also sells things other than gold, especially to his mid-scale intermediaries that he furnishes with mercury, which is in high demand at the mining sites,<sup>13</sup> and recently, he also started selling metal detectors that he imports from China. Like other exporters, his office is a node between international buyers like Swiss trading companies – many of which are merely lawyers' offices or individuals listed in the Swiss trade register rather than big firms – and refining companies and the artisanal mines. Gold flows toward Bamako on one side, and on the other

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<sup>11</sup> The case of Diabi, as it is with his "competitors" (to be understood more in the sense of co-operative competitors within a cartel) in Bamako, highlights the misleading nature of the official numbers that situate Mali as being the third largest producer of gold in the continent. In 2013, the production of artisanal gold was said to have risen to 20.7 T from 1.6 T in 2012. (See e.g., <http://www.reuters.com/article/mali-gold-idUSL3N0OD2YU20140527>). These official numbers are very likely to be inaccurate as they include the registered exports, a large part of which is smuggled in from neighbouring countries, rather than being the production from within the national territory. A recent report of the Déclaration de Berne, a Swiss NGO, reported a similar case where gold was produced in Burkina Faso, exported first to Togo, and then shipped by plane to Switzerland (DB 2015).

<sup>12</sup> See for example, Chapter IV of Decree N°02-536/P-RM "Réglementation de la collecte, de la transformation et de la commercialisation de l'or et des autres substances précieuses ou fossiles." ARTICLE 14: L'or à l'exportation doit avoir fait l'objet de traitement chimique et mécanique pour être présenté sous forme de lingot titré. ARTICLE 15: La levée de toute intention d'exportation d'or, ou de diamant est conditionnée à la présentation d'une attestation de titrage du produit à exporter. L'expertise porte sur la qualité et la quantité et se traduit par la délivrance d'un certificat. ARTICLE 16: (...) Pour certains cas spécifiques et pour les besoins d'étude ou d'analyse, une autorisation est délivrée par la Direction Nationale de la Géologie et des Mines en vue de l'exportation à l'état brut. L'expertise porte sur la qualité et la quantité et se traduit par la délivrance d'un certificat."

<sup>13</sup> Because of mercury's high toxicity, the process directly endangers the health of the miners who use it, as well as damaging ecosystems into which it is released. Mercury use in mining has been particularly publicized since it was targeted by UNEP through the Global Mercury Project whose principal aim was to reduce emissions in the artisanal sector (see Spiegel and Veiga 2005), which had the side effect of adding a supplementary layer of illegality to the livelihoods of artisanal gold miners (for a counter narratives about mercury use see Tschakert and Singha 2007).

side, back to the mining sites, flows mercury, metal detectors, and other tools needed for the assembling of the gold, while artisanally made *dores* fly to Switzerland and Dubai.

Picture 2-11 melting thin gold bars into a one-piece doré



Wholesalers like Diabi are thus on the edge of another zone of qualification which I label as “legal qualification”. The contours of this zone are relatively unstable for they depend as much on changing national and international regulations concerning imports and exports of precious metals as they do on the increasing pressure faced by importers to “act with diligence”<sup>14</sup>. Besides, as the changes in the landscape of import-export of gold in Bamako between 2010 and 2012 show, the main actors within such a zone of qualification are prone to change swiftly according to the sociopolitical context. Yet, beyond the precise content of legal procedures and the respect or lack thereof for their compelling norms, what matters in these zones are the “papers” and “authorizations” produced by the bureaucratic apparatus which permit the export of gold by plane (mostly to refiners in Dubai) on a regular basis and at a relatively large scale. Diabi, like other wholesalers, thus has a critical role to play in assembling together these procedures by adequately making use of his contacts in the bureaucracy – alongside the more concrete activities of transforming the substance into *dores* and obtaining national certificates of quality as well as exports rights, thus adding to the properties of gold a legal layer.

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<sup>14</sup> See for instance the constitutional initiative called “For Responsible Multinationals”, which is about to go to a vote in Switzerland (<http://www.konzern-initiative.ch>)



Picture 2-12 Making an approximately one kg doré



#### 2.3.4 Refining to the four “9s”: international standards qualification

For this last segment of the chain, I take the stance of a Swiss trader who mainly “facilitates” transactions between *comptoirs* in Mali as well as exporters in Ghana, and clients in Dubai. Among the people I met in Switzerland who were directly or indirectly implicated in the trading of gold, I spoke several times to an independent “self-made” gold trader who would, as he liked to say, “facilitate” transactions by using his own contacts like Diabi, rather than through established routes like those of the industrial sector. Franck’s story is illustrative of the workings of this last segment, which, instead of enabling gold to be refined to 99.99% purity in one of the refineries accredited by the LBMA (none of which is currently located on the African continent),<sup>15</sup> rather redirects it to be refined to the same or slightly lower degree (99.9% or 99.5%) in one of the many gold refining companies in Dubai, which operate under a parallel standard.

According to him, the relatively small-scale transactions that he manages are usually completed in less than 24 hours once they have been settled. A percentage below the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) statement is agreed upon – just like Ibrahim when he settles with his

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<sup>15</sup> See the updated list: <http://www.lbma.org.uk/refiners-gold-current>; applicants have to meet several criteria: five years of existence, at least 10 T gold refined per year, possess a tangible net worth of not less than the equivalent of 15 million pounds, as well as meet the technical criteria of refining. The LBMA standard permits trading under the auspice of the London Gold Market.

Dubai customers whether it is one dollar per gram, or half dollar, or less that is kept as a residual margin – and the price is then adapted in view of the carat. Upholding the terms of transactions during 24 hours serves to preserve from possible withdrawal if prices came to drop or rise. All the parties involved make their profit according to the percentage they agree upon initially. Usually, the transaction is managed and secured by the importers because *comptoirs* cannot, or do not want, to bear the financial risk. It then consists of one person getting the gold physically in Bamako or Accra, and travelling with it to Dubai – as illustrated earlier with Ibrahim’s account, or on fewer occasions to Switzerland. Both segments of the journey from the exporter to the plane, and from the plane to the refinery, are secured privately on behalf of the importer, possibly with the organizational support of the exporter. Refineries assess the carat again and pay the individual according to the initial terms of the transaction, even though the price may have changed in between. What is the role of Franck in such processes when he merely stays at home and “maybe makes a few phone calls”? In his own words, his role mainly consists in engendering trust between both parts since he “personally knows” the people in the *comptoirs* with whom he works. This is reflected in the motto on his business card: “Trust is our aim”.

Refining companies both operate as buyers of raw gold and as producers of certificated bullions and semi-finished products for industrial use and for jewellery. As another trader stated, refiners are mainly service providers whose role “is to get the gold from their customers and refine it to the standard grade of purity. Afterwards, the customer decides if he wants to take the gold back or sell it on the market or to the refinery itself, which is what usually occurs.” In this last segment of the chain, refined gold becomes certificated by international standards of purity and gets a certified hallmark. Licensed refineries operating with high and onerous technologies constitute another semi-autonomous field whose agents compete to define and meet the criteria they impose (e.g., required grades of purity, financial reserves, etc.) for the transformation of gold into a standardized resource whose properties have been “purified” both materially, from other substances, and symbolically, from other competing qualifications through complex socio-material procedures.

At this stage, gold reached a highly paradoxical status for the greater the precision of its measurement and purity together with its accreditation to international standards, the more detached it is from the previous segments of the chain that have been totally invisibilized and can materially not be traced back. So after a tortuous journey across several zones of qualifications where it is handled and worked by uncountable numbers of independent actors who operate on their own and cooperate according their own rules within each zone, artisanally extracted gold ends up melted in the same refineries to form the same bullions than LSM produced gold which travelled straight from the open pits of mining companies to the Swiss refiners, i.e., within one and unique zone of qualification through a definite and registered numbers of hands.



### **2.3.5 Mapping the zones of qualification**

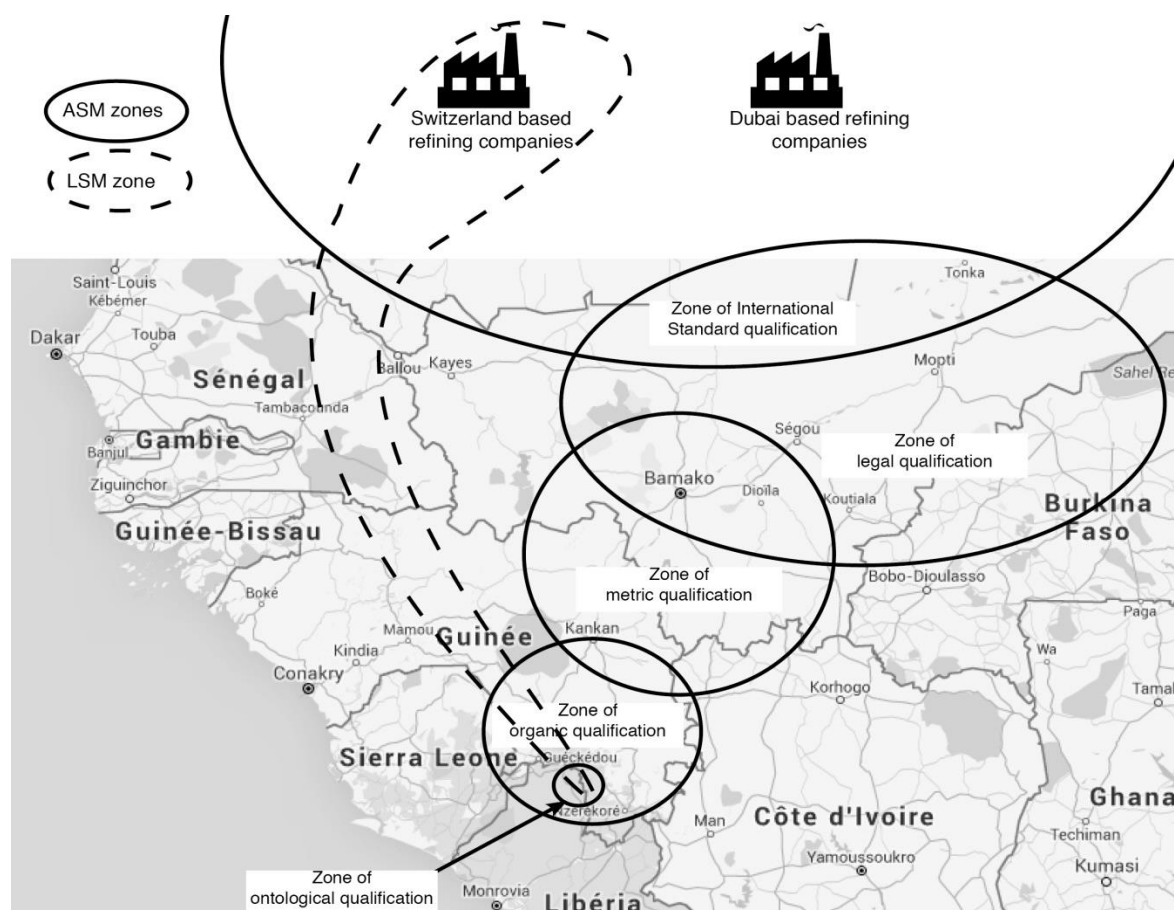
On the one hand, LSM gold is produced within a unique transnational zone of qualification, where extracting and refining actors are directly connected. On the other hand, ASGM gold undergoes many procedures of qualification in successive “sites of differences” to paraphrase Tsing (2015: 61), which assemble it as a resource, but the different segments of the chain remain separate. Following Müller (2015), who states that the politics of assembling resources occurs in specific spaces, I now provide a tentative geographical representation of these spaces based on the trajectory I mentioned above. I am not suggesting a formal isomorphy between the depicted zones and geographical territories (see Table 2-1). Indeed, gold can traverse various spaces in which it acquires an increasing number of properties while losing others; these properties correspond to the terms of exchange set in different zones. Therefore, the places and geographical locations mentioned in the table below are only illustrative.

Zones are not stable. The actors that populate them are structurally positioned in competition to one another and constantly struggle to improve and legitimize their positions using different strategies; they contest zone boundaries, question the dominant values of the zone, or create new values and procedures of qualification. This translates into conflicts and struggles within each field that can possibly change the contours of the zone. But more importantly, the ASGM supply chain is so flexible only because it operates on the edges of the LSM chain. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the expansion of industrial mining led to the acceleration of artisanal gold mining in places where the latter had existed for years. The acquisition of new land for industrial mining continuously displaces artisanal miners and leads to the development of new mines at the edges of LSM sites. New legislations intended to control the extractive sector only make ASGM spaces more precarious by rendering them illegal.

Table 2-1 Zones of qualification of artisanally mined gold along the global circuit of production

| Zones of qualification   | Ontological qualification (see chapter 3)   | Organic qualification       | Metric qualification       | Legal qualification                     | International standards qualification   |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Locale                   | Subsoil of mining site                      | Surface of mining sites     | Towns in mining regions    | Bamako/Conakry                          | Switzerland-Dubai                       |
| Brokers                  | <i>Damantigi</i> and religious intercessors | Small and mid-scale traders | Fonderies                  | Exporters/ <i>comptoirs</i>             | Refineries                              |
| Materiality              | Fluid (moving with spirits)                 | Amalgamated powder          | Thin bars                  | One kg <i>dores</i>                     | Bullions or semi-finished products      |
| Socio-material procedure | Politico-religious ritual and extraction    | Weighing and amalgamation   | Authenticating and melting | Hallmarking and production of paperwork | Purification to international standards |
| Properties               |                                             |                             |                            |                                         |                                         |
| Ontological continuity   | X                                           | X                           |                            |                                         |                                         |
| Organic quality          |                                             | X                           | X                          | X                                       |                                         |
| Weight                   |                                             | X                           | X                          | X                                       | X                                       |
| Carat                    |                                             |                             | X                          | X                                       | X                                       |
| Legality                 |                                             |                             |                            | X                                       | X                                       |
| International standards  |                                             |                             |                            |                                         | X                                       |
| Accountability           |                                             |                             |                            |                                         | (X)                                     |

Figure 2-1 Geographical sketch of the zones of qualifications on the basis of the aforementioned case



## 2.4 Conclusion

So, in contrast to the view that supply chains are usually rather straightforward,<sup>16</sup> this chapter has described a situation wherein two apparently antagonist production processes function in parallel and end up merging at the end of the chain. Therefore, instead of considering the two as competitors – as the two sectors are often presented (e.g., World Bank 2012) – a structural view of how ASGM and LSM gold occupy the same markets and how they influence one another is needed. In such a view, itinerant miners are seen as free from the constraints of formal supply chains and do not endanger the system, as the rhetoric of illegality suggests, but they are rather useful to it. Since they are continually displaced by the expansion and creation of LSM enclaves, they play the role of pathfinders, as argued by Luning (2014) in Burkina Faso, and also the role of recoverers who collect the residue on the edges of gold extraction enclaves.

The supply chain of artisanal gold mining in West Africa thus highlights what has been stressed elsewhere. “Supply chains [as for the artisanal sector] rather than vertically integrated corporations have become the rage. In a supply chain, discipline is directed toward inventory. Labour and natural resources are costs to be reduced by finding someone willing to take care of these issues for less” (Tsing 2013: 25), in this precise case, it is at zero cost. Workers along the chain, from tunnel diggers in Guinea to small traders like Franck in Switzerland, do not work for wages but for themselves; they value a certain sense of “freedom” and imagine that their skills are their capital, as the following chapters will discuss. Paradoxically, their work, which consists of assigning meaning, qualification, and value to gold – by connecting people, raw material, and procedures of transformation through “gift-like social relations” in each segment of the chain – is rendered invisible in the chain by successive assessments and new qualifications. This suggests two things that will be explored further in the next two chapters. First, a great amount of work is required in the production of gold, and much of this work lies in the informal sector, for example in community relations, politico-religious rituals, or institutional management of common lands; these are purified out of gold along the commodity chain, and that value is transferred to the end of the chain in a form of primitive accumulation. Secondly, it also reveals that miners at the bottom of the chain still find artisanal gold mining an attractive occupation to engage in, which suggests that, despite high insecurity (uncertain rewards, continuous threat of expulsion, and physical hazards), miners appreciate sources of value other than the uncertain financial returns of mining gold.

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<sup>16</sup> See for instance Porter’s model (1985) of the value chain.

## **PART TWO**

# **Materializing masculine aspirations**

# Chapter 3: Is gold mining a lottery? Gold materiality and the micropolitics of its extraction

## 3.1 Introduction: The story of how *Damanba* became the “big mine”

How is gold produced? How do actors with vastly different backgrounds come together and cooperate over extremely short time spans? What sort of moral economies emerge from such sites of cooperation? How do these economies differ from the usual labour arrangements rooted in agrarian systems? This chapter will address such questions by investigating the materiality of gold. In particular, I draw on one peculiar form of exchange at play in gold mining spaces in the Mandé world – workers never exchange processed gold among themselves. They believe that if they are lucky, the raw ore allotted to them will be rich on gold; therefore, to exchange gold would be to disrupt one’s luck.

By way of introduction, I first relate the story of Damanba (‘the big mine’) in Koundiana Koura as told to me by the *dugutigi* of the village.<sup>1</sup> The story explains the birth of Koundiana Koura as a venue for miners, and hence displays the characteristics of an origin myth that may reveal the values and representations associated with mining labour.

Long ago, gold was found only in small quantities around the village of Koundiana Koura. There were several mines nearby, but people could not earn a living mining gold as they do now. Gold complemented the villagers’ agricultural work during the dry season, and those who wanted to earn a living from mining were better off leaving the region of Bouré.

During one dry season, an old man arrived from Mali asking to stay and work. He could not walk well because one of his legs was crippled, so he was not suited to farm labour. He was sent to the neighbouring hill, where villagers were digging for gold; perhaps they would take pity on him and give him some work. The old man joined the villagers, who were extracting ore from an old precolonial shaft, and made just enough to meet their daily consumption needs.

The old man offered his help, and because of his age and condition, was allotted the work of pulling the rope and helping with washing, tasks often associated with women’s labour. His job mainly consisted of bringing to the surface the buckets of ore that the villagers mined in the tunnels 20 metres underground. In spite of his age and handicap, the man worked long shifts without complaint.

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<sup>1</sup> The *dugutigi* (literally, “head of the land”) is, in theory, “the eldest father among the *faw* (‘cohort of fathers’) who are responsible for the pact between the ancestor and the djinns of the land and of the bush” (Leynaud and Cissé 1978).

At the end of every workday, he was given a small share of the freshly excavated raw ore, which he would wash in a calabash in the hope of obtaining a little gold powder. During the first few days, like his fellow workers, he found only very small quantities of gold, which he would sell in the village and share with his *tuteur*. Two weeks later, as he was sifting the ore, he found a gold nugget in the bottom of the calabash. No one in the village had ever seen such a large nugget. Since the gold had been in his individual share, it belonged solely to him. It was more wealth than he had ever had in his life.

With that gold, he enlisted the miners to drill another shaft next to the first one, paying for the sacrifices and food during the digging. All the men in the village worked in the tunnels at least once. After weeks of uninterrupted activity, the mine finally collapsed. This shaft became known as Damanba ('the big mine'), since it had brought the most gold to the village.

This story, which was narrated to me as an origin myth explaining the village's status as a centre of gold mining in the region, makes a number of statements about gold, luck, and cooperation, which I wish to explore further in this chapter. As an origin myth, the story provides a surprising discourse on norms, access, and local citizenship that contrasts mainstream ideas of production.

First, the story's protagonist embodies all sorts of otherness. He is a foreigner, a cripple, old and alone. And yet, by assisting the working team, he soon makes a fortune, while the villagers, who have toiled for years, have never been so fortunate. While the moral obligation of hospitality is part of the conventional discourse, and though the relationship between the first-comers and latecomers are strongly shaped by institutions such as *tutorat*, strangers are usually given subordinate positions (Bayart 2001; Chauveau 2000). Second, the old man uses his earnings to support the villagers who gave him a chance to work, which results in success for the whole village. Thus, luck is not an individualistic matter in the story; on the contrary, it is created through common work, then shared and redistributed through the initial network of cooperation. Hence, contrary to the mainstream idea of production in Mandé, production and distribution do not follow conventional gender, lineage, and generational routes. In this chapter, I explore the role of "luck" in such alternative modes of production, and the extent to which forms of cooperation in the gold mines transcend, change, or create social boundaries and alternative social spaces. Drawing on the story of Damanba, I first establish four essential claims about luck in the production process, which are based on observations of everyday work at several mining sites.

First, there is never certainty about earnings, and wins are rarely very important. Such wins do not correlate with the time invested in digging the shaft, tunnels, and galleries that may provide exceptional wealth or next to nothing. From this perspective, any operation is a bet since individual labour may not necessarily be rewarding, and miners often describe gold mining as a "lottery".

Second, artisanal gold mining is labour intensive. Accessing gold requires the cooperation of many individuals who must labour together in spite of the uncertainty of their potential earnings.

Huge amounts of earth must be removed manually from the tunnels before gold can be obtained. To use the lottery metaphor, as miners often do, mining is a cooperative bet.

Third, team members do not share the final product – gold – on the basis of its monetary value, but by dividing the raw ore into different piles, i.e., the individualized possibility of cash value if one of them finds gold in their own pile. Depending on their position in the team, miners can access larger or smaller shares of ore, but this does not necessarily correlate to cash value. In the Damanba story, the old man becomes extremely rich from a pile that was extremely small compared to that of the other villagers, yet, it ended up containing much more gold.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, and most importantly, because of these sharing principles, conventional lines of power and authority (lineage, age, gender) that usually define access and distribution in other spheres of production seem to be blurred to the extreme. While older men usually possessed most of the wealth due to the social institution *fasiya*,<sup>3</sup> this didn't seem to apply in Damanba since youths, women, strangers, and even cripples could become rich through the gold mines.

The principal claim of this chapter, which derives from these observations, is that gold mining creates spaces of social inversion, where conventional norms are replaced with the rules of luck, which are theoretically the same for everyone engaged in gold production. The idea that the gold mine is a place where lives can change overnight reflects an opposite conception of production as the one underlying agrarian values in rural areas.

### **3.2 Changing seniority rules in rural Mandé**

Morality in the Mandenka agrarian world tends to revolve around the institution of *fasiya*, wherein older men control the behaviours of women and young men. Such an institution is rooted in agrarian production, where its temporality ideologically translates into strong kinship bonds. Although *fasiya* is constantly contested and adapted, all men and women are expected to comply to it, especially in rural areas. To boldly stress its specific form in terms of cooperation, I briefly come back to an old article of Claude Meillassoux, who, in 1977, contrasted *fasiya* with the social organization in a hunter-gatherer horde – i.e., episodic cooperation without longstanding bonds or obligations – which is conceptually closer to the moral system practised by itinerant miners.

In contrast to the horde, members of agricultural crews are tied together at least until the time of harvest so that anyone can benefit of the work invested in the collective labour.... Time and continuity are essential features of economic and social organisation [in rural Mandé]. If we observe the composition of [agricultural] teams, we discover that they

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<sup>2</sup> In everyday work, however, the amounts of gold discovered in successive shares tends to be relatively homogenous.

<sup>3</sup> *Fasiya*: patriarchal classificatory parenthood based on seniority, that is, the primacy of fathers (*faw*) and elders (*korow*) on their classificatory children (*denw*) and cadets (*dogow*).

change with time...which equates with generational turnovers.... At any time, one individual, the eldest one in the cycle owes its subsistence to no living member of the community but only to dead ancestors while all others are indebted to him for their subsistence. In consequence, the elder appears as “naturally” designated to receive and manage the product of its younger partners to whom he advances food and seeds until the next harvest.<sup>4</sup>

In the village sphere, morality tends to revolve around variations of *fasiya*, which is the general idea that harmony is attained by submitting to male elders on whom younger generations depend (see Brand 2001a; Viti 2013); submission to one’s elders is performed, among other ways, in rituals to ancestors. In Meillassoux’s model of seniority, elders control the labour of youths as well as that of the so-called “matrimonial goods” (women), placing women in a situation of double exploitation – they are not recognized for their work as producers on the farm or for their reproductive labour. Newcomers are integrated through *tutorat* (see Chapter 2) – an institution through which “strangers” are granted access to land by pledging allegiance to one elder in the main clan, thus functioning symbolically as sons. However, in recent years, the monetization of rural communities has led to transformations in the institution; for instance, seniority now commands respect only when it is coupled with other elements such as economic success, marital status, number of descents, or the degree of education. Drawing on Meillassoux’s premise, that elders maintain their positions through their capacity to circulate goods, Anne Attané (2011) observed that seniority is increasingly acquired by redistributing revenues rather than merely aging. In other words, forms of authority that are ideally associated with age can, to a certain extent, be obtained with money, thus possibly undermining agrarian social norms. The cyclicity of agrarian time – which underlies the norms of *fasiya* – is undermined by the possibility of fast access to cash. Thus, there is room to question established hierarchies.<sup>5</sup>

In areas rich in gold, the notion of “frontier” – as proposed by Kopytoff (1987) – has been widely used to examine the institutions emerging in these spaces (Arnaldi di Balme and Lanzano 2013; Werthmann and Grätz 2012). This prism, a conceptual tool initially developed to explain the relations between locals and newcomers in agricultural African societies, has been particularly useful in describing the relations between several waves of migrant workers (Grätz 2003), the evolution of power relations between them, and the resulting strategies used to capture wealth (Werthmann 2003b). It has also proven useful for analysing the emergence and stigmatization of specific social spaces. However, the approach is also problematic because it builds on the assumption that the

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<sup>4</sup> Original text “De la reproduction à la production” from the book « Terrain et théories » published in 1977 by Editions Anthropos in Paris. Text reproduced by revueperiode.net: <http://revueperiode.net/de-la-reproduction-a-la-production>, March 10, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Yet, as Haller (2002a) demonstrates in other contexts (fisheries in Nigeria and Mali), monetization does not necessarily undermine so-called “traditional” institutions if they get themselves monetized; “old” institutions are likely to transform and adapt to new contexts.



frontier is a space characterized by an “institutional vacuum” (Scott 2014). This idea fits in cases where mining has emerged as a sector only recently, but not in this context, where cooperative practises have continued for centuries. For example, in Burkina Faso, gold mining only dates to the past 30 years whereas a historical account of mining in the Mandé world shows that gold mining practises emerged alongside long-established institutions. Thus, the question arises as to how existing institutions are transformed by these changes in the gold economy.

I now explore the ways in which social organization in gold mining sites in the Mandé region differ from conventional ideas on the role of age, gender, and local citizenship in production processes. I do so after making two basic assumptions: first, I do not assume that mining spaces have an institutional vacuum, but rather posit that long-standing rules on access to resources have been transformed. Second, I assume that the materiality of gold enables alternative modes of cooperation. Broadly, this chapter seeks to understand how people with different backgrounds, origins, and social affiliations cooperate to extract and produce gold outside of the normative *fasiya* framework. I contend that such cooperation is made possible due to a work ethic based on the idea of morally acceptable luck (1981), which underlies the peculiar materiality of gold. To do this, I use Appadurai’s (Appadurai 1988; Appadurai 2013) approach, and switch the focus from the forms and functions of exchange to the material being exchanged. In other words, rather than studying how people interact in mining settlements, I will examine the “material and mental realities” (Godelier 1984) that the discovery of gold entails during the production process by tracing the “social life” of a gold particle. In doing so, I shall present the forms of cooperation that arise during the assemblage of such material and the mental realities that the production process demands.

### **3.3 The social life of a gold particle (from underground mines to market stalls)**

In the following sections, I will sketch these production relations by tracing the “social life” of a gold particle.

#### **3.3.1 The allocation of mining locations: Restating statuses and local citizenship**

Before a new mining site opens, or in order to officialize exploitation that has begun informally, village officials conduct a ceremony, after which mining locations are allocated and teams are formed (see Chapter 2). During my fieldwork, when I was shuttling between the large mining fields of Bouré and the village of Koundiana Koura, I witnessed the opening of a new gold mining parcel in Kintinian, Bouré, a place I regularly visited. The leader of the “youths’ group” (*jeunesse*) of Kintinian had called to inform me of the event, assuming that it would probably be interesting because they were going to make an important sacrifice. Indeed, the ritual was interesting, particularly because it was so informative about the local political framing of gold extraction.

The sacrifice was not very different from other seasonal events, although this one was particularly onerous and explicitly extended the “religious” domain (of events) which I had witnessed in several other sacrifices.<sup>6</sup> The choice of a cow, according to Drissa who was representing the youths’ group (*jeunesse*), highlighted that “there was money here”. All the customary authorities and administrative officials were present, one of whom was Drissa. Contrary to my expectations, however, the sacrifice was not performed by one of the heads of the *tombolomaw*<sup>7</sup> (customary police in the gold mines) or by the *dugutigi* (head of the central lineage of the village), though they were responsible for managing the gold fields, collecting taxes, allocating space, and arbitrating in case of conflict. The cow was instead brought and slaughtered by the head of the family that owned the parcel of land to be allocated for gold mining, even though the family had never cultivated that land. The plot owner was not a central figure in the village, but he stood in front while all the other dignitaries assembled behind him. Once the cow had been slaughtered, Drissa commented that the cow had not been bought by the sacrificer. From that perspective, the sacrifice deviates in logic, since according to Cissé (1981), what matters is not how large the sacrifice is, but who provides it. In this case, the whole ceremony was organized and financed by the *tomobolomaw* and the village authorities, rather than by the *damantigi* (chief of the mine), who did not have any specific function or authority in the mine, but who only performs the role of a landowner. Thus, the provision and performance of the sacrifice were separated so that the “official owner” – the *damantigi* – conducted the sacrifice even though he would have normally been unable to afford it.

Most of the requests were addressed to God, but some were also directed to the djinns that populate the subsoil and are considered the owners of the gold. In addition to the requests for a prosperous and safe new mining field, the hundreds of people waiting to rush upon the new parcel were reminded that the so-called natives had prerogatives over the other miners, and that the land was the property of a single person, a native, who was the “chief of the mine” (*damantigi*), i.e., the sacrificer, though his title was not associated with any specific authority. Although miners would typically insist that “the gold is for everyone”, the political ritual I had just attended seemed to have

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<sup>6</sup> As argued by Godelier, I assume that politics and religion are two sides of the same coin; the latter provides much of the symbolical elements on which the former builds, i.e., roles and statuses. In the Mandenka-speaking area, religion (a mix of Islam and animist rites) regulates amongst other things the individual’s relations with ancestors which, by extension, means that it regulates relations to the land by defining who is entitled to it and under which conditions. As Carola Lentz has shown in Burkina Faso, holding the “ritual power” permits one to govern land and mobility by defining changing notions of natives and strangers (2013). In the Mandé, most sacrifices are done in honour of so-called *bolliw*, which are “things-persons” collectively possessed (i.e., by “natives”). They are granted a capacity of action (i.e., for interacting positively with ancestors and entities) (c.f. Colleyn 2004; Kedzierska-Manzon 2016), yet are moving objects rather than fixed shrines, meaning that they can be displaced, which renders claims on the land highly dependent on local power relations as well as on the financial capacity of the individual to afford valuable sacrifices.

<sup>7</sup> Literally, *tombolomaw* means “the holders of the constraint”; that is, the village-based police institution that regulates the presence of workers, collects taxes, and mediates conflicts. Members are usually local *kalayantigiw* (literally, “those who hold the long pickaxe”, which is the typical tool used in the tunnels for the extraction of deposits), miners who are respected for their experience.

been organized and performed to prove the opposite, which in Drissa's words meant that "the gold is for everyone and anyone can get lucky, but in the end *they* [the strangers] work for *us* [the villagers]." Thus, the relationship between the humans and the djinns and God, as well as the prayers for luck and safe working conditions, seemed to be of little concern to the officials, at least for Drissa who represented the local youths, except for what the ritual stated about statuses and the associated rules.

According to local belief, as stated by the village head in Kintinian, humans perform sacrifices to win the permission of the djinns that govern the subsoil. When there is gold in a primary deposit, it is invisible, remote, and located deep underground. At this stage, it is part of a whole, the subsoil (*ju kono*), which, in the local taxonomy, is seen as God's domain, in contrast to the surface, which is seen as humans' domain (for more detailed descriptions of local geological taxonomies, see Duvall 2008; for metals in particular, see Jonckers 1979 and Erny & Kanté 1993). Gold as a raw material is supposed to be the work of God, unlike agricultural products, that are the work of men.

So, by clarifying what is said to be derived from God's work and what is derived from men's work, I simply wish identify the human and non-human stakeholders at play in the "exchange" the sacrifice was supposed to mediate. The subsoil is populated by living spirits (*djiné*), who exercise control over the resources in the subsoil, such as gold or quartz. According to most informants, if gold indeed moves (concerning which there is no consensus among miners), it is because it is constantly being displaced by djinns, who are the initial owners of the gold. Such entities that are considered ancestors spirits can take different forms and shapes that are visible to the human eye. For example, one morning, we arrived at Jah's *daman* and found a snake that had fallen into the well. This occurrence was interpreted as an excellent sign for beginning operations. The snake possibly was a djinn, Jah explained, and therefore its presence would signify the presence of gold. Politico-religious rituals, such as the one described earlier, or everyday propitiatory sacrifices, are conducted as per the convention of the place to obtain permission from the djinns to access their gold.

The opening of a new mining site is always accompanied by the giving of a gift provided by the entire "community" through one member (the *damantigi*) in the form of a sacrifice to the djinns, who are expected to reciprocate by providing safe access to the gold. Considering the stakeholders at play, which includes the entire community, administrative authorities, miners (local or itinerant), and the entities of the subsoil, the ritual performs a political function, since it attributes new roles and strengthens existing ones. Given that the central lineage exercises a monopoly on the ritual office, the ritual gives its members – and, by extension, the so-called natives – control over the resources of the subsoil, for only they are entitled to conduct sacrifices and interact with djinns at the opening of new mining fields, allocate new spaces, and manage pits. Their monopoly over the "ritual power"

(Lentz 2007) enables and legitimizes their exclusive control over the subsoil resources and the constitution of a sort of rent of which non-natives are excluded.

This resource monopoly deserves some attention, since it differs completely from regular land tenure and rules of access to surface resources such as arable land, trees, water, and sand. In short, land tenure in the Mandinka-speaking region is rather flexible, and has historically aided the regulation and assimilation of immigrants. In the continuous expansion of the agricultural frontier depicted by Kopytoff (1987), newcomers have always been granted access to land through institutions such as *tutorat*. The rules governing the exploitation of subsoil resources, in contrast, are apparently stricter since access is not ceded as easily as land is, and hence, it remains under the control of the principal clan in the village, since only they can operate as ritual officers. No matter who digs or finds gold underground, it is only the lineage members who will interact with the djinns, which means that the so-called natives supervise the extraction and organize the labour of all the other miners. In view of the mobility dynamics in gold mines, this situation can be summarized by the popular saying, “There are only two ways to get gold: either having it at home, or going for it.” In other words, as Arnaldi di Balme has suggested in a recent study of artisanal gold mining in Mandiana region in Guinea (2013), there are two parallel economies in the gold mining sector: a rent economy among the so-called natives who get a share of what is extracted; and an economy of capture among non-native miners who struggle and constantly move to work in the best locations. However, this divide does not translate into a fixed hierarchy between “owners” and “workers”, since itinerant miners (*kalayantigiw*), the non-natives who work underground, may earn much more than the natives who manage the mining shaft. Being possibly much wealthier than their “hosts” with whom they associate on an equal sharing basis for mining, miners undermine *tutorat* authority as derived from *fasiya*. This also explains why native men, who could obtain gold at home in a form of rent, often travel to work mines in other regions to take a chance of higher gains in a form of capture.

The ritual described above illustrates how agrarian institutions are reframed in mining context to serve other purposes. The rules of *tutorat* that usually serve to integrate newcomers on the long-term of agrarian time are adapted in order to regulate the cooperation of “natives” and “strangers” on the short-term, yet excluding the purpose of integrating them. The next section discusses these work agreements by tracing further the social life of a gold particle from underground to the surface during the extraction phase. In this discussion, I consider how these complementary economies interplay with each other, in particular, the types of cooperation that can be seen during this stage.

### **3.3.2 Association and extraction of the orebody**

Artisanal gold production relies on three important physical peculiarities that underlie the production process. First, gold is found in the form of particles, which on a large mining field is akin

to searching for a needle in a haystack<sup>8</sup>. Second, these particles are initially found in the subsoil, and the ore has to be excavated in large quantities and brought to the surface for processing. Third, gold's density is 30 times greater than that of water, and thus, it is separated from the other ore particles using gravimetric methods such as a pan or a sluice; these methods are sometimes accelerated by amalgamating heavy materials with mercury.<sup>9</sup> Particles sometimes collect over time in existing or past riverbeds, in which case shallower digging or panning of the riverbed is possible at lower labour costs.

After the sacrifice and the allocation of locations, each male or female owner (*nyado*) enlists a team of four diggers to drill a vertical one-metre-wide well reaching up to 30 metres deep depending on the location of the deposit. Depending on how hard the ground is and how deep the workable deposit is, the team will require between two weeks (if the ground is loose) to two months (when they must go through laterite) to reach the orebody. During this initial stage of excavation, which does not generate any income, the miners' social and economic risk is partly mitigated by the *nyado*, a "native" who is responsible for supporting the team with food and funds for small expenses until the deposit is reached. I have been told several times that *nyado* tend to be generous, and their kindness is important for motivating the miners and building trust with them. In this sense, *nyadow* are also heavily dependent on the quality of the *kalayantigiw* with whom they associate. Indeed, *Kalayantigiw* cultivate a strong relationship with their underground environment and the entities that populate it via engagement through everyday ritualized actions (small sacrifices) and deep knowledge of the underground (recognizing the signs of rich gravel, anticipating collapses) of which natives are not always aware of. In Kouroussa, for instance, I followed the work of a team of diggers whose *patronne* came every day to enquire about washing tests and encourage the workers by paying for cigarettes and coffee and by having rice prepared. She was therefore greatly appreciated by the team, and was said to be a good *nyado*. The interdependence at stake in the association, and the relative power the workers hold as a team, was clearly stated by one of the diggers: "If she doesn't pay for our small needs, it will be known, and others won't work with her either. At the end of the day, we all count the same when we share *nye* [raw gravel], and our chances to strike luck are bound." In that sense, the small scale of the relationship – four diggers and a *nyado* for one shaft – helped maintain a mutual sense of obligation, which is "made real" in the ore-sharing agreement. Indeed, since all of them – diggers and *nyado* – receive the same amount of extracted ore, association can be

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<sup>8</sup> By way of comparison, « gold is so rare that the share of ore representing usable metal is 0.00033% compared to 0.91% for copper, 2.5% for lead, 19% for aluminum, and up to 40% for iron » (Ali 2006).

<sup>9</sup> The use of mercury in artisanal gold mining can have destructive effects on the environment and on health, as has been thoroughly documented over the last ten years. Although mercury amalgamation has been subject to world scale reduction initiatives by international organisations (e.g., UNIDO, the Global Mercury Project, and the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership), it remains by far the most efficient and accessible treatment process for artisanal gold miners worldwide.

seen as an effective horizontal principle of exchange wherein their respective chances to strike “luck” is arithmetically divided between them.

I now turn to the second stage of extraction, which is the drilling of the tunnels and extraction of the deposit. This activity is conducted by more experienced workers, called *kalayantigiw*. During my last field visit in March 2014, Sandaly and I joined Kalou from Bamako to visit Karakhena, in Senegal, where he had been working in a shaft with two Malians and one Ghanaian for several weeks. “*Nye a ka gni*” (“the gravel is good”), I was told repeatedly. They had found a potentially rich deposit and were starting to conduct tests to assess the quality of the ore. During every new test, everyone would cease their work and gather around Kalou as he did the washing. In this case, in every new panning, shining gold flakes appeared on the edges of Kalou’s pan. Once he released the remaining water, the pan was passed from hand to hand around the shaft and to the neighbouring holes. There, other teams, whose excavations were less close to the rich deposit, also paused in their work to analyse the pan’s contents, expecting some sort of good signal from the first findings of Kalou’s team.

This scene was repeated several times over the next two days. Each new washing brought optimistic comments about what the shaft held, and the miners discussed the most appropriate direction to branch into underground. The *nyado* visited several times during these days and made several sacrifices. She paid for important meat meals and encouraged Kalou and the other workers. At the same time, increasing numbers of *kalayantigiw* came to the *daman*; some were acquaintances of the team’s members, but most were simply gold miners from among the 40,000 present in Karakhena at this time, gathering information and trying to assess their chances of striking it rich in that precise well. One week later, although the operation had not been as successful as Kalou and his coworkers had expected, the work was seen as potentially lucrative by other *kalayantigiw* who continued to spend their labour in the tunnels for a share of the hopefully gold-rich ore.

In contrast to the other contexts in which artisanal gold mining has expanded worldwide, at no time during the process has there ever been a question of monetized labour or exchanging a certain quantity of gold for a definite amount of labour, which makes the system of production unique not only compared to other Mandenka forms of production, but compared to other gold mining contexts as well.<sup>10</sup> That is, labour is always rewarded with a share of raw material: as long as ore is extracted, it is split and stored in different piles. The content of the gold in each share remains unknown until it has been individually processed, so in theory, a small share could yield a nugget and a large share

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<sup>10</sup> Scholarship on artisanal gold mining in Burkina Faso (Werthmann 2009a), Benin (Grätz 2010), Congo (Geenen 2015) and Tanzania (Bryceson, et al. 2013a) presents different forms of cooperation in which labour is most often exchanged for a part of the cash value of the gold once it has been processed, or more fixed amounts of cash (wages).

nothing but powder. As the miners say, “Mining is a lottery; anyone can get lucky.” Although such lines of discourse, together with stories such as the one of Damanba presented in the introduction, contribute to the attractiveness of artisanal gold mining, I must clarify that such mining does not, unless in exceptional cases, translate into sudden wealth accumulation. The daily subsistence of miners shows that given the average dissemination of gold particles, gold mining usually allows for a relatively stable, yet low, cash income that enables itinerant miners to maintain their mobile lifestyles or provides an additional cash income for local women as part of their livelihoods.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the “lottery” principle is also extremely inclusive in the sense that any contribution, even small efforts such as preparing tea or counting the numbers of buckets of ore, is rewarded. Each person receives a potentially rich share of ore, which is also extremely individualistic, since the final earning is supposed to be the result of personal luck. The exchanges people engage in during the extraction phase thus take a form that is similar to gambling, in that everyone gives something (labour, time, resources) for very uncertain returns. Additionally, as in so-called “positive balanced reciprocity” forms of gambling (Binde 2005), a form of redistribution is expected from those who have struck it rich, as the story of Damanba illustrated.

Drawing on Godelier’s understanding of production, these principles form the ideational framework for cooperation in artisanal gold mining, which is characterized by the relative horizontality of labour arrangements and can be summarized as follows: native residents have a preferred relation with the entities who own gold, and therefore, are entitled to manage the production process and extract a rent of it. However, it is possible for whoever engages in such a process to bet labour or resources and individually find gold and strike it rich.<sup>12</sup>

In the next section, I trace the movement of gold particles from the piles where they are stored to the market stalls where they are sold. I thus focus on the distribution, processing, and sale of gold, and thus move to the implications of “sharing luck” for incomes and the uneven access to gold.

### **3.3.3 Distribution, processing, and selling**

Once Kalou’s washing tests revealed that the ore was potentially rich, the deposits pulled from the pit in plastic palm oil canisters were kept next to the shaft in separated piles corresponding to the parties involved. To process and wash the raw material, the workers may opt to involve supplementary participants, usually women from the neighbouring villages, ceding to them a share

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<sup>11</sup> Intimate transactions between itinerant male miners and women who support their moves are discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>12</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3 and illustrated in the introduction, the egalitarian idea of being equally subject to luck is a powerful narrative, which contributes to the attractiveness of gold mining spaces.

of their own raw material (one bucket out of ten, for instance), thus giving the distribution system the appearance of a cascade division.<sup>13</sup>

How is luck concretely shared once the gold-bearing ore is extracted from the pit? By studying Kalou's mining operations in Karakhena, I detail how the raw material is distributed and processed. After the sacrifice is made and teams are formed, two more members join the initial team of four diggers and one *nyado*. These team members are typically women, who pull the buckets out of the pit in exchange for one bucket out of every 50 they extract. Such tasks usually involve more than two people, and a rotational shift system is established among the women to allow for intermittent shifts. During the week, different participants, including men, performed this role. There were, on average, five *kalayantigiw* working inside the tunnels, on a rotational shift basis. These were newcomers who asked for work in the tunnels, and who each received one bucket for every 20 they extracted. The team also reached an arrangement with the owner of an air compressor to send air into the tunnels for a similar share as that of a *kalayantigi*, but on a daily basis. Once all the shares had been allotted, the rest was divided among the five members of the initial team. According to rough estimates, for every 100 buckets extracted, each stakeholder received the following share of raw material (no gold or money so far): the green and red bars show the share of the initial team and the *nyado*, the orange bars show the share of the *kalayantigiw* excavating the tunnels, and the blue bars show the share of the women doing surface labour (see Figure 3-1).

Once shares have been allocated to the external parties who perform temporary tasks (*kalayantigiw*, air provision, rope, processing, and washing), the team responsible for digging the well divides the remaining ore into five equal portions. Their larger shares are thought to be justified because of the prior excavation work involved, that is, since they initially look a chance on a location that may have yielded a poor result. Itinerant gold miners, or *kalyantigiw*, benefit from this system because they work in the best shafts, where gold is considered to be abundant. It is more important for them to be able to move to the right spots given that for the same amount of labour, their earnings may vary dramatically depending on the quantity and quality of the gold-bearing deposits extracted from a well. In fact, they are sometimes wealthier than the shaft owners, which they often mention in jokes and show off through ostentatious consumption in the mining camps (see Chapter 5). The women who bring up the buckets can also earn additional shares upon processing the deposits. Thus,

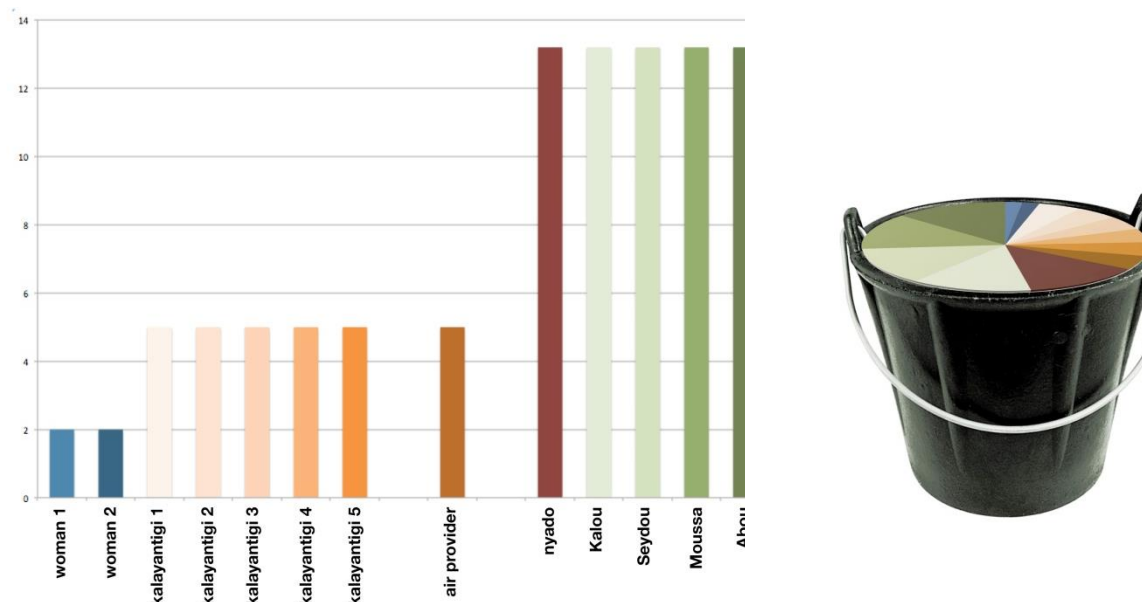
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<sup>13</sup> In general, the processing and washing stages are considered women's work in the gendered division of labour. A number of explanations are provided for the underground-surface gendered division of labour, including the physical strength required to work in the tunnels, the symbolic pollution of women during menstruation, and the need to avoid their potential interference with underground entities. From the labour perspective, the entire household relies on women's work in the domestic sphere, which concretely limits their presence in mining sites to short periods of time.



as with the old man in the Damanba story, any individual involved in the work has a chance to strike lucky, since a single bucket can contain more gold than an entire pile of ore.

Figure 3-1 Distribution of raw material among parties per 100 extracted units



Thus, the physical properties of gold largely determine the modes of work and distribution, since the extracted ore remains in its “natural condition” until it becomes individual property through processing and washing. Only when the shiny gold powder becomes visible in the heavy sands at the bottom of the calabash does the individual share stop being *nye*, that is raw ore, and become *sano*, proper gold. It enters the world of commodities as exchangeable gold powder that can be sold on the local market to petty buyers who come to the mining sites every day to buy the powder.

In summary, gold production through the *daman* process requires the cooperation of numerous people, who work together by exchanging their labour for shares of raw ore. In this form of organization of labour and distribution, neither production nor earnings are seemingly structured by conventional lines of authority, as in other mainstream forms of production such as farming. In contrast to other mining sectors, such as artisanal diamond mining (i.e. D'Angelo 2014) or artisanal gold mining as done in other countries (Ghana, Benin, Burkina Faso, see e.g., Hilson et al. 2006), access apparently does not rely on an unilateral chain driven by capital ownership or status. On the contrary, the miners and other workers present their work as a sum of mutual interests, which they express through the term “association” and make real through a complex system of arithmetic distribution. By not sharing the processed gold or following a system of fixed wages, all the stakeholders are given chances to get lucky; however, the chances are obviously not equal since the shares are unequal. In such a system, all parties are invested in the moment of washing. In addition to maintaining hope, this ethic of “luck” strengthens and affirms the interdependence of the workers.

However, as the example shows, at the moment of ore sharing, the shares are far from equal. The initial team that digs the well, which is usually comprised of locals, accumulates ore in the form of a rent economy, which is well accepted as a complement to farm labour – the most valued source of earning, while all the other stakeholders, mainly itinerant miners, rely on a finding-based economy, where their aim is to work in resource-rich operations where the chances of maximizing their wealth are higher. The two groups share possibilities to strike rich<sup>14</sup> rather than products, and this is what forms the basis for their cooperation. In doing so, they approximate forms of gambling reciprocities that have been developed for fostering exchange in the context of egalitarian societies (e.g. Mitchell 1988; Woodburn 1982). The next section argues that the idea of luck and the related forms of cooperation are imbricated in the materiality of gold.

### **3.4 Gold materiality: a dense yet fluid resource**

With a density that is 19.2 times that of water, gold is among the heaviest elements. Due to its high density, small quantities can fetch a large amount of money. The materiality of resources plays an important role in the assemblages and political systems that form as a result of extraction; in the study area for instance, the material properties of gold (such as how it can be easily stored and transported) have contributed to the formation of historic empires in Mali and Ghana during the Middle Ages (Kevane 2015; Niane and Ki-Zerbo 1991). At the ground level, the materiality of resources contribute to forging systems of value – for example, *fasiya* in the agricultural domain. Contrary to agriculture – which allows for a certain degree of anticipation and requires long-term investments which produce relatively fixed roles and statuses (elders vs. youths, *horonw* vs. *nymakalaw*, men vs. women, local vs. strangers) – the revenue from mining is quite unpredictable, is not dependent on status, and cannot be reduced to the amount of time and labour invested. This poses a problem in terms of “moral luck”: why are some more lucky than others? This is a problem that *fasiya* morals, based on notions of fate and continuity, cannot answer.

By comparing gold with the production systems of other resources like diamonds or rice, I argue that the mental realities that gold entails in the Mandenka context are more fluid than solid, more mobile than fixed, and more extensive than finite. Mental realities support cooperation across conventional lines, as well as the need to promote an individualized conception of the person – in line with the imaginary quest – that ore sharing eventually concretizes.

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<sup>14</sup> Chapter 4 addresses in more detail the possibilities the miners contemplate, that is, their aspirations when they engage in mining.

### 3.4.1 Fluid gold

One morning in Koundiana, Jah asked me to move the motorbike from the courtyard and help him move other items that were lying around the house so as to clear some space in the courtyard. His niece, who was about to start studying in Kindia, had just arrived from Siguiri and Jah had promised her she would have the opportunity to “wash the courtyard”. I found this a strange expression, for guests are usually offered food and water on arrival, rather than being given tools to wash the soil. I first thought that I had not heard him correctly, but suspected that it was something related to washing ore. I asked him to explain how and why she would wash the courtyard. His niece and his wife, Mai, were going to take all the gravel from the familial courtyard where we had been eating and relaxing every evening and wash it in search of gold. Everything would go to Jah’s niece as a gift to start her student life. Obviously, while transporting sacks of ore and while changing dirty clothes after visiting the mines every day, small, invisible particles would necessarily have fallen on the ground – we were literally sitting and sleeping over gold that was just not visible to our eyes.

After the washing, I saw that the amount of gold that Mai and her niece had collected was quite significant. I asked Jah why he did not collect the gold directly every day, to avoid the risk of losing these invisible quantities with rain for example. “It’s not good to keep gold,” he told me; besides, “it was hers to wash her luck.” When I later asked why he was not storing the powder or nuggets instead of selling them right away, the same answer was given: “If I have it in my pocket I go direct to sell it, and I can keep the money if I need to make savings.” Apparently, if the gold is not to be sold and turned into money immediately, it is better to let it circulate, even if it poses the risk to let the particles flow away from the courtyard during a night of rain.

Such an idea has its corollary when miners speak of a more or less good mining “season”. Sandaly told me several times that he had heard from one or another acquaintance that “gold had not come out this year”, or on the contrary, that “there was a lot of gold” in one or another region. Thus, gold may not be here one year, yet comes back the following year, which suggests that it circulates independently from miners’ efforts. In terms of practices, if gold mining is to be compared with the production systems of other resources, there are indeed peculiarities in how its materiality is understood that plays a role in the way its production is related with ideas of luck and specific forms of cooperation. In a continuum where farming represents potential for planning and reduced uncertainty and diamond mining on the contrary represents total uncertainty and the impossibility of planning, gold would be in between; some of its features being closer agricultural production and others to diamond production.

Diamond indeed is solid, extremely rare, and supposedly immobile in the view of most informants. Its production does not require much travel since, on the contrary, workers work

extensively in wide-open shafts, sometimes for months or years before a gem is found. There is neither cyclical nor regularity in the production: it is just as likely that several gems will be found successively in just a week or nothing will be found for long periods of time. Its solid, one-piece composition makes dividing it between parties impossible, unless it is done in the form of money once it has been sold. As a consequence, its production is based on a vertical system of employer-owner and employee-diggers who are paid a daily, yet extremely low subsistence wage, and are given a small part of its cash value as a reward when one is found.

As a counterpoint, rice, which could also represent here most other subsistence agricultural products, is fixed in the fields of the village or the neighbouring hamlets. Though there may be some rotation between the fields, those which are attributed to farming normally keep on serving the same function on a rotative basis over time. Its production is cyclical according to season and can be anticipated, at least to a certain extent. It can also be administrated as a row product and divided between hearth-holds or be sold. In contrast to these resources, gold is understood to be mobile, which implies that miners need to move and find it like game. It is not solid like diamonds – although it can be found in the form of nuggets – since it is melted and is usually found in the form of powder. Besides, it has no cyclical temporality like farm products but, contrary to diamonds, allows for everyday earning like wood gathering. And finally, in everyday incomes, there is always the possibility of striking a denser portion, eventually a nugget, that can by itself turn a miner rich.

Gold is extremely dense due to its high concentration of value, and it is fluid because it moves, separates, melts, and aggregates, and therefore requires intrepid travel to acquire it. In the process of searching for gold, luck is somehow fetishized – everyone deploys effort to make it an individual matter – and becomes morally acceptable because it is shared (rather than produced) in a way that individual success can be attributed to collective efforts (and call for redistribution through spending), whereas failure cannot be personally ascribed. To paraphrase Tsing (2013), the system favours “gift like relations” on which people from so different backgrounds can build relationships of affective attachments, which are very much needed in the precarious environment of the mines (see Chapter 5 precariousness and 8 on networks of social support). Yet, the emergence and acceptance of spaces of inversion also work through the spatial and symbolical separation of mining sites from the village spheres, the morality of which is overtly contradicted. In the next section, I will discuss the notions of luck and cooperation that accompany the view of gold as dense and fluid.

### **3.5 Luck and cooperation**

By tracing the social life of gold particles from their initial location in the deep subsoil controlled by djinns to the Monday market stalls in the mining camp, the previous sections have highlighted the efforts made throughout the process to exchange all kinds of things (labour, ore, time,

sacrifices, artefacts) for gold. Central is the notion that each person's earnings would, in the end, demonstrate the individual "luck" of the workers. Myths and everyday discourses also support the idea that luck is central to the process; this, given the day-to-day earnings of workers, is rather contradictory to the relative stability and predictability of what a worker, depending on his or her position in the association, concretely expects from working in the *daman*. For example, during the five months I spent at Jah's, accompanying him every day to the mine, earnings of 0.1 to 0.3 grams per day (at that time, between 5 and 15 dollars per day but one must consider that there are also periods without wins) were quite common, occasionally reaching several grams per day. Because of the relatively even distribution of gold particles in the subsoil, the chances that one worker would find more gold than another operating in the same well are low. Then, the question is, why do people systematically prefer to keep their share unprocessed, instead of sharing gold or money (since they would receive a higher price from small-scale buyers on the market by grouping the product)? In other words, can the lottery metaphor that miners so frequently used to describe their work operate as an explanatory concept rather than a descriptive image?

In a recent article, D'Angelo (2015), who studied the diamond mines of Sierra Leone, warns scholars against the abusive use of "contingency vocabulary" as an analytical tool. Indeed, his review shows that many studies, especially from the field of "development", tend to associate artisanal mining with gambling, which he says may undermine miners' agency, delegitimize their livelihoods, and reinforce stereotyped representations of them as "young, male, economic migrants (and probably ex-combatants) inspired by greed and the 'casino' mentality" (2015 see also Lahiri-Dutt 2006). Such views also run the risk of importing western conceptions of gambling as an immoral, asocial, and unproductive activity, which, as the previous sections have shown, is certainly not the case, as miners produce social spaces through complex forms of exchange that transcend conventional boundaries. As Binde (2005) has shown in his anthropological review of the forms of exchange in gambling, in most cases, gambling entails a proper ethic and often fulfils social functions such as support and distribution. Thus, although such warnings are extremely valuable to avoid conflating unrelated notions merely because of the homonymies they would present in a metaphorical discourse, they do not help in the present case to make sense of the discursive insistence on the power of luck, of the propensity to bet one's labour for uncertain returns, or of the practical efforts made by workers to maintain their luck during ore sharing.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> D'Angello's proposition is to treat the "contingency vocabulary" as "a discursive genre (Bayart 2005) that both internalises and undermines dominant views" (D'Angello 2015, 246). This approach is fruitful in a more "vertical" context such as the artisanal diamond mining industry; however, in the case of gold, where everyday finds allow for relatively stable livelihoods as long as the price does not drop, the discourse on luck is directed internally and horizontally towards associates.

Returning to the forms of exchange (of possibilities rather than of products) during the production process, what it concretely achieved in terms of cooperation is striking compared to other spheres of production. Indeed, in such a strongly patriarchal context, most productive and reproductive spheres rely on a morality of respect and submission to *fasiya* (seniority) and *fabara* (father-based autochthony), in which access to wealth is determined by age, gender, and lineage. In the case of the artisanal gold mines, cooperation seems to draw on a different ethic.

At first glance, cooperation in the gold mines resembles a typical stag hunt system (Tomasello, et al. 2012), where multiple people benefit from joining their efforts (i.e., to reach the deposit 20 metres deep) instead of searching alone (i.e., by randomly panning in riverbeds). As in stag hunt situations, sharing the spoils entails potential friction and requires strategies to maintain party confidence. While such distribution is usually organized along conventional lines, in the ephemeral context of the mines, where the workforce is mixed in terms of backgrounds and affiliations, and workers are temporarily present due to the resources' potential (material or social) to deplete rapidly, the legitimacy of conventional affiliations becomes elusive and questionable. In contrast, in some regions in Burkina Faso and Benin, where gold was recently found (compared to its centennial integration into the economy of actual southern Mali, upper Guinea and eastern Senegal), many scholars who witnessed these gold rushes have reported on the underlying conflicts (e.g., between locals and strangers and cadets and elders) that accompanied the emergence of these new mining sites (Grätz 2004; Werthmann 2003b). In many mining sites in Guinea and Mali, both local and temporary miners seem to agree that “gold is for everyone; anyone can get lucky”; this mind-set blurs conventional boundaries and rules of access to wealth.<sup>16</sup> In other words, cooperation in the gold mines seems to rely on a formal ethic in which individual luck is central. Disputes are arbitrated by the *tombolomaw*; these most often concern the crosscutting of tunnels by teams engaged in neighbouring shafts, and are commonly settled by referring to the importance of sharing opportunities and by emphasizing that they ultimately benefit the entire mining community.

In the introduction to a special issue of *Social Analysis* on luck and fortune, Da Col (2012) addresses “luck” as a concept-event that generates “novel forms of subjectivities, inversions of familiar terms, and the reworking of distinctions, contradictions, and partitions between our own great cosmological divides: the religious and the economic, the moral and the material, the agentive and the random, the necessary and the contingent, the temporal immanent and the transcendent future.” (ibidem 2012:3) In the case of the artisanal gold mines, a similar process seems to be at play, whereby the usual oppositions do not apply. Luck is not opposed to hard work, agency is not opposed

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<sup>16</sup> I do not suggest that conflict is absent from mining spaces in Guinea and Mali: several examples at different scales (between miners, villages, and generations, between miners and private companies) imply the opposite. However, I argue that an ethic based on shared luck renders conventional lines of authority elusive in such spaces and allows for more egalitarian relations than in other spheres of production.

to contingency, and individuality is not opposed to collaboration. More concretely, in view of the organization of labour, strong bonds of interdependence notwithstanding, cadets are not subordinate to elders, strangers need not defer to locals, nor do women subordinate themselves to men, since all are theoretically recognized as having the same chances. Their different roles in the production process are valued differently, for example, courage and skills are valued among *kalayantigiw* or charisma among women, yet all have equal chances to strike it rich.

The exceptionality of mining situations to the dominant model of production based on institutions of *nymakala* (caste-like specialists) and *fasiya* (patriarchal seniority) suggests that a proper ethical system based on luck can cohabit with traditional morality. Although various aspects of everyday life, such as health or reproduction, also refer to “luck” as something that can be manipulated if approached appropriately – for example, through the intercession of *féticheurs* or *marabouts*, which both imply individual engagement – mining is peculiar in that luck is addressed collectively through cooperation but experienced individually. Before continuing, I shall make more explicit how notions of fate and luck are usually understood in the Mandinka world, in the context of the role played by *féticheurs* and *marabouts*. As Saskia Brand puts (2001a), “life in the Mandé is conceived as a path leading from birth, at which a person is endowed with particular attributes, to death, when one’s destiny will have been fully revealed.” *Tere* (sort of vital force) and *baraka* (luck, easiness) are attributes received at birth through the mother, and are progressively revealed, as fate, throughout the life course, so that “whatever a person does in life, it has been decided beforehand” (Brand 2001:30). Then, the question is less about how to get good luck than how not miss it on one’s way, which mainly consists following religious obligations, complying with collective rituals, and making the sacrifices demanded by spiritual authorities. Approaching the question from the opposite side, Colleyn (2004) explains that “bad luck” or adversity is always attributed to the negligence of rituals and sacrifices. Since those are necessarily collective rites, they involve a high degree of cooperation between human and non-human participants, as was introduced with the example of the sacrifice earlier in this chapter. *Marabouts*, interceding through Islam, and *féticheurs*, interceding through animist rites, occupy the space between fate and human agency by dictating to individuals the sacrifices they have to make in order to see their efforts and actions rewarded. By doing so, these spiritual specialists become part of the cooperation network for luck, from which they benefit directly by being ceded part of miners’ income when they strike lucky.

So, striking lucky in the gold mines, I argue, is practically and symbolically the result of cooperation. Yet, this does not explain why the product of such cooperation remains individualized with such insistence. Williams (1981) has questioned the concept of “moral luck”, since in his view, luck resists moral evaluation because actions and results are uncoupled in moments of luck, which

makes morality elusive.<sup>17</sup> The absence of the “control principle”, as Williams calls it, is illustrated in the introductory story of this chapter: why would an old stranger win more after one week than a whole team who had worked for so long? If such questioning induced by the “control principle” falls within the limits of the western conception that while a person is interdependent on others, he is essentially accountable for himself, it does not necessarily resonate in the West African context, where notions of fate are decisive for the self,<sup>18</sup> and the necessity to cope with daily material uncertainties makes the fact that “life is lived within limits” more obvious (Jackson 2011). However, among the implications Williams identifies for luck situations, the role of egalitarianism deserves attention since it aligns with the idea that “anyone can get lucky” regardless of social background and affiliation.

I briefly come back to the traditional conception of luck in West African religions in an attempt to explain the possibility of a moral individual luck in a collective system of cooperation. As Fortes had shown in 1949, West African religions were essentially structured by the cult of ancestors and by relations of kinship and descent. In such context, “ancestors are elders”, as Kopytoff puts it (1971), and filial piety, is a duty of which the cult of ancestors is the ritualization, which nowadays, though contested, determines how young men manage their everyday lives, aspirations, and opportunities. The notion of fate is so intimately linked with the notion of kin group – destiny being defined at birth within one specific lineage – only a temporary exit from the group can allow transformation, for instance by going to the gold mines. There are few sites for individual luck. When I asked informants where else one could strike lucky individually, they mentioned either places of gambling such as the national lottery and PMU that are exclusively urban, or the fuzzy places encapsulated by “going abroad” (i.e., emigration). What these different places and situations have in common is that they imply a disconnection, at least partial or temporary, with close networks such as peers and parents,

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<sup>17</sup> The immorality of gold, as well as other metals, as a source of income is a widespread conception that ethnomineralogy associates with the “creative” role attributed to metals and smiths whose activity makes their position “too close” to the domain of God (Childs and Killick 1993; Chirikure 2015). In the Mandenka-speaking world, for instance, such an association has long contributed to the ambiguous position of *numuw* (smiths) within the community (Mc Naughton 1993), which is spatially concretized in the location of their compounds and forges at the margin of the village. Kante (1993) explains in detail how the forge also serves as a shrine and how *numuw* constantly intercede at the intersection of the human and non-human worlds. During my fieldwork, I repeatedly heard “*sano a ma gni*” (“gold is bad”) from my interlocutors, most of whom, paradoxically, were miners, and who were thus in close contact with the gold. Such a statement mainly refers to the dangers associated with gold, because of its proximity to the sacred, which comes with a number of interdictions (e.g., the distancing of menstruating women, theft) that are said to have dramatic consequences for the lineage (the worst being its interruption) if they are not respected. A more sociological explanation for the widespread notion of immorality that surrounds gold extraction is the link between local cosmologies and rapid accumulation. This view is found in the ambiguity of sudden and extremely localised sources of “polluted money” (High 2013) or ‘bitter money’ Werthmann (2003a); (Werthmann 2009a), which can only be used in specific consumable goods markets rather than in markets involving reproduction.

<sup>18</sup> Cissé (1981) explains that luck is mostly contained in the *tere* (located in the head of the person), which is also the vital force. A person can have a more or less good *tere*, for or against which little can be undertaken.



as if individual luck could only be envisioned when enfranchised from traditional hierarchies and lines of authority.

It would certainly be inaccurate to consider gold mining sites flat social spaces free from power relations, but since conventional hierarchies are apparently blurred, it is worth paying attention to the alternative hierarchies at play in the mines. I have discussed the different tasks performed by the teams, which in addition to determining their functions in the chain of actions also reflects their social position within mining spaces. The *kalayantigiw* claim status by reproducing a martial vocabulary – that is, by miners calling themselves “officers” or ranking themselves with imaginary medals: “one gallon”; “two gallons”; “three gallons”, and so forth, according to their experience, their knowledge of the subsoil, their command over secrets and Islamic verses to interact with the djinns, their capacity to endure hardship, their travels outside, and their capacity to anticipate and avoid accidents; all of these are extensively discussed at the coffee stalls that abound in the mining camps and contribute to the social value of people.

These masculine hierarchies are not only built in parallel to conventional systems of privilege based on age and lineage, but also often overcome them. Among the other social spheres in the Mandé world, hunting brotherhoods can serve as a heuristic tool to better understand the peculiarity of mining spaces, since the two activities share similarities in terms of being structured through alternative hierarchies. Moreover, their differences may be helpful in understanding the role of luck, personhood, and mobility in mining spaces.

### **3.5.1 Spaces of inversion? A heuristic detour through the *donsow***

Similar to contemporary gold miners, *donsow* [donso] (Malinké hunters) have traditionally embodied the itinerant adventurer, a sort of wanderer, in Simmel’s terms ([1908]1979). The *donso* comes today and leaves tomorrow, in contrast to the stranger who comes today and stays tomorrow. I use the figure of the *donso* as a heuristic model to reflect on the miners’ status and position in society. I argue that mine workers share some similarities with hunters in the way they are perceived, particularly concerning their liminal position (Kedzierska-Manzon 2014) and how they arrange themselves into various social categories. In the seemingly rigid Mandenka world, the status of hunters has often been identified as an alternative, opposing structure to that of the *nyamakala*, particularly because of their relation to space. Kedzierska-Manzon (2010) sees hunters’ social identity as marked by their liminal status, which she assigns to their regular movements in the bush, which, in contrast to the other villagers, becomes their main spatial referent. A hunter is defined by his belonging to the *donsolo*, which is inseparable from the learning of hunting procedures and his physical displacement in the bush while tracking game. Hellweg says that “A *donso* is the one who routinely re-enters his village from the forest and the savannah” (2001:46 cited in Kedzierska-

Manzon 2010). Hence, the focus placed on mobility rather than presence in the village makes movement a salient part of the *donso* identity, which could similarly be said of gold miners, who travel regularly (from one site to another), and which they affirm as a counterpoint to their more settled fellow villagers.

Cissé (1964) stresses the that the internal organization of the *donsow* is distinct from the *nymakala-horonw* social structure because this organization rejects all notions of clan, age, class or occupational status, and is instead structured only by internal seniority. As one of his respondents states, “[*donsow*] are from no country, their space is the bush and wherever the game is. They are from no clan nor race, not Malinké, not Bambara, nor Pulla” (Cissé 1964, 178, cited in Bredeloup 2008). There is no prescribed age to enter the *donsow*, but once a member has been consecrated by initiation, he must obey his consecrated elders and teach his consecrated cadets. Cissé refers to the situation as “the world upside-down” (1964, cited in Bredeloup 2008), which highlights how conventional hierarchies are rejected, echoing a recurring statement of gold miners, who qualify the gold mines as a ‘world apart’. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, among the *kalayantigiw*, hierarchy is only based on experience, so a 20-year-old man can be recognized as an “officer” and may teach an older man how to work in the underground tunnels, treating the latter as his *petit* (junior) within the context of the mines, thus inverting roles and statuses. While conventional statuses are maintained in the social life of the village, they disappear within the hunting brotherhood. Similarly, gold miners occupy a liminal position among contemporary Mandé, since, like hunters, they organize their everyday life in a symbolically dangerous environment far from the villages and maintain a highly mobile lifestyle.<sup>19</sup> Liminality, in the case of gold mining, is hence both an in between physical space, in the sense that mines are by definition ephemeral and deserted once the resources have been exploited or once the workers have been expelled, and an in between social space, since as in Turner’s understanding of ritual phases (1995), mainstream identifications, statuses, and moralities are temporarily suspended during this stage. Thus, in addition to allowing for horizontal forms of exchange and distribution during the production process, the hierarchies that emerge within mining spaces are grounded in an egalitarian system of relations where experience supersedes *fasiya* and *fabara* principles.

### 3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have followed the social life of a gold particle, starting from its existence as the property of djinns in the deep subsoil to its becoming a commodity to be sold at a market stall.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The next chapter addresses the idea of transition and transformation in the life course in their ambiguous relation with long-standing practices of adventurism which are central to the making of men’s personhood.

<sup>20</sup> Chapter 2 has traced the second part of the social life of a gold particle once it has integrated into trade circuits, that is, from the market stalls to the planes.

I have identified the various parties at stake in the different forms of ritually mediated exchange (of labour, of possibilities, of resources), including living and non-living entities. This focus has allowed me to sketch a micropolitical model of gold exploitation in the Mandé world, whose underlying ideational foundations can be outlined in two ways.

First, mental realities frame the presence – and for most miners, the movement – of gold, since it is owned by living entities that populate the subsoil. Since it is believed that the elders of the central lineage have made agreements with those entities, only they are entitled to interact with them at the dedication of a new plot for mining. This segregation, which is much stricter than in the agricultural sphere, justifies local residents' control of access to the subsoil, and their control of ritual power in these circumstances. As in most domains, there is a differentiation line between locals and strangers. However, natives are dependent on the external workforce of itinerant miners to extract the gold from their subsoil, and the relationship between them cannot be legitimized through the Mandé social order – for instance, through traditional institutions of hosting such as *tutorat* – that apply in the agricultural sector.

Second, both itinerant and local parties seem to agree on an inclusive narrative that gives a central place to the idea of “luck”. In contrast to conventional *fasiya* and *fabara*-based affiliations, anyone can strike lucky in the mines without the permission of an elder. This narrative, as I have shown, is concretized in everyday actions; the imaginary is turned into the real, as Godelier would put it (2007), especially when the ore is distributed, which is essentially a distribution of possibilities rather than a distribution of income. Although most miners are involved in a vast array of activities to generate their livelihoods, and though they continue in the mining sector largely due to the fact that the occupation allows for relatively regular earnings, the trope of the lucky strike remains central in the ideological framework of the micropolitics of gold mining.

As long as prices do not fall, earnings from gold mining will remain comparatively higher than in other sectors; I indeed met several persons who had left the security of wage labour in the industrial sector to fully engage in the artisanal mines. Nevertheless, income alone cannot explain the magnitude of the movement to gold mining. As this chapter has suggested, in addition to the underlying cooperation beyond and across conventional affiliations, the ethic of luck at play in everyday work may also contribute to the attractiveness of mining spaces for the alternative hierarchies, identifications, and sources of social value it facilitates. Similar to foraging situations, miners produce social spaces in which a form of egalitarianism is valued; as with hunting brotherhoods, miners' social practices suggest a state of liminality in which mainstream morality is suspended. Of course, this view falls within the set of representations that structure gold mining micropolitics and do not mitigate the conflicts and exploitation that takes place in the sector, although

it may bolster the appeal of mining spaces beyond purely economic explanations.<sup>21</sup> Such findings are consistent with similar ideas developed by Grätz (2009), who ascribes significance to the strength of friendships, and with Cuvelier's work on masculinities in Katangese mines (2011). However, in this chapter, I have put forward the hypothesis that gold's specific materiality in the Mandenka-speaking world is what is central to the making of such alternative spaces.

With the acceleration and intensification of gold extraction as a source of revenues coupled with declining agriculture, mandenka agrarian moralities – imbricated in cyclical time and well defined social structures (*fasiya*, *fabara*, *nyamakala*) – that still predominate in the village sphere are increasingly in competition with the work ethics of the mines wherein rapid change and cooperation beyond conventional lines of authority are permitted. The contradiction between both is mainly resolved by maintaining the two spaces of the mine and of the village symbolically and spatially separated. Mining work is acceptable among natives in the form of managing shafts from which they extract a rent that complement the agricultural production. In consequence, those who wish to “try their luck” in the tunnels rather move out of the village and adopt the mobile lifestyle of *kalayantigiw*. As a condition of their success, or to simply experience alternative ways of life, gold miners maintain a highly mobile, often transnational, lifestyle that will be explored in further detail in subsequent chapters. The next chapter explores further the hypothesis that artisanal mining spaces, like other liminal spaces, play a role in the making of male personhood by investigating the motives and aspirations of the young men who engage in gold mining.

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<sup>21</sup> The next chapter addresses the motives and aspirations for engaging in the gold mines through this lens.

## Chapter 4: Going for gold, making male personhood?

### 4.1 Introduction: “Another *kountani*! There are an increasing number of hotheads in these mines!”

One afternoon, after several weeks of working in a new shaft, Jah called me to let me know that he felt quite optimistic about the first ore washings from his latest *daman* (exploited well), and that I might like to come now that the extraction of the potentially rich ore had started. Being still busy in Siguiri town, it took me two days to return to Koundiana, which, it seems, had been enough time for the good news to spread among the villagers and the miners of Bougoufe.<sup>1</sup> When I arrived at the site, many experienced miners, so-called *kalayantigiw*, had already come to claim a turn in his well. Among them was Ibro, a Malian man who was around 25 years old, had just arrived in Bougoufe, and had been advised to try his luck at Jah’s. To convince Jah to let him dig in his well, Ibro was started telling him his story, which I will briefly summarize:

Ibro had first travelled to Libya, with the objective of migrating to Europe, as several peers from his home had done before him. This turned out to be a particularly harsh episode, and Ibro had witnessed the death of two of his co-travellers while crossing the desert. Once he had finally crossed the Algerian and Libyan borders, he found himself with no spare money to pay for the rest of the journey – the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea – and consequently, he had started working in Tripoli as a cart pusher shortly before the start of the civil war. Ibro said that he had been drawn into the war but had quickly left, but he did not wish to return to Mali, as he hadn’t won anything. He instead followed some of the friends he had met in Libya to Burkina Faso, where he started working in the artisanal gold mines, “by chance”. Following friends and rumours, he had finally ended up here in Koundiana, Guinea, which he attributed to a series of coincidences.

After a little chat on the side with Felix, a Nigerian man who had also intended to migrate to Europe some years ago, Ibro resumed his story. He said that he had been working in the mines for a year and, for the moment, considered it a good option for making money. Despite all the difficulties he had faced so far, he had not lost courage, he insisted to Jah, which he seemed to state as an argument to convince Jah to give him a chance to take a turn in the *daman*.

While presenting himself and his friend as “*morts-vivants*” to the attentive audience in Jah’s backyard, Ibro emphasized the epic nature of his adventure in the sense that he was “alone”, “following his heart”, and was “willing to endure hardship” in all kinds of contexts that

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<sup>1</sup> Literally “tent city”, a generic name for the improvised camps where newcomers and itinerant miners temporarily stay near the artisanal gold mines.

would normally be avoided. The whole story, though the different episodes were not very detailed, essentially seemed to be a show of “courage” during his adventure, the goal of which, once he had saved enough, would be to return home, launch a business, get married, and start a family.

Once the “*causerie*” (presentation chat) was over, and almost everyone had left the courtyard, Jah turned to Sandaly and I and said with a very disapproving tone, “Another *kountani*! There are an increasing number of hotheads in the mines here.”

Beside the uniqueness of each worker’s trajectory, the story displays some elements that, as I wish to show in this chapter, are recurrent in the lives of many itinerant gold miners and structures their journeys. Two aspects seem especially important in the way the newcomers view themselves. Initially, they request a position in the mine not on the basis of their expertise, but rather by showcasing their personal value according to their past experiences and demonstrations of courage. As other studies on West African migrants have shown (e.g. Andersson 2014; Bredeloup 2014), the absence of an economic alternative and the subsequent migration is often reframed through the vocabulary of adventure. Discursively, it is not only the hunger for gold and the need for subsistence that matters, but an imperious appetite for adventure, whatever the place or the domain.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the adventure of gold mining, at least initially, is considered a temporary phase before the return home as a responsible adult, a *kountigi*, a wise mind. This brings into question the role of such a journey in the fabric of masculinity and personhood. These observations lead to the following hypothesis: many miners perceive their activities in the mines as a random and temporary opportunity, and they undertake such journeys at a specific moment of transition from youth to adulthood. Therefore, it is important to understand workers’ engagement in the mining sector beyond the causal mechanisms associated with the so-called “poverty spiral” that development literature often highlights (c.f. Hilson 2009).

Placing aside poverty and the marginal economic position of those who enter the gold mining sector, in this chapter, I propose to understand the motives of gold miners in light of their age and aspirations at specific phases along the life course, as well as in relation to significant relationships throughout these phases. I shall hence characterize gold mining spaces as *liminal spaces* since they allow for a certain blurring of conventions, as the last chapter has highlighted. The notion of *liminality* applies to the context of gold mining spaces for at least three reasons: first and foremost, they feature an “anti-structure” as described by Turner (1995); that is, they allow for the relaxation or even the inversion of conventional social norms (e.g., egalitarian ethics vs. conventional hierarchies). Secondly, they are often seen as transitory and possibly facilitating the passage towards social male adulthood, and thirdly, they contain recurring elements of violence and impose a

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<sup>2</sup> Instead of a failed migration attempt like in Ibro’s story, many miners mention less distant journeys, often to the Ivory Coast, during which they “accidentally” start mining work along their way. In Niger, Grégoire and Gagnol (2017) have documented that many miners were “returnees from Lybia”.

proximity with death, as many rites of passage do. From such a perspective, it is clear that the attractiveness of artisanal gold mining, which is an extremely uncertain occupation, arises from not just the pursuit of economic profit and accumulation. Drawing on these ideas, this chapter will look at the liminal character of gold mining spaces through the framework of age, in particular, the relation between age, aspirations, and engagement in artisanal gold mining. The chapter finally makes the case that, among itinerant miners, the age group division is in practice quite porous since liminality tends to become the normal rather than a phase between well-defined age classes.

Though it is attractive, miners and the population in general consider gold to be dangerous. In addition to the intrinsic dangers associated with gold,<sup>3</sup> the risks undertaken by artisanal miners vary from the social uncertainty of distancing oneself from the domestic sphere to the physical risks associated with the manual excavation of shafts and tunnels, which causes many accidents and the deaths of hundreds of mine workers every year in the region.<sup>4</sup> So, on the one hand, gold mines are said to be appealing in terms of the potential they unlock, and hence, they are seen as a viable path to transition into adulthood since they provide relative autonomy. But on the other hand, the activity puts people at risk every day. By taking these intermediary observations as a starting point, and considering that miners might not see these points as being in opposition, this chapter seeks to understand the individual motivations of young men to engage in the uncertain and mobile way of life that gold mining demands.

I will do this by retracing their journeys based on discussions held in the mining camps, at their homes in Guinea or Mali, as well as during recorded interviews. My goal is to place their aspirations within the broader framework of their life histories by exploring the linkages between journeys and personhood, acknowledging that, as Gardner (2009) puts it, the experience of travel “affects the experience of moving through life”. These topics have been widely explored in the context of transnational migration, as such activities allow for economic contributions to the home and recognition, social status, and the making of personhood for the migrants in several places simultaneously. I understand personhood to be processual and relational in line with Jackson’s intersubjective perspective (2013), and I therefore aim to look at the tensions and issues in the relationships between young miners and their elders. In line with Jackson, I assume that there is no

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<sup>3</sup> As seen in the previous chapter, according to gold’s relational nature with living entities (djinnns), its mining and distribution makes it subject to potential symbolical pollution and can put the clan at risk when specific principles of reciprocity are not respected (e.g., it is believed that the theft of gold or the failure to perform requested sacrifices can provoke the interruption of the lineage on the next generation; there are numerous stories of sudden death, illness, and infertility in such cases.)

<sup>4</sup> Because of the informal nature of ASM, there are no “official” numbers. However, estimations established on local Red Cross and police reports situate the mortality rate due to mining accidents to as high as 18% in the population of able-bodied men in the region of Bouré. Grätz (2010) provides detailed descriptions of how miners think about and cope with death and mourning in Burkina Faso. Many similarities can be found with my own research, especially concerning the spontaneous support networks that emerge in the mining settlements.

single definition of “good”, since, in people’s view, it changes with time (processual) according to their experiences and interactions (relational). Indeed, parents may judge the activities of their sons poorly (e.g., gold mining sites are often described as “*mamaya*”, that is, a place where people act unproductively without thinking of the consequences of their actions), while it is exactly what the latter may value. Although in development literature, there is no alternative narrative to the “poverty driven” one (e.g. Hilson and Potter 2005; Sinding 2005b) that explains why so many people risk their lives in underground tunnels and endure such poor living and working conditions instead of cultivating crops in their village, many of my interlocutors mentioned reasons other than subsistence to explain their departure to the artisanal gold mines. In this chapter, I am not questioning the poor material conditions of rural dwellers in West Africa, but rather, the subjective motives of individuals that lead them to take unconventional routes. This brings me back to Jackson’s affirmation that people “are never entirely determined by social orders and their moral rationales”. He adds, “this sense that virtue cannot be totally prescribed or predetermined means that much ethical activity is best understood as a function of the relationships between unpredictable situations, [e.g., episodes of loss and fortune, accidents and sudden deaths along mining journeys], and extent moral norms [e.g., of contributing to the household livelihood]” (2013: 8). In the following sections of this chapter, I draw on a specific figure in the gold mines: the so-called *kountaniw* (literally “hard heads”, who infringe on all kinds of norms in their journeys). Experienced miners and the local population see them as “hotheads”<sup>5</sup> who seek hope at a high risk, representing an extreme – almost clichéd – image of youth, as opposed to *kountigiw*,<sup>6</sup> who are seen as responsible miners struggling to make a living. I question the popular discourse about their supposedly irresponsible and sometimes immoral behaviour, in light of the aspirations of the young male gold miners I interviewed.

I begin by discussing the notions of life course and transition, which I consider to be an entry point for understanding the miners who are entering a field of activity that is often stigmatized (Tschakert 2009a; Werthmann 2003b) because of its illegality and the systemic risk-taking it demands (Grätz 2009; Heemskerk 2003). The chapter will then discuss the oft-contested aspirations of young men who engage in mining journeys, and the ways they attempt to reconcile these meaningful episodes in terms of personhood in a gerontocratic system. I use the stereotypical image of *kountaniw* (intrepid hotheads, literally “hard heads”), as opposed to *kountigiw* (responsible, literally “wise heads”), to discuss their engagement in gold mining, as well as the generational struggles that underlie their mining journeys.

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<sup>5</sup> Literally traduced from French “têtes brûlées”, used as an equivalent to Maninkakan “*kountaniw*”.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 8 addresses in greater detail how experienced artisanal miners use their social networks to make systems of mobility to support their itinerant livelihood.



## 4.2 Age, transitions, and mobility

In the self-aware history of the Mandé world, production is mainly structured by age, gender, and lineage; however, these factors shrink in importance in the context of the artisanal gold mines (see previous chapter). This chapter examines why young men leave home for the mines, and how these journeys affect their relations in the *fabara* (“place of the father”, place of lineage affiliation). In this section, I address in more detail the age stratification in the mines – with the potential conflict it entails – through the notions of life course and transition.

Relations among the Mandé in everyday life become most visible when they touch the domains of production; these are highly structured according to age group, as well as seniority.<sup>7</sup> The main principle is *koroya* (rule of seniority) (Doumbia 2001; Panella 2007), which induces a form of “*aînesse sociale*”, as Meillassoux called it (1975). It is a set of obligations that youths have towards elders, especially their fathers,<sup>8</sup> and consequently, the appropriation by the latter of the labour provided by the youth for further distribution. This is rather clear in rural agricultural contexts where families tend to be big, and where younger members work for the family’s production, which is redistributed thereafter by the *lutigi* (head of the *lu*). Beyond kinship, production is also organized by seniority, as in apprenticeship systems, which are more prevalent in urban areas. There, apprenticeships tend to replicate the institution of *koroya*, so that apprentices in whatever domain, be it a garage, a tailor shop, or a jewellery workshop, work in return for their master’s knowledge, secrets, and support until they are released. These powerful relations of authority, of male elders upon their cadets, are maintained all along the life course and are reproduced with the following generations of cadets, and between successive formalized age groups at the scale of the village.

Specific events and changes related to biological and social development, which are more or less ritualized, also mark different life phases. Doumbia (2001) lists five different categories of age,<sup>9</sup> of which two, *balukuya* (youth) and *makoroya* (adulthood), are of particular interest here. Indeed, as for Ibro, many miners are considered “youth” in the mining sector and project themselves as “adults” back home, out of the mines, or in any other temporary work sphere. Being an adult, which traditionally involves being a full-recognized person who can perpetuate the lineage through parenthood and by providing for the family through labour, is intimately linked with marriage and

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<sup>7</sup> In brotherhoods, like the *donsolow* (hunters’ brotherhood), these structures of authority are overcome by a hierarchy based on experience rather than age, which finds several parallels with the social organization among artisanal gold miners (Chapter 3).

<sup>8</sup> Kinship in the Mandé is of the *Iroquois* type, that is, the brothers of the father are categorical fathers, and the children of the father’s brothers are siblings.

<sup>9</sup> According to him, age categories rely on both, the biological (physical changes) and social age (initiations, acquisition of rights, and participation in specific institutions). *Denya* (early childhood, about 0–3 years), *denmisènnaya* (childhood, about 3–12 years), *balukuya* (youth, about 12–25 years), *makôrôya* (adulthood, about 25–60 years), and *makôrôbaya* (old age, about 60+ years); the study shows that, in practice, these categories are getting increasingly porous.

the establishing of a new house (*bo*), usually within the familial compound (*lu*). With regard to generational hierarchy, adulthood comes with new obligations towards one's own family unit, but also with greater decision-making power and recognition in the public sphere. It hence implies change in the social hierarchy (i.e., controlling the labour of others) and another order of reciprocity regarding elders (i.e., not just as recipient of their actions). This suggests a transition from one stage to the other, as well as a change toward a less mobile form of livelihood, with agriculture being the norm. As Jesper Bjarnesen (2013b) states, "the move away from home is often inscribed into local cosmologies as a move towards maturity and independence, and is often seen as the promise for a change in socioeconomic status, through the potential for accumulating wealth – to pay bride wealth, invest in agricultural land, buy urban property etc. In this way, these trajectories have been important acts of social practice for individual migrants as well as in a more general sense as cultural idioms of paths to adulthood". Furthermore, the adelphic mode of succession along collaterals restricts long-term mobility away from the physical location of the *lu*, for elder brothers are expected to take responsibility for those in the familial compound (Dessertine 2013). The home place – *fabara* (literally place of the father) – is seen as more than a physical place; it is an incorporating space to which people are bound regardless of their geographical location; the space in which personhood is socially acknowledged. Conceptually, what I wish to point out is that mobility is culturally seen as an expected stage in the life-cycle before returning "home", which, in practice, may not manifest or may impose adjustments within such a moral ideal (Brand 2001a).

"Stages" refers to periods characterized by "normative events" (Sapin, et al. 2007) regulated by institutions such as marriage or parenthood. "Going on an adventure", it seems, is increasingly considered such an institution, forming part of the transition to adulthood (Bredeloup 2014; Doumbia 2001; Durham 2000; Hertrich and Lesclingand 2013), as was initially the case among *numuw* (smiths) and other lineages *nyamakalaw*, where young men were encouraged to improve their smithing skills by travelling and working all over West Africa (Cissé 1964). Bredeloup (2014: 52) argues that, with the increase in migration to Europe in the 1990s, emigration has been conflated with other forms of adventurism, and a new moral value has emerged, that reversely stigmatizes non-migrating youths, who are often described as *tenesy* (stuck) (Jónsson 2012), who stayed on in their village rather than going on an adventure. A similar claim can be made about young Cameroonian migrants for whom the world outside home has become a "symbolical bush – a place at once of peril and transformative possibilities" (Jackson 2013: 27). The outside world becomes a space of ethical questioning as was the bush in traditional transitional stages and initiation. In that ideational framework, "going on an adventure" is seen as a way to become a man. It's a path not only towards material wealth, but towards the knowledge and experience that characterize male adulthood.

While adventurism was traditionally associated with social, and to a lesser extent, material wealth (Cissé 1964; Doumbia 2001; Kanté and Erny 1993; Rouch 1967) it turned into being a regular and much needed source of income when it started taking the form of seasonal wages in Ivorian plantations (Amselle 1976), and later, overseas migration to France, Spain, and Italy (Mazauric 2012). Nowadays, the contemporary context of extremely scarce economic opportunities and border closures emphasizes the new contradictions of this ideology of mobility. Contrary to “navétannes” of the colonial period, who worked when there was a demand for seasonal labour and brought in additional income annually, or those who migrated in the postcolonial period and contributed in the form of remittances (Amselle 1976), mobility is less and less associated with financial returns but remains a means to construct social personhood (c.f. Fioratta 2015). As a consequence, a growing number of young people find themselves on the move without access to economic opportunities. The most documented of these spaces are the so-called “transit zones”, mainly in North Africa and the Sahara, where migrants en route and other adventurers are “stuck” and settle down semi-permanently, struggling to make ends meet in these places and with no wish to give up on their aspirations and risk returning a failure (i.e. Brachet, et al. 2011; Choplin 2010; Schapendonk 2012). “Adventure” there takes a paradoxical turn since, as Andersson puts it, it is “eventlessness [that] defines migrant life in the enclaves” (2014, 214). Fioratta (2015) offers an interesting analysis of Guinean migrants in Dakar who can only afford to stay in the city, but cannot send money back to their families. They see their adventures as a way to evade “uselessness”, and prefer to be seen as struggling outside, despite the economic hardship such a choice entails and their nostalgia for village life in Guinea. As their adventures stretch out in time, they seem to suspend the course of life trajectories, while it is paradoxically part of the steps towards adulthood. From the macro perspective of time and labour, the experiences of young West Africans may be seen as another example of what Craig Jeffrey calls the “global economies of waiting” (2010), at some stage in the life-course. Global capitalism increasingly produces a “surplus population” across the globe, of which “youth”, as a category of the productive order, compose the greatest part, and at the same time, are the most excluded for they do not rely on entitlements as their elders do. Especially in sub-Saharan Africa, “where people have written into their minds certain hopes but for whom social goods are elusive”, many of them define themselves as “people in wait” (Fergusson 2006 cited in Jeffrey 2010: 4). For them, “waiting” increasingly becomes their main occupation. Afternoons are spent drinking tea and making plans for adventures and generating fortunes elsewhere, which become ways to imagine alternative futures. In this context, I argue that mining journeys are possibly an option to just try something, and thus actively make a decision regarding their lives, notwithstanding the few chances to actually strike it rich.

In this context, becoming an adult is only one aspect of personhood, as much as being an intrepid adventurer can be another aspect. Both, which either represent the *badenya* axis, duties and

compliance to the group, or the *fadenya* axis, individuality and competition for greatness, do not necessarily interplay, but are less clearly separable in different phases. Adventurism, it seems, does not lead any longer to adulthood and can, on the contrary, postpone the passage, while building a reputation remains nevertheless essential in the making of personhood. The ways these ambivalent aspirations interplay, as well as the potential tensions their conciliation implies, for becoming an adventurer no longer necessarily leads to becoming an adult, is the main topic of this chapter.

### **4.3     *Kountaniw'* ambivalent aspirations**

*Kountani* literally translates to “hard head”, meaning those who do not want to see reason, as understood in the common sense, and refers to young people who take important risks to achieve their goals. The expression, which hints at a set of risky practices, is pejorative for the transgressions it suggests. It is clearly an external categorization (like *Jah* about *Ibro*) rather than a form of self-identification. Young people would call themselves adventurers, or tap into the repertoire of their experience as miners and identify as *kalayantigiw*. However, although those who fall into the category of *kountaniw* would not necessarily use the same word to define themselves, they constantly play such outsider roles. In the next three sections, I first look at their aspirations from the perspective of their departure and their introduction to the gold mines. Then, I look at what they do when their adventure brings them reward, and finally, when it does not. I try to focus on their relationships during their journeys, including relations with peers, relatives, and the *fabara* at large, in order to place them in larger processes of transition.

#### **4.3.1         Escaping inactivity: betting on the journey**

Can someone “love” working in hazardous and harsh conditions without any certainty of financial return? According to the (somewhat provocative) viewpoint held by many young gold miners, the answer is yes. In this case, the question is also about what these activities are an alternative to. In this section, I look at how gold miners conceive mining as an alternative to conventional life course trajectories in their villages.

Young miners, or older miners recalling their early days in the artisanal mines, constantly contrast their life in the mines with their life in the village, the family, or the *fabara* (home-place) in general. The story was usually narrated as a series of back and forth geographical movements between the opposing spaces, corresponding to moments of opposition, negotiation, and conflict with significant elders. In these accounts, the home-place is described as a place where they feel they are constrained or “do nothing”, as Mbrema describes his younger years:

Look, I was home, I was just seated there every day in the courtyard, waiting for them to call me for work, but there was no work. There was no other boy at home, so I was the elder.

I had to stay there, for if someone comes to our place, I was responsible for taking care of their needs. How can I take care of the needs with no job, I asked my parents. They didn't want to hear anything, but just wanted me to cultivate crops when needed and stay at home for the rest of the time. For me, this just meant remaining seated, doing nothing. I complained and told them that I would rather go to the mines at least to cover my own expenses, but they said no, I should not leave the familial compound, and that they would find me some work. I stayed for four more months like this, but after that, I could not bear this situation any longer. I finally told them that I was leaving to the bush (to the gold mines), and that I would be better off sending money home from there and taking care of myself, instead of staying home and only consuming.

Over the ten years, there were continuous disputes between Mbrema and his father concerning his long incursions into the gold mines in Guinea, Mali, and Liberia. The same story goes for many others, whose departure does not equate with sudden wealth accumulation, but who rather insist on how their life in the gold mines allows them to imagine a positive image of themselves in the future. In their accounts, they often speak of the mines as a space for "hope", as opposed to the expected trajectories in their close social environment. In this context, the gold mines are often presented as holding an irresistible attraction despite the harshness that comes with them, and – except in exceptional cases – the little concrete income they generate.

Issa, for instance, a 22-year-old Malian who has spent two years in the mines of Mali and Senegal, mentions the strength of the attraction of the mines, which he says he is now "bound to":

Issa: I started doing mining works four years ago with a friend from Kati who asked me to come along. We earned a little that first time and went back to the village; since that day, I am bound to the mines. I can say that I love working in the mines. I felt strongly about it when I came back home for the first time. I didn't stay there even for a whole month before going out again... Every time I returned to the village, I felt more and more discouraged. As I told you, I got connected with gold mining from the start.

Matthieu: So, what makes you feel so strongly bound to mining works?

Issa: Once you are in the gold mines, at least there is hope – there is hope to make money. It's what makes me stay here rather than go home. I haven't earned much, but I know I can. At home, I just stay there doing nothing and I know it won't change. Nothing can change there. Before, I was learning to be a driver...but you are an apprentice and you don't earn anything unless when your master takes pity on you. And you know it will be like this for years until you are released, and still you won't work on your own if you don't have a vehicle. In the mines, you can work only one month and one day you may earn more than in any other job. It's the view I have taken....

Matthieu: And how is it going so far?

Issa: I haven't earned anything yet except for my everyday expenses. But I have got hope. I know I will, it's inside me...I am just following my spirit. And when I earn, it will multiply much faster than if I had just stayed home.

“Hope” in his account is intimately related to “money”, although he hasn’t found any encouraging sign of it so far. The possibility of “going faster” is what seems to animate him the most, even if his goal, which he is so urgently aiming at, remains vague. In practice, the mines allow him to make possibilities vivid instead of them remaining inactive, which, in his description, seems to satisfy a vital need.<sup>10</sup> In sum, engagement in artisanal gold mining is presented as a form of bet: a path to possibly going faster than one would if following the conventional route of apprenticeship embedded in seniority and age hierarchies.

The parallel between mining and gambling, which I have already drawn through the lottery metaphor, applies to the life trajectory of the miners. To consider engagement in the artisanal mines as a “bet”, or as consecutive binding bets as Becker suggests (2006), necessitates defining what the bet is for; it seems to be less a bid for “getting rich”, regardless of familial obligation, than, precisely, for fulfilling filial obligations, as I will show next.

Issa presents his engagement in the gold mines both as a means to be “active” rather than “do nothing at home”<sup>11</sup> and, consistent with Mbrema’s narrative (as well as many other young men), a way to evade patriarchal authority. He clearly affirms that he is willing to endure the uncertainty of the miners’ way of life. He claims that he has liked it since he first began working on the mines, although it has not brought him any financial wealth yet. In his story, the important part for him is that he is “active”, which takes the form of long and very demanding hours in underground galleries and tunnels and constant travelling from one site to another when he feels – “inside him” – that opportunities arise. Being constantly on the move resembles a quest, which despite its uncertain results, promises that life may change suddenly without transitioning through all the prescribed stages of traditional Mandé gerontocracy. In short, what Issa and the others state is their determination to take their chances to “make money” faster, even if it fails, and even if it comes with increasing conflict with their elders. Given the relative assurance of making at least small revenues in the gold mines, what their “bet” engages with is mainly time, that is, “going faster” if they get lucky, instead of “falling behind” in becoming adults if they do not.

#### *A very concrete bet: extracting gold from the samasen*

This feeling of urgency “to go faster” takes a very concrete form when applied to the different excavation techniques used to access gold in the tunnels, and the related practices of risk-taking. In

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<sup>10</sup> Conversely, the same repertoire is used in the discourse of parents in the home-place who consider their male relatives in the gold mines as “not being able to do anything else”, as though they have no other choice.

<sup>11</sup> The importance of being active is consistent with analyses of the notion of person in the Mandé world. According to (Germaine 1988), according to spatial movement mirrors movement in time and is hence essential in maintaining the *tere* (positive strength and conscience). The same idea was developed more recently by Vigh (2006) from his fieldwork with young soldiers in Guinée-Bissau.

this section, I narrate stories of hazardous operations that are often described as typical *kountani* behaviour. Indeed, accidents and rescues form the backbone of miners' stories, and act as markers in chronological accounts of their journeys and personal evolution in the sector.

Underground, tunnels rapidly lose the linearity that the shafts' alignment on the surface suggests. Some get wider and higher, like vast rooms, where rich deposits have been uncovered; others become extremely narrow and only serve to reach another gallery or let air circulate; all suddenly go up or down depending on the direction the quartz deposits that contain gold indicate. The most important safety rule is that the so-called *samasen*, literally *elephant feet* (the remaining pillars), which sustain the whole system of galleries, are left untouched by the teams, no matter their potential gold content. In abandoned mines, it is not unusual for *kountaniw* to take their chances in cutting into the *samasen*; it is certainly a more hazardous technique, but also supposedly a more certain way to obtain golden flakes. Such "rites," as Le Breton (2002) would probably qualify them, are presented as a game of dares. By bringing up a sack of ore cut from the *samasen* before the tunnel collapses, young miners compete and evaluate their respective "courage". In addition to these risky competitions, which tap into the performance of "bravery",<sup>12</sup> young men constantly judge themselves in view of their respective abilities, strength, endurance, and "courage" to go deep and remain for long hours underground. The first descent into the galleries in a new site can help determine their reputation and the possibility of them getting work later in the wealthiest shafts. Those who do not dare descend or who get stuck while descending the wells are not given a second chance to take a turn in the wealthiest shafts.

While elder miners and members of the *tomboloma* (customary police in the mining sites) condemn these risky behaviours, they also emphasize that they exhibited the same behaviour in their earlier years in the gold mines, hence pointing to a kind of rite of passage among young men throughout generations. Jah, for instance, relates his first journey 20 years ago, where there had been three successive shaft collapses, and though he had avoided the first two, he had been caught in a tunnel in the last one and had to be rescued by his friends. Interestingly, at the end of his story, Jah added, "but you know, I was doing all kind of stupid things at that time", and very proudly, he began listing all the norms he had infringed. In his narrative, Jah made very clear the difference between the two periods of his life, his earlier years as a young outsider as opposed to his cautious and calculated travels at the present time. In comparison to the other stories, and despite his initial goal of making money fast, what emerges from Jah's past journeys is less the acquisition of material wealth, rather than the experience of risk-taking and pushing boundaries away from his home-place.

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<sup>12</sup> As recalled by Wa Kamissoko (2009) the historical domains of masculinity, besides clan leadership (*mogoya*), include bravery (*cè farinya*) and occupational expertise (*mansaya*).

As suggested earlier, making personhood is above all a relational process which can be expressed in different social spaces and that can either foster the *badenya* aspect of personhood, oriented toward the home community, or the *fadenya* aspect of personhood, expressed through individualistic performances of the self. Mining sites typically offer spaces for *fadenya*-oriented behaviours, e.g., through spending on peers, while they also imply being absent from the home-place which may hinder other forms of reciprocities, such as those with the family, which sustain the *badenya* aspect of the social person. The next section addresses this tension through the moral dilemmas faced by young miners and their attempts to solve them.

#### **4.3.2 Absence and expenses**

So-called *kountaniw* see themselves as outsiders and risk-takers, unlike other villagers or less mobile artisanal mine workers, and are reversely labelled as such. As shown in the previous section, they present their appetite for gold as a natural disposition, something they feel deeply inside themselves and that binds them, almost addictively, to the gold mines. Risks are taken mainly to get money or autonomy from elders faster, which implies actively seeking fortune wherever it may be, rather than following conventional trajectories structured by seniority. In this section, I look at their aspirations from the other side – that is, not how they obtain cash or what they are willing to risk for it, but what they do with it once they have it. I first try to see how they relate cash with autonomy in their relationship with their elders.

In their stories, they seem to experience a feeling of “freedom” in their ability to move rapidly from one place to another for uncertain periods of time, which they do without requiring the consent of their elders. From a moral stance, young men’s journeys to the mines are tolerated as long as they do not compromise their presence during the cultivation season. Money, like other components of large households’ livelihoods, traditionally passes through elders and in particular the father or head of the *lu*. It plays a particular role in shaping what the miners describe as autonomy. While it does not necessarily mean cutting bonds, the goal of autonomy may imply tensions when resources are involved. As Bähre states, “the solidarities of kinship do not unfold in opposition to conflict but in the midst of it; they involve small bonds with social tensions” (2007: 52, cited by Ferguson 2015: 107). The following excerpt from Issa’s story illustrates such an argument, considering that cash from the mines is increasingly used to monetize the elders’ consent.

I knew my father didn’t want me to go, but I decided to go anyway. When I left one morning, only my mother knew that I was going to do so. Before we were three days out, my elder brother and my father came find me. They told me that if I was not in the village, I had to pay for the family... I told them that I was not coming back; that I was not going to cultivate crops. I was on my own now, getting money on my own, and I would pay if I had something. I gave them the little I had and now it’s fine, I go wherever I want, I am free like the wind in the desert, and I just send something when I can.



Such episodes of opposition are a motif in most stories and tend to indicate the tendency to compensate for the absence from the domestic sphere with payments, or remittances, as they would be called in a migratory context. When the distances are not too large, like in Issa's episode, it is not unusual for the head of the household to send one or two of his sons to the gold mines to literally confiscate the earnings of their absent brother. While narrating his journeys in Mali and Guinea, Sayon, for instance, mentioned that his close relatives had tried to convince him five times to come back home, sometimes undertaking long journeys to find him and bring him back. But they had all agreed to accommodate him when he sent money home instead.

In Sayon's story, after being absent from his village for nearly one year, and during which he had made quite consistent earnings, he met a friend from his home-place in the mining camp of Norasuba (Guinea). The friend had not been as lucky as he and could hardly afford to return to the village. Sayon helped cover his friend's transport expenses and gave him some cash to hand over to his own father. No more than one week later, his mother visited Norasuba, imploring him to come back to the village and help his father and brothers in the farm. Sticking to his position, Sayon refused to return, and instead gave his mother additional cash for the family as compensation for his absence. In his narrative, the same episode repeats again and again with small variations and with other relatives visiting the mine imploring him to return: two of his brothers, his mother a second time, another brother, and finally his father. The story concludes with him discharging his father from finding him a spouse and paying the *dot*, which he explained as such:

M: You discharge him from what?

S: From my spouse problem. They don't need to bear the expenses to marry me. I will marry a woman from the area with money from the gold mines. I have already paid for all the expenses for the wedding and we are about to marry now. I can pay everything on my own. I went back to the village recently and paid for food and insecticide, which are family expenses. I will do the same for the wedding; there will be no cost for my parents. My father himself saw that I could do it and so accepted to release me.

Sayon explained later that the issue is not so much that they needed him to work on the family farm, but rather what he represents in terms of potential costs and wedding-related expenses for his parents, whose access to cash is very limited. With his greater access to cash from the gold mines, Sayon somehow imposes his will on his parents and organizes for himself the transition to adulthood. At the same time, the whole process is not presented as a conflict, but rather as a welcome economic agreement – justified as a compensation of physical labour – from the parents' perspective.

Panella has similarly identified a progressive “monetization of social relations” (2007) in a village of the Malian Wassoulou, an area increasingly surrounded by several artisanal gold mining fields, a phenomenon that she linked to processes of individual accumulation and saw as a source of

generational conflict. What she interpreted as disruptive in the social order of that specific community, seems to now aid the integration of possible paths towards adulthood for young men, as illustrated in Sayon's story. Among the elders, it seems to have turned into a conventional strategy to diversify livelihoods, in which the absence of younger men – especially those engaged in a questionable field of activity like mining<sup>13</sup> – allows elders to pressure them and justify confiscation of a part of their incomes. What I suggest is that both, sons and fathers, play their roles in the plot to preserve a certain moral ideal. Yet, as stressed by Sayon, it is no secret that though they are stigmatized by their elders because of their occupation, their families are increasingly dependent on what they earn from the gold mines. These plays, in which the elders blame the cadets for their absence from the *lu* and receive cash in return, have now reached such a degree of standardization that, as I accidentally found, they are reproduced in local comedies. One evening, as we were watching all sorts of comedies on a DVD heavily loaded with videos, we watched the guinean made movie *Akan N'dya Praa*,<sup>14</sup> which, to the delight of Kalou, Sandaly, and Issa, repeatedly stereotyped old men comfortably pontifying on the immoral behaviour of their sons in the mines while simultaneously living upon their labour.

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<sup>13</sup> On that topic, Werthmann (2003a) draws on the notion of bitter money to discuss the notion of ill-gotten wealth from the gold mines. Tschakert (2007) shows how artisanal miners are marginalized and ostracised in Ghana. Chapter 3 of the dissertation briefly addresses some of the inherent perceived dangers of extracting gold which is considered a property of the *djiné*.

<sup>14</sup> “Akan N'dya Praa” ironically means “I am doing right”, which stresses the emic view of gold mining as morally acceptable in opposition to its stigmatization outside the social world of miners.

Figure 4-1 Screen shot of VCD Guinean theatre piece “Akan N’dya Praa”: two elders blaming the son for his immoral occupations in the gold mines.



Source: Djenné Bamba (script) and Aminata Sylla (direction), year unknown

Whereas so-called *kountaniw* argue that their aim is to get money and become autonomous “faster” than if they had stayed home, their stories indicate that their adventures in the gold mines do not necessarily enable a transition towards adulthood faster; instead, the transition becomes more hazardous and dependent on luck. However, they seem to reshape this period of transition by making use of their earnings to present themselves in front their elders and sometimes take the higher ground in important matters such as marriage. Their departure to the mines, which is often seen as a form of dissent, can hence also be read in light of their conventional aspirations of contributing towards their home-place, or *fabara*. Moreover, as noted in the comparable context of rural Senegal, the decreasing returns from the agricultural sector have also contributed to encouraging young men to marry earlier than in the past, often under the relative pressure of their elders, who urge them to take responsibility for the household (Perry 2009). In that context, we might question whether the labelling of young miners as “hotheads” obsessed with quick money, and the blame levied on them for their antisocial behaviour towards their families, are justified. It is possible that these behaviours only reflect the few options available to them to fulfil filial obligations rather than their urgency to accumulate money. Indeed, the aspirations of Sayon, Issa, and Mbrema were not obviously limited to “owning a motorbike” or “wearing nice clothes”. Their aspirations also go beyond “projects” such as investing in a small business or turning artisanal mines into small mechanized mines, which are both resurgent

fantasies in development circles (e.g. Amankwah and Anim-Sackey 2003; Jaques, et al. 2005). For most of these miners, aspirations are inseparable from the home-place, *fabara*, where personhood is usually made and recognized, and are, as for Sayon, sometimes difficult to conciliate because of their absence from the village. Their wishes invariably included goals such as building their parents a “solid house” or financing their brothers’ and sisters’ education, somehow turning their individualistic *fadenya*-oriented adventure into a merely *badenya*-oriented form of contributing the family’s livelihood. Although these wishes certainly reflect the moral discourse that young men may feel expected to display, the effective practices for their realization depends more on their luck in finding gold than on simply on their desire to support their parents. So, moral obligations concerning expenses in the family as opposed to every day expenses as expected by peers in the mines can be contradictory. As Mills suggests in her work on the plural notion of “selves” among rural Thai women working in Bangkok (Mills 1999, chapter 7), there is a strong moral dimension to earning and expenditure. In the case she documented, women had to negotiate their aspiration for what they saw as “modernity” while playing the role of good daughters and sending money home. In the gold mines, all expenditure suggest a battle between competing “selves” in the sense that anything spent onsite is less available to send home, and reversely, what is not spent onsite and kept for the family may be viewed by peers as greed. The next section looks at this problem in particular.

#### *A very concrete expense: buying a motorbike*

Though their aspirations are closely tied to the home-place and the family, individual consumption, showing off, and constructing reputations while on the move are also a part of the adventurous lives led by gold miners.<sup>15</sup> From this perspective, miners’ expenses can apparently take two different forms: expenditure onsite or at their home-places, which, as is widely documented in the literature on transmigration and remittances, can be experienced as a perpetual dilemma (and potential area of moral breakdown) (see i.e., Ibrahim’s story in Jackson 2013; Timera 2002). In the peculiar setting that is a gold mine, in which enormous amounts of wealth can surge swiftly when a gold bearing vein is hit, miners, as part of their *ethics of luck*, are expected to display their wealth and circulate their money on site, which is especially contradictory to family-related moral obligations. In this section, the purchase of a motorbike, a symbol of success and one of the most desired items in mining camps, is used as an example to spotlight these contradictions and examine how they are resolved.

In the villages or transit towns along the routes leading to the gold mines, a recurrent topic in the discussions of miners was the idea of leaving one’s place via public transport and returning home

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<sup>15</sup> Werthmann (2008) provides a detailed comparative analysis of “frivolous squandering” at gold mining camps in Burkina Faso, which she interprets as a means of engendering social coherence in the mining camps. Grätz (2009) has also pointed to consumption as central to miners’ migrant identity and cohesion.

with a motorbike. This was stated a concrete goal before going to the mines, and served as a material and timed objective, so that one could return home if it was attained – but this was very rarely the case. In contrast, seeing others ride their way back on their own bike served as a confirmation that one or another mining field had potential, and from which “many people had returned owning their own bike”. In a discussion with a young man called Fode in Kantedou Balandou, Guinea, the whole process of travelling to the mines, working in the shafts, and returning home was encapsulated in an elliptic sentence: “I am going to Mandiana to get a motorbike.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, after coffee shops and food courts, motorbike sellers are among the first to set up shop in the market alleys of temporary mining camps. Motorbikes of all kinds are sold, despite their higher prices compared to what they would cost in the cities, and their use and purchase defy conventional norms of non-ostentation.

In Kokoyo for instance, once the miners have left the mining fields at around 4 p.m., the roar of motorbikes indicates that the day is truly over. A multitude of young people spend the early evening riding bikes around and inside the camp – a behaviour that elders would condemn for being irresponsible, extravagant considering the price of gas, and dangerous: in other words, typical *kountani* behaviour. In Kokoyo, the *tombolomaw* (local mine authorities) blame this “inconsistent behaviour” for frequent accidents in the camp. For this reason, the *tombolomaw* decided to exclude dangerous riders, though this measure was never really implemented. Young miners are also mocked by residents for privileging fancy models, especially sports bikes, which are more expensive and technically not suitable for the terrain. The same kinds of judgements are also made about the squandering of gasoline on “unnecessary rides”. One of the most recurrent stories that emphasized the irrationality of this behaviour revolves around “that guy who bought a second and a third motorbike just because he didn’t know how else to spend his money”; in short, consumption in its most ostentatious form in such a context. Yet, though it is subject to much discussion, owning a motorbike remains the exception rather than the rule. Therefore, I would situate the item as an object of desire and as an indicator of the low proportion of successful miners among the broader population. From the perspective of consumption choices, ambivalent moral obligations become clearer. Werthmann also observed a similar opposition to the making of “bitter” money by Mossi gold miners in Burkina Faso (2003). She argues that “money” extracted from the gold mines is “bitter” for it was considered polluted and sterile, since it deprives the earth and their ancestors from their property; consequently, spending it on social occasions essential for the reproduction of the community, such as bride prices, cattle, or funerals, was forbidden for it carried risks of sterility. Similar findings were reported by Andrew Walsh (2003), who observed that Malagasy sapphire miners would label money earned through sapphire mining as “hot money”, which had to be consumed “daringly” to fulfil immediate desires rather than be invested with long-term intentions.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Fode Kante in Kantedou Balandou before he left on the next day for a mining trip.

Yet similar narratives and practices regarding the instantaneous uses of money, as well as forms of ostentatious consumption, suggest a more balanced view on the polluted effectiveness of mining incomes. Indeed, I argue that once it is converted into all sorts of items, income from gold mining may serve different purposes that allow one to negotiate expectations both in the moral world of the mines and at home, and create value in these apparently separate spaces, as the following scene shall illustrate.

*Picture 4-1 Riding sports bikes at the end of the day in Karakhéna, 2014*



“Apache [sports bikes] are nicer, but a Sanili [conventional robust bike] is better for transport and maintenance,” was a common topic in everyday conversations. Studying the recurrent discussions about how best to choose a motorbike provided interesting insights into how young miners balance competing moral obligations such as onsite spending versus saving for their parents, as well as how they handle their own desires for purchasing goods. Again, fellow miners expect those who strike it rich to spend in a *fadenya*-oriented way, by both, serving the group locally (i.e., food, cigarettes, etc.) and by showing off their value individually (i.e., motorbikes, urban flashy clothes, etc.). They also know that miners’ spending is expected to be *badenya*-oriented, and contribute to lasting assets such as a home added to the family compound. In other words, the miners are compelled to spend money that they do not necessarily have in various places and spaces. The desire for motorbikes partly highlights these contradictions, because they can also contribute to their resolution; that is, I argue that they allow one to achieve all of these goals – displaying wealth, spending onsite,



and saving for the family – or at least contribute to achieving them. How this is done can be exemplified by the following scene:

On a *kebe*<sup>17</sup> afternoon in Kokoyo (Mali), while in his tent, Kalou provoked his *petit*, Moussa, by attacking the irrationality of the latter's recent acquisition of a sports bike, arguing that Moussa would have done better by keeping his money, returning to his home-place in Guinea next year with the savings, and buying a Sanili in Conakry for less than half the price that what it had cost him here. Petit Moussa answered without contesting the provocative comment, but instead emphasized that making profit *per se* didn't matter in his rationale:

Firstly, there was no point in enduring such hardship if no money was to be spent.

Secondly, Moussa insisted on a joke – the bike looked great, especially in comparison to the awful Sanili bikes such as Kalou's one.

Third and most importantly, Moussa said that he already had a motorbike at home. He would sell this one once back in his village, no matter the price difference, and the money from the bike would go to his father.

Instead of accumulating and saving money, which was an obsessive preoccupation for Kalou, Petit Moussa was in fact stating that since he had earned his income through luck, earnings had no other purpose but to be spent where they permitted pleasure and eventually to gain social status. Moussa's argument also reinforced the symbolical boundary between him, young and adventurous *kountani*, and Kalou, experienced and cautious *kountigi*. However, what the example also puts forward is a sincere preoccupation to fulfil filial obligation by bringing a share of it back home.

In this example, it becomes clear that accumulation is not a priority, as some popular narratives about miners would suggest (i.e. Hilson 2010). Yet, money is not to be squandered either, as Werthman argues in the case of Burkinabe gold miners (2008). Rather, what seems to be important is that miners make use of their time in the mines to build personhood both in terms of the esteem of their peers and at home through spending and consumption, of which motorbikes function as a recognizable and transferable sign of success in the mining camps as well as in the home village. To paraphrase Graeber, the "value" of the bike lies amidst the economic, ethical, and semiotic fields which it merges as "refractions of the same thing" (Graeber 2001, cited in Penfield 2015: 30), that is, at the same time, it is the outcome of an economic exchange facilitated through labour, the fulfilment of a moral obligation, and a sign of success among peers, regardless of how much money was in the end "lost" in the transaction. In the everyday uncertainty of the mines, such acquisitions can also be a means of setting a deadline to one's journey, serving as a concrete goal that maintains hope and helps miners endure working conditions and signals a way out upon being achieved. The

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<sup>17</sup> On Monday, which is market day, and on Friday, which is the day of worship, no one is permitted to work in the artisanal mining sites. These days are called *kebe* and, besides their primary function as days of market and prayer, they are mainly used for relaxation and leisure.

expression “going to get a bike” is often used as a metaphor for “going to the gold mines”. It encompasses the idea that the acquisition is a goal marking the ultimate destination of the journey, after which a return can be considered.

Although it bears its own logic, encompassing moral obligations towards both the *lu* in the village and the peers in the mines, to Sandaly and Jah, Moussa’s rationale seemed typical *kountani* behaviour. They asserted that it is important to be cautious with one’s spending, promoting an almost ascetic lifestyle crafted to make money last, and avoiding debts “by avoiding women and not buying useless items”. Kalou regularly made this point very clear when he spoke about the precarious conditions in which he lived in the camp that so strongly contrasted with his quite luxurious house where we stayed in Siguiri. He could pay and rent a house in the villages near the mining sites, he said, but if he would do that he might lose the “strength and courage” to do harsh work in the mine. The “responsible” attitude of *kountigiw*, which is expected considering their position as comparative elders, appears to convey a message about their own status, and asserts the claim that they did not need these forms of distinction to be “someone”.

So far, I have looked at the aspirations and practices of young miners categorized as *kountaniw* for their allegedly transgressive behaviours towards seniority hierarchies and the prescribed route toward adulthood. In spite of their seemingly defiant behaviour, and the constant conflict in elders-cadets relationships, a focus on relations, particularly exchanges, with their parents, or the *lu* at large, suggests that the mutual construction and maintenance of such a transgressive identity is a support – by eliciting obligations – rather than an obstacle to the circulation of wealth from the younger generation to their elders. The next section focuses on the trajectories of miners whose journeys have not generated such material wealth.

#### **4.3.3 Lost bets and disappearances**

The previous two sections have highlighted trajectories of engagement that relied on the relative success of miners; they won their “bet” of going to the mines in the sense that the journeys provided them wealth and, most of all, the opportunity to stand up to their elders and have their experiences recognized. Though little of the wealth remains in their hands, as these “successes” allow elders to confiscate part of the revenue of their cadets’ labour until they “liberate” themselves, like Sayon did, by paying for their own marriage independently and forming their own home-place, or for less lucky ones, by “disappearing” for a time in the mines. In the former case, youths can satisfy their desires for material goods while concomitantly fulfilling their obligations towards their elders by transferring a large part of their earnings in cash or in kind to them. In both cases, their journeys gave them the assertiveness to stand up to their peers and elders. In this section, I wish to provide a counterpoint to these “successful” stories, by focusing on the journeys of youths who left with similar



aspirations, but whose adventures, at best, have not met their expectations. Yet, they remain stuck, lacking the material or psychological means to turn back.

As discussed in Chapter 3, itinerant gold miners, so-called *kalayantigiw*, usually meet their basic everyday needs by earning a few decigrams a day. “Lucky strikes”, though they do happen, are extremely rare. In that context, many miners follow their journeys much longer than expected and, as they often say, progressively “disappear” from the reach of their close relations, either to avoid having their little income sequestered by their elders (as Sayon complained), or simply because they cannot financially or psychologically afford to return to their village. I stick to the term “disappearance”, which recurred in many stories, and describes the total suspension of contact with the family, including phone calls, which may have been possible despite spatial distance. An example of this process is the case of Mansa, to whom I was introduced because he was considered a very experienced *kalayantigiw* and had been travelling for a long time. He introduced himself as such when we first met in Allahmdoulilaye, in the Sikasso region (Mali):

When I first left, I started doing mining works close to my village in Kouroussa. Most of my friends were moving back and forth from the village, but I decided that I wanted more, and I started following other friends further in Mali, then to Burkina and to Ghana. In the beginning, I thought it wouldn't be for more than a year. Then, I gave myself three years to make things better. But it didn't get better, so I had to keep on going... this is why I am keep on going. In my mind, I thought I would come back as soon as possible when things were good, but I have lasted a long time. It is eight years now.

Stories of this kind are very common among miners. Though he is recognised for his abilities and his courage among other miners as his nickname Mansa (chief) indicates, he could at that time just make ends meet and perpetuate his lifestyle. Earnings are presented as a precondition to return, that is, they are needed to prove that the journey to the mines appears worthy. As long as basic moral obligations are fulfilled, like spending some time in the village, being present for religious events, and most of all being present for harvests, “success” is not seen as a necessary condition to travel back and forth, yet, it becomes a requirement to justify their absence when they have stopped meeting these moral duties. In addition to feeling that his adventure is incomplete for not having struck it rich, Mansa has also made it clear that he is not interested in the peasant lifestyle that an eventual return would imply, though he could not see any other option. Mansa had hence progressively “disappeared”, which could be seen as a “moral breakdown” (Zigon 2007), that is, when a contradiction is observed between the local moral order (i.e., joining the *lu* for harvests, coming back to attend to funerals, and so on) and the individual's effective actions and decisions, in this case not being present for these events.

The justifications given by miners who have “disappeared” to explain and make sense of their absence can hence be placed in relation to their own anxiety of seeing time pass, and the increasing

pressure to equilibrate their ethical selves with the moral contradictions they face. These justifications mainly take three forms, which often combine together. Most frequently, “disappearance” is blamed on external factors such as a lack of material means to pay for the transport and the other inherent costs of travel. But how then can we understand the avoidance of communication that requires no return, such as phone calls? Two personal justifications are often given. First is the feeling of powerlessness that many miners have, which was described best by Mbrema, who was working and staying with Kalou in Kokoyo, and with whom I often went to a hill next to Kokoyo, since that was the closest place we could get cellular coverage and I could send daily text messages to my wife. On this occasion, as on every evening, we climbed to the orange-looking top of the hill – so coloured because of the patch of abandoned top-up vouchers – that was crowded with people holding their cell phones over their heads, desperately waiting for the wind to direct the GSM waves toward us. After my message had been sent and Mbrema had finished his brief phone call, I naively asked him if his family was fine. My unthinking assumption that Mbrema had surely been engaged in family talk was revealed to be wrong, as he had actually been speaking to a friend in another mining settlement close to Yanfolila, around 100 kilometres east, “just taking some news” from a friend currently working in another gold mine. Mbrema explained that he in fact had not had any contact with his family for over a year; not because he could not afford to call them, but because he “didn’t want to expose himself to the bad news they could give him, and for which he could not do anything to help”. Regular communication was certainly not expected, yet in his case, irregularly communication had been replaced by disappearance and the absence of communication. As Jah’s sister told me once a brother who had left to the mines years ago, “I don’t even know if he is alive now, probably still somewhere in the mines.”

The second recurring justification is also closely associated with the feeling of being unable to meet potential demands, particularly those of a financial nature. When talking about maintaining contact with family, most of my interlocutors almost invariably complained about their parents’ financial demands, and their parents’ incapacity to understand that they were not in a position to send them money, which many argued was a reason to, at least temporarily, refrain from contact. Put clearly, what stopped many miners from maintaining contact with their parents was the feeling that they would be unable to respond to demands of support, be they emotional or material, that they nonetheless considered legitimate. These justifications also emphasize negative feelings such as being “unable”, “useless”, or “powerless” *vis-à-vis* their parents, which they only experience through these interactions, and which contrasts the rather positive discourse they usually have about themselves and their lifestyle in the mines.

The positive esteem accrued from their experiences as itinerant workers in the gold mines and the recognition that came from within this world, in contrast to the negativity that characterized their

interactions with their parents, was indeed a structuring factor in the narratives of Mansa and others. As noted above, Mansa was introduced to me by other workers, who held him in high esteem for his long-standing experience and knowledge of the sector, even though he had not been ultimately successful in terms of earnings. Kalou simply stated that “he knew a lot about gold mining”, and members from Kalou’s crew as well as neighbours from other tents would often come and ask him for advice about their own excavations, which he would give while simultaneously insisting on his expertise, his techniques, his secrets, his contacts... all resulting from years of travel in the gold mines across seven countries. In the course of our discussion, after he had expanded broadly on the qualities he had gained throughout his adventures,<sup>18</sup> I turned to the topic of his personal attachments and how he considered them, especially since he was away from home and had not settled elsewhere. The story he told was very similar to the histories of Kalou, Jah, or Sayon, and consisted of a long process of negotiation, conflict, and lies, which lead him to make up stories about his activities, fake successes, and finally make a radical break from his relations, which he experienced as a relief. In his view, however badly his relations may have turned due to his unconventional trajectory and persistence in seeking fortune in the mines, his absence could only be conceived as a temporary one, however distant and unlikely his return might be, for it was only at home he could “be someone”. Such a statement, if it is representative of other similar trajectories, supposes at some point to reconcile aspirations with unmet expectations, and predicts an eventual return to the home-place. The last section looks at when and how some give up to keep on their journey.

### *Giving up*

The very act of “giving up” is surely experienced more deeply by those who are described as *kountaniw*; “hotheads” who disregard basic morality and follow any opportunity that comes their way, as opposed to less adventurous workers to travel back and forth between their farms and the mines. In the theories on adventurism (Bredeloup 2014; Cissé 1964; Doumbia 2001), the dominant justifications extended for being absent over long periods are the acquisition of wisdom and experience and the acquisition of wealth. In the gold mines, when material wealth cannot be found, and living and working conditions, sometimes combined with indebtedness or illness, become too difficult to bear, some may lose the “courage” that motivates them to move forward, as it happened to Jah in his early years. After he had left home, without the consent of the head of his of household, for more than two years, Jah got “stuck”, in his words, in the diamond mines of Bamankoro. He had left the neighbouring gold mining fields of Kerouane, Guinea, with another miner, who had convinced him to try the work in the diamond mines. Given their extremely precarious situation at that time, they also contemplated working for a *masta* who would cover their basic needs as a

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<sup>18</sup> The next chapter discusses learning and knowledge in the making of mobile livelihoods.

security.<sup>19</sup> Instead of security, however, half a can of soda filled with rice was the only payment provided, which quickly put Jah in debt as he needed to borrow money for coffee, cigarettes, and other small expenses, which, like his co-workers, tied him more closely than he would have wished to his new occupation. After seven months of almost daily excavation work in the open shafts, as Jah recounted, he felt desperate for the first time. He lost both “courage” and “strength”, which literally pushed him to return to his home-place. In his description of events, the return was not a mindful decision, but an impulsive salutary endeavour to leave, although he found himself “without money, nor even shoes”. This episode of extreme deprivation was echoed by other itinerant gold miners.

What is striking in these accounts is the anxiety of waiting for luck, which is balanced in the story by the intrepid tone given to the narrative and its rhythm. For Jah, as for Kalou (robbed and beaten at the Ghanaian border), or Moussa (having lost all his savings in a useless shaft in Tingrela), the episodes of deprivation are narrated heroically, in the form of “I have gone through this and I am still here”, thus creating value for the experience rather than its material outcomes. Though they are present in the rest of the story, other actors are excluded from these episode of hardship, which stress the “epic of the adventure” (Bredeloup 2008). While travel and work experiences are narrated as histories of friendship and social relations, enduring hardship is presented as an individual matter. Instead of seeing these episodes as failures, as they could be interpreted, renouncement often comes with a dramatic narrative, which stresses the narrator’s capacity to endure adversity as well as his determination, which can only be undermined by extreme conditions unimaginable to ordinary people. Thus, if no material wealth is brought back, experience and wisdom, thus potentially status if adequately performed and narrated, is nonetheless gained as a resource accessible to everyone; social capital in the form of these intangible assets is also acquired, yet its value is relatively limited to the social field of the gold mines.

Finally, the renouncement of the adventure must also be placed in the context of the subjectivity of aspirations and temporality of the miners’ life course. If mining is a lottery and has to be understood as such – that is a series of consecutive bets, when and under which circumstances does one decide to cash out (supposing that something has been earned) or to fold? As this chapter has suggested, besides putting at risk their social relations, health, and life, the main risk miners take has to do with time: going faster, and gaining status faster, if things go well; or falling behind, and spending more than what would have been spent staying home, if they fare poorly. Concerning their

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed description of labour organization in the diamond mines see (D’angelo 2014). Contrary to the gold mines, in which all stakeholders operate independently under principles of cooperation (see Chapter 3), diamond mines privilege a more hierarchical structure, in which artisanal miners make their labour available to a *masta*, who takes charge of their basic needs. Once a gem has been found by the team, it is – in theory – the property of the team, who will negotiate its price with their *masta*. The extreme scarcity of diamonds, in comparison to the regularity of income from the gold mines, suggests the eventuality of long periods with absolutely no income but the food provided by the *masta*.

success, on the one hand, Issa and others repeatedly stated that mining was by far the fastest way to get money, while on the other hand, renouncing the gold mines was explained as a matter of not falling behind their brothers and friends of the same age group at home. Diakaria, for instance, described his decision to leave the mines as a relieving one made possible by his father, who “helped him realize he was losing his time” in seeking to achieve things that could be properly done at home. In this story, Diakaria’s father convinced him to return home to Conakry and work as a tailor, just when he was losing courage. This is why, Diakaria insists, he is especially grateful to his father, because without his intervention, he “would still be doing *mamaya* in the mines”. The metaphor of gambling makes sense here, as Diakaria retrospectively describes his time spent in the mines as a period of addiction, “I could not stop doing anything else, if that had not been because of my father”. By giving up on the mines, Diakaria returned to a more conventional trajectory before “it was too late”, he says. Although gambling money is not very common here compared to Western postindustrial societies, unless it is in big urban centres like Conakry or Bamako where PMU and lotteries are widespread, it is striking how Diakaria’s argument is built on a similar line to that against gambling addiction; a discourse that also reflects the one held by authorities, e.g., in an interview at the Service of Mines in Kankan in which miners were accused of abandoning their responsibilities towards their families, which sounded very contradictory with most miners’ motives since, in many cases, it is precisely in order to complement the household’s livelihoods that they engage into mining. Rather than see it as a health problem, like it has been constructed in Europe, when I asked people in town if they would gamble or not and why, I was told some people had luck gambling money and some did not. Trying it was not seen as particularly bad, but to continue when it did not pay out was considered folly. Concomitant with notions of fate that structure personhood (see Brand 2001), luck at playing PMU or at digging gold is something that a person possesses or not. It is considered fine to try it, but unwise to persist in vain.

Whereas Sayon or Jah saw in the attempts of their parents to bring them back home a disguised racket, Diakaria adhered to a narrative of recovery from an addictive behaviour, or as expressed in uncountable cultural and historical contexts, “gold fever”.<sup>20</sup> Instead of projecting himself into an indefinite moment of wealth in which he would be able to ultimately fulfil the moral obligations he had left behind during his adventure, he accepted re-entry into the prescribed path, and recommitted himself to the successive steps toward adulthood. Instead of being cruelly optimistic, to borrow Berlant’s expression (2011), in maintaining attachments to rather uncertain possibilities, Diakaria’s renunciation is portrayed as an afterthought, tainted with the satisfaction of having secured the path towards what he sees as the good life.

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<sup>20</sup> The literature inspired by the US gold rush is replete with similar stories (i.e., “L’or” by Blaise Cendrars), as is the cinema (i.e., the character of Dods in “The Treasure of the Sierra Madre”); such stories of quests turning into a sickly obsession abound in other cultural and historical contexts as well.

#### 4.4 Never-ending navigations

So far in this chapter, I have looked at the trajectories of young itinerant male gold miners through stories of their activities in the gold mining sector and of the journeys they have embarked upon. I now propose a synthesis by discussing their motives to engage in mining gold in relation to time and by discussing the reasons which finally lead many of them to perpetuate these livelihoods in the long run instead of returning home as accomplished adults.

The length of their “navigations” in the mines, to borrow Vigh’s concept, which he defines as “tactical moves within an uncertain context”<sup>21</sup> (Vigh 2006), emphasizes the ambivalent nature of miners’ activities: While mining gold requires their continuous movement in hope of economic change and personal transformation, they perfectly know that the chances of striking it rich are small, and thus, rather insist on other forms of value, non-monetary in most cases, that they acquire in their journeys; most of which relate to a certain idea of masculinity. Many other studies in similar contexts have already pointed out artisanal mining spaces perform an important role as *loci* for the gendered construction of manhood (Cuvelier 2011; Moodie 1999): the largely male workforce of tunnelists and casual miners, as well as the fact that the populations of the mining camps are mainly composed of men instinctively call for parallels with other in “between spaces” where genders are segregated during the liminal phase of the rites of passage (Turner 1995).<sup>22</sup> Although the parallel sounds theoretically appealing, the present case strongly contrast with the very idea of “passage” since miners rather seem to convert this lifestyle, in spite of its inherent precariousness, into a way of life on the long term. Their experiences thus put into question the idea of clearly identifiable “stages”, as proposed by Doumbia (2001) for the Mandé. In practice, the temporality of the life course rather seem to stretch into endless navigations without clear ends, thus echoing Wilson’s commentary on the notion of “precarity” : “indeterminacy is less the exception than the condition (...) living can be just that. Leading particularly anywhere, lives get lived nonetheless.” (Wilson 2016) In contrast to this hopeless vision, miners experiences demonstrate that, although they don’t necessarily lead anywhere, the journey as such is meaningful and valuable. In spite of not making “transitions between stages”, the idea of liminality, which finds so many symbolical representations in Mandenka imaginaries of the bush (Haour 2013; Kedzierska-Manzon 2010), helps nonetheless to make sense of the willingness with which they engage in situations that they know are physically dangerous, mentally exhausting, and possibly violent, and yet that they oddly present these experiences with a vocabulary of “love”, which Mbrema’s narrative perfectly illustrated.

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<sup>21</sup> In his book, Vigh opposes the “social death” of so-called *blufo* in urban Guinée Bissau, who are stuck in the position of youth who cannot gain the authority and status of adulthood due to the “violent life chances” arising in the context of warfare.

<sup>22</sup> See for instance the detailed description of the circumcision ritual by Camara Laye in “L’enfant noir” (1953).

Thus, what I have sought to point out is that, beyond the fabric of gender, mining journeys are spaces that allow room for a relative autonomy from traditional social structures, and which are perpetuated for much longer than initially expected. While the idea of “rite of passage “ has often been associated to historic forms of adventures (Cissé 1964, Bredeloup 2014), I rather contend that, like other forms of “adventures” mining journeys participate to the construction of masculinity, but don’t have a beginning and an end that could easily be identified, as if the liminal phase had taken over the “stages”. Yet, the stories of my interlocutors also show that the idea of going across stages, thereafter to engage into the mine to advance faster throughout phases of life, remains a powerful driver. Mining journeys thus often perpetuate for years with no clear destinations nor any intention to settle down or come back to the home-place. The life-courses of many men engaged in mining gold consequently looks as if they were suspended between ages (most of them are not youths anymore, nor grown-ups in view of filiation), between social spaces (camps are not the bush nor the village), and between moral worlds (egalitarian ethics and conventional hierarchies). When they don’t “succeed” – in the sense of a radical transformation which very rarely occurs – they nevertheless keep on travelling from one site to another, seemingly floating rather than navigating, since their new destinations are less the result of cost-benefit calculations to improve livelihoods than they are narrated as spontaneous moves – “following one’s heart” (Ibro), “as foreseen in a dream”(Issa) – that stress the individualistic *fadenya*-oriented character of such journeys. Yet, beyond narratives, concrete events do in facts play an important role in shaping their journeys; either when they are related to the field of *fabara* and the family relations at large as we have seen in several examples above, or when they are the outcome of changing mining legislations or site closures as will be shown further in the dissertation. In other words, one of the most valuable aspects of mining journeys is the relative autonomy they provide – and which is explained nicely by Issa who, in spite of being in a vulnerable situation at the time of the interview,<sup>23</sup> described himself as “free like the wind in the desert” – while in contrast the concomitant risk they entail is that of remaining suspended in liminality and not making the expected passage through life phases, as “rites” of adventures are theoretically intended to.

One intriguing aspect of their trajectories is the way they handle the idea of physical risks, by seemingly taking it much further than needed to merely make a living. Danny Hoffman, who studied the trajectories of young combatants in Sierra Leone through the perspective of labour (Hoffman 2011), offers interesting parallels for how life in the bush remains attractive, despite the inherent violence of the “work” of soldiers. As one of Hoffman’s informants states, “life in the jungle is like fulfilling a desire. It’s like taking up a challenge or meeting a challenge.” (Hoffman 2011: 38).

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<sup>23</sup> Issa was indebted for the loss of a cell phone, for which he was struggling to save money from the mine. Yet, could not continue in his endeavour because of the sudden closure of all mining sites in the prefecture of Mandiana in 2012. He thus found himself with no money to perpetuate the journey in another region, plus, he had unresolved financial obligations in Mandiana.

Similarly, what matters most for Sayon, Mbrema, Issa, or Moussa is that they don't remain "seated at home doing nothing". They claim that they are willing to take risks to fulfil pressing desires, which materialize in the form of motorbikes and RNB-clips-like-clothes in which they parade every evening between the huts of the mining camps. And they push this appetite for danger to the extreme by risking their lives by working in tunnels that may potentially collapse.<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of labour, Hoffman stresses similarities between mining work and war work in his essay: "What is important here is not just that the same labouring bodies were deployed for work in the mines, forests, and plantations as were deployed on the battlefield. Even more disturbing is that *these different modes of work became so qualitatively similar*. In other words, the organizational logic at work in the region was increasingly one of making young men available for 'just in time' production based on whatever opportunities presented themselves: mining, timber cutting, tapping rubber, or war fighting" (Hoffman 2011: 42). What Hoffman points out is that, among young men with very scarce options of personal change, hard – and possibly violent – works become interchangeable and viable options to "do something", as Abou insisted in his account. Ibro, who was described as a *kountani* by Jah in the introduction to this chapter, and who presented himself and his friends as "*mort-vivants*", had typically had such a trajectory where episodes of migration, war, and mining had followed each other. He had entered mining "by chance" after briefly combating in Libya, and fuzzily foresaw the idea of returning home. Yet, for the moment, he was more concerned with pursuing the journey in search for more luck.

Coming back to the gambling metaphor, and as a way of summing up, for many young miners, their introduction to artisanal gold mining comes with imaginaries of transformation for which they are ready to take big risks. However, big wins are extremely rare, and what keeps them in the sector is the autonomy it provides, the feeling of being "doing something" rather than "staying put", and the everyday wins that they indeed obtain from their labour. Indeed, they often see the hard work in the mines as associated with freedom, and the hours spent "doing nothing" and "drinking tea" at home as constraining. Rather than being forced to wait for improbable change at home, they claim that they prefer to work in the mines, which, instead of the former, gives them the feeling that they have taken control of their life, as illustrated earlier by Sayon.

In general, young Malians and Guineans are useless to the capital – both as a labour force or as consumers – and so it is increasingly within "traditional" structures of production as well within which decreasing options are available. As a sort of surplus population, they need to wait their turn

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<sup>24</sup> I shall stress here that references to physical risk were not just an aspect of miners' discourses, but a very real aspect of their work. During my field research in several mining fields across Mali, Guinea, Senegal, and Ivory Coast, episodes of tunnel collapses were extremely frequent. Similarly, in the narrative interviews, many participants had survived such accidents once, and many of them had lost friends and co-workers that way.



to access responsibilities and positions of accumulation in the family, or migrate to cities or abroad, which have been proven to be dead ends, and finally undertake opportunity-driven activities such as gold mining which are seen as valuable options to prove one's value as a man and possibly hit big. With this perspective of personhood, however little the chances are for effective change, what seems to be worth the journey is the value of the journey itself. Besides, as the journeys become longer, those who remain in the sector tend to professionalize their activities (see next chapters) and turn it into their main source of livelihood in the long run, thus complying with more *badenya*-oriented aspirations. What the trajectories of these young miners have highlighted is that, for most of them, the bet they took on entering the artisanal mines turned out being a full-time occupation whose product soon reintegrated the circuits of exchange within families, rather than being a one-time step to fortune and adulthood, as journeys are ideally believed to be in Mandenka imaginaries of adventure.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Contrary to dominant analyses that focus on economic push and pull factors and livelihood-making to make sense of the attractiveness of the artisanal gold mining sector, I have suggested that such journeys were determinant in the construction of male personhood for they allowed young men to contest generational hierarchies and provided alternative spaces for assertiveness and competition among peers. The main hypothesis in this chapter is that, beyond providing access to objective material subsistence, mining journeys opened subjective spaces for the projection of individuals and permitted the creation of alternative fields of value, all of which were not necessarily convertible monetarily. I have argued that many young men in the rural areas of Guinea and Mali are in a situation where they have very few choices for change, and which they perceive as hindering them to move, not just in space, but through life. In this context, I have drawn on theories of adventure and the social person to consider mining spaces as liminal spaces of transition, where young men could play an active role in their life – regardless of material outcomes – and prove their value as male adults both among peers and at home toward elders, which oft provoked situations of moral ambivalence because of the contradictory values they experienced in mining spaces combined with the difficulties they faced in complying with filial duties.

Though young miners were pejoratively labelled *kountaniw* by their elders, because their practices would allegedly threaten basic moralities, their own views on their occupation showed that they were quite creative in assuming their outsider status while simultaneously striving to comply with their filial obligations. With regard to this, although monetary outcomes are elusive, they remain an important component in the making of male adulthood. Even though miners often insist on personal value, money should not be overlooked for its spending certainly plays a central role in constructing the social person both among peers and in the home-place. In fact, the maintenance of

such a transgressive identity by both parties (elders and young men), that elder who label *kountanis* from the outside, and the intrepid performances on the side of youths, can be seen as a way to perpetuate circuits of distribution from the younger generation to the older ones in the context of scarce economic opportunities and decreasing spaces for young men to mark the transitioning to adulthood. By blaming cadets on a moral ground, fathers justify that a part of their sons' earnings return to the home-place, which has increasingly become standardized in such a way that these contributions have become vital to households.

Through these arguments, my aim is to echo the growing questioning of the oft taken-for-granted, poverty-driven nature of artisanal gold mining (Hilson 2009). As Hilson argues, the narrative of the poverty trap has had a successful career in development and policy circles, yet, the diagnosis is probably superficial for two reasons. First, it makes the assumption that everyone in the sector is the same: As "youths", the motives of Issa, Mbrema, Sayon, or Moussa are certainly different from those of elder men, women, or anyone who would occupy another position in the labour system of ASM. Secondly, it privileges structural explanations which – though macro-economic factors certainly play an essential role – overlook the sense that people give to their actions. As the stories of my interlocutors illustrate in this chapter, there are many other sources of value than gold that young men can get in gold mining sites. Thus, if mining should not be understood univocally in terms of poverty and subsistence, an approach that pays attention to the social person throughout the life course reflects that one of the issues faced by young men is that of seeing time pass without having reached their expectations. In other words, their continuous mobility tends to perpetuate over time and morph into a full-time and much needed source of livelihood rather than a parenthesis in the way toward being a man.

As the next chapter will show, the fact that miners' journeys perpetuate much longer than they are initially imagined leads to new forms of residential and labour arrangements within the households, which link the apparently antagonist social spaces of the mines and the *fabara*.

## **PART THREE**

# **Perpetuating precarious circulations**

# Chapter 5: Mining impermanence, *kalayantigiw*' technologies of mobility

## 5.1 Introduction: Kalou four years later, a “professional” miner in Senegal

In the previous chapter, I looked at young men's work in gold mining as a transition period into adulthood. In this chapter, I focus on experienced miners who have made gold mining their main – if not only – source of income in the long-term, and who subsequently have to remain in a quasi-permanent state of mobility to ensure the security of their livelihood. I assume that, being in the social space of illegality (See Chapter 1), itinerant miners' everyday realities are marked by their “expulsability”; a term which, drawing on de Genova's concept of deportability<sup>1</sup>, I use in reference to the subjective side of Sassen's theory of expulsions (2016 [2014])<sup>2</sup>. This means that miners can be expelled from their workplaces, their temporary houses, and, most prosaically, from life at any time, which is in turn constitutive of their status as subject in the industry, including a peculiar work ethos and the mastering of the needed techniques to cope with a precarious environment.

Consequently, their aptitude for mobility is a precious resource that helps them manage the ephemerality of the mines. In this chapter, I consider the subjectivities produced by the impermanence of nearly everything in the daily lives of itinerant miners, and the technologies they develop in response to the uncertain temporality of mining. I will do so by studying the sites workers frequent every day: the mining settlements, mining sites, and mining routes that connect them. I argue that most of what they base their mobile lifestyles on is impermanent, which in turn produces

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<sup>1</sup> I have coined this term in line with Nicholas de Genova's concept of “deportability” (2002), which draws on Foucault's work on governmentality. This is not to say that miners' situations are like those of irregular migrants. However, I argue that they share certain traits in terms of their structural position in society, which keeps them under the constant threat of removal (from their villages in case of land acquisition, from their work sites in case of artisanal mine closures, and from life in case of accidents such as shafts collapsing). For instance, in Niger, a recent law established the kind of material itinerant miners can use to build their houses in mining settlements. Only removable materials are allowed; bricks or banco are forbidden to facilitate miners' expulsion. In Guinea, there is no official law, but the institutional rule allows the construction of straw huts and tents for living quarters, and the use of planks for shops and coffee places. Similarly, the construction of “hard houses” is forbidden by local authorities. Similarly, in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, mining settlements have officially been banned, which means that while many are tolerated, they can be emptied and demolished at any moment.

<sup>2</sup> I thus follow Mezzadra and Neilson (2015) who call for more attention to the “productive” effects of expulsions.

specific subjectivities wherein an aptitude for mobility is central, highly valued, and a desirable form of knowledge.

I thus adopt a “mobility perspective” (Sheller and Urry 2006) to study the methods by which they produce gold and investigate in detail the kinds of knowledge full-time gold diggers acquire and value during their journeys. I focus in particular on the “mobility skills” (Tarrius 1996; van Dijk 2007) of itinerant gold miners, construed as “the ability to mobilize specific networks and knowledge, and to develop bypassing strategies to maintain oneself on the move” (Arab 2008, my translation), which includes the incorporation of a specific work ethos that values the aptitude to cope with the material conditions of everyday life.

To introduce these notions, I wish to relate an episode of reunion with Kalou that took place in a Senegalese mining camp nearly five years after we first met in Guinea. In the end of February 2014, I was about to embark on my last leg of fieldwork for two months, until the end of April. While preparing for my visit, I faced difficulties in once more locating my principal informants, since I was unsure of where they would have moved to since my last visit, despite being in regular contact. In my last phone call with Kalou three weeks earlier, he had let me know that he was in Mali, in the region of Yanfolila, which had convinced me to go to Bamako directly, rather than to Conakry. I met Sandaly there, who had arranged to join me from Kankan, and together, we started planning our trip to Yanfolila for the next day. As usual, Kalou was not reachable through any of his different cell phone numbers, and I decided to call his wife instead in Siguiri (Guinea) to confirm if he was still in Mali, maybe using a different number. After exchanging courtesies and catching up, Bintou told me that Kalou had just left Yanfolila in Mali and had moved to Senegal, but she couldn’t say precisely where. There was no cell phone coverage there, but since he called her every two days or so, she told us that she would let him know that Sandaly and I were in Bamako at the moment. The next day, by chance, I got a call from Namori, an Ivorian friend I had met through Kalou two year before, who urged me to visit Karakhena, Senegal, where “the mine had become so big”. He had moved there first, he explained, and had been followed by Kalou a few weeks later. We were thus about to meet again in Senegal, just as two years before in Mali.

It would take us only one day to reach the Senegalese border. But, due to the Ebola outbreak, severe limitations had been placed on cross-border travel. Our first attempt to cross the border failed because Sandaly had a Guinean passport. Indeed, since the first days of the epidemic, Senegal had closed its Guinean border, and Guinean nationals arriving from Mali were not permitted to enter the country. The next day, Namori and his Malian friend came for us at the border, each of them riding his own motorbike. Since I had a tourist visa, it was decided that I would cross with Namori through the checkpoint, while Sandaly, like many other Guineans, would take a detour to avoid the officials and we would meet again on the other side. Less than an hour later, we were on the Senegalese part

of the road to Karakhena. Mining fields started becoming increasingly noticeable: a growing number of people, their clothes tainted with orange and red dust, walked along both sides of the road; black and blue tents made of plastic sheets and thousands of *bougouw* (straw huts, temporary houses in mining settlements) lined both sides of the main corridor; motorbikes, minibuses, tricycles... there was a sudden spike traffic in a place that, two years earlier, was known only as an agricultural hamlet. People, tools, and sacks of ore were continuously being moved from one extremity of the camp to the other, further linking the Senegalese town of Saraya in the west and the Malian border in the east. Once there, we finally encountered Kalou who had just come back from the *faro* (mining field), accompanied by his girlfriend Fanta. It is our fourth meeting in nearly five years, each time at a different location: first, one month in Koundianakoura, Guinea, then several times at his home-place in Siguiri, followed by two weeks in Kokoyo, Mali, and this time in Senegal. Kalou was quite excited and optimistic about his two operating *damans* here, and despite his many years of experience in mining, he seemed to be impressed by the size of the settlement. Over two hours, we exchanged news about what has happened since last time, about the Ebola outbreak, and about Kalou's plans for the future. What strikes me since our first encounter in Koundiana is how he seems to have increasingly "professionalized" his activity, at least conceptually, in the way he speaks about it. His mobile lifestyle seems to be organized by a set of "rules" he applies to himself, which appear to be an ensemble of processes that, beyond merely supporting the mining of gold, are presented as a broader attempt to organize and rationalize his life and occupation, which is now generates a livelihood upon which a large part of his family relies.

I summarize some of these moments of reunion from my fieldnotes, in particular those highlighting the "professionalization" of Kalou's activities in the mines – or at least his desire to appear so.

Kalou is quite proud of his 'house' in Bougoufe, which is one of the largest tents around. Essentially made of plastic sheets stretched over a wooden structure, it comprises an open "veranda" covered with fabric rather than plastic that lets the air circulate from both sides, and where people come to talk and chill out at the end of the day. But, Kalou explains, "it costs no more than 5,000 CFA. Since I don't know how long I am going to be staying, I do not spend a lot on housing." It's something he's been practising since Kokoyo, he says. Here, it's special because there had been a fire in the camp the week before. Everything in the neighbourhood had been burnt, and they had had to rebuild their houses. I realized that the very few remaining tree trunks around have all been burnt black. The fire had destroyed dozens of houses, straw huts, and plastic tents. Apart from tiny details like the few remaining burnt trunks, there were no visible signs that the whole neighbourhood had disappeared and reappeared in less than a week. It was a bad time, Kalou explains, but he optimistically affirms that it gave him and his neighbours the occasion to reorganize better: for instance, by enlarging the fenced space used as a bathroom and by digging a second latrine on the other side of the "house".

Picture 5-1 Main road to Karakhena between the towns of Saraya (Senegal) and Kenieba (Mali)



Later, when Sandaly explained the “*tracasseries*” (hassles) he had faced at the border because of his Guinean nationality and how Ebola is now making travelling difficult, Kalou stood up smiling, walked into the tent, and came back holding several papers. “Look,” he said, “I am Malian now.” Indeed, next to his Guinean identity card lay a Malian identity card of a certain Adama Camarra, born six years later than Kalou (at least according to his Guinean national identity card). It shows a recent picture of him sealed with an apparently original stamp. “I was bothered too often by “*corps habillés*” when I was staying in the Kokoyo (Mali) settlement”, he explained, which had turned worse since the beginning of the Ebola epidemic. During his last trip to Bamako two weeks ago, he had opted to pay for a Malian identity card to make his moves easier. Since his girlfriend Fanta was also going to be crossing the border regularly, he also had a Malian document made for her to facilitate her moves.

As the discussions continued and the heat in the “veranda” rose despite Kalou’s astute airing system, our host sent one of his “*petit*” neighbours to take the motorbike and bring us food and cold water. I did not recognize Kalou’s bike, which was different from the one I had extensively used in Koundiana two years before. I asked him what had happened to it. “I let it go home,” he answered, before explaining that it is too complicated to wander around with a bike out of his own country because of continuous police harassment. Now that he could afford it, Kalou was doing the same as Namori had done in Kokoyo the year before: buying a bike at a local stand, using it as long as he was around, and selling it when he moved to another site.

As a last visible sign of his social ascension in the world of the gold mines, I notice that Kalou seemed less keen to present himself and his co-workers as just a “team” of associates, but has adopted a sort of entrepreneurial vocabulary with hierarchies that place him on top. While Moussa has been his junior since their time together in Koundiana, others have followed

since then and have been attributed specialized responsibilities. Namori, for instance, would exclusively negotiate future operations. Some others were “apprentices” who would either dig tunnels or cut wood, and the most trusted were delegated the task managing a *daman* on behalf of Kalou in other regions and informing him of their activity from their location; indeed, two of his apprentices were working elsewhere, one in Mandiana (Guinea) and one in Yanfolila (Mali).

Nothing is stable. Tents appear and disappear, the mining site can be demolished at any time, the border opens and closes unpredictably, and vehicles can be used in some places but not in others; yet Kalou is unfazed. Though these four excerpts from our first talk appear to have nothing in common, they demonstrate how Kalou sustains his mobile lifestyle – by living in temporary shelters, developing the ability to cross borders fluidly even in the context of strict bio-power apparatuses because of the Ebola outbreak, acquiring local mobility in and around his temporary settlement using a motorized vehicle, and building a network of peers and subordinates that help him maintain his operations across the region. With the right combination of specific knowledge and assets, his lifestyle could be described as a set of “mobility skills” (Tarrius 1996; van Dijk 2007). Contrary to what I have described so far (particularly in Chapter 4), nothing seems to be done “by chance”. Unlike the stereotypical image of *kountaniw*, who instinctively take off in search of fortune, Kalou embodies the opposite stereotype; he positions himself as *kountigi* (“the one with a wise mind”). Indeed, he insists that his expenses, such as for the construction of the *bougou*, were precisely calculated and anticipated; the decision to travel between sites was vetted by a dense network of peers who informed him of opportunities and assessed chances, as Namori had done here. Phone calls with his wife Bintou, especially since he was off the grid, were scheduled regularly so that he could stay in touch with his home and associates. In short, while Kalou had spoken about the technologies of extraction he would master when we first met four years before in Koundiana, Guinea, this time he listed the technologies of mobility he was currently mastering. Indeed, he had spatially expanded his social networks and scope of activity and turned his occupation into a full-time job and a unique source of income. In spite of the impermanent nature of mining contexts, Kalou’s life testified to a popular motto among miners: “a miner must be where the gold comes out.”

As Kalou suggested, mining gold successfully in the long run relies on technologies of extraction from a technical viewpoint, but also on technologies of mobility, here construed in the Foucauldian sense, as the discourse, knowledge, and procedures involved in the constitution of the itinerant miner. “Technologies of mobility” thus comprise an array of social technologies (e.g., forms of dwelling, methods of passing borders, etc.), wherein the norm is being ready to move and relocate, a set of skills which in turn miners associate with a peculiar sense of value. In this chapter, I focus on how technologies of mobility induced by expulsability and fast changes emerge in relation to – and often in opposition to – notions of locality and the ideal of permanence. I thus seek to disentangle



notions of locality and mobility, which are embedded in the places and routes that miners traverse, and whose articulation allows miners to circulate.

I consider them to be two sides of the same coin when addressing itinerant miners' socio-technical system of mining gold whose form is very alike circulatory movements.<sup>3</sup> In the following sections of this chapter, I will thus first discuss the notions of locality and mobility from two theoretical perspectives; the first being that of French scholars who have studied "migratory circulations" and who focus on the use of specific skills, networks, norms and institutions that movers mobilize to stay on the move, and the second being the one of the "new mobilities paradigm", which emphasizes the interrelation between mobility and immobility and points out the inequalities at play in different mobility regimes. Then, I ask what subjectivities and knowledge is incarnated in miners' techniques by focusing on the three main places in which miners ground their everyday lives: the mining camps, the mining sites and the mining routes. I do so by paying special attention to the role played by ephemeral infrastructures of mobility and locality in establishing a temporality of impermanence. I conclude by discussing the incorporation of a peculiar work ethos among full-time itinerant gold miners for whom being mobile is compulsory to cope with everyday uncertainty and constantly changing work locations.

## 5.2 Two approaches of the mobility-locality nexus

I briefly examine two ways of approaching the relation between mobility and locality. I assume, in line with Dahinden (2010b), that translocal formations result from a combination of (possibly transnational) *mobility* between different places on the one hand, and on the other, the making of *locality* in some places that act as "social, economic or political anchorage" (2010: 51). I thus wish to question this relation between *mobility* and *locality* in the context of the gold mines where *locality* – which usually enables people to move – holds a relatively elusive significance because of the ephemeral character of mining places which can appear and disappear within just few days. I first look at the concept of "territories of circulation" used by scholars researching migratory circulations for whom *locality* mainly evokes personal relations and social networks that support a mobile lifestyle. Then, I discuss the question from the perspective of mobility studies where *localities* suggest, among other concepts, infrastructures that facilitate or, on the contrary, limit the mobility of people.

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<sup>3</sup> Such movements can be described as "migratory circulations" (Arab 2008; Bredeloup and Pliez 2005; Ma Mung, et al. 1998) in order to differentiate these from conventional concepts stemming from migration studies that often assume that migration is irreversible, induces ruptures rather than continuity, and downplays journeys and mobility in favour of settlement and insertion, as evidenced by the use of the binary of "departure" and "return". Studies on work and mobility in West Africa indeed prove that such binaries are of little help in understanding nomadic and transhumance lifestyles (van Dijk 2001) or circulatory labour migrations (e.g. Amselle 1976; Meillassoux 1975; Murray 1981) in the postcolonial period.

### 5.2.1 Miners' territories of circulation

The notion of territories of circulation, “that do not follow the borders or logics of nation states but have their own hierarchies and forms of sociality” (Tarrius 1993: 50), is especially apt for describing miners' movements – just like transmigrants, miners travel, cross borders, and construct territories without necessarily concerning themselves with the indigenous use and values of these places, since they do not aim to settle down.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the territories that transmigrants travel through often feature non-sedentary forms of social life in places scattered across national and administrative boundaries. One illustration of such territories of circulation is the highly normative regulation of exchanges along the itinerancies and within the social networks of movers<sup>5</sup> (Tarrius 2010: 417-418).

Within territories of circulation, there is usually one place – a locality where social, economic, and political relations are enacted – which is considered central, that is, the main locality, which is often the place that is considered the individual's residence, and to which the family and other emotional ties are linked. In most miners' cases, it would be the *fabara*, meaning the “home-place”. Other localities often have a secondary status since they are merely functional, serving mainly as places to generate a mobile livelihood over extended territories. Also of secondary status are the localities that transmigrants use in their migratory circulations; these places are physically located and inhabited, and thus allow for social ties to be developed in and around these places, and which in turn support miners' movements in the long run; be it, for instance, in the case of Tunisian and Algerian cross-Mediterranean female traders (Schmoll 2005), Filipino cabaret dancers (Parreñas 2010), or Polish trade tourists (Morawska 2001). The fixity of these elements in a system of mobility, that is, the presence of non-moving individuals who allow for the circulation of mobile ones, is indeed seen as a functional condition for such systems by Tarrius (Tarrius 2002), who distinguishes “informal notaries” (non-movers) from “ants” (movers), who profit of the local anchorage and social relations of the notaries.

The first question is how and to what extent do gold mining spaces fit such a pattern, considering that the chief characteristic of these spaces is their ephemerality. They can surge rapidly and disappear as fast as they grew, leaving behind hardly any social life or infrastructure beyond abandoned lines of empty holes.

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<sup>4</sup> Such a notion is thus useful to overcome the “national bias” that migration studies have long perpetuated; it applies to many studies about artisanal mining in the global South. Wimmer and Glick Schiller (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) describe it as a “methodological nationalism”; they point out that the lives of transmigrants, and of people on the move in general, question the idea of nation states, which the social sciences have taken for granted for so long that they “ignore” its constructed character. The social sciences “naturalize” it as a unit of analysis and consequently reproduce the “territorial limitations” of national borders in the study of migration.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Chapter 8 on social networks.

The second question draws on Tarrius' (Tarrius 1996) idea that circulating between places requires specific "mobility skills". Given the transitory nature of their situation, I hypothesize that itinerant miners who have turned the activity into a full-time occupation develop specific skills and acquire dispositions that allow them to be continuously mobile despite the ephemerality of places and the relatively low support they receive. So, what are these skills and what makes them specific to mining?

In the next section, I move to a second body of literature, the so-called "new mobilities paradigm", and briefly summarize some claims that are of relevance for the study. In particular, I emphasize that mobility can be seen as a resource which is distributed in an uneven way.

### **5.2.2 Miners' uneven im/mobility**

Locality, with the home-place often being the emotional centre, is not exclusive as the literature on "home" demonstrates<sup>6</sup> (e.g. Olwig 1997). An apt way to think about translocality can be found in the field of mobility studies, which help to "demigrantize" (Dahinden 2016) research on human movements<sup>7</sup>. Mobility scholars consider mobility and immobility as the two interrelated components of all forms of social life (Hannam, et al. 2006). This approach is particularly apt in the context of West Africa, where scholars have documented the co-existence of many diverse cultures of mobility that question sedentary assumptions (Bilger and Kraler 2005; De Bruijn, et al. 2001; Klute and Hahn 2007). As Schapendonk summarizes, adopting a mobility perspective means paying "attention to the role of fixed infrastructures, networks, and places in mobility processes, as well as to intersecting periods of rest and blocked mobilities" (Schapendonk and Steel 2014). In the case of itinerant miners, the very notion of "infrastructure" – be it along the routes taken by miners (e.g., border checkpoints) or in the places where they stay (e.g., temporary mining settlements) – is extremely elusive for, as will be shown, it is often unfixed and constantly changing.

As Bauman and others have shown (Bauman 1998; Bauman 2006[2004]), individuals are not equal before mobility regimes enforced by all sorts of infrastructures. Within this vast area, their

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<sup>6</sup> This literature emerged within transnational approaches in the 1990. In the present case, however, in contrast to "transnational approaches", the national referent is not necessarily the most pertinent because West African itinerant miners are less affected by national borders than other transmigrants to core countries such as the US or Europe. They create resources through their aptitude for mobility, whether this mobility is intranational or transnational, rather than through the crossing of national borders specifically. Therefore, as Brickell and Data advocate, a translocal (rather than transnational) approach, which "pays attention not just to the transnational migrant but also to those who move across other scales beyond the nation" (Brickell and Datta 2011), may be better suited to study itinerant gold miners for whom the borders of nations are just one of the many boundaries they overcome, and are not always the most salient.

<sup>7</sup> Contrary to transnational studies that mainly focus on the connections between nation states (see Schapendonk and Steel 2014) and on the social spaces that emerge from these connections (i.e. Bauböck and Faist 2010; Vertovec 2003), the mobility paradigm aims to focus on the dynamics of im/mobility at play between different places, not necessarily countries.

movements may be induced or blocked by the state, by private actors and subcontractors of mining corporations, by armed groups at certain periods and in certain areas, as well as by many other local institutions. My introductory example illustrated one such form of inequality: a Guinean national in time of Ebola, was not permitted to cross the Senegalese border, while Namori, who carried an ECOWAS passport, or me, a Swiss privileged tourist with a Senegalese visa, could simply go across in minutes. Indeed, as Glick Shiller and Salazar suggest, mobility should not be understood only in terms of interconnection, but also in terms of confinement and exploitation within certain spaces (2013). In this perspective, moving across different spaces (national, corporate-governed, customary governed) can be seen as not only an aptitude to be acquired, as construed through the concept of “mobility skills”, but as part of miners’ structural position and as a stratifying factor among them – those having the right ID papers and/or the financial capital are more capable of mobility than others.

### **5.3 Technologies of mobility across impermanent terrains**

As a first step, I wish to look at the knowledge that miners develop during their journeys, which enables them to perpetuate their mobile livelihoods in the long run. Contrary to other kinds of income generation like in the agricultural sector, it does not transit through the usual lines of kinship and within age classes, but is constructed through journeys and exchanges with people from very diverse backgrounds. I explore knowledge acquisition in the three kinds of sites across which miners move: mining settlements, mining sites and mining routes.

#### **5.3.1 Mining settlements: relational skills**

While narrating their journeys, most informants listed the numerous places they had been. Some of them I knew, but most of them were just names of places I could imagine through their stories, without being able to locate them on a map. In fact, these crowded places, often as big as secondary towns, have no existence on maps (or legal register, or cadastre) whereby the limits of mining concessions within and across which mining settlements have often developed do exist legally. It is precisely what renders them so elusive and their habitants disposable.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In certain countries (e.g., Niger), the law forbids the use of hard construction materials for living infrastructures in mining settlements. In Guinea and Mali, though it is not formally stated in the country’s laws, local institutional rules allow miners to build living infrastructures in the form of *bougou* (straw huts), tents (using plastic sheets), and wood. Thus, the infrastructures of settlements are removable, and they remind workers that their presence will be tolerated only in the short-term. This is in contrast to so-called immigrants who, in the *diatiguia* tradition, are loaned a piece of land and are given a place to start a *lu*.

### *Social relations in the mining camps*

I have briefly described my arrival in Karakhena in the introduction to this chapter. Although the size and the populations of the mining camps vary, most of them are organized around common features. I describe here the camp of Kokoyo, which I know a little better as I stayed there longer.

Located in the south of Mali, Kokoyo had been active long ago, but had become popular again in 2011. As with most other mining sites, the camp was built around a centre – a small village that existed prior to the gold rush – around which tents and *bougou*w have sprung up concentrically as people kept arriving. The narrow path to Kokoyo from the town of Kangaba, which was initially meant only for motorbikes, had progressively been enlarged by the continuous passing of minibuses that would commute non-stop to the neighbouring town. So, it became a relatively large dust road.

The camp is organized into different neighbourhoods that roughly correspond to the origins of the miners who, at their arrival, search for contacts and support among people from the same region, speak the same language, and share the same ethnic affiliation, that is, “mes semblables” (“my fellow men”) as Sandaly put it when we arrived there, thus emphasizing ethnicity lines more than usual. The division is much narrower than simply following lines of ethnicity, since people from the same village often meet, on purpose or by chance, in the camps and host their co-villagers while they settle down into their own *bougou*. However, ethnicity and nationality are used relationally, such that non-Malinke Guineans group in the same neighbourhood as other – mostly Malinke – Guineans, and vice versa. Burkinabé group together and are often called “Mossi” by others, after the dominant language among these miners, be they Mossi or not. In Kokoyo for instance, after spending some time with some Ivorian men who tried to help us find Namori, we found three possibilities: we could either stay with Sandaly’s co-villagers who also came from his sub-prefecture of Koumban, but whom he did not know personally, or with Kalou who had placed his *bougou* in an area inhabited by Siguiri men from his hometown, or with Namori and other men from the Ivory Coast. “Mes semblables” were thus people from the same village, from the same region, or simply co-nationals. Like most people, Kalou was not staying with his co-workers who were all also residing close to people of their own “region”.

The definition of “fellow men” is elastic, in that it can stretch in scale to include those from the same village, the same linguistic group, or the same country. Namori, for instance, was staying with three young men from the Ivory Coast whom he had just met. In the same line, neither of them were working with their fellow dwellers. A clear line was maintained between the living sphere they shared with their fellow countrymen and the working sphere in which they would, in contrast, avoid cooperating with their co-dwellers, which, according to Kalou, was necessary to avoid spoiling their

chances of hitting gold.<sup>9</sup> However, as Abou clearly states, building support relations – even though they do not necessarily reach a high degree of intimacy – is much needed to make everyday life easier.<sup>10</sup>

You can see it is not easy to live here. Especially today, because I am sick and I cannot work until I feel better. But I am not alone, we are together with Kalou and Moussa, and we have been together before. No, the first time I went to the mine (in Ghana), it was much harder. I had come with a friend and we knew no one. The first two nights we slept outside. Only later were we taken into the house of a villager, but we had to pay with what we got from the *daman*. Now, we come here and we are organized. We get a good place like this one (showing the proximity with the “shower”) and we are on our own.

Pragmatically, the same difficulties plague everyday tasks: water is rare, difficult, and costly to access, to eat you need to pay for every meal, sleeping can also come with a cost, depending on who is hosting you. Many unaccompanied men deal with such necessities by associating with local women, most often by entering so-called “small marriages” (*fudukuruni*, see chapter 8), thus exchanging care and sex for a share of their own production, just as Kalou was doing in Kokoyo. I shall come back to it in the next chapter.

Despite maintaining a segregation according to their provenance in the camp, many also insist on the importance of knowing how to relate with others across ethnic and regional lines of affiliation, since this is an important source of opportunities, thus pointing to the importance of social relations even in such short-term settlements. When I asked them what they had learnt from their experience, after enumerating technical skills related to mining, the miners most often mentioned the ability to socialize with others. The more alien this “other” was, the greater they felt was the skill. For Kalou, hanging around with me and paying for my coffees (which I insisted on paying back when we were back in the *bougou*) was certainly a great source of pride and “bossness”. However, beyond my own presence, I wish to stress that his mining mates were composed of people from Burkina, Mali, Niger, and the Ivory Coast, which was of great importance in his eyes, rightly because of their otherness.

For instance, if Kalou chose not to work with close others, it would not just be a way to keep gold outside the sphere of intimacy, but also a means to expand his network, and thus, his chances of working in wealthy shafts in good scenarios or conversely in bad ones get support in case of need. While in Koundiana, he had arranged to stay with influential locals, in Kokoyo, he made friends with a Malian gold buyer whose sister was his girlfriend during his stay. His decision to extend his social circle beyond the boundaries of the home region was clearly stated and formulated as a way of

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<sup>9</sup> However, I noted that many other workers are not so reluctant to work with their close relations. Many families move and work together during the dry season, or a group of young men originating from the same village will travel together when there is no agricultural work or school to attend.

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 8 analyses in greater detail the role of apparently distant relations in providing crucial support.

“learning by comparing”. More prosaically, he also mentioned that his Malian friend who knew about good *damans* through his gold-buying business, kept him informed of new opportunities. This supports the idea that, despite the ephemerality of the places in which these relations emerge, social capital strongly matters for accessing gold<sup>11</sup>.

Mining settlements exist as a venue for numerous people from the region and from much farther away, whose trajectories mesh as long as gold is being extracted. As “places” to live, mining settlements greatly differ from “homes”, wherever the idea of a home is, and thus implies learning to inhabit these elusive environments – this is made possible by developing social skills as highlighted here. It also consists of learning new ways of dwelling in infrastructures marked by an extreme temporariness. As the next section will discuss, these skills include an ability to adapt to a nomadic form of living and its practicalities, but which builds upon relationships external to the domestic sphere. Since other forms of ephemeral dwelling have been studied in the region, the next section seeks to highlight the specificities of mining camps.

### *Spontaneous and ephemeral dwelling*

Michel Agier has studied different types of precarious settlements – especially urban townships (2013) and refugee camps (2002) – and he highlights the specificities of these types of dwelling. A central feature he identifies is their uncertain temporality, which is also a characteristic of gold mining camps. I suggest that mining camps differ from these other two kinds of camps (refugee, slums) due to the peculiar temporality and governmentality of mining settlements.

In contrast to refugee camps, though there are similarities in terms of the internal organization of social life in both spaces, mining camps are not devices engineered by governments, international agencies, or other powerful institutions that partake in “the policing of emergency,” whose main outcome, according to (Agier 2002: 337), is to “make the camps spaces of pure waiting without a subject.” The genealogy of mining camps is similar to that of townships: they both represent a progressive occupation of space by “footloose workers,” to borrow Breman’s words (1996). Now, if we look at the modes of dwelling of the (temporary) inhabitants of mining settlements, they are quite similar to refugee camps since they support the idea of not settling. Yet, while the temporary tends to become permanent in refugee camps, governments instead enforce that which makes mining

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<sup>11</sup> Chapter 8 provides a detailed account of the changing structure and composition of miners’ networks over the course of their careers. It supports the idea that the professionalization of the activity occurs in a cosmopolitan sphere relatively separate from village life. For instance, a survey conducted at the sites around Misséni in Mali listed 16 nationalities and estimated that a population exceeding that of the district capital of Sikasso worked there, rendering the cosmopolitan nature of gold mining sites apparent (Camara 2007).



settlements unique – they regularly empty them and in some cases erasing them from the Earth's surface.

*Picture 5-2 An alley in Karakhena, Senegal (2014)*



*Picture 5-3 Abandoned camp near Massioko, Mali (2013) that was said to have up to 20,000 dwellers a few weeks before the visit*







Whilst urban townships progressively urbanize through the efforts of inhabitants who see themselves as long-term settlers – notwithstanding threats of removal, protests, and conflicts as Agier (2013) documents – mining camps remain at a very proto-urban stage and are never perceived as homes; they are considered temporary forms of shelter that house miners before they return home or continue on their journeys. Mining camps are a sort of intermediate place that offer a lot of hope because of the earning opportunities they present, but this hope is tempered by the continuous threat of removal. Besides, in the best case, fortune could strike at any time, or better opportunities can be found elsewhere, which means that people invest the least they possible can so that they can move fast; from this perspective, mining camps are ephemeral places par excellence. In Karakhena, for instance (see Image 6-2), according to a member of the *tomboloma*, it took three months for what was previously an agricultural hamlet to become a camp with 40,000 people. The exact opposite happened at Massioko Kourani in Mali (see Image 6-3), which was abandoned in favour of a neighbouring camp in the same district less than a week after the government threatened to eject the miners by force in order to make room for a prospective mining company.

Miners' expulsability affect all their everyday social practices, which are all tailored to be short-term arrangements. In Kokoyo, as elsewhere, "houses" are better described as temporary tents and *bougouw*, and are made so that they can be abandoned at any time. "Marriages" (*fudukuruni*) are "small,"<sup>12</sup> meaning that each partner can leave at any moment. Food is not cultivated, as this would require time and planning; food is bought with daily earnings. In sum, although inhabited, these places, with their evanescent temporality, contrast with their counterpart, the *fabara*, which evokes continuity in dwelling, alliance, or production. Living in the camp means staying for a very short time, which Kalou reiterates when he says that he can leave at any moment; Namori did so the week after our arrival – he left his "house" in the camp to try his luck at another site.

Such a lifestyle supposes knowledge or dispositions acquired through previous experiences and journeys, rendering it possible to travel easily between mines and settle quickly for unknown periods of time and leave just as fast for their inhabitants have purposely not invested in any form of infrastructure. From what I witnessed in mining camps in Mali, Guinea, Senegal, and Ivory Coast, and according to what I was told about other sites, most of them are organized in ways similar to the Kokoyo camp that I have briefly described here.

### *Threatening neighbours: junior mining companies*

Most of the large mining settlements where we stayed had fenced and relatively discreet neighbours: junior mining companies. Because of the system of granting leases (see Chapter 1), most potentially rich spaces in West Africa have been leased to foreign junior mining companies. Most of

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<sup>12</sup> The next chapter addresses these forms of temporary partnering between individuals of both sexes.

them operate under prospection contracts, which means that they are not actively operational. Over the last ten years, many such companies – called “zombies” in extractive industry jargon (see e.g. Desjardins 2016) – have set up minimal infrastructure to mark their presence on the leased land. Though juniors do not have the means or the intention to begin industrial mining, their basic infrastructure serve as a reminder of their legal entitlement to the land. In terms of mining finance, juniors display these infrastructures – “the drilling camp in the bush”– as proof of exploration to attract larger investors (Gilbert 2017). These companies raise capital on the basis of the mining titles they have acquired for territories that have not yet been assessed; they do not conduct any actual mining and often work on negative capital until they (the luckiest ones) discover a new deposit, following which they swiftly sell their mining title. Most of the time, these companies are no more than a registered name and a mining contract, and they do not have the means to conduct systematic prospection. Therefore, they rely on the presence of artisanal miners to evaluate their chances. To them, the acquisition of mining titles is pure speculation, and as Sabine Luning (2014) demonstrated, they may even use the presence of artisanal miners as proof of the alleged high grade ore hidden in the subsoil. This is a highly paradoxical situation since miners will become disposable in case of a sale. Hence, the transient nature of artisanal mining is intimately connected to the temporality of mining finance, which mining exploration fairs, like the London Finex depicted by Glibert (2017), incarnate for they are occasions for junior companies to market and sell their titles.

In Karakhena (Senegal, 2014) for instance, the presence of a junior company, Afrigold, was merely symbolical: two containers, one truck and a 50 cm high barb-wired fence that artisanal miners crossed everyday to reach the hill they were exploiting (see Picture 5-4 below). However, it was a recurring topic of discussion at Kalou’s tent during our stay. After an incident that had forced the company to stop its operations, rumours were circulating that artisanal miners would soon be expelled to make room for the company to operate. Kalou, who had just left Yanfolila in Mali, seemed very worried about it and was thinking of either relocating to a neighbouring site or going back to Yanfolila were he could join his previous co-workers in their on-going *daman*.

*Picture 5-4 Afrigold's waiting infrastructures of extraction and exclusion on the edge of the informal mining site of Karakhéna*



As Chapter 8 will discuss in more detail, such thinking indicates a certain degree of professionalization and the possibility of relying on support networks of peers in different localities in case of eventualities such as expulsion. According to Kalou, it was also something he had learnt to anticipate in order to avoid the “problems” of forced removal. Indeed, during his early years in Nigeria, he had lost some of his possessions when the army emptied the camp. Similarly, in Gbonko (Guinea, 2011), the mining settlement was located next to a relatively modern and recently built house occupied by less than ten employees whose leader explained to me that he was the “owner of the site”. Such a statement was highly questionable since the site was entirely managed by the village’s authorities who also claimed ownership and effectively controlled the space by collecting levies on miners and traders. The inhabitants of the “modern” house were waiting for the company that employed them to decide whether they would expel the artisanal workers and start an industrial operation or sell the lease to a larger group, which eventually occurred when the land was bought by Avocet Mining the following year. In the meantime, they were individually buying part of the artisanal miners’ production and, above all, symbolically established through their presence that the land had been granted on lease<sup>13</sup>. Another example is that of the mining site of Djigouroumba in

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth mentioning that ASM and LSM operators do not necessarily enter overtly conflictive relations as long as artisanal miners are not being forcibly removed from their ongoing operations. On the contrary, as in Gbonko, cohabitation tends to be more common, which tends to blur the divide between artisanal (usually informal) and industrial (usually formalized) gold mining towards forms of illegal semi-industrial mining where junior companies’ employees and artisanal miners’ interests meet in the realm of informality. In 2012, we accidentally came across the lease of a prospecting mining company whose local operators were buying the leftovers of the artisanal miners so as to process them in their plant, which was considered by both parties a good deal at that moment.

Guinea, near the Semafo-owned mining plant in Kiniero. The site was being emptied by Guinean militaries when we arrived there to meet one of Sandaly's brothers who had been working there for a year. Most *bougouw* had already been abandoned, yet Sandaly's younger brother and two of his friends were still there, because they did not want to give up on the well they had been working in, which, they were convinced, contained rich ore. In this case, the site was being closed because Semafo was extending its operations. As an established company with a certain public image to maintain, the evacuation had apparently been planned with foresight, with the temporary residents of the mining settlement having been notified months before the imminent closure.

In the three examples, what I wish to point out is that the miners live by side by side with those who are almost invisible, yet, who can have them removed. These agents are neither village authorities nor the government or a clearly identifiable company, but employees of junior companies whose existence is often short-lived and limited to a registered name, prospective mining titles, and minimal infrastructure and employees that make their existence "real". Although they may seem asleep, these junior mining companies can sell their titles to larger ones, which can actually start mid or large scale operations in a very short time. Proximity with such entities of fast capitalism makes "neoliberal time" – that Piot (Piot 2010) describes as a "time whose outcomes are unknown" – concrete as it renders the physical presence of mining settlements and miners and their work uncertain even in the very short-term. Attitudes towards uncertainty, again, vary according to experience and social capital in the field of the gold mines, that is, the capacity to anticipate rather than react to the eventuality of site closure. Kalou, representing a *kountigiw* attitude, was mainly worried about relocating with no loss to a new place, while by contrast, Sandaly's younger brother in Djigouroumba was only worried with extracting more ore, despite the risk of being expelled by armed forces.

### *Synthesis*

To sum up, itinerant miners progressively learn to relate with other workers, residents, or "temporary spouses" to sustain their itinerant lifestyle and make life easier for themselves in the temporary camps. Such skills imply the ability to cope with concrete issues such as accessing water, food, and shelter, yet never knowing if what was acquired one day will be present on the next. Both material and relational assets are thus dependent on a particularly uncertain and short-termed temporality. The fact that uncertainty is a common denominator for neoliberal temporality has indeed been shown in many different contexts (e.g. Bear 2014; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Ferguson 2006). Yet, it is striking how in the field of artisanal gold mining uncertainty takes a material and physical form in the everyday reality of mine workers whose houses, places of work, social relations, and possibly lives are subject to removal from one day to the other. Consequently, miners need to develop skills and social relations to cope with the ephemerality of these places. Thus, whereas

*fabara* symbolizes the permanence of place, artisanal gold mining settlements can be viewed as the opposite: pervading ephemerality. The following section switches the focus from the places where miners live to the places where they work, and seeks to identify what knowledge labour generates, and how it is transmitted through alternative circuits of cooperation formed through travel.

### **5.3.2 Mining sites: technical skills**

I now turn to the second kind of place in which miners spend time – the mining fields where they work. Except during days off (*kebew*), on Monday, which is market day, and on Friday, which is the day of worship, miners spend most of their time in the mining field, which they often call *faro* – a reference to the agricultural field and the idea of labour. Still drawing on Tarrius’ conception of territories of circulation, I look at work and networks as a sites for the construction and transmission of the normative institutions that underlie miners’ circulation.

#### *Silent cooperation among miners*

Operating in the galleries as a *kalayantigi* requires a large body of knowledge that ranges from the spiritual to the technical and geological, and which miners accumulate in their itinerancies. By shadowing Jah in his everyday work when we lived together in Koundiana, I was progressively introduced to the most basic these techniques. To start with, I was taught how to descend down a well using my elbows and heels instead of my feet and hands as I would have instinctively tried to do in my first attempt. I briefly summarize typical experiences while working in a handmade tunnel to stress the precision of the techniques that, once acquired, allow gestures to combine without speaking.

Once inside, non-verbal communication is preferred because speaking is an unnecessary expenditure of energy in the hot and dark tunnels. Most routine communication includes sequenced gestures like pulling sharply on the rope twice to send the bucket away, and passing *nye* between the miners’ hands to assess its quality in the darkness by just touching it. While crumbling the gravel between his fingers, Jah would say “*nye a ka gni*” (“the gravel is good”) when he judges it as good. Otherwise, he would simply pass it without comment to Djibril, a young associate. Once when a quartz vein was found, Jah stood behind Djibril while he excavated. Holding a torch, he simply indicated the direction of the quartz with the light, but did not speak. Here, the miners’ safety relies on an optimal combination of mining techniques, gestures, and procedures that need no dialogue to be communicated. Without the strict use of these gestures, miners run the risk of losing energy – and consequently extracting less ore – and also putting the whole gang in danger of a shaft collapsing.

When several people work in a tunnel that has not yet joined the network of galleries that allows for air to circulate, shifts are made shorter so that each can rest and breathe fresh air from the

pipe that is powered from surface: no one speaks, and after a few minutes of hitting and scratching the lateritic wall, Jah passes the pickaxe to Djibril. He slowly moves backwards, takes a deep breath from the pipe, and climbs in the well one metre on top of us. He props his legs against the wall and sits on a wooden support to take a break, hanging above us. Nobody says anything – the sound of the pickaxe against the rock has continued with such regularity so far that, without looking, a change of digger would have been noticed. Other skills imply some sort of engineering knowledge – to know which part of the tunnel needs to be supported with additional wood, *nombo* (lianas), or simply protected from additional digging to prevent collapses.

Saving energy is certainly essential inside the hot and oxygen-deprived wells. Yet, in addition to these practical constraints, Jah also made the point that he needed to “feel” that his fellow workers had the necessary “experience”. Indeed, he would sometimes have to do sensitive work in hazardous situations inside the same galleries with other *kalayantigiw* from different regions with whom he did not share the same language. In such cases, being able to cooperate efficiently by using and knowing the same techniques, yet without having to verbalize actions, would also imply his own security.

Indeed, managing risks inside the galleries is central to being *kalayantigiw*; the next section looks at it as a means of assessing their knowledge of mining at large.

### *Recited cooperation with djinns*

Technical skills are also translated into the politico-religious domain where they are qualified and where their transmission is ritualized to mark in and out group distinction among *kalayantigiw*. Miners are thus expected to have knowledge of the spiritual domain for, as seen in Chapter 3, prosperous and safe mining goes hand in hand with the cultivation of peaceful relations with the living entities of the subsoil as well as following one’s own spirits’ demands in order to maintain a good *tere*. Most “officers”, *kalayantigiw* for example, pretend to have the capacity to avoid collapses by possessing secrets that allow them to communicate with djinns and thus know whether or not to descend and operate a well. Such knowledge is ritualized in every descent by listening to the ground; for instance, by hitting the wall three times with the back of a pickaxe while simultaneously pressing the ear against the wall. This kind of exercise may seem merely technical since falling gravel could be interpreted as danger. In fact, I asked Jah if the sign was merely the crumbling of sand from the upper part of the tunnel when hitting the walls. Surely it is, but it also involves other competencies stemming from the religious realm, since the message can be understood by *kalayantigiw* (thus not by me) who have received the secret from their master through the spreading of gri-gris inside the tunnels with water that served to wash tablets on which the appropriate Islamic verse were previously written.

As Colleyn points out in his analysis of Bambara fetishes, “yet hidden by the energetic theory [of the *nyama* (vital force)], social relations can be felt. The transmission of secrets to capture and accumulate *nyama* obeys to strict codifications” (Colleyn 2004).<sup>14</sup> More importantly, the acquisition of such knowledge usually supposes extended travels, since the secrets are often related to the journey achieved to gain them. A result of these travels is the initiation by a master to the secrets of mining. Sayon’s account illustrates the process, as well as his own deference towards his master.

Yes. No matter how thick the rock is, Moussa Doumbia (Sayon’s master) can always enter. He is the one who made me follow his techniques. I always stayed behind him no matter what happened. Even when I thought I knew more than he did, I stayed behind. Once, the mine escaped me (the shaft collapsed), but Moussa Doumbia told me not to fear. I left him in one of the tunnels as he told me, and tried to cut a passage elsewhere, but then the other part fell as well. He was still at the same place I had left him, and he told me not to worry. He made me sit in the part which looked good, and went to the collapsed part and repaired it quietly. After that, we just went out. The mine never collapses just like that... it gives you signals. When you are in it, you feel as if the mine expands. When it is about to fall down, there are first small gravel that will inform you, then the water in the bottom gives you vocal signs as well. Three times you can see the gravel, then you get the water signals, only then it falls. You can either come out if you have time and the mine is not deep, or you can find a secure place to wait. Moussa Doumbia gave me lots of his secrets and I am a master myself now. Whatever the nature of the mine, even if it is full of water, I go down and work inside.

Learning how to deal with the everyday hazards of underground gold mining is a central part of becoming a *kalantigi*. After observing as an apprentice how to act in case of a tunnel collapse, escaping one is turned into a sequence of initiation to finalize the apprenticeship.

When I felt I was ready, I paid ten kola [nuts]. But Moussa Doumbia told me to wait... it was not going to be this year, but he told me to wait until next year. I waited for the next year and he felt I could be autonomous, and I felt it too. I paid ten kolas so that he would liberate me, but before he told me to go inside the mine once more, he made it fall just after me to see if I was scared. I was so scared that I tried to take another tunnel and I almost stayed stuck. So he told me that he could not liberate me yet; I needed to know the work better. He made me go inside another well that was full of water; I stayed there working while the water increased inside... I almost wanted to cry at that moment. After that one he sent me to another mine – I gave him the ten kolas before I went down and I went inside. I waited and he came inside as well and he gave me this necklace (sort of leather grigri). When the mine is about to fall, it tightens around my neck. He gave me other secrets for protection, and also gave me secrets for gold. I know the verses to tell at any occasion now. If we are two associates working in the same *daman*, I will always get more than you. Whoever comes inside, I will always be first. And if we are together and I tell you to respect one part and leave it untouched, you better

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<sup>14</sup> My translation, the original was as follows: “Toutefois, bien que masqués par cette théorie énergétique, les rapports sociaux se font sentir. La transmission des secrets indispensables à la captation et à l’accumulation du *nyama* obéit à des codifications très strictes” (Colleyn 2004: 68).



do so because if you touch it I will know it even if I am not inside and the mine will take you [it will collapse on me]. Now I am a master myself and I am teaching four people.

The story of how Sayon learnt from his master, Moussa Doumbia, illustrates how in- and out-group boundaries are institutionalized by ritualizing the experience of the “precarity of life” (Butler 2006). The way he became a *kalayantigi* and a master also reveals at least two things. First, it replicates the dares undertaken by inexperienced *kountaniw* (see Chapter 4); becoming a *kalayantigi* – being recognized as such by one’s master and peers – required Sayon to voluntarily put his life in danger. The intentional collapses provoked by his master can be interpreted in line with Turner’s description of the transition ritual (Turner 1995 (1969), Chap. III), since, just after it, Sayon embraced a new identity by becoming a master himself. In this highly unpredictable environment, different forms of liminality intertwine – men of different ages, living in ephemeral places, often work close to death. The living sphere of the camp is marked by the ephemerality of its infrastructure and the transient presence of mobile workers. Meanwhile, the working sphere of the mining field – especially the apprenticeship rituals that render it more visible – is marked by the fleeting nature of life, which is a direct consequence of the reality that mining galleries can collapse unexpectedly. Secondly, this story can also be read in view of Sayon’s larger life-course and tells us about the alternative identities his engagement with mining provides him, as opposed to his life in his home-place.

Sayon is less than 30 years old and is the son of a smith in a small village in upper Guinea. Before mining gold, he learned the art of metalwork in the forge from his father until he decided to leave. At that moment, he had two alternatives: either stay in the village and support his father as a smith and work on the farm on the side, or move in with one of his *numu* relatives to continue improving his skills as a smith. As Sayon said, if he had followed one of these paths, he would still be doing secondary jobs for one of his fathers. On the contrary, not only had he been able to finance his wedding by working on his own in the mines, he had also gained the status of “master”, that made newbies come to him asking for his guidance. Within the social field of the mines, and though it is not transferable as such to the context of his home-place, Sayon had rapidly gained social status in the hierarchy prevalent within gold mining sites. As the example of Sayon illustrates, though they have cross-cutting conventional affiliations, mining spaces are not flat spaces. The next section addresses the formation of hierarchies by looking at the networks through which knowledge and value are transmitted.

### *Networks of transmission*

As Colleyn (2004) recalls, the transmission of knowledge – especially secrets – is “almost a reification of social relations” in the sense that it consecrates inequalities usually based on age and sex. As explained earlier (see Chapter 3), conventional hierarchies are blurred in the context of the mines, but the example of Sayon shows that other hierarchies take form, such as through the

replication of the apprenticeship system, and are similarly reified through the ritualized transmission of knowledge. The tendency to professionalize the activity through apprenticeship systems can be seen in the mining fields, in particular in underground mining, where *kalayantigiw* masters progressively teach their followers how to best extract *nye* from the ground.

The learning of gold mining techniques is inseparable from the mining journeys along which newbies put themselves under the guidance of experienced masters who teach them how to navigate impermanence – and also extract a rent on their submission. By way of example, the below table (see Table 5-1) shows some of the linkages between miners and their master(s): Masters always originate from regions very distant to the ones of their apprentices. Even among miners originating in mining regions such as Boure and Siguiri, which have a long history of mining gold, they travel and learn from masters in relatively far regions, sometimes in other countries, instead of being taught by their masters “at home” (i.e., Kalou or Karamo K). Consistent with Gell’s claim on “technology [being] coterminous with the various networks of social relationships which allows for the transmission of technical knowledge” (1988: 6), analysing the transmission of such knowledge sheds light on networks that invariably extend from the local, especially the *fabara*, and are clearly separate from it. Except Mansa, whose master is from a village close to his, all the others have travelled fairly long distances either within their country of origin but also often across national borders before asking a master to train them which signals, again, the high value put on the experience of travel.

Table 5-1 Itinerant miners and their masters and their respective place of residence (??=missing information)

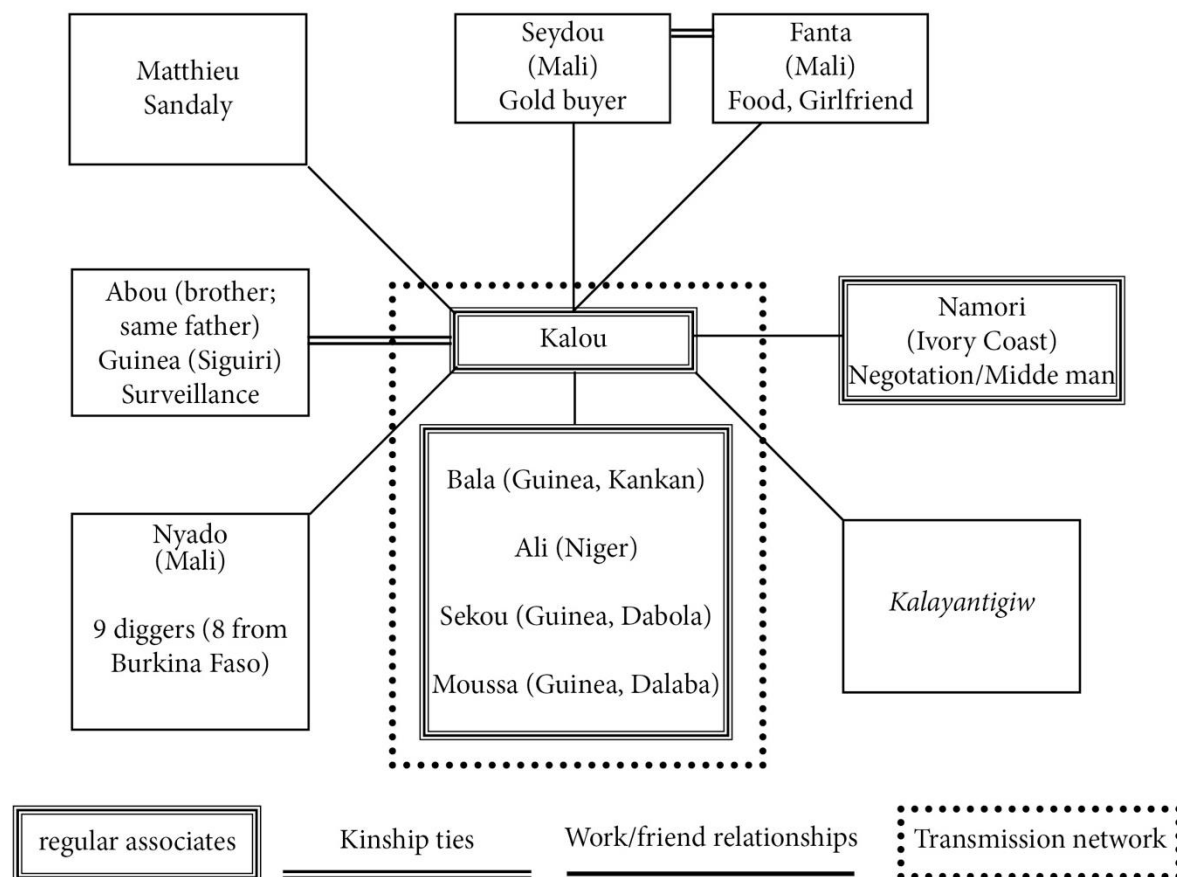
| Miner’s name       | Miner’s place of residence | Master’s name | Master’s place of residence |
|--------------------|----------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Kalou              | Siguiri (Guinea)           | Kofi          | ??, (Nigeria)               |
| Abou               | ?? (Ghana)                 | Kalou         | Siguiri (Guinea)            |
| Issa               | Kati, Bamako (Mali)        | Kalou         | Siguiri (Guinea)            |
| Moussa             | Dalaba (Guinea)            | Kalou         | Siguiri (Guinea)            |
| Namori             | Bouake (Ivory Coast)       | Ibrahim       | Fourou (Mali)               |
| Officier supérieur | Kissidougou (Guinea)       | Moussa C      | Balato, Boure (Guinea)      |
| Karamo             | Koumban (Guinea)           | Karim         | Soubre (Ivory Coast)        |
| Fode               | Kantedou (Guinea)          | Kassimou      | Balato, Boure (Guinea)      |
| Laye               | Famania (Guinea)           | ??            | Kintinian, Boure (Guinea)   |
| Kaba               | Koundian (Guinea)          | ??            | Balan (Guinea)              |
| Sayon              | Kossokoba (Guinea)         | Moussa D      | Doubaya (Guinea)            |

While many “technical systems” that are traditionally attached to the home-place transmit knowledge following the rule of ancestry (Kopytoff 1971), gold mining occurs in rural areas that bear the traits of more urban communities, that is, for instance, the reliance on associational rather than communal social networks<sup>15</sup>. A closer look at Kalou’s (ego) social network that he mobilized

<sup>15</sup> Famous ethnographies of the Zambian Copperbelt compiled by Mitchell (1969) have indeed similarly stressed the existence of a so-called “inter-ethnic community” in mining towns where social relations cross-cut conventional boundaries based on, for example, ethnicity. However, it must be stressed that, in these contexts, it was merely a consequence of labour migrating to mining towns where the social mix was more

for work in Kokoyo, and how he managed some of these personal relationships within it, shall help clarify the point (see Figure 5-1).

Figure 5-1 Kalou's ego work network in Kokoyo



The above image shows the main relationships involved in the extraction process in Kokoyo from the perspective of Kalou being the *ego*. It only includes persons who were physically present at the *daman*, and whose presence played a role in the extraction of ore. In the block below Kalou are his current associates – two of them being apprentices who have been following him for between three years (Moussa) and two months (Bala), while on his right stands Namori whom they had recently met, but whose association with them would continue over the next few years. On the left is Abou, a younger brother who had come to join them against Kalou's will. To show his disapproval, Kalou had given Abou the most subordinate role of transporting stuff on demand from the camp to the site. In Kalou's view, his brother had come to the mines with the intention of making quick money rather than leaning from him; therefore, he would not do him any "favours" and would not let him approach the *nye*. The whole episode, which illustrates the strength of norms within these specific territories of circulation (Tarrius 1993), seemed to disturb Kalou, whose main complaint about his

diverse than in the workers' home villages. In contrast, what itinerant miners' master-apprentice relations feature is the voluntarily preference for a certain degree of difference and the seeking of it, which the distance travelled to reach one's master illustrates.

brother seemed to hinge on the complicated crossing of the two moral worlds that Abou's presence meant. In Kalou's view, his remittance to the family should suffice, without having to additionally take care of his brother in the context of the gold mines. Kalou's surprising response to his brother's unanticipated visit (excluding him rather than including him in the team) seemed to be driven by the specific morals of the mines where travelling and learning from total others is valued; and that his brother was not an "other" to Kalou. Furthermore, in the meritocratic ideology of miners, Abou had no experience of the sort that could be valued, compared to Kalou's associates and apprentices who had "suffered" on their way; his punishment thus appeared as a way to conform and preserve mining institutions on which his association with the rest of the team relied.

Thus, in addition the overall diversity of the people involved in the production system, which echoes a form of cosmopolitanism from below claimed by discourses on "suffering and sharing the same condition", channels for learning and transmitting knowledge are based out of kinship and *fabara*-based relationships along which they usually transit. In such a context, my presence and Kalou's insistence that Sandaly and I stay with him in his settlement was certainly an additional opportunity for him to show off his "bossness". While conventional ideas on transmission, especially given the extensive research on lineage-based specialists (*nyamakalaw*), place the family and the local environment as the preferred place for the transmission of knowledge, it is seemingly a different scheme that applies in the case of gold mining. Knowledge about how to exploit the subsoil, while highly ritualized, is paradoxically less territorialized, since places disappear fast; instead, it is imbricated in constantly moving networks, which is why a capacity to stay constantly mobile is valorized, which is also considered as a proof of the capacity to deal with different environments.

### *Synthesis*

In summary, the main feature that the working and living spheres of the production system have in common is their extreme impermanence which is expressed symbolically through the ritualization of knowledge transmission among miners. Ritualized interactions such as the presentation made by a miner when he joins a new team, or knowledge transmission between master and apprentices, indicate that, in addition to the value attributed to movement, value is also tied to the experience of coping with uncertainty. The highly heterogeneous composition of teams whose members "have the experience of suffering", the epic journey realized before asking for a master's guidance, and the ritualized experience of shaft collapse indicate altogether that miners sense of value lies on their established capacity to take risk, to endure hardship and to be autonomous from their inner circle of kin and affiliates.

As I have tried to depict in this chapter, the idea of being a "professional" suggests a dependence on goldmining for subsistence, being permanently mobile, and valorizing this ephemeral

lifestyle as opposed to the permanence of the home-place. The next section looks at the routes taken by miners to other sites that require a specific knowledge of the production system to deploy.

### 5.3.3 Routes: mobility skills

Just as the temporality of places is elusive, the routes that connect them are always redrawn. I draw on Tarrius' ideas of "mobility skills" (1992), as explained earlier, thus suggesting that being on the move requires one to socialize the changing territories of miners' circulations. Just as Clifford (1997) had undermined the opposition between roots and routes, or dwelling and travelling, the previous part of the chapter has shown that both were conciliated in a form of nomadic-like dwelling, which suggests that miners have specific know-how to link places through movement even when the environment in-between is rapidly changing. I focus on the changing character of routes and the spaces they connect.

#### *Flashing borders*

At the end of the two weeks Sandaly and I spent in Kokoyo with Kalou, Namori, and the rest of the team, there were regular discussions in the night about a new mining field in Sieke (Guinea) that was said to be lucrative. Besides, the last few weeks had not been profitable for Kalou, especially since one of his *damans* had turned out to be surprisingly poor. It was decided that Namori would go there with Boubacar, a young *kalayantigi* who had family in the region, to gather news directly on the ground and evaluate the possibility of them moving there – if not the entire team, then possibly a part of it would go. Curious to see this sort of prospection campaign take form, and also tempted by the possibility of relocating to a more salubrious environment than that of Kokoyo, Sandaly and I decided to go with them since there was room for us on the motorbikes. Two days later, I had packed my stuff and was waiting in the early morning for Namori to pick me up at Kalou's tent.

We took the "road" (more an agricultural path) that would take us from Kokoyo on the Malian side directly to Doko in Guinea, without having to cross the border checkpoint at Kouremale. Boubacar knew the way, which, he says, was the one used by petty gold traders ("balanciers") to move from one side of the border to the other to avoid officials. After two hours of fast driving, our little caravan was stopped by Guinean soldiers who had blocked the way with a rope tied across the road to the trees on both sides. Contrary to Boubacar's past experiences, which had been confirmed by other miners who had used the road the day before, a border checkpoint had appeared during the night. Yet the "border post" consisted of a rope and five soldiers on the "Guinean side", none of whom were equipped with any register or stamp. After ten minutes of argument, which mainly concerned Namori's suspicious presence in the area because of his Ivorian nationality which was associated to the alleged presence of ex-"Force Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire" (FRCI) in mining

areas, Namori would “thank the security forces for their important and necessary work” with one box of cigarettes each. While my presence might have increased the price of the bribe, it seemed that the soldiers were busier with arguing with Namori, eventually resulting in a relatively quick “All right, go ahead”. Yet, it is not the episode as such that interests me, but rather how it was talked about afterwards. Thus, during the rest of the day, there were arguments about how Boubacar, according to Namori, should have “know the way”, meaning that he should have anticipated the roadblock and thought of an alternative route. What appeared to me an unpredictable event was exactly what should have been foreseen according to Namori.

Similar scenes repeated in different forms, with different persons, and in different locations an uncountable number of times during my fieldwork. Thus, what I wish to point out here is not the payment of a bribe or tax to cross a newly set up administrative border, which happens in all other kinds of contexts, but the rapid emergence and constant relocation of such administrative borders along mining routes. I suggest that national, prefectural, and district borders are not fixed in the contexts of miners’ journeys. Borders suddenly gain a material reality in all kinds of locations where, in other circumstances, they remain vague words. Here are some episodes from my fieldwork, whose repetition suggests a certain degree of standardization in the process of flashing borders: In 2011, a gendarmerie post appeared on the border of Telimele prefecture during the month that diamonds and gold started being found in the river; the same year, in the south of Sikasso, Ivorian ex-FRCI started controlling the ford across the river connecting Mali and Ivory Coast, even though their “mandate” was revoked for months; in 2012, a similar ephemeral post appeared in the outskirts of Mandiana when gold mining was booming; in 2014, the Senegalese police suddenly undertook “controls” on the way out of Saraya toward Karakhena, and so on. All these sudden boundaries were equally unpredictable, yet, Sandaly, Jah, and Kalou, had always been informed of it before. What this peculiar journey to Doko revealed was that both Boubacar and Namori considered the anticipation of such an event part of the body of knowledge their activity should ideally entail: not anticipating and having a solution to bypass it was a relative failure. I will briefly touch upon the national and political context, which miners also take into consideration.

### *...and changing political climate*

In contrast to the volatility of localized administrative borders that solidify and melt unexpectedly, mainly as a result of state agents’ strategies to “chop” (“bouffer”) (Olivier de Sardan 1996), the sociopolitical context at the national and subnational scale across which mining routes extend and within which mining sites emerge tend to have a more durable temporality, yet prone to rapid changes. Such contexts matter when deciding where to relocate to and requires complex evaluations of their relative advantage or inconvenience. For instance, the temporary collapse of part of the Guinean administration during the transition period that followed the collapse of the Moussa

Dadis regime in 2009, was perceived by many miners as a potential opportunity, since the district offices of the mining minister were not collecting levies from the mining sites any longer. On the contrary, other forms of political instability, including military activity, in some regions such as the Ivory Coast (2011), were avoided to side-step risks of racketeering. Choosing the next destination is hence more complex than just following the route to places “where people believe that the gold comes out” and implies balancing a vast array of partly available information that goes beyond merely the available instrumental support and foreseeable opportunities.

The different policies aimed at formalizing the sector, which usually aim to close down artisanal mining sites, implemented with more or less rigour and use of violence in different national contexts, are rapidly known to translate into large movements of people. As I mentioned in a short note (Bolay 2013), the presidential decree to shut down all artisanal gold mining sites in Guinea during the dry season of 2012 as a means to increase food security by forcing a return to agriculture, led to the massive displacement of gold miners to the neighbouring Malian sites. The site in Karakhena (Senegal), where Kalou and Namori were working in 2014, was also closed shortly after Sandaly and I left, as I learnt afterwards in a phone call with Kalou, namely because of the increasing “insecurity” that was said to have spread in the region following several attacks on gold buyers in the camp and itinerant miners on their way home,<sup>16</sup> some of which were fatal. For similar reasons, such as insecurity and threat to food security, the Ivorian government also justified the closure of 158 artisanal gold mining sites in the central and northern parts of the country between April and June 2015.<sup>17</sup>

On a more local scale, the micro-politics of the *tomboloma*, who are organized differently across different sites and regions, also vary in their level of attractiveness to the itinerant miners. To gain information on potential arrangements, one would have to make direct contact with people on the site, or must make a direct visit, as Namori and Boubacar were doing from Kokoyo in Mali to Sieke in Guinea. Along these routes, coffee places or “gare voiture” are also places where information can be found; this stresses the importance of relational skills to adequately access useful tips and information on neighbouring mining sites from other miners or local residents during mining journeys.

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<sup>16</sup> During the two weeks I spent in Karakhena in March 2014, a gold buyer was attacked overnight in the camp, and two miners were found dead on their way to Kedougou. The local press repeated many other such examples in the following months. A little later, the site was closed. This resulted in the displacement of miners to Mali and Guinea (an account of the closure is provided by Birame Faye in *Le Quotidien*, 9 March 2015). In the local press, the closure of the site was mainly attributed to the climate of insecurity. Other sources however offered an alternative narrative (Prause 2016, personal communication) by hinting that the junior mining company, Afrigold, had a role to play and that it was done to enforce its lease in Karakhena.

<sup>17</sup> See the official website of the Ivorian government, [http://www.gouv.ci/actualite\\_1.php?recordID=5727](http://www.gouv.ci/actualite_1.php?recordID=5727)

## Synthesis

The routes taken by miners are, unsurprisingly, changing rapidly, as are their destinations and the potential obstacles they can pose. Like other spheres of activity that require intense mobility, itinerant miners develop strategies to bypass potential obstacles or simply anticipate them by getting the right information from the right persons at the right moment. Another necessary skill that appears to help miners determine their route consists of the ability to adequately judge which destination would be most suitable, which they do not decide merely on the basis of potential incomes, but also according to many other variables, such as the sociopolitical situation in the place, the health situation, and the reputation of the mining settlements. Such a body of knowledge that could be broadly described as “mobility skills” (“*savoirs circulers*”) does not rely as much on technical skills as it does on relational competencies and social capital. While in other systems of mobility, agents need to maintain relations and contacts in relatively well defined localities to support their movements (i.e. Schmoll 2005; Tarrius 2002; e.g. between urban markets Walther and Retaillé 2008), that is, especially with the so-called “notaries” who know the place well and allow transmigrants to make use of their own social networks, in contrast, in the present case, an attachment to places is close to nothing since they are meant to disappear. However, maintaining contact with other mobile workers across the region, as between Namori and Kalou, rather than with individuals in fixed localities, is what allows them to adequately navigate between mining sites.

In anthropological literature, the peculiarity of continuously being on the move without relying on fixed localities is a characteristic of nomadic groups; an identity that itinerant miners often use metaphorically to speak of themselves when they describe their activity. Yet, their activity would rather qualify as a contemporary form of transhumance, where movement is needed to access resources temporarily available in remote places. Like transhumant groups, their attachments remain intimately tied to their home village, the *fabara*, in which they ultimately seek recognition despite being physically absent in it most of the time. In sum, the system of mobility practised by *kalayantigiw* differs from other forms of circulatory migrations (Parreñas 2010; Schmoll 2005; Tarrius 1992; Walther and Retaillé 2008) because they do not rely on a network of relatively fixed localities to support their movement, but on other continuously mobile individuals. From this perspective, their circulations are better described as a nomadic-like mobility, rather than conforming to existing patterns of circulatory migrations.

The next section wraps up the findings of this chapter by focusing on the values miners associate with their mobile livelihoods, that is, what they consider makes them “professional”. I shall use the concept of ethos to link the notion of value to itinerant miners’ work, travel, and hierarchies in the labour system.



#### 5.4 *Kountigiw'* work ethos: everyday transience

Scholars using the concept of “mobility skills” relate it to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (for a detailed discussion see Moret 2015), which entails a cyclical and generative principle that reinforces itself through experience (Bourdieu 2011). As Moret puts it, “the concept (of mobility skills) includes the technical skills that mobility necessitates (organizational skills, the ability to cross borders, perhaps illegally, etc.) but also goes beyond it. It entails a more general capacity, that of being able to constantly be on the move and to include mobility as an integral part of actors’ global strategies” (2015: 192). As we have seen, in addition to technical competencies, a broader body of knowledge is progressively incorporated. In fact, it is the right combination of relational, technical and mobility skills that allow miners to use mobility as a response to the instability of mining terrains and comes to define specific modes of dwelling, working, and travelling, and, I argue, a specific *ethos*.

Bourdieu defined ethos as “an objectively systematic set of dispositions of moral dimensions, of practical principles” (Bourdieu 2011, my translation), that is, a component of the habitus, which is a disposition, constantly re-actualized, that shapes practices and behaviours. As Fusulier (2011: 97-98) argues, the notion of ethos can thus be a useful way “to define the ‘profession’ through its consequences to the individual. (...) The profession would be a sort of social configuration that would produce a particular ethos, which translates, among others, by a feeling of attachment of individuals to their work.” (my translation) In the case of a professional ethos, Zarca defines it as “dispositions acquired through experience and related to more or less anything that is pertinent in the exercise of an occupation. It consists in learning not only what is expected to respect the rules of one’s art, but also how to exchange with colleagues and judge them as professionals: why we admire them, have esteem of them, or why we despise them” (Zarca 2009: 352 cited by Fusulier 2011, my translation). Indeed, as I stressed in several examples, miners continually exhibit such dispositions while ranking each other as “*kalayantigiw*”, “masters”, “officers” and so on, as well as by distancing from the deposit those who do not show “courage” in their mining practice or by travelling out of the *fabara*. Droz and Lavigne (2006) add in their definition that “this ethos – just as the habitus – is constituted through experiences of anyone and through processes of learning: it is progressively incorporated as to become a second nature. When social practices are first determined by moral connotations, the concept of ethos intervenes. It assimilates different schemes in an implicit system of value” (2006: 48, cited in Forney 2010: 270, my translation).

Based on such an understanding of the notion of ethos, it can be argued that what miners learn on their journeys comprises the learning of a mode of being and living on the move, along with its proper norms and modes of evaluations that matter in their everyday professional activity, yet which contradict conventional and sedentary moralities. In fact, in several instances, people judge their co-

workers on the basis of an ethos that values risk taking, courage, and experience (especially abroad), that are evoked through anecdotes of past journeys. Such instances include, for example, the narrative that new miners use to introduce themselves to the group, as was the case of Bala when he joined Kalou's team. According to Kalou, he had accepted Bala as an apprentice after he had heard about his previous adventures. When he learned of what Bala had endured so far, Kalou estimated that Bala was courageous and would probably learn fast and adapt quickly to the elusive lifestyle of the mines. On the contrary, a lack of experience is seen as a minus point, as I often heard Jah say in several discussions with other workers, who would complain that those who made decisions in Koundiana had never left the village and knew nothing about the constraints of the mining settlements. "There are good miners but no master here," they would say.

As I have argued through this chapter, knowledge in the field of artisanal gold mining essentially consists in knowing how to maintain oneself on the move and cope with the ephemerality of places, which translates into making transient everything that usually constitutes "a home" – namely, adopting short-term and disposable living infrastructures, cultivating short-term emotional and sexual relationships, and generating short-term earnings largely spent on the site. Conversely, the aptitude to cope with ephemerality is valued and constitutes a work *ethos of transience*, on the basis of which miners organize their everyday life, establish social hierarchies, and build networks to survive that single operation and which also will allow to them sustain their mobile livelihood.

Schematically, this work ethos can be considered as the organizing principle upon which miners who have "professionalized" their activity and use it to generate a full-time livelihood, base their occupational choices on, and in view of which they evaluate their peers. I propose to see it as the established and theoretical counterpart of the everyday *ethics of luck* I have addressed in Chapter 3. While the everyday *ethics of luck* enables cooperation across social fields by making whoever is involved in gold mining, young or old, man or woman, local or stranger, *kountani* or *kountigi*, able to cooperate on a day-to-day basis, the notion of ethos suggests a systematized set of principles within the social field of itinerant miners. It allows a rationality of social practices in the longer term (i.e., modes of living, working and moving) within one segment of the labour force, namely the *kalayantigiw* who consider themselves professionals, which, given their situation of expulsability, consists of making the transient perennial.

Both "everyday ethics", on which everyday cooperation is based, and "professional ethos", on which a professional identification is based, are grounded in everyday practices and should be distinguished from morality in the broad Durkheimian sense of a "codified representation of society" (Yan 2011). Briefly, the three can be represented along a continuum of time and engagement, from the external to the internal, which translates into internalized principles and practices (see image below, Figure 5-2). In the "outside" of gold mining spaces, Mandé moralities – in their "codified"

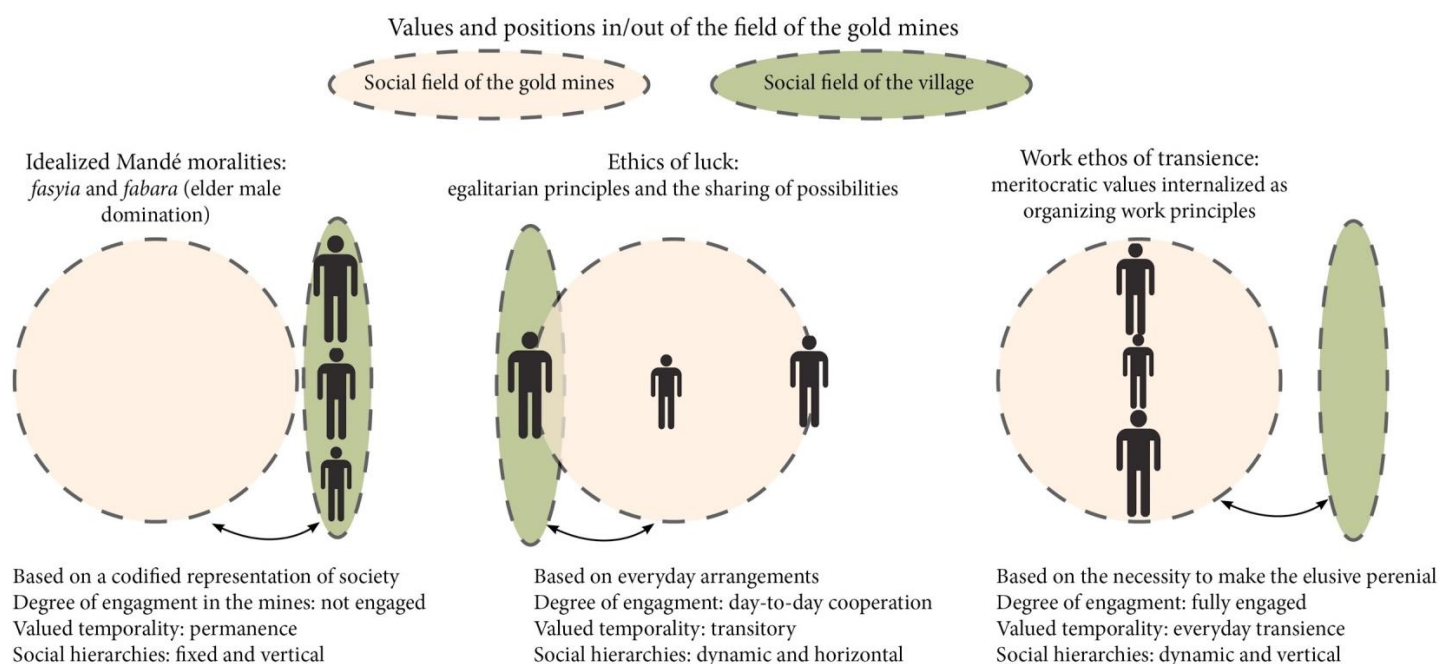
version, as myths that *jeliw* (“bards”) perpetuate, and which widely circulate in everyday talk – tend to value principles of seniority (*fasiya*) and attachment to the home-place (*fabara*),<sup>18</sup> which are both overtly contradicted in the mines. Hence, from the perspective of conventional Mandé moralities, miners are often poorly judged outside their social field, because of their allegedly transgressive behaviours.<sup>19</sup> However, at the intersection of the field of the miners and the field of the villagers, everyday cooperation is made possible by acknowledging that everyone’s individual chance to strike luck benefits the entire group, thus enabling new attachments across conventional boundaries. Finally, those whom I have called “professionals” in this chapter, and who have made gold mining a full-time activity and unique source of livelihood, have progressively internalized the principles that arise from their precarious lifestyle. This work *ethos of transience* is based on principles that allow them to make the transient perennial; they are also a sign of professionalization that forge hierarchies among them. As the image below shows, different degrees of engagement in the sector thus go hand in hand with different moral economies.

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<sup>18</sup> Examples abound in the two most famous written versions of the Mandé epic narrated by Wa Kamissoko and written by Tata Cissé (Kamissoko 1988; Kamissoko and Cissé 1991) and also in the one narrated by Mamadou Kouyaté (Niane 1960). However, in line with the thinking of Claude Meillassoux (2000), Anne Attané (2011) has shown that though it is increasingly being associated with wealth and less with age, seniority remained a ruling principle between generations at a discursive level; seniority relations are increasingly established through relations of financial dependency that do not necessarily replicate age. Jackson (2002), in a detailed comparative analysis of the Mandé and Kuranko version of the Soundjata epic, stresses that succession and authority are far from straightforward as they could be interpreted in popular discourses. The myth of Soundjata precisely makes the case that, for the “hero”, “succession does not conform to the ideal pattern (primogeniture); [since] Soundjata is second-born”.

<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere in West Africa, scholars have made similar observations and have qualified mining spaces as “heterotopias” or spaces of “marginalization” (Tschakert 2009; Werthmann 2010) to stress the stigma that comes with the fact that miners’ values are poorly understood and badly judged from outside their social field.

Figure 5-2 Moral economies in production settings in/out of the field of the gold mines



While short-term temporality is valued in the social field of the mines, permanence and reproduction are valued in ideal Mandé morality. As seen in other mining contexts (see i.e. Ferguson 1999), people often view the opposition between mines and villages through the tradition–modernity lens, which they also associate with different temporalities: fast and changing modernity versus slow and stable tradition. Indeed, the mines give access to a certain idea of “modernity” through the adoption of an urban lifestyle, short-term consumption, and imported goods, made possible through *fadenya*-oriented behaviour and effort, while villages represent the opposite<sup>20</sup>. A worldview that places the family system, the *lu*, as the centre where the permanence of the lineage is secured, goes in hand with agricultural modes of production whose cycles remain attached to the home-place and which favour *badenya*-oriented behaviour since it permits the family to secure harvests from one year to the other.<sup>21</sup> Yet, as we have seen, this ideal view of the “village life” has, in practice, moved

<sup>20</sup> A recent article about artisanal gold mining in Ghana proposes to consider mining sites as proto-urban (Fafchamps, et al. 2016). Similarly, the intermediary position of mining sites between the urban and rural spheres has been noted by (Bryceson and Mwaipopo 2009) who consider mining settlements in Tanzania as experiencing an urbanizing process. These contexts are indeed relatively urban in terms of lifestyle, in particular among the youth, while they retain certain rural features in terms of infrastructure. Nevertheless, what these studies may have neglected is the dominant temporality of these spaces; if they are indeed rather urban in terms of sociabilities and forms of consumption, they are under permanent threat of being dismantled or abandoned which hinders any will to develop these places locally.

<sup>21</sup> Meillassoux (1975), for instance, argues that agricultural production relies on strong imperatives of continuity and induces relations of indebtedness on the part of younger generations towards their elders. Commitment to the community, as expected in the yearly agricultural labour system, is typically *badenya*-oriented. In contrast, hunters or gatherers – or miners – who operate in bands, are less constrained by such ideas of continuity. Contrary to the agricultural mode of production, they are likely to favour *fadenya*-oriented behaviours.

towards more heterogeneous livelihoods and lifestyles for decades while the normative environment remain strongly attached to the pre-cited agrarian values.

Yet, as Kenny states, “being called a man [cè], is a collective and earned title” (Kenny 2011) that refers to a specific life stage of a married man and father active within the *fabara*, securing the household’s livelihood through agriculture, thus securing the continuity of the group. Being recognized as a man consequently implies to (re)connect – physically, economically, or socially, according to everyone’s means and possibilities – with the home-place and contributing to perpetuating the *lu* in the village. From this perspective, this continuity is threatened by gold mining since young men spend months or years disconnected from the *fabara*.<sup>22</sup> It is not new for youth to travel, we have seen earlier; yet, the fact that such a lifestyle of uninterrupted movement lasts over the long-term and creates a certain autonomy for individuals from the social field is a major transformation in the eyes of an older generation. In another West African context, Jesper Bjarnesen (2013a) has also shown that being mobile or immobile was differently valued at different stages along the life course. So, while one is expected to travel when one is younger, this is not true for those who are older. The professionalization of itinerant miners’ activities when they are “adults” opposes the idea of permanence expected by village life. On the contrary, artisanal gold miners appear to think it important to acknowledge the fact that nothing in their environment is permanent<sup>23</sup>.

## **5.5 Conclusion: making a living out of the ephemerality of mining journeys**

This chapter has shown that informal labour-based technologies such as artisanal gold mining, though often associated with “locality” and its alleged potential for local development (ILO 2002), profits from being studied from a “mobility perspective” (Sheller and Urry 2006) first, because of mining sites’ evanescent nature as “places”; and second, because of miners’ temporary situation in such places. Therefore, artisanal mining technologies cannot be located in places of learning and transmission as easily as other long-standing techniques of production such as farming, fishing, or hunting technologies which are tightly linked to village based institutions.

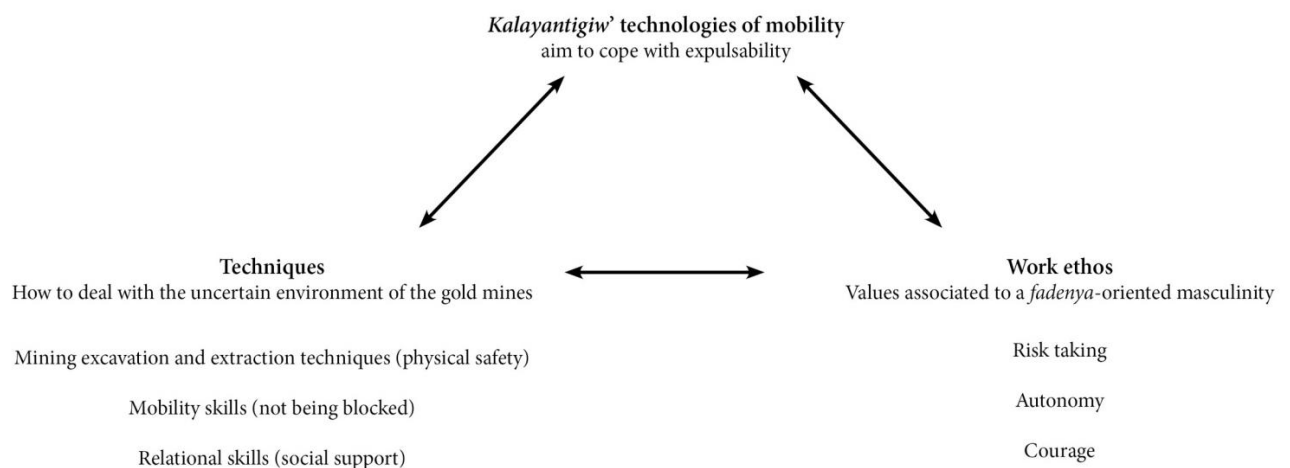
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<sup>22</sup> Contrary to the conventional understanding of migration that suggests the making of remittances, that is, being a man and a part of the *fabara* despite distance, itinerant gold mining often follows an adventurist ideology (see previous chapter) that comes with the suspension of close ties. In the same line, the inverse relation between the ideal temporality of the life course (successive stages towards adulthood, elder age, death and revelation of destiny) and one of working in the gold mining sector (suspension in time) also recalls heroic revelations, such as the one of Soundjata who embodies the ambivalence of being a “child-adult” (Jackson 2002: 221) between ages.

<sup>23</sup> These tensions that arise from the ambiguous relation miners maintain with the *fabara*, the home-place they usually consider their main locality while being on the move for their work, will be further analysed in the next chapter to investigate the residential strategies they develop to conciliate both.

I have studied the technologies of mobility that artisanal gold miners acquire and deploy, utilizing a specific body of knowledge that allows them to deal with constantly changing work locations – caused by reasons including site closures, cornering by mining companies, or rapidly changing political context – and involving the internalization of a specific work ethos. By investigating the technologies deployed, I have suggested that their activity necessitates specific skills and knowledge that extend beyond purely technical wisdom on how to extract gold, and that these skills and knowledge are essentially related to specific modes of moving and dwelling in an uncertain environment. Moreover, the acquisition of these technologies of mobility translates into a work ethos that mainly values an aptitude to deal with the ephemeral environment of the artisanal mines, which emphasizes a *fadenya*-oriented form of masculinity. While being produced as mobile subjects by specific conditions of precariousness, they reversely develop techniques and values through which they embody this subjectivity (see Figure 5-3 below).

Figure 5-3 Model of *kalayantigiw*' technologies of mobility



The concept of “mobility skills”, borrowed from French studies on migratory circulations, and the concept of “infrastructures of im/mobility”, borrowed from the field of mobility studies, have helped me depict the knowledge that full-time itinerant miners acquire in the course of their journeys. From observing the places and routes they travel through, I conclude that the most common feature of what constitutes their everyday life is the extreme ephemerality of virtually everything that usually makes a place – enduring social relations, infrastructure, and a sense of attachment (Cresswell 2009: 169). During their mining journeys, nothing is fixed nor thought to remain. Camp infrastructure can appear or disappear within a few days depending on political decisions, the deposits and mines that they excavate can be seized by mining companies from one day to the other, the routes they take change from one day to another and cease to exist when the sites are emptied, the borders they travel across emerge and dissolve without warning, the labour arrangements they engage in tend to be one-off, and the emotional and sexual relationships they cultivate in the camps are not supposed to extend

the period of labour. Altogether, these features make them mobile subjects, capable to conduct their work in highly precarious conditions “on their own” and to relocate unpredictably. Paradoxically, the transient work, continuous travel, and risk-taking that they value and contrast to fixity, permanence, and subsistence farming in the *fabara* is exactly what allows the rest of the family to make ends meet in the home-place.

So, in what sense is it different or similar to other forms of mobile labour in rural areas? From the perspective of mobility, the system of circulation induced by the ephemeral nature of places contradicts the usual relation between mobility and locality, in which localities support mobility. In contrast, itinerant miners develop a nomadic-like system of mobility in which they do not rely on localities, nor on the “local notaries” (Tarrius 1992) that control local social networks and other factors, to perpetuate their mobile livelihoods. Instead, they construct a relatively autonomous social field (with a proper work ethos, a knowledge system, and social hierarchies) that transcend local and national boundaries. Within this field, the “poor-to-poor” (Tarrius 2015) relations that they maintain with other peers on the move allows them to sustain their continuous movement without depending on local points of contact.

Although their work in the gold mines is often to support their family, which may be seen as *badenya*-oriented behaviour, the contradictory values that they promote in their journeys, as well as the very fact that they hardly spend time in the home-place, may lead to a certain ambiguity towards their family’s expectations. The next chapter addresses how itinerant miners resolve these questions by looking at the strategies that they deploy to practically reconcile their mobile lifestyle with a certain sense of permanence in the *fabara*.

# Chapter 6: Mobile livelihoods between scattered households

## 6.1 Introduction: "Any time I hear echoes from the mines, I take my bike and I go"

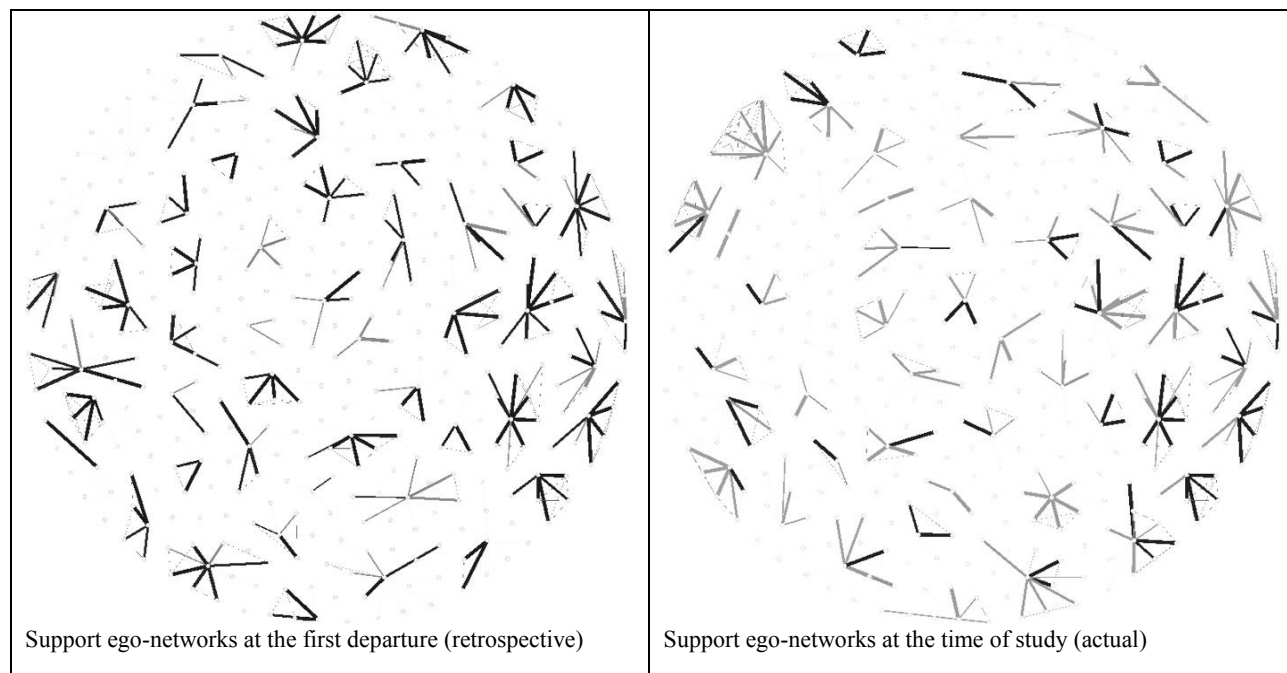
In the previous chapter, I examined the techniques and knowledge required to support the mobile livelihoods of itinerant miners and highlighted the ethos which results from their work and lifestyle. Both their mobile lifestyle and work ethos are clearly *fadenya*-oriented, meaning they favour an individualistic and “heroic” idea of the male person. It also implies that *kalayantigiw* spend a relatively long time away from their home-place. The varying lifestyles in the mines and villages often lead them to distance themselves from their relations back home, which sometimes translates into an almost total suspension of contact for relatively long periods. However, as I suggested in the introduction, being a contributing member of the village community is another aspect of male personhood – the so-called *badenya*-oriented aspect – which appears difficult to conciliate with their way of life. Indeed, the temporariness and ephemerality induced by their continuous journeys to produce livelihood, secure subsistence and make are also experienced as obstacles to the realization of other aspirations usually linked to the *fabara*. In this chapter, I will explore this contradiction from the perspective of mobility, by asking how itinerant miners seek to reconcile their mobile way of life with more stable, located, and fixed attachments upon which reproduction and other processes traditionally rely.

Before embarking on the theoretical framing of this chapter, I propose to practically illustrate the issue it tackles by looking at the evolution of miners’ relations with their home-place, whether or not they maintain them, and by listening to some of the contradictions they experience. A comparison of the support networks mobilized by itinerant gold miners when they first leave indicates important changes in the composition of the social relations that they maintain contact with. The proportion of *fabara*-related ties within their support network drops from 73.9 per cent (at first departure) to 21.9 per cent, once miners have acquired experience. This shows that most of the 54 professional Guinean and Malian miners interviewed stopped maintaining contact with their relatives as they progressed in their career (see Figure 6-1). This observation is consistent with the hypothesis that itinerant miners favour *fadenya*-like behaviours at the expense of *badenya*-oriented ones. As will be discussed in greater detail later, miners’ trajectories are indeed marked by a progressive disruption of home-based ties, although those ties may have made possible their initial work in the mines. The *fadenya*-



*badenya* tension in terms of aspirations is thus reflected in the support networks of itinerant miners who progressively separate the two social fields.

Figure 6-1 Networks of support for mobility and work (black: domestic group and kin; grey: others)



In the long run, many of them thus find themselves, more or less, voluntarily distancing themselves from their close relations (the ones attached to the home-place) and relying on less durable relationships built during their itinerancies, although some of them last for a longer period. This may indicate a professionalization of the activity – for the remodelling of social networks around work relations hints at a career effect (Podolny and Baron 1997)—and may point toward an emerging transnational social formation built from below. Yet, it also suggests the increasing vulnerability of miners during their engagement, since, being more isolated, they are less protected by the support and exchanges that large households allow (Sen 2003). As many of them said, however, at a certain point, their mobile lifestyle became their way of life and they felt that they had no other option other than to keep moving from one mining site to the other. Here are some examples of how itinerant miners' views change over the course of an enduring career.

For instance, I was presented to Sekouba, a person who is reckoned to have undertaken the greatest travels, in the vicinity of Koundiana (Guinea). He now considers moving a constraint that he would avoid as much as possible.

S: I don't have the courage anymore. The family is big, and I am the only one around now. If I move, it leaves an empty space no one can fill. So it is more because of the family than because of the work as such. My work remains more or less the same wherever I go. The

only thing I have changed is that I avoid living in bougoufe (generic term for mining settlement). That is not good, you can get ill too easily, and that is bad for the family as well.

M: So how do you do? Are you not staying in the camp here?

S: Yes, now I am. I just try not to when I can, but here I had no one to stay with and I had to come to meet our needs. I am trying not to move when I don't have to because I cannot be far from my family now. Not too far, not too long. Now, I am just getting what I can and I return home.

Indeed, several experienced miners have reported a certain fatigue associated with maintaining a state of semi-permanent mobility. Such weariness, which Sekouba refers to as a "loss of courage," seems to be even more burdensome for those who, like Mansa, have no other option. Mansa said,

"I did ten years without ever coming back. I never thought I would last so long and always wanted to return. In my mind, it was clear that when things would turn fine I would return, but I have lasted longer than I thought. Now I am here [back in his home-place], but there is no other thing I can do, so at any time I hear echoes from the mines, I take my bike and I go."

In his current situation, Mansa feels trapped in an indefinite cycle that revolves around life in the mines, which he is unable to change. While it is normal for young men to maintain a high level of mobility to support all sorts of projects (Bjarnesen 2013a; De Bruijn, et al. 2001), they are ideally expected to settle down and lead a "stable" life in their home villages when they get older. However, Mansa's case shows why the return towards a more *badenya*-oriented lifestyle is difficult in the current economic climate. On one hand, miners' incomes depend on their continuous movement; on the other hand, after being relatively disconnected from their home villages for so long, they feel the need to not impose on their relatives if they decide to settle down. Their life stories show that the combination of deagrarianization and the accelerated growth of mining have somehow broken down traditional mechanisms of reincorporating aging men after periods of mobility. Laye expressed the same idea when he told me that the mines had "taken" him, which suggests that it was somehow against his will. According to him, he could not abandon mining because, like Mansa, he had no other skills and did not know how else to make a living. Consequently, he and his wife had adopted a nomadic lifestyle – they travelled together from one mining site to the next, accompanied by their little daughter. In these cases, it seems like there is no endpoint to their journeys. In contrast to the *koutaniw*, who aim to change their lives through their mining journeys, Sekouba, Mansa, and Laye seemed resigned to these continuous travels, as moving around seemed to be the most feasible solution to make ends meet; the ephemeral has become an everyday livelihood strategy for them.

In these examples, except in the case of Laye who was younger, the two others had somehow moved back to their home village and used it as a base from which they travelled. In other words, they had moved from a *fadenya*-oriented lifestyle that was relatively detached from the home-place

to a *badenya*-oriented one, which, in contrast, was centred on the *lu*, the family in their home village. However, their main occupation remained work in the gold mines, which suggests that they came up with elaborate processes to conciliate their mobile livelihood with a relatively sedentary residence. This chapter draws on a strand of questions introduced in the previous chapter; yet, instead of approaching the “mobility-locality nexus” (Dahinden 2010b) by questioning how people move without relying on stable localities, it looks at the different ways they reconcile (or not) their mobile livelihoods with a sedentary home. This will be addressed by looking at male miners’ mobility practices and strategies and the mobility patterns that result from them. Though women certainly play a determinant role in the establishment of such patterns, I temporarily elude the topic here and shall expand on it in the next chapter. The present one makes the argument that, to maintain their career in the long run, itinerant miners formulate residential strategies that, through balancing mobility and local investment, facilitate their journeys between the home-place and the mining fields.

## **6.2 Strategies of mobility and residence**

In the following two sections, I first define the notion of “mobility strategies”, and then relate it with Mandenka ideas and representations of home and practices of housing in rural contexts.

### **6.2.1 Mobile livelihoods and centrality of the *lu***

Mandé-speaking societies practise a “house system” (Lévi-Strauss [2004] 1979 in Dessertine 2013) that privileges the *lu* – which is familial compound that concretely embodies the lineage as the physical place of agricultural and domestic (re)production over generations, and also as the house of ancestors’ spirits.<sup>1</sup> Itinerant miners, who are almost permanently on the move, deploy “strategies of mobility” (i.e. Moret 2015; Schmoll 2005) for being mobile, which are incorporated into their habitus. In contrast, they develop “residential strategies” to fulfil their aspirations of perpetuating the lineage and having a family of their own, which implies that they must physically inhabit the *lu* to a certain degree (Dessertine 2013). Some scholars attribute a heavy determinism to the kinship system described by Lévi-Strauss and tend to assume that miners on the move necessarily come back to their home-place. Such a view risks neglecting well-established findings in the study of mobility and migrations, such as the fact that, very often, “people who move may not know exactly where they are moving to”, nor where they are going to end up and for how long (Du Toit 1990). Studies on translocality (Brickell and Datta 2011) and on the home in a transnational context (e.g. Levitt and Waters 2002; Olwig 1997) have shown that, for many people, “home” refers to various scattered attachments as well as to various physical places of residence. Thus, though the notion of *fabara* is important at a symbolical level as well as to the representation of the self within the group, it

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed, yet dated, description of the residential system in rural Mandenka villages, see Bernus (2005), and Appendix IX.

nevertheless allows for a great variety of practical arrangements on how to inhabit the *lu* (familial compound) or not. As I did in the previous chapter, I opt to view itinerant miners' livelihoods in view of their mobility to identify different kinds of movements and to determine the strategies they develop to reconcile their *badenya*-oriented aspirations for stability with their *fadenya*-oriented mobile lifestyles.

In the field of what agrarian political economy would describe as “reproduction”,<sup>2</sup> miners strive to find practical ways to accommodate the tensions between individualistic aspirations that could potentially lead to further recognition of the individual within the group (yet of little value in terms of reproduction), and the peer pressure to conform and contribute, for instance, to agricultural livelihoods, to assume responsibilities in the community, and to secure generational continuity (of high value in terms of reproduction). While journeying to the mine could be interpreted as a possible shortcut along the route to personhood<sup>3</sup>, mining journeys are most often undertaken for reasons closely tied to the *fabara*, i.e., to improving one's status by increasing the assets of the family. Therefore, the situation of itinerant miners is especially paradoxical for the more they perpetuate their *fadenya*-oriented (individualistic male) mobile lifestyle, the greater is their distance from the family, i.e., their *badenya*-oriented aspirations (inscription into the group) to become a man within the *fabara*. This spatial remoteness thus implies a distance in time with regard to the life stages an individual is expected to pass through along the life course. In fact, one of the conclusions that can be drawn from the above examples is that these itinerant miners did not seek to increase their mobility, but rather, to reduce it. Indeed, in all my discussions with experienced itinerant miners, their main preoccupation, i.e., their “goal” after years of almost uninterrupted mining journeys, was not to keep on moving, which had become part of their routine at that point, but rather to establish a more settled lifestyle into which they could integrate their mobile livelihood.

So, coming back to the notion of “strategies of mobility,” I understand it as the different mobility patterns utilized by miners to overcome the conflict between having to move to earn one's livelihood and societal expectations to settle back down. If we believe that Sekouba or Mansa, for example, were more worried about making a stable income than increasing the duration or distance of their journeys, these necessary strategies imply residential choices. In line with this, Ferguson (1999: Chap. II) has analysed the migration of workers from agricultural to industrial spaces in copper mines in Zambia. Ferguson considers the “residential strategies” they adopted, depending on labour constraints, but also depending on their own need to be recognized in the “traditional” village

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<sup>2</sup> Bernstein (2010) defines reproduction as the labour of “securing the conditions of future production”, which entails the consumption fund (e.g., access to food through farming), replacement fund (e.g., replacing the tools used for production), and generational reproduction (e.g., growing and caring for children), a large part of which occurs within the space of the *fabara*.

<sup>3</sup> see Chapter 4 for a discussion of artisanal mining and life course progression

sphere and/or in the “modern” sphere of the mining fields. They developed different “cultural styles” by either embodying the “local” worker (faithful to the village and its conventions) or the “cosmopolitan” worker (concerned with consuming “modern” goods). Their inclination towards one of these two figures also dictated how they would balance their social, economical, and emotional investments in either residence – either in the Copperbelt region or in their villages. Similarly, I wish to account for the various ways miners invest in different living places – in the context of the *fabara* or elsewhere –and for the kinds of mobility they consequently develop to reconcile their mobile livelihoods with their aspirations for a certain stability.

To do so, I identified a few recurrent mobility patterns from the many mining narratives that I had recorded and observed. The empirical section will present a typology of four residential strategies, ranging from the most to the least mobile and the most to the least engagement with the *fabara*.

### **6.3 Theoretical types of residency**

On the basis of the life stories of experienced miners who have made gold mining a full-time and long-term occupation, and in line with Dahinden’s locality/mobility approach (2010, see also Moret 2015), I propose four residential strategies according to how the two poles of mobility and locality interact. These strategies represent miners’ responses to the exigent mobility their occupation demands in relation to their moral duty and personal aspiration to make their attachment to the *fabara* physically real. They differ in their form according to the importance given to the familial compound as a central or peripheral place in their mobile livelihood, as well as in terms of the intensity of their spatial mobility. Theoretically, on the basis of the aforementioned criteria, there are four possible combinations and all but one offer a possible way to make a living out of gold mining as a full-time occupation; I have called them “good shots strategy”, “biresidential strategy”, “emigration strategy”, and “stuck immobility”.

I shall illustrate each strategy using selected life stories, in addition to other ethnographic material, in an attempt to use individual cases to confront theoretical combinations so as to build ideal types, i.e., a conceptualized representation reducing the variety of mobile livelihoods according to the criteria mentioned above. Construed as such, these strategies are conceptual models that should help in constructing a theoretical framework on contemporary notions of the *fabara* and the journey. To differentiate each of them, I have looked in particular at four aspects: the relative amount of time spent either in the home-place or in secondary localities, the importance of the contribution to the household’s livelihood and the form it was made in, the direction of investment – especially in construction – towards the home-place or any other place, and the arrangements between male and female spouses in different places. The graphic representations of each type have been inspired by

Moret's research on mobility types among European Somali's cross-border movements (Moret 2015).

### 6.3.1 "Good shots" movements: arrangements within the household - Alhassane

The first type of strategy, which I have called "strike movements", gives the family compound a prominent role in the mobility systems of those who opt for it, while giving peripheral roles to other places. It basically consists of the maintenance of strong material attachments to the home-place, which is used as a hub from which one can depart to new and changing destinations. The story of Alhassane should shed some light on how this type of strategy emerges as a way to reconcile gold mining with local aspirations.

Alhassane started working in the mines of Boure with friends who originated from the same village in the sub-prefecture of Mandiana when he was 20 years old. After this first experience, he travelled on behalf of his father to work with an uncle who operated further in the mines of eastern Mali. He rapidly turned away from his initial group of friends and preferred making his own way in the mines, rather than returning to agricultural work. In comparison to the trajectories of the young men I mentioned in the previous chapter, Alhassane disappeared from the sight of his family for four years, during which he travelled across Guinea, Mali, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, working in gold mines, and occasionally, diamond mines. When he came back home for the first time, he felt that a gap had formed between his brothers and him, most of whom were starting to plan their marriages. However, after years of adventure, he did not consider a return to agriculture within the *lu* a viable option. In accordance with his father's wishes, he agreed, together with his brother, to contribute to his family's needs, especially in terms of agriculture, by contributing financially to the costs fertilizers and seeds, and by participating occasionally in agricultural work. Now, Alhassane has married but does not stop travelling. Before he leaves to gold mining sites, he usually anticipates household costs gives the money to his wife, who is in charge of the house and who also generates her own income by selling horticultural products in the local and neighbouring markets. In summary, most of the time, especially during the dry season, Alhassane travels to mining sites when he feels that his chances are especially high, which he evaluates based to the news he gets from acquaintances active in the domain, and more or less, does nothing but 'rest' when he is at home.

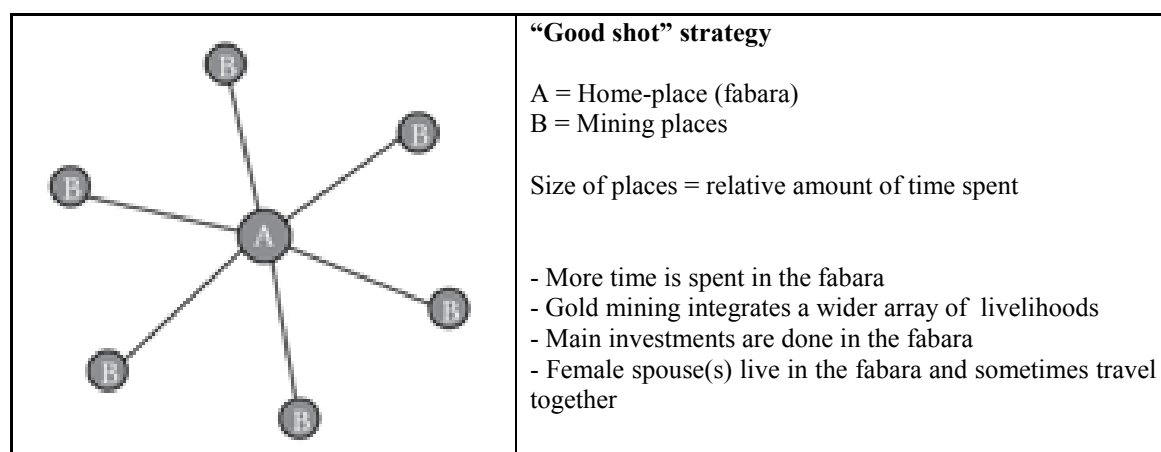
His claim of reducing uncertainty by moving only when he gets the green signal from his acquaintances should be tempered by the fact that there is no assured certainty of income. However, what his practice shows is that he relies on a network of friends who do not simply inform him, but also provide him with shelter, contacts on site, and work, which is relatively better compared to the journeys of lonely, poorly informed workers. Thus, by resettling in the *lu* after several years away, Alhassane has embraced a *badenya*-oriented lifestyle and cultivated a strong local relationship with his home village, while at the same time maintaining a relatively mobile way of life that is mainly dependant on his contacts and "*tuteurs*" in mining areas. In his words, he now moves "*par à coups*" (by "shots"), which suggests that his journeys are less risky than what they would have been in the

past. His mobility is hence organized in a “star shape” (Moret 2015), with the *lu* serving as a clearly defined centre from which he can move back-and-forth to different regions according to the available resources. In doing so, Alhassane also maintains a strong relationship with his home-place, which allows him to easily convert his earnings, for they integrate with the broader array of livelihood generated by the family.

Mbrema’s situation is similar. He spent a significant amount of money (according to his family) to set up a newly built house in his village, which he uses as a base to move around according to the season and potential opportunities. Compared to Alhassane, Mbrema is older and has married twice. His second spouse often comes with him when he travels. As he says, “[he] rather have [his] little needs and expenses spent together with [his] wife than outside”, which points to a recurrent division of tasks within polygamous households, in which one of the spouses is in charge of the house and the other travels and takes care of feminine work while on the move, which include crushing, washing, and processing the ore, as well as care, food, and other reproductive work in the volatile environment of the mines.

Sako, a gold buyer, has a similar arrangement, since after nearly ten years of working as a tunnel worker, he has settled again in his home-place from having travelled as a miner and increasingly as a gold buyer. He collaborates with his brother who finances a part of the gold-buying business and manages the selling of gold. Thus, as these examples have shown, making the *lu* the main residential centre, despite continuous travelling, helps facilitate the conversion of knowledge and wealth acquired during these journeys into status in the home-place.

Figure 6-2 “Good shot” strategy



To sum up, “good shot” strategy consist in (re-)centring activities in one place of residence from where one can easily commute to promising mining sites. Very often, people who themselves originate from mining areas are well positioned to adopt this kind of strategy. It also supposes to have reliable social networks that can provide valuable information on the places where to operate.

### 6.3.2 Biresidential strategy: the duplication of attachments - Oussman

The “biresidential” strategy involves relatively intense mobility between two places, and a relatively lower reliance on the *fabara* as a support for miners’ mobile livelihoods. Such a strategy consists of multiplying attachments in two places with the advantages and prerogatives that come with it, such that being mobile is more of a commute than a journey. The story of Oussman shall indicate how such sedentarization occurs.

Oussman was born and raised in a village in the prefecture of Kouroussa, which, at the time, was not yet the important gold mining centre it has become now. Torn between his wish to become a mechanic and pressure from his elders not to leave the village for he was the elder son, Oussman started working episodically in the gold mines close to his home-place as a complementary source of livelihood, but without any willingness to pursue his engagement in the mines. After these first few experiences in the local gold mines, he obtained the consent of his father to leave for the Ivory Coast to live with a brother of his father and there undertook an apprenticeship as a mechanic. At that time, Oussman explains, many people were leaving to search for gold and diamonds in Seguela. Some of the other apprentices had indeed left the garage to go work there, which Oussman finally decided to do as well, counting on the fact that he had had some previous experience of mining work at his home-place. Very soon, his team found a gem that they could sell at a very high price, which made it possible for Oussman to get married and build a house in his home-place, and which further convinced him to keep on working in the mines instead of settling back home. During the next few years, he travelled across Mali and back to Guinea with his wife, who supported him in his mining works and was simultaneously doing small businesses in the mining field. His elder brother passed away



in this period, making him responsible for his family, as well as his brothers' wife.<sup>4</sup> Since gold mining was his best source of income at that time to meet his obligations, he finally decided to settle in Fatoya (Boure) where gold mining is the principal occupation of the population, and where he could keep on working throughout the year. He built a house there with the money he had earned in Seguela, in the Ivory Coast, and arranged with his first wife to stay in the *lu* while his second wife would stay with him in Fatoya and he would commute between both places.

Since he was not considered a 'native' in Fatoya, he could not access some of the benefits restricted to so-called 'natives', such as managing shafts as a *nyado*, which would have allowed him to develop a yield rather than a capture economy (see Chapter 1), which would have allowed him to cut down on his journeys. Soon, Oussman joined the local "Red Cross" committee,<sup>5</sup> an association of experienced miners who carry out rescue operations in case of accidents and collapses of tunnels, which allowed him to access some additional rights in terms of access to gold, and extend and intensify his social capital with the natives. Later on, building on a strong friendship with his *tuteur*, he managed to partner with him to manage mining shafts, thus accessing all the benefits available to 'natives'. Since Oussman also obtained land for cultivation in the vicinity of Fatoya, he maintains a strong double territorial and relational anchorage both in Fatoya and in his home-place, between which he regularly commutes, depending on mining opportunities in any of the two regions, as well as according to his responsibilities as elder son in his village.<sup>6</sup>

The case of Oussman represents the type of sedentarization I call "biresidential strategy". The bi-locality of residence and work allows him to limit his movement to only two places, so that though he frequently commuted between both (a one-day journey), his movements no longer bear the uncertainty of his previous mining journeys. In other words, bi-locality commuting limits the intensive travelling that is a condition of the *kalayantigi* way of life, and in his case, allows him to

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<sup>4</sup> Levirate is a widespread institution in rural Guinea and Mali. While it is often viewed as a form of "violence against women" (e.g., Violence against women in Africa: A situational analysis, UNECA 2010), it can also be seen as a form of security against deprivation at the death of a husband, since women are excluded from the benefit of "adelphic" succession. According to (Razy 2007), women can either accept or decline to remarry with the brother of their deceased husband, but they usually accept it due to the lack of an alternative.

<sup>5</sup> The association only bears the name "Red Cross" and does not receive any institutional support or financing. It consists of a group of co-opted, local, and experienced miners who are responsible for preventing accidents, for they are entrusted with the responsibility to stop the operations if they are considered too risky, and implementing rescue operations in case of accidents. The members are compensated in the same way as the members of *tomboloma*, since their service is considered beneficial to the community. While its institutionalization as a community group was an exception, existing only in Boure, the model has been adopted in other regions of intense gold mining activity. The affiliation to the "Red Cross" came along with humanitarian narratives which are increasingly used to claim financial and material support from non-governmental sources, especially from the industrial mining sector. Contrary to other institutions, it does not simply mirror existing forms of collective leadership that are dominated by the "elders" in villages, but has a more inclusive membership by virtue of co-opting *kalantigiw*, whose experience is acknowledged by their peers.

<sup>6</sup> In the *fasiya* system, such duties theoretically include the administration and securing of the material needs of the members of the *lu*, as well as performing representative and ritual functions for the family. Notably, small units within the *lu* tend to be responsible for their own subsistence, yet the *lutigi* (head of the family), like Oussman, assumes a role of arbitrage in cases of conflict and is consulted for most family matters.

upgrade himself to the position of a shaft owner instead, i.e., to a less uncertain source of livelihood that is based on the yield rather than the finding of gold.<sup>7</sup>

How far does Oussman's trajectory represent that of other miners who turned gold mining into a full-time occupation? Despite being seemingly dependant on the coming together of many conditions, it is a more conventional strategy than it seems, since it offers a compromise between one's moral duties towards the *fabara* and the world of the gold mines. Karamo, one of Sandaly's brothers, who assumed responsibility as the head of the family in their home village of Koumban while spending most of his time in Mandiana, puts it thus, "At some point you cannot be everywhere and still do what you have to do [as an elder son] at home." Here, he adds smilingly, "It is no secret that I am a Mandianaka [a resident of Mandiana] now, but still I am here at any moment, I take care of the family through my brothers and no decision is made without me speaking. Also, now I have a machine working for me in Koumban Koura [a mining site close to his home-place] with my brother, so that I also work in the mines". Besides, it is important to note that Karamo is a smith and that his *tuteur* in Mandiana is also one, and this is a recurrent trend in the profiles of commuting miners. Indeed, this kind of arrangement is certainly facilitated by the fact that *numuw* (smiths) often train in their trade away from their home-place and thus rely on an established network of potential hosts compared to members of *horonw* families. Such networks exist outside of mining activities and facilitate mining mobility, since smiths traditionally work in mining sites where they play a functional role in maintaining tools and ensuring peaceful relationships with underground spirits.<sup>8</sup>

Moussa and Sekou, two brothers I met in Kadiolo (Sikasso area in Mali) and who come from Famanian in Guinea, had typically built such dual attachments on the basis of their *numu* status. Sekou had worked as a smith in Kadiolo long ago and had then built a house there, and his brother had followed him. Both travel regularly between both places, which was also made easy by the relative proximity of both places and did not require more than a day's travel.

Another factor that facilitates this type of bi-residence is the previous emigration of family members to mining areas. Demba, for instance, had moved from Kankan to the region of Boure, where his mother had stayed before him. Later, he successively married two women so that they would make his commuting between both places easier since one would stay in the village and the other in the mines. His marital situation is similar to that of Oussman, since he also married a second time so that, according to him, one of his wives would remain in the home-place caring for his mother, while the other one would be with him in Boure, and they would alternate after a certain period. He owns a house in both places, and so do the other miners I have mentioned earlier. He

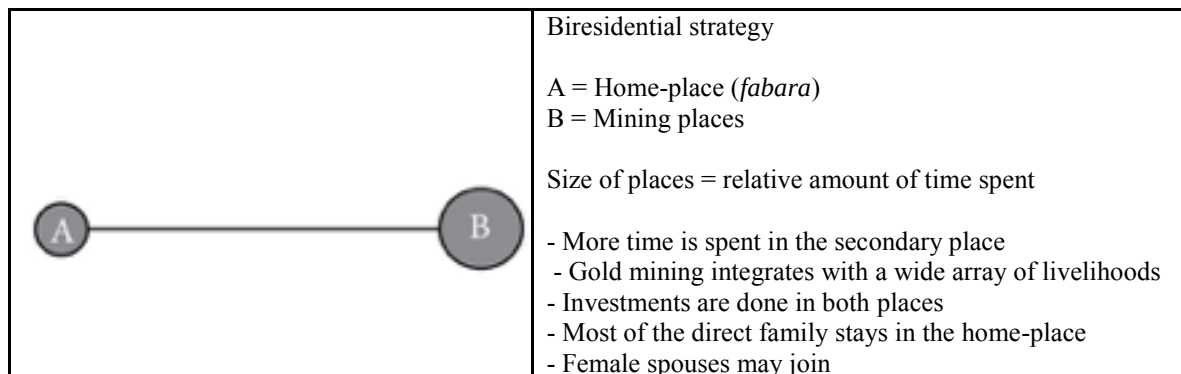
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<sup>7</sup> Refer Chapter 1 for a description of the dual economy in artisanal mining sites.

<sup>8</sup> For more details on the traditional role of smiths in gold extraction, especially their role in maintaining good relations with djinns on behalf of the village, see Kanté and Erny (1993)

spends more time in the secondary locality than in the *fabara*; yet, he puts in a lot of effort to fulfil his duties “at home”, such as taking care of his mother.

Figure 6-3 Biresidential strategy



In summary, what I call a “biresidential strategy” is a common process of establishing multiple attachments as a response to changing of roles and responsibilities after death, illness, or emigration of members of the family. It is utilized by miners who conveniently already have multiple ties in different mining regions that they can activate. While such patterns are rather common in rural and urban areas,<sup>9</sup> with the gold boom, such movements are increasingly from rural to rural areas.

### 6.3.3 Emigration strategy: the paradox of “success” - Sidiki

The third strategy I wish to address is one I have called “settled emigration”, for it merely refers to the settling down of an individual after years of travel, with the intention of constituting a new family home in the place of emigration. In terms of mobility, it is considered a means to reduce travel time by relocating oneself to a place where the gold is accessible more easily and from where journeys to emerging hotspots can be undertaken more easily, especially in a rapidly changing context where mining sites tend to be closed frequently when new ones appear. The individual’s material and physical attachments to the *fabara* are hence considerably diminished, both as a source and as a contribution to the *lu*’s livelihood, while the itinerant lifestyle is partly maintained, but from a clear centre envisioned as a new home. I will draw on the story of Sidiki to illustrate this type of residential strategy.

Sidiki was born and raised in Conakry, but his family is from Kouroussa, upper Guinea. He entered the artisanal mining sector relatively late compared to the many young men who turn to it as an alternative to the social trajectory they are expected to follow in their villages, or who originate from the mining regions where they start mining alongside their parents. His shift to the mining sector followed the failure of several attempts in petty trade and other

<sup>9</sup> In the distinct context of urban migrations, multiple attachments have often been documented in the case of villages associations of emigrants in African cities (i.e. Piot 1999; Wallerstein 1960)

businesses. For more than ten years, he travelled across West and Central Africa and could boast of having accumulated more than several thousands of euros, especially through the exploitation of collapsed wealthy shafts that he would repair. During these years, he developed and combined a vast array of ‘mobility skills’ and attributes his ‘successes’ to his ability to be ‘where the gold comes out’. His trajectory is especially noticeable since Sidiki moved from an urban lifestyle in a relatively well educated family, though one that is not especially rich, to being a sort of mining Big Man,<sup>10</sup> teaching numerous apprentices, and accommodating the harshness of the itinerant miners’ lifestyle, thus being especially skilful in turning the evanescence of itinerant gold mining into a perennial livelihood.

Despite having accumulated significant earnings, Sidiki was aware of the drawbacks of his mobile lifestyle when he raised the issue of potentially settling. Indeed, his economic prosperity was due to his ability to move and find gold as well as his ‘luck with gold’ – ‘luck’ that he had not found in any other domain, according to him. Therefore, settling down would not have been an option for him, because all his attempts to invest his winnings from the mines into agriculture, trade, or business had constantly failed so far. Furthermore, his skill in finding and extracting gold safely, that is, being an experienced *kalayantigi* who possesses loads of secrets, would not help him make a living back in Conakry. In short, neither the status nor the competencies he had acquired were transferable to the town where the rest of his family was.

As a solution to balance the quandaries of getting older, his wish to settle down with his wife and children, and his feeling being constrained by the need to keep moving for a living, Sidiki had opted to emigrate to the village of Doko, in upper Guinea, at the heart of the upper Guinean artisanal gold mining region, and extremely close to the Malian border. So far, Sidiki had occupied several houses with his wife and children in many places in Guinea and Mali, but his move to Doko and the construction of not just of a single house (*bo*), but a soon-to-be family compound (*lu*)<sup>11</sup> was described as a final settling down (“s’installer”). Thus, he would still spend most of his time in temporary mining settlements in Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso, yet with greater proximity to his wife and children. In his view, emigration to mining regions was a reasonable option for maintaining his activity in the mines, and in the longer term, to limit his movement by capitalizing on his wealth and experience.

Such a trajectory highlights one of the paradoxes of the itinerant lifestyle of miners for whom emigration becomes a solution to reduce their movements in contrast to others who travel long distances as a means to maintain physical and material attachments back at their home-place. In contrast to multi-residency, though there are still occasional back-and-forth movements to the home-place for community events, miners who have adopted this strategy do not contribute to the livelihoods of the larger family, and instead only make periodical remitting.

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<sup>10</sup> Werthmann (2003b) aptly uses Godelier’s “Big Manship” framework to analyze the concentration of power in a mining site in Burkina Faso. Though not associated with violence, as seen in the case studied by Werthmann, Sidiki presents some of the traits of the influential Big Men, especially through the recognition of his skills and the numerous miners who sought to work with him or follow him as apprentices.

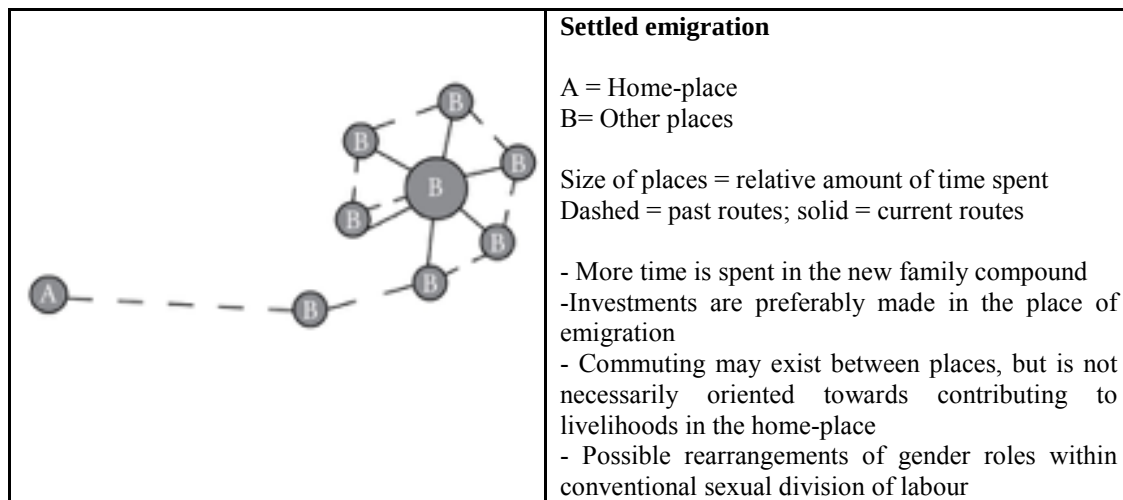
<sup>11</sup> In spite of not having a “native” status in Doko, Sidiki had planned, in accordance with the village head, to get enough space so as to add future houses (*bo*), and eventually have a place of his own.

Jah, who is the oldest among his siblings, opted to migrate to a mining region. Though he did not move very far from his home-place, his move provoked conflict since there was no other brother left to take care of the family, which is the solution other “emigrants”, such as Bankal or Sayon, had found in their family. However, miners who had emigrated to mining areas would remit a part of their earning back to their home-place, apparently with more regularity than while on the move. Bankal, for instance, considers it a different life stage compared to his years of travelling and says, “When I was on adventure I was on my own. Now I can travel wherever at any moment, but my place is here (in Balato, Boure). Even if I am a stranger, my sons have grown here.” Coming back to the case of Jah, his emigration and resettlement is also worth considering from the perspective of the arrangements he made with his wife Maimouna. After several years of itinerancy together, their settling down in Koundiana also provoked important changes in the way Mai and Jah procured their earnings. While Mai had mostly contributed to mining activities at the sites they had been operating when they were on the move, their settling down in a mining region facilitated her transfer to another method of earning – running a food court – which proved to be a great success.

Contrary to Jah, who was exclusively dependent on the unpredictable income generated through mining, Mai’s income tends to be more regular. In a way, the traditional distribution of subsistence tasks between men, who were in charge of the grain in the long-term, and women, who were in charge of day-to-day expenses, was substantially modified, since Mai was contributing to a longer term than Jah did. Such a rearrangement of tasks is no exception to the domain. Women often remind their husbands, for instance, that they are the ones who pay for the coffee and cigarettes their husbands cannot afford, “when they have pity” on them. I am certainly not arguing that livelihoods in the mining sector deprive men of their masculine prerogatives, which, on the contrary, they continuously and insistently perform. However, it is worth noting that in the peculiar context of emigration, which entails less support from the family and little access to agricultural products, which, as argued earlier in the chapter, is the domain *par excellence* where men prove their *badenya*-oriented masculinity, complicated further by the uncertain incomes offered by the mines, can contribute to rearrangements in spouses’ tasks that undermine conventional gender roles. As a corollary to Attané’s observation (2011) that seniority principles increasingly align with changing relations of financial dependency between generations, a similar claim can be made about gender relations. Indeed, in the context of the mines, while male miners are dependent on their “luck”, and incur the risk of earning nothing, their female spouses tend to engage in feminine income-generating activities (food, petty trade, housing, etc.), which provides more regular, and possibly higher, incomes. Many of these domestic-related works, which are not paid out in the familial context of the village, are sold as services to single male miners in the context of the gold mines, which in some cases, makes some women the real “winners” of the artisanal mining economy. In fact, though it strictly aligns with the conventional sexual division of labour, the monetization of such feminine

work contributes to changing gender relations from the inside without undermining the traditional division of labour.

Figure 6-4 Settled emigration



Intra-regional migration is certainly not new in West Africa, and neither are their possible effects on migrants' everyday lives. Yet, drivers and directions have their specificities in the context of artisanal gold mining, as do the consequences of migration in terms of gender roles within spouses. For a long time, labour migration has followed rural-urban or seasonal rural-rural patterns (Arthur 1991; Bakewell and De Haas 2007). Emigration to mining regions differs from traditional migration patterns since, as the examples show, in terms of drivers, it is often the result of several years of travel rather than an intentional shift to a specific location. In terms of direction, "emigrants" to mining regions illustrate a movement towards non-urban areas, yet not rural, in the sense that agriculture is not the principal livelihood. The narratives of Jah, Bankal, Sayon, and Sidiki also show that there is no *fabara* determinism such as the local discourses suggest, through some reified conceptions of the familial *lu*. Indeed, as has been shown elsewhere (for instance see Jansen 2001), this segmentation of *luw* into new family compounds, sometimes because of migration, is the basis of lineage genealogies. I wish to emphasize that although mining journeys differ from previous forms of migrations, the "return to the home-place" is not an irremediable continuation of mining journeys as it is often presented (e.g. Dessertine 2013; or in another national context Jonsson and Bryceson 2009); that is, miners do not necessarily "come back".

Furthermore, just as other forms of migration involve a redistribution of tasks and contributions within the household, settling down in a mining region can lead to rearrangements in the contributions of spouses in the household economy, which could possibly affect gender relations without calling into question specific male or female tasks. Women can potentially stabilize and increase their incomes outside of mining, thus becoming less dependent on the mining operations led

by their husbands, while men perpetuate the same form of economy, which, as opposed to agriculture, does not offer an assured income and, in the absence of “luck”, possibly weaken their status as the breadwinner of the family.

#### **6.3.4 Stuck immobility – Felix**

The theoretical model based on the interaction of mobility and locality that I proposed earlier suggests a fourth type of “strategy” involving low mobility and a few places of residence. Such a configuration exists but does not qualify as a “strategy”, since being immobile and disconnected from the family is hardly a desirable option.

However, at some points in their trajectories, it corresponds to the reality experienced by many miners, whose immobility illustrate the extreme precariousness that marks so many of their lives. If being mobile is a precondition to accessing the most profitable spots, such mobility requires means, whose distribution is uneven or that can simply deplete unpredictably. The story of Felix, a strong 30-year-old man from Nigeria who was my neighbour during the months I stayed at Jah’s in the mining village of Koundiana, shall exemplify how some people get “stuck” – in his words – during their journeys.

Felix was *the* ‘stranger’ in the village of Koundiana until I came. He was the only Christian, the only Nigerian, and probably the only non-Malinke to reside there permanently. He was thus a very interesting person in my view, and, considering the many villagers who enjoyed talking with him about his experiences abroad, he was very interesting to them as well, and accepted that they constantly teased him about his Christian otherness.

We rapidly became friends and enjoyed talking and smoking in the evening, sometimes sharing some gin he would get in the neighbouring town of Konkoi and discretely resell to his neighbours who were not supposed to drink publicly. Over several discussions, I reconstructed his journey from Nigeria to Koundiana.

He had first left to Libya with the idea of migrating to Europe, but after having reached Lybia, he was left with virtually nothing to pay his passage to Italy. He thus spent two years in Tripoli doing all kinds of small jobs to save enough to pay for the journey to Europe. However, his boat had been captured shortly after leaving shore and was sent back to Libya. After this, he renounced his migratory project and moved to Burkina Faso and then Mali, where he kept working on small jobs, such as repairing umbrellas, on his way. Once, in the region of Kangaba, when he was falling short of money, he invested his remaining savings in gold mining and had lost it all, which marked his introduction to the gold mining sector. Since his impressively large body would not allow him to descend into the tunnels, he was forced to work on the surface for comparably smaller shares. The only time he had moved had had been to Koundiana, seven years ago, because of the comparatively cheaper cost of living on the Guinean side of the border, and he had not moved since then: he was “stuck”, as he repeatedly told me.

In his view, his immobility was due to his lack of income from the mines. He would present it as a cyclical problem in the sense that he needs more money to move to more profitable places, but he can only afford his own subsistence in Koundiana. Further, he had no option other than to work to the surface since he was too fat to enter the tunnels, which also restricted his access to gold. In other words, Felix rationalized his current situation by seeing his immobility as both a cause and a consequence of the poverty that kept him “stuck” in an indefinite loop, waiting for his luck to turn.

Over the following years, I often visited my first *tuteur*, Jah, in Koundiana, and always paid a visit to Felix as well. In the first few years, since we could not communicate using cell phones then, I would have to wait until my arrival in the village to find out whether Felix had moved or not, since he had always claimed that he would return to Nigeria as soon as he could afford it – by return, Felix meant a “decent return”, which he usually portrayed as him being able to own a minibus in his hometown. During my last call to Jah, I learnt that Felix had finally moved, but only 100 metres away. After seven years of occupying a house, Felix had apparently decided to build his own and stay.

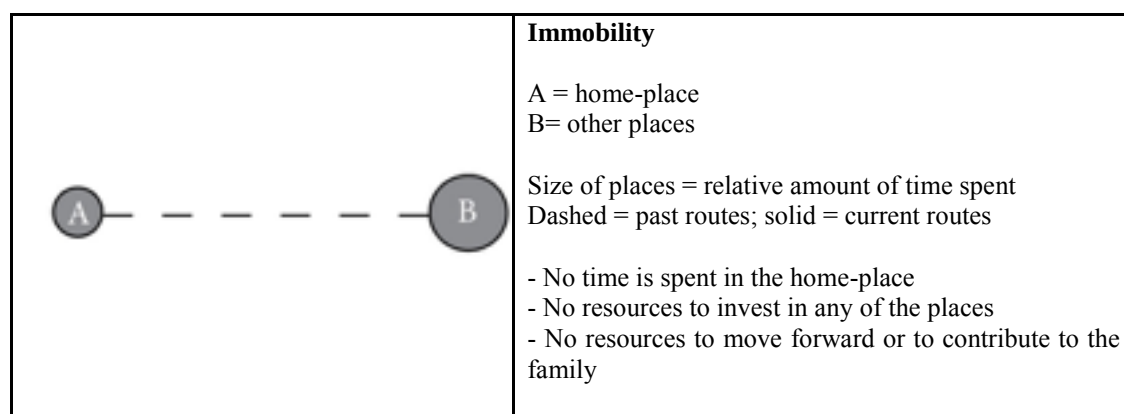
I have met many others in very different circumstances who, like Felix had during those seven years, had become stuck far from their home-place without the resources to move forward. Most often, they would attribute their situation to one specific event (the final loss of his earnings in a bad operation, in Felix’s case), which points to a threshold of precariousness that can be tolerated. Once this threshold is crossed, miners may lose their ability to make enough to pursue the journey or even generate their everyday subsistence and pay off their debts towards local gold buyers, which could fix people against their will.

Unanticipated political decisions, such as the seasonal closure of all artisanal mines in the prefecture of Mandiana in July 2012, or the closure of the Djikourouba site in favour of an industrial mining company that had intensified its prospection campaign in 2011, are examples of events that can immobilize people in precarious situations. In July 2011, the president passed a decree saying that the gold mines should be closed during the rainy season. In the week that followed, troops were sent to the largest artisanal mines of upper Guinea to implement the decision, which led thousands of people to leave for neighbouring mining sites across the Malian border where no such interdiction had been decided. I was in Mandiana with Sandaly at that time and decided to stay anyway, since we were planning to attend a wedding close by in the next week. With the closure of the mines, the streets of Mandiana became more crowded than it had been during the dry season. This was not because people were coming to the mines, but because people were being expelled from the mining sites around and had nowhere else to go. Most of those who could afford it travelled to neighbouring Mali where no such policy had been implemented. At the “*gare voiture*”, rather than linking the town of Mandiana to the mining sites as usual, all vehicles changed their course to the Malian border. In



contrast, those who could not afford the journey or who did not want to take the risk, simply stayed in town, where, according to our *tuteur* – a relative of Sandaly – “there was no bed left”. Indeed, an impressive number of unemployed workers filled Mandiana. Coffee stalls everywhere put out additional benches where groups of men sat the whole day, mainly discussing and complaining about the new policy of the president. Most of them were desperately looking for work in the agricultural fields, but local families were more likely to rely on their own kin networks. Most of workers who stayed back discreetly returned to the abandoned sites to rewash old ore and collect decigrams of gold to cover their everyday consumption needs. Mohammed, a 22-year-old man from Dabola, was one such worker who had to borrow from the owner of a coffee shop who sympathized with him, and for whom he now worked in exchange for shelter until the reopening of the mines. Most envisioned their constrained immobility to be a temporary state. However, the stories of people like Felix show that precariousness together with indebtedness have the power to fix people much longer than they would imagine.

Figure 6-5 Immobility



It is thus clear from these examples that, instead of a “strategy” to reduce their movements, those whose activity (or inactivity) in the mines is marked by immobility are struggling in this situation. In contrast to the “settling down” of emigrant miners who choose to relocate themselves while they still have the option of travelling from their new home, their immobility is caused by the lack of resources.

### 6.3.5 Synthesis: scattered households

I just looked at the mobility strategies used to reconcile the individualistic (*fadenya*-oriented) mobile lifestyle of professionalized miners with a more, *badenya*-oriented, stable way of life, so as to (re)integrate the *fabara*, be it physically by inhabiting the *lu*, or virtually, by remitting and episodically participating in cultivation and other social and ritual duties. To do so, I departed from a classification of miner’s residential strategies according to the degree and orientation of their

mobility, which corresponds to three possible residential strategies and one unwanted state of non-residency experienced by immobilized workers.

While classical migration “types” as reviewed by Fergusson include temporary models, such as the one proposed by Mitchell (1987: 82–83, cited in Ferguson 1999: 44) where young men work temporarily in the mines as a “transitional phase” before settling at home,<sup>12</sup> the examples in this chapter point towards the stabilization of spatial mobility as a livelihood strategy. Such strategies come with the scattering of the household across different places, implying different forms and degrees of attachment, of material investment in these places, and of different kinds of arrangements between spouses, all aiming to allow male miners to maintain their position – or improve it – within the *fabara*, while simultaneously complying with the requirements of their itinerant mining job further away.

These patterns also mark a shift in the temporality that full-time itinerant gold miners experience. As mentioned earlier, mining journeys may stretch much longer than initially intended. As long as miners remain on their indefinite journeys distant from the *fabara*, their life courses somehow remain suspended in terms of the life phases young men are expected to pass through. Regardless of their material success in the mines, settling down – while maintaining their mobility – is seen as a way of re-engaging with the temporality of the *lu*, i.e., being a man who can effectively fulfil *badenya*-oriented moral obligations. In contrast, for those who get stuck, all journeys seem to stop in conjunction with time: immobilized workers like Felix or Mohamed, very much like the so-called “superfluous men” during the late nineteenth century South African Gold Rush (Arendt 1966, cited in Mbembé 2004), are constrained by changes in national policies or by political decisions that allot space to industrial mining companies; they must wait for gold to become accessible again in order to re-start their cyclical journeys to other sites. In the meantime, they remain detached from the *fabara*, thus extending their liminal situation. In this context, the notion of “strategy” must be understood as dependent on the fluctuations in miners’ fortunes. Thus, to paraphrase Jackson (2011), their “strategies” indicate choices made “within limits”.

However, the different strategies of “settling down to stay mobile”, to borrow an expression of Dahinden (2010a), does not simply mean reducing one’s journeys, but also implies finding suitable arrangements within the household, particularly between spouses, to make mobile livelihoods sustainable. The next chapter will look at the arrangements made within households scattered in different places, especially at the implications they may have for individuals’ changing roles and status in different places and across the life course.

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<sup>12</sup> Such transitionality is addressed through the notion of adventurism in the previous chapter.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Though there are local historical continuities in how men make use of mobile and sedentary lifestyles in identity projects throughout their lives, the growing importance of mining as a source of income has intensified and prolonged typical periods of mobility. This chapter investigated how itinerant miners stabilize their mobile livelihoods in the long run. It describes how mining journeys provide men a way to access incomes and become adults by performing a *fadenya*-oriented version of themselves and by undertaking intrepid adventures, although such a lifestyle may contradict their more stable, family-focused, *badenya*-oriented aspirations. I thus looked at the different residential strategies itinerant miners adopt to expand their activities spatially while complying with their *badenya*-oriented aspirations of being capable and contributing men in the context of the *fabara*. These arrangements signify a balancing of the impermanence that characterizes mining journeys and the permanence of the *fabara*, which they can only reconcile by moving between both spaces<sup>13</sup>. There is no single way of being an artisanal miner, as this chapter has shown. Managing mobile livelihoods involves balancing the *fabara* on one hand and spatial mobility, as well as the associated element of chance, on the other. In such cases, migration – meaning a change of residence, i.e., settling in a new *lu* of the *fabara* – can be a means of reducing mobility. Altogether, these different residential strategies show that, contrary to imaginings of “quick money” (see Hilson 2010), mining often turns into a long-term livelihood strategy, which corroborates with research in neighbouring regions where artisanal mining is increasingly being acknowledged as a viable and much needed source of income (e.g. Banchirigah and Hilson 2010; Maconachie 2011; Tschakert 2009b).

By relating two temporalities – of the miners’ life course marked by a search for permanence with age, and of the acceleration of the mining industry marked by the growing impermanence of sources of incomes and the increasing pressure to constantly adapt to changing terrains – miners’ journeys also come to question assumptions about the relationship between notions of “stability”, “mobility” and “precarity”. Stability, which is the foundation of *badenya*-oriented aspirations and is associated with a more sedentary lifestyle, appears to be an ideal that miners are paradoxically able to approach by remaining relatively mobile in a precarious environment – usually by journeying near one main residence, the initial *lu* or a new one, or by commuting between two places. In contrast, stillness, or the impossibility of always being mobile as illustrated by Felix, rather than being associated to stability results in increased vulnerability.

The growing importance of mining as a livelihood, including the movement it entails, not only suggests that miners are moving between spaces, but also that they are also moving between different

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<sup>13</sup> In contrast to these movements in time and space, being immobile, as is the case following changes in local or national policies towards artisanal mining, could thus result in one “getting stuck” in a liminal existence, i.e., suspended in time and between statuses.

roles and statuses that leads to shifts in age and gender identifications. The next chapter explores these questions in detail.

# Chapter 7: Intimate and economic arrangements along mining routes

## 7.1 Introduction: Meillassoux reloaded?

This chapter should be read as a direct continuation of the previous one, since it aims to shed light on the impacts of miners' mobile lifestyles on different economic and intimate arrangements. I consider these impacts through the lens of the exchanges at stake between male miners and women as spouses, heads of household, associates, hosts, or girlfriends, which sustain their mobility between mining and *fabara* spaces. On account of my position that is embedded mainly in male networks, my perspective remains quite male-centred. However, in order to better understand these arrangements, I propose to shift the focus from “households”, which emphasize the importance of elder males (Meillassoux 1975), to hearth-holds which locate women at the centre of the familial economy – I define the notion later. Contemporary literature has brought hearth-holds to the forefront in order to account for the fact that socioeconomic units tend to be rather female-centric than male-centric, especially in the context of migration. Drawing on the concept of intimate transaction (Zelizer 2005), i.e., economic exchanges within relations of intimacy, I make the argument that, in order to conciliate their *badenya* and *fadenya* aspirations, male miners engage in intimate exchanges wherein they adopt different positions that contest identifications in terms of age and gender roles.

Through their labour, the women implicated in these exchanges not only support the mobility of male miners between mining spaces, but they also permit keeping the contradictory ethos that miners constantly negotiate relationships without conflict by maintaining separate relationships in different places. The chapter thus adds a case to the existing literature on the decisive role of women in supporting men's migrations – the most famous analysis in West Africa is probably *Femmes, greniers et capitaux* by Meillassoux (1975) – that often highlights the exploitative nature of their relations with men. However, in contrast to such an analysis and by paying greater attention to the productive role of women, I shall make the case that, by making men circulate and adopting themselves management positions that subtly draw on existing gender roles, certain women make important economic gains, and sometimes become the “real winners” in the mining economy.

Before doing so, I shall first provide some background on the relation between mobility and the sexual division of labour in Mandenka agrarian society.

## 7.2 Labour mobility and the sexual division of labour

I already provided some context to the Mandenka gender regime imbricated in relations of (re)production in the introduction to this thesis. This chapter is based on these earlier premises and on the critiques of Claude Meillassoux (1975) of neglecting the productive role of women outside reproduction (Delphy 2013; Edholm, et al. 1982). It also draws on another strand of critique posed of late by migration studies, namely, whether women were invisible in the study of migration, unless as passive spouses following their husbands, or that when they are considered migrants, is it only through the lens of involuntary migration, that is as “female victims exploited by male perpetrators” (see Lutz 2010 for a review of the gender category in migration processes). Similarly, political and scientific views on artisanal gold mining are often based on the same mindset in which women are either “invisibilized”, (though they compose 50 % of the workforce, Hinton et al. 2003), victimized (e.g., stereotypes of women as prostitutes sexually exploited as discussed by Bryceson et al. 2013), or are seen as passive (following their husbands), especially in relation to men.

Some scholars have challenged these misconceptions by investigating the forms of sexual partnering practised by women in mining settlements in Tanzania (Bryceson, et al. 2013b), or at how female labourers perform the ambivalence of their status in Burkina Faso (Werthmann 2009b). My aim is to explore different forms of arrangements between men and women – within the household and in mining spaces – that functionally contribute to sustaining the mobile nature of artisanal mining, while also leading women to monetize their usually unpaid labour. Such arrangements question common assumptions on gender relations and the usual sexual division of labour in agrarian Mandenka society. I shall briefly outline some of the characteristics of the Mandenka kinship system and how it translates into specific gender relations so as to understand better the ways in which these conventions are challenged later in this chapter.

As outlined earlier with the concept of *fasiya*, rural Mandenka society is patrilineal and patrilocal, which means that women move to their husband’s village once they have married; while they remain affiliated to their own lineage, their children belong to the husband’s lineage. For women, as spouses, it means that they remain “strangers” to their husbands’ lineage, and by extension, are considered “strangers” in the village (*so*) and in the family compound (*lu*). There are several consequences to this gender regime, which have been highlighted by Feldman (2011). First, there is the threat of being repudiated by their husbands, which often implies losing contact with their own children, for they remain attached to their father’s lineage. Secondly, it seems that, in the migratory context, women are closely attached to their husband’s *lu* and are placed under the authority of the father of their husband (*lutigi*, the head of the family) instead of returning to their own village. This phenomenon has increased in the migratory context because, apparently, it prevents husbands from formally divorcing their wives; such situations are probably the least favourable for

women who purely become domestic workers in their husbands' families. Finally, even though they may wish to return to their own village, their return may not be desired by the members of their own lineage, for their repudiation may sometimes be considered shameful. The relative isolation of women within the context of the *lu* is mirrored in the division of labour. Their activities are mainly restricted to the sphere of reproduction (care, domestic work, etc.) and income generation, such as petty trade and cash-oriented horticulture, whose product is secured individually. While masculine work tends to be mostly collective (mainly agricultural labour), feminine work is more individual and tends to be centred on cash-generative activities, which is also one of the reasons why, with the increasing reliance on money, many great international traders in West Africa are women (Bredeloup 2012). Therefore, women, as wives, can be looked at from at least two perspectives in a migratory context: either a migrant themselves (alone, with other women, other friends, or a husband), or as "anchor wives" in the home area (Bryceson, et al. 2013b, 49).

Migration has often been seen as possibly "emancipatory" from the *fasiya* social structure described above; this argument is valid as much for women as for male and female cadets in general. Hertrich (2014), for example, analyzes the increase in migration of young women in relation to the decrease in divorce rates. The interviews she conducted suggest that migration serves as an alternative to divorce for young women, who no longer need to endure the personal costs of breaking down a union. Lesclingand (2011) found that young women who have been working in urban centres for a time – though in relatively exploitative conditions – tended to value their urban lifestyles once they returned to the villages. Financially, they could gain certain independence with the money they had saved, and socially, they could engage in more egalitarian marital relationships. In contrast, it has been shown that, in areas with significant male emigration, between 40–50% of households were female-headed (Safilios-Rotschilf 1994, cited in Aina 1995). This suggests certain reformulation of gender relations within households where, in practice, female spouses hold most of the everyday decision making power. This observation describes a "mythical male dominance", i.e., "as an alternative for those societies in which males demonstrate dominating behaviours against women, but women nevertheless hold social and economic power and/or political authority" (Hoffman 2002: 4). As Broqua and Doquet (2013) have argued in their analysis of male dominance in Mali, men's obligation to pursue prestige is a powerful tool oft used by women for their own benefit. Similarly, miners' contradictory *fadenya* and *badenya* aspirations may sometimes lead them to enter into gendered relationships that favour women's economic gain over their own.

### **7.3 Hearth-holds and intimate transactions**

The distinction between a household and a hearth-hold was made by Ekejiuba (1995). In her words, the concept of a household "clouds the true pattern of gender interaction and power relations,

portraying the impression of men as sole providers and female dependence and passivity, as opposed to their active participation in socioeconomic process”. In contrast,

Hearth-holds can either have an independent existence of their own or can be the most intimate, clearly discernible subset nestled in the household. In other words, hearth-holds are an extension of the mother child bond. The unit is centred on the hearth, or stove and is a concept that men and women themselves employ in their daily lives. The unit is demographically made up of a woman and all her dependents whose food security she is either fully or partially responsible for. The dependants include all her children, her co-resident relatives and non-relatives who, in one way or another, assist her in provisioning, caring for and nurturing members of her hearth-hold [...] The male spouse can be a full member of the hearth-hold, but in most cases he oscillates between several hearth-holds, that of his wives, mother and mistresses. (Ekejiuba 1995: 43)

This definition focuses on the interrelation of production and reproduction which, in practice, are spatially and socially often women-centred. I use the concept cautiously for the specific cases under study, for it may suggest an essentialist bias when it is meant to pertain to everyone, and might run the risk, if one focuses only on reproduction, of dismissing the productive role of women, in and out of the hearth-holds. Since male and female spouses usually have independent economies, hearth-holds serve as spaces where women take charge of their economic activities and secure their living. This approach has the ability, compared to other Western-centred approaches to household division of labour, to not prejudge the economic dependency of wives on their husbands (e.g. Greenstein 2000). Indeed, their financial autonomy is meant to protect them from other forms of social and economic dependencies related to their relative isolation in the kinship system and the consequent threat of being repudiated. Yet, in everyday practices, female spouses can usually claim the same right, for example, over land or mining shafts, as their husbands, as long as they formally do it with their “permission”, i.e., by conforming to traditional gender roles and with the acknowledgement of their husbands.<sup>1</sup> However, monetary economic dependency often does run the other way, since women tend to generate a more regular income than men in the gold mines. For example, during the months I stayed at Jah’s, his wife Mai had her own business, and she regularly paid for Jah’s everyday expenses when he fell short.

In contrast to past wage workers implicated in circular migrations (e.g. Meillassoux 1975; Murray 1981), itinerant miners are dependent on their “luck”, which is not systematically rewarding in terms of money. Consequently, when they are on the move, they engage in both monetarized and non-monetarized economic exchanges to access the support that they would traditionally be entitled to in the form of “domestic production” in their home-place (Meillassoux 1975). While describing

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<sup>1</sup> These practices echo what Barbara Hoffman (2002) associates to a form of “mythical male domination” that is evidenced when women hold several kinds of power, but act as if males were the dominant sex in all spheres of life.



these exchanges, I was inspired by Zelizer's analysis of the correlation between economic exchange and relational intimacy (2005). I will thus focus on the arrangements that men on the move make with women, who act as hosts, associates, informal or formal spouses, in terms of intimacy and economy. According to Zelizer, "intimate relations" concern only two parties, which signify that, at some point, they imply a certain degree of trust. While western conceptions of the economy tend to treat intimacy and economy as two "hostile and separate spheres" (2005), Zelizer proposes that payments and compensations (e.g., of money) are, on the contrary, central to intimate relations (e.g., within the family sphere). In contrast to other transactional approaches to gender relations, such as the concept of "sexual-economic exchange" that Tabet describes as a continuum from marriage to prostitution (Tabet 2014), the advantage of Zelizer's focus on intimacy is that it includes sexual exchange as one of the possible forms of exchange in the sphere of intimacy, rather than limiting the focus of intimacy to sexual relationships. This wider focus is more appropriate in the case of itinerant miners for whom sexuality is one of the possible components – though it may not always be present – of the arrangements that they engage in within hearth-holds. According to Zelizer, transactions within the intimate sphere are highly indicative of how individuals conceive their relationships, since people always invest a lot of effort in building different systems make transfers and payments, which are used to create, affirm, question, or invert the distinctions they make in their relations.

Following this approach, my intention is to understand, by looking at exchanges between individuals of the two sexes, if and in what ways women benefit from participating in this highly gendered labour system (for a critique and a women-centred analysis of partnering in Tanzanian mining sites, see Bryceson et al. 2014). Women function as members of the casual labour force (in crushing and washing the ore) and also in sustaining the mobility of male workers; in certain cases, women make significant profits, obtain security, or escape from bad familial relations. I follow Lahiri-Dutt (2006) observation that women's roles vary greatly with context; the motives for women to engage into mining and the forms of their engagement vary from one case to the next, depending on age, familial situation, and the family's economic strategy. Some married women may go to the mines as part of the lu's livelihood strategy, sometimes with a husband, other relatives, or other women from the same village. Other women may go on their own to flee bad marital situations. Younger and single women are certainly less pressured in how they handle their relations with men, while older married women who are settled may be better positioned to embrace management positions. So, by focusing only on some recurring forms of exchange, I certainly do not pretend to cover all possible configurations. Yet, I will seek to identify some roles that the mobile character of mining livelihoods leads men and women to adopt by looking at the four main female figures that enable miners' mobility through the lens of intimate transactions in which they are engaged.

### 7.3.1 *Tutrices: the feminization and monetization of the diatiguia*

Women sometimes also play an important role as *tutrice* (host person) in supporting miners' work and journeys by giving them shelter and access to work. This is, in theory, no surprise since, being more attached to the domestic sphere, women are also more prone to playing the role of *tutrice* for temporary travellers in mining areas, especially when their own husbands are away. This hypothesis also makes sense in view of the literature on African migration, which stresses that, in regions of high emigration, 40–50 per cent of rural households are female-headed and thus qualify better as hearth-holds. These functions of the reproductive sphere are usually assumed by local, often elder, women by temporary replicating familial pairs of mothers and sons, where the latter are “fed” by the former; in return, a part of their earnings from the mines are retroceded to them like “good” sons would do for their mothers. Such an agreement implies a certain degree of intimacy, for they imply a bilateral relation whose material reciprocity is only managed between these two parties.

Though their husbands intercede on their behalf on the formal level, once the temporary host is welcomed, the women manage the temporary gold diggers and travellers. In Mandenka areas, male heads of a household are not supposed to accept any compensation for hosting temporary travellers within the context of the *diatiguia* (or “tutorat” in French, see Chauveau 2007), which is the moral obligation of hospitality a host has towards foreigners. There is more – their capacity to host a temporary guest is seen as a sign of malehood. In contrast, women who manage everyday expenses and lead the hearth-hold have no qualms in disclosing the charge for hosting, which they explicitly monetize in the context of the gold mines. In practice, traditional *diatiguia* often turns into vertical arrangements between local women, who provide food, shelter, and possibly access to work, and itinerant miners who place themselves under their patronage. For instance, in his first journey to Boure, Sekouba, who knew absolutely no one when he arrived, approached the imam of the village neighbouring the mining site where he aimed to work, with the hope that he could host him for a few days, but it was actually done by his wife. Indeed, according to Sekouba, the imam's wife had “taken him home and put him to work”. During the two years he stayed in Fatoya, he relied on her for all kinds of instrumental support, worked on her behalf, and gave her a part of his earnings as remuneration for her service. However, he would remain formally dependent on the imam with regard to issues concerning the social life of the village. Such types of arrangements are quite standardized, as Mansa puts it, when he explains how he would usually integrate into a new mining environment:

If I don't know anyone that is no problem either. I go and ask the authorities, and they will put me in contact with someone who can host me. Women take care of that most often. In Traorila (Ivory Coast), there was this woman who had a house built so that she could accommodate people like me. I was sharing it with another Guinean, and we would both give

her a little of what we were getting from the mine. Well, if it is not in town, I can also build my own *bougou*, but it is less preferable [in terms of comfort].

Thus, instead of setting up his own *bougou* (tent) in the mining camp and having to face the poor living conditions that accompany it, Sekouba preferred to live in the house of a *tutrice* in the neighbouring village, despite having to pay for the service.

The increasing flow of itinerant miners has added to the population travelling along existing routes of migration, i.e., towards points of departure to Europe (Ba and Choplin 2005; Timera 2009). Along these migratory routes, the monetization of the *tutorat* relationship has already been observed, such as in the cases cited by Pian (2008), where Senegalese male *jatigiw*<sup>2</sup> have been observed to increasingly provide paid smuggling services to emigrants. Against the backdrop of the gold mines, especially in areas where villages or towns are located close by, a similar trend can be seen in the sense that the *tuteurs* (male *jatigiw*), who “normally” are the elder men in Mali (Bertrand 2013) are, in practice, most often *tutrices* (female *jatigiw*), who perform different roles that would have traditionally required separate forms of reciprocities. Indeed, institutions such as the *diatiguia* not only serve to house temporary workers, but also increasingly help enlist them into specific teams or networks of workers in operations that are managed by kin or those allied with them. It thus allows the *tutrices* to receive a part of their guests’ earnings and keeps them circulating within these same networks. Since, again, it is not money (see Chapter 3) but shares of raw material that are circulated, the circuit of exchange appears to be similar to that practised in ancient times where a part of the harvest, usually a symbolic one, is given by the guest to the host (see Chauveau 2000: 66). Furthermore, rather than being supported by male *tuteurs*, as was the case traditionally as material reciprocities were integrated into the masculine space of farm labour, it is the female *tutrices* who often take charge of the *diatiguia* in the mines, though they may sometimes formally act on behalf of their husbands, and they have direct access to the income that is generated out of their hospitality, which the men are not supposed to accept. Indeed, as in the case related by Sekouba, women are inclined to remain close to the domestic sphere, while their husbands are often on the move.

### **7.3.2      *Niado musolu*: local wives associating with itinerant miners and managing mining operations**

In some cases, the local women, in addition to donning the *tutrice* hat, engage in the economy of the neighbouring mines by assuming the role of *nyado* (shaft owner) for multiple wells and work with different teams of diggers that they may host additionally. Traditionally, only native men are supposed to have access to mining shafts at the opening of new plots; but in practice, women –

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<sup>2</sup> Corresponds to “*tuteur*”, the one who honours the institution of *diatiguia* that incorporates strangers into the social fabric.

usually the first wife when they are several – regularly take care of managing the miners and providing them with everyday support and encouragement.

Madame Kouyate, though not acting directly as a *tutrice*, is one such powerful woman whose presence in the locality enables male miners to work and circulate, which she consequently uses to extract material wealth from the relationships of dependence that tie young gold diggers to her. Every time Sandaly and I stayed in Kouroussa, we were hosted by Mr. Kouyate, who, besides being one of the town dignitaries, was also the brother of an eminent ex-politician. In the immense three-storey house he had built, the courtyard was constantly covered by piles of ore that the girls and women of the household were crushing and washing under the strict supervision of his wife, Madame Kouyate. Our host, Mr. Kouyate, was often away, and he would insist that this whole mining business in which his wife was so intensely engaged did not interest him in any way. On his behalf, Madame Kouyate was the *nyado* of numerous mining shafts. With the rise in artisanal gold mining operations around Kouroussa, she now spent most of her time in the neighbouring mining sites, “taking care” of her “*petits*” (little ones), as she would call them, mostly young men, some of them even very young, but apparently no less than 16 years old, who were in charge of excavating the initial wells. Every morning, she had food prepared in the huge house in Kouroussa, which was then distributed among the different teams with whom she was associated. In the afternoon, she was driven on the back of a motorbike by one of her sons to the neighbouring mining sites, where she would pass from shaft to shaft, greeting her neighbours, friends, acquaintances, and workers aloud and constantly providing her associates with small amounts for coffee, cigarettes, or additional food.

At the end of the day, bags of ore were brought back from the mining site to the courtyard of the luxurious house to be crushed and washed by three of her daughters and the wife of one of her sons. During our several short stays at Mr. Kouyate’s, we see young men who would regularly present themselves at the gate of the house, asking Ms. Kouyate if they could join one of her ongoing operations. Though I had instinctively interpreted these scenes as a rather crude form of exploitation, Sandaly and other miners informed me that Madame Kouyate had built a reputation for herself as being a suitable *nyado* for young miners, who would benefit from working with her. However, the second type of arrangement clearly differs from *diatiguia* as the power balance is at stake in the exchange. Miners, like Sekouba, who place themselves under the protection of a *tutrice*, would consider it an acceptable charge and would be willing to pay for it. In contrast, the young men who asked Ms. Kouyate for work and protection literally worked for her.

While some women may play the roles of both *tutrice* and *niadow* in relation to miners, their ability to act as *niadow* depends on the degree of autochthony that is granted to them by their husband’s family, according to them which can manage shafts on their behalf. In contrast, any resident woman – married locally or not – may host miners and provide them with food and shelter

within her hearth-hold in exchange for a part of his production. These women play a similar role in that, through status and local anchorage, they occupy a dominant position, symbolically close to a maternal one, in view of the reciprocities at stake, i.e., a hearth-hold with food and shelter on the one hand and shares of raw ore on the other. On the other hand, itinerant male gold diggers who are deprived of social capital and local citizenship, place themselves under their guidance and do not mind depending on them. In other words, to sustain their *fadenya*-oriented (male individualistic) adventurist lifestyle, miners may have to publicly adopt a subaltern position vis-à-vis local women, which would be seen poorly by those back home. In other words, itinerant miners may be led to symbolically move back along their life course, temporarily acting like sons, i.e., “cadets”, in order to be responsible fathers or elders, later back home.

### **7.3.3 *Fudukuruniw* (small marriages): temporary partnering**

I now turn to another kind of arrangement between men and women that involves an intimate relation and a form of cohabitation; it also often includes sexual exchange. *Fudukuruni*, which literally means “small marriage”, is a much discussed institution, which is difficult to define, even though it sparks so much discussion in mining settlements, especially when episodes of conflict surge between temporary partners or between temporary and regular partners, leading to the intervention of the *tom boloma* who assumes an arbitrating function. I shall try to briefly delineate it, since it has a different way of accommodating a form of intimacy with economic exchange, primarily based on domestic services rendered within the context of a hearth-hold.

The social life in gold mining settlements often undermines, or even inverts conventional moralities, and allows for everyday ethics that are based on alternative hierarchies within these social spaces. *Fudukuruniw* can also be seen in this light as they are based on a seemingly functional concept of spouses as the partner in a “economic-sexual exchange” (Tabet 2014), in which the temporary couples live together and exchange care, sex, and earnings, but will not raise a family together. As Brand has argued (Brand 2001b), the spread of notions of romantic love through media sources, as well as growing capitalist relationships in urban centres, have led to the decline of so-called “arranged marriages”, though the procedure remains formally almost the same (see e.g., Hertrich 2007). Again, while there may be similarities between the context of the gold mines and that of urbanized areas, in terms of individuals’ distancing from the traditional moral life of the villages, claiming that *fudukuruni* results from the emergence of liberal conceptions of the family, the couple, and sexuality in general would be an unproductive shortcut. Instead, what I think we should focus on in *fudu* (marriage)-*kuruni* (small) is that it is not “marriage”, at least in view of its social and demographic function of perpetuating the lineage, but that it is “small” indeed, in view of its temporality. In short, *fudukuruni* provides all the reproductive functions of a union, except for its demographic one, within one temporary hearth-hold.

Every time I met Kalou in one or the other mining settlement, he was engaged in an intimate relationship. While narrating his experiences in the gold mines, Kalou told that he had first had such an arrangement when he was working in Nigeria, where he stayed for almost one year with a girlfriend who was, in his words, “just like my wife”..

She fed me, she bought me clothes. We lived together. When I would win something, we would divide it between us two. We could have married, but for me that was not the thing to do because, in my mind, I would turn back when I had enough money. So I was just working and coming back to sleep at her place, but it was only for the time being there.

While further explaining the relationship he had had with her, Kalou insisted that the functional aspect of being a couple allowed him to have all their “little needs together instead of spending it elsewhere”. This statement echoes a recurring trope among male miners, according to whom having relations with girls can have bad consequences, since it is associated with unnecessary expenditure and loss of money. On the contrary, *fudukuruni* differs from casual or paid sex for it comprises, among other things, a mutualization of resources (financial, social, etc.) between partners for the time that they are together, while maintaining the principle of separated economies; either party is supposedly free to leave at any moment for another mining site or return home with his or her wins and where a regular and formal spouse remained.

In the case of Kalou, his girlfriend was also his *tutrice* and thus had some power over him, which he realized when he started contemplating the idea of leaving, but could not do so before he had paid off money that he owed her. At that point, according to Kalou, she would have been supported by the locals if they had entered into a dispute, while he had no contact other than her. He was thus bound to her in a complex relationship that simultaneously engaged emotional, sexual, financial, labour, and client ties, but in which he found himself being more the dependent party in this precise case. Being his *tutrice*, in addition to being his girlfriend, she would accommodate him and have him work for her as well.

Whenever I visited Kalou during the nearly five years of my study, he was always accompanied by a regular girlfriend in the mines, and always a different one, while his wife Bintou was staying in Siguiri with the children and his mother. Although these arrangements are envisioned as being temporary initially, they can evolve into long-term relationships or be formalized as a regular marriage. For instance, in 2014, when I asked Kalou whether his relationship with Fanta, his current girlfriend, was a *fudukuruni*, as he had himself qualified his relation with another woman from Sierra Leone whom I had met the year before in another mining site, he corrected me right away, explaining that Fanta and he planned to get married in a “real marriage”, which requires a long process to formalize the union, as well as the acceptance of his first wife.

While in some cases, the female partners may have some power over their male partners due to their local status, the fact that they are not married – or are separated from their husbands – often makes them relatively vulnerable. For example, when he was in Burkina Faso, Nuam had a similar *tutrice*-girlfriend relationship with a woman who hosted him and sent him to the mines where she was also doing petty trade, so that he would contribute to the hearth-hold:

During the first month, she could not ask me to pay for the stay because I had nothing, but when I started earning, I would bring back little amounts for her. There, I would work during the whole day, and in the night, I would bring the ore back so that she could wash it for us both. If God helped me, I could have had as much as two or three grams; but after six months, I realized that there was never much gold, unless for the Mossi[thus suggesting that the ore was unevenly divided], so I decided to leave. The girl had children and she would offer me small gifts so that I would stay, because she knew I would leave one day. She knew adventurers. In the end, I left anyway, because my situation was not good, but it was fine with her. She had done good things for me, and on my side, I know I must do good things as well for the people I meet, because you never know what will come next in the adventure.

Apart from the fact that sexual conquests reinforce an “adventurer” status, in the cases of Kalou and Nuam, their temporary partners were locals who were in seemingly precarious situations – these women had no husbands, which was seen as rather undesirable. Indeed, one of the main threats to married women in the patriarchal Mandenka society is that they can swiftly find themselves disaffiliated and deprived of material resources in cases of divorce or repudiation<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, for women, entering into *fudukuruni* may imply subtle strategies to avoid the possible consequences of these temporary unions – such as being pregnant – because they can negatively impact their family life. This, of course depends on their marital statuses. Whereas it is quite common for younger women to periodically travel to neighbouring mining sites, in which case having a love affair is tolerated and can sometimes turn into a formal union, for married women, temporary unions are tolerated within the context of the mines but are not acknowledged in their villages.

The rules that the *tom boloma* applies in cases of arbitration, considering temporary partners and possibly a formal husband, is quite illustrative of this ambiguous tolerance. While a formal husband can reproach his wife for having entered into a *fudukuruni*, female spouses are not publicly blamed by the *tom bolomaw*. In a case I witnessed with Sandaly, the conflict was arbitrated in the following way: the formal husband was morally blamed for letting his wife work alone in the gold mines – he or a brother should have accompanied her – and, while the male partner was not morally blamed for having engaged in a relationship with a married woman, he was required to financially

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<sup>3</sup> The adelphic mode of succession through collateral brothers, combined with patrilocality, implies that women inherit virtually no material possessions, i.e., all assets remain within the patrilineage. Married women find themselves to be “strangers” in their husbands’ families (Feldman 2011). Due to the existence of polygyny, which (although morally condemned) involves the possibility of uneven access to resources between wives married to the same husband, spouses usually have separate economies that will enable them to face and overcome such eventualities.

compensate the formal husband. Faced with claims from the husband that he would repudiate his wife anyway, the *tom bolomaw* strongly argued in favour of not divorcing, thus protecting the woman against the risk of social disaffiliation. A similar case occurred in Sandaly's family: his uncle had agreed that his wife would go work in the gold mines in a place where her family was also present, thus guaranteeing a form of social control. After a few months, his uncle's wife got pregnant and this became a very important reputational issue to Sandaly's uncle. According to Sandaly, it was of little surprise that, not having been accompanied by members of the husband's family to the mine, she engaged in a *fudukuruni*. In this case, the *tom bolomaw* had urged the husband not to repudiate his wife and her son, insisting especially on the existing ties that linked the two families of the same lineage. Thus, though women are not blamed in the context of the mine for being in a *fudukuruni*, they must avoid pregnancy<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Sandaly, they do so by calculating their ovulating periods and avoiding sexual relationships during these, or by insisting on using condoms. However, this is a topic on which I have very little information.



Picture 7-1 Campaign for the prevention of AIDS in Siguiri targeted at *fudukuruniw*



My view here is once more limited by the context I circulated in, which was mostly male networks. Yet, I can hypothesize that, although relatively horizontal in form, such relationships are inclined to involve women who lack resources and who need to compensate for the absence of a husband, so as to access basic security. In her research on women living in gold mining settlements in Burkina Faso, Werthmann (2009) explains why women come to gold mines. From this viewpoint, the presence of women in gold mines is often the result of fleeing bad familial and marital situations.

Despite being the subject of many discussions, *fudukuruniw* were rarely presented to me as such by temporary partners, even less so by women. As the image above suggests, its association with AIDS, or the fact that it is often the result of the meeting of precarious trajectories, gives the

expression a negative undertone;<sup>5</sup> indeed, male and female partners, who often may be married (formally) elsewhere, rather speak of their “boyfriend” or “girlfriend”. The relative tolerance with which such multiple bonds are treated, and the ambiguity these partnerships bear, as long as they are not publicly qualified as such, provide a counterpoint to the idea that single women in mining areas would necessarily be isolated from their husbands or families, who, in some cases, tacitly accept the eventuality of temporary partnerships. The discussion Namori and I had with Toumba, a Guinean woman we met in a mining site close to Misseni in south-eastern Mali, shall illustrate such an ambiguous agreement.

Toumba had spent the last four years circulating in Guinean and Malian gold mining sites, regularly coming back home, while her husband stayed there, according to her, ‘because he is not doing a job that lets him move, he is a tailor’. Though she never mentioned in detail what relationship she had with her current ‘friend’, a Malian man with whom she had been living and travelling during the last year, there was little doubt that they were a couple, which became a source of great uneasiness for Namori. Her account of her journey began with no mention of her husband, nor of her Malian friend.

T: I just did four years now mainly in Mali. I have been here since May. In the beginning, I first went to Gbonko (Guinea) from my village, but it was not going well so I left to Mali, close to Bougouni.

M: And you were with someone?

T: Yes, I was with a girlfriend. We left Gbonko together. She is not from there either, but we met in Gbonko. We didn’t know we would reach as far as Bougouni (Mali), but we finally arrived there, after going from one site to another. After Gbonko, we walked to Karana, but it didn’t work either. I was going to find an acquaintance there, but she could not get me a job. Since she was about to take a vehicle to Bougouni, we joined her up till the mines there. We worked in different groups. In the beginning, I could not find people to work with, so I had to rewash old gravel just to meet my daily needs, which I barely could, and then I got sick. My foot started swelling and I could not do any work. My (male) friend helped me at that moment. When I felt relieved and could work again, I joined his team and we have been working together since then. From there, we have moved to other sites where we can work yearlong.

In the following years, when she was travelling and working with her male friend, Toumba visited her husband’s village regularly, which supposes a sort of consensus between them both; a

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<sup>5</sup> Given the scope of the practice, *fudukuruniw* have been an important target area in terms of AIDS prevention, since these arrangements permit sexual relations out of wedlock. Although I did not get a chance to investigate the possibility that *fudukuruniw* may be linked to a public health problem, such attention is odd for two reasons at least: first, extramarital sexual relations occur in the mines as they do in the villages; and secondly, the practice logically limits the number of partners in mining sites rather than increases it.

topic that proved to be complex to discuss since Toumba's independence of movement, though acknowledged, was somehow in contradiction with conventional morality and role attribution.

M: And how is it different to travel for a man or a woman?

T: It's easier for men.

M: Why?

T: Whatever the conditions are, they can decide to leave at any time. If it doesn't work somewhere, they can just go the next site, but a woman cannot.

M: But is that not what you have been doing?

[Namori intervenes, seemingly bothered by my question, which suggested that Toumba could apparently move on her own in the gold mining areas without being 'authorized' by her husband.]

N: The problem is that the children will not be supervised. It is very exceptional – a woman must ask permission.

T: Yes, my husband gave me permission. When there is a need for money, I ask him first and then I go.

M: So how is it for you about the children and so?

T: My husband looks after the children when I am away. I know about the mines, and he is not doing a job that lets him move, he is a tailor.

M: And so he does the things in the house? He can cook food?

T: No, for this there is another woman at home.

I did not ask Toumba about her relation with the other wife at home, but according to Namori, there was no doubt that she was the reason for Toumba's departure to the gold mines. Although I would not presume the nature of Toumba's relationship with her Malian male friend, what is certain is that they were living in the camp as a couple in most aspects, i.e., sharing the tent, bed, and meals, working on the same shafts, he in the tunnels and her on the surface, then dividing the product. While the conversation had flowed easily up till then, the atmosphere turned uneasy when we spoke about the role of her husband. Namori explained his reaction later, saying that Toumba's husband was probably "unaware" that she lived with another man in the camp, which would have probably remained tacit. At the same time, given that *fudukuruniw* are considered a typical institution of mining settlements, it is very unlikely that her husband would not presume at all that Toumba was supported by other persons, possibly by men, when staying for several months in the mines. Thus, contrary to the idea that women would be necessarily divorced or repudiated if they entered into a relationship with a man other than their husband (which would be very likely to apply in the context of the village), there seems to be more room to manoeuvre and a sort of tolerance among spouses as

long as both, including for example the itinerant hearth-hold of Toumba, contribute to the household livelihood. However, such tacit arrangements are limited to the domestic sphere and are not displayed publicly. Indeed, as Werthmann (2009) showed in her study on Burkinabe mining sites, women unaccompanied by their husbands or any other relative run the risk of acquiring a bad reputation.

Finally, I ask if there is really anything special about *fudukuruniw*, since it is rather common, at least for men, to have a girlfriend, be they married or not. In the villages, men are encouraged to formalize their extramarital relations through marriage, as Jah did when he married his long-term girlfriend and made her his second wife. In the same vein, Kalou and Fanta's plans to get married would officialize an existing relationship and make Fanta enter the familial realm. However, this option is only available for men, since in a context where polygyny is frequent (and 27% in Mali Bove et al. 2014; 36.7 % of married men have two or more spouses in Guinea Bove and Vallenggia 2009), it is possible for men to consider formalizing these extramarital relationships through polygynous weddings. On the contrary, married women having public extramarital relationships expose themselves to repudiation and divorce, unless their husbands overtly fails to assume their "masculine" responsibilities, including providing subsistence<sup>6</sup>. From that perspective, these temporary partnerships are quite singular for their relative social acceptance. It also points to the hypothesis that the tolerance extended to such arrangements may benefit both parties by avoiding the personal costs of breaking a marital union, or by possibly avoiding a complicated cohabitation between co-wives, as in the case of Toumba.

Besides being an effect of economic precariousness, i.e., the necessity for women to find their own source of money and protection to compensate for the risks inherent to the adelpic rule, local conceptions of the household economy may also play a role. Contrary to Western conceptions of love, and the belief that the circulation of money within the couple would alter its intimacy (Zellizer 2005, cited in Attané 2009), West African societies have traditionally made transactions between men and women as well as between generations visible. Acknowledging these circulations and the necessity for female spouses to have their own economy seems to render acceptable, at least among poor households, especially when the male spouse cannot make ends meet, women's journeys to the gold mines, with little regard for the nature of the arrangements they make during their absence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For an in-depth and sensitive analysis of the complexities of extramarital relationships as tactics of power of women over men, see Broqua and Doquet (2013).

<sup>7</sup> Broqua and Doquet (2013: 310) make a similar point in their analysis of conflictive marital relationships and what they call the "trap against themselves", where the male spouses in precarious economic situations find it increasingly difficult to perform and assume Mandenka norms of masculinity.

#### 7.3.4 Formal spouses: from itinerant hearth-hold to scattered households

Another, yet more conventional, form of arrangement centred on one or several hearth-holds, which also involve sex in the exchange, is the one that occurs between formal husbands and wives, either travelling together – possibly with their children – or having their small family unit distributed between different localities, especially in the case of polygynous marriages.

In most everyday aspects, such intimate arrangements are not very different from *fudukuruniw*, but in their long-term temporality, and for what they implicate in their explicit objective of extending the family – both in alliance and progeny – which in the Mandenka ideology marks full recognition as a complete adult human being (Hoffman 2002: 18). In many cases, I met couples who had initially come together in the context of mining areas, just like Jah and Mai who had first met and partnered in the Malian mining fields and who spent almost ten years together, regularly moving from one place to another in Mali and Guinea, soon with their first child, before settling down in Koundiana. Earlier, they had been hosted or had stayed temporarily in different mining regions. Two years after the birth of their first child, they had attempted to establish a house of their own with the idea of settling down in the Boure region (Guinea). However, after less than one year, they had been expelled from the place, when a neighbouring mining company constructed its second treatment plant right in the village of Kofilani, where they were staying at that time. During their years of itinerancy, Jah and Mai had mostly worked together in the same mining operations, by associating with other *kalayantigiw* and shaft owners. In addition to working in the shaft by pulling out buckets of gravel and crushing or processing the ore, Maimouna would take care of the food and housework when she was not with the team. Later, when they settled down in Koundiana, Mai progressively spent less time working directly in mining operations with Jah, and increasingly turned to selling products and services to itinerant miners, first by doing petty trade and then by opening a food court.

Such a strategic division of economic tasks are relatively frequent between spouses, once they have the means to do so, although they challenge the idea that only a “capable man” is able to provide for his spouse(s). Karamo, for example, used to travel to new spots with his second wife, whom he had also met in mining areas. While he would spend most of his time working inside the tunnels and taking turns as a *kalayantigiw*, his wife would manage their temporary *bougou* (tent) in the mining settlement where she would also sell coffee and cigarettes. I asked Karamo why he is joined by his second wife and not the first and if it was not a problem for her to accept the poor living conditions of the mines. Karamo told me that it was normal for a newly married wife to stay with the husband. Besides, she was also interested in coming along because of the opportunity to make money on her own, which would not have been available to her, in the context of the village. In terms of the division of labour within the larger household, his first wife stayed in his home village with the children they had had together. Instead of opting for an itinerant hearth-hold, like Jah and Mai or other young



families had before settling down, Karamo circulated between two hearth-holds, one itinerant and temporary with his second wife and one in his home-place, managed and centred around his first wife and the children of this first marriage. This second kind of arrangement was exactly what Kalou was aiming at when we spoke about his relation with Fanta, his girlfriend in Karakhena (Senegal), and their wish to formalize their partnering through marriage, that is moving from *fudukuruni* at the mine towards a formal marriage. Both Kalou and Karamo managed their absence from the main household in the same way. They would leave the *fabara*-centred hearth-hold headed by their first wife, and pay her a certain amount for their absence. According to them, these transactions would cover the cost of caring for children at home. In doing so, they would comply with their moral obligation of supporting the family at large in the long-term, by providing a monetized equivalent of the grain, while their wives would be in charge of everyday expenses, which in the same analogy corresponds to finding money to pay for the sauce of meals.

Picture 7-2 A kalayantigi (itinerant gold miner) with his spouse and child driving towards the mines of Gbeleko (Guinea) (Matteo Maillard, 2016)



This division of labour suggests that the women who manage a hearth-hold that comprises children and possibly elderly members, perform a very high number of unpaid everyday tasks as compared to those who are on the move in the gold mines. The latter, in addition to possibly monetizing their domestic work, usually benefit financially from the effervescent economic environment in the gold mines by engaging in small businesses or by “getting their luck” by

participating in mining operations,<sup>8</sup> This spatial division of labour also correlates with age, for the more men and women advance in age, the less they are inclined to engage in mining work.

### **7.3.5 Synthesis: women enabling men to circulate and making money out of it**

Economic-intimate arrangements between men and women in mining areas contribute to enabling the circulation of itinerant male gold miners, especially through the provision of domestic work, outside their home-place, while conversely enabling women to increase their access to cash resources, most often by monetizing the forms of labour associated with the domestic sphere.

These can take several forms, essentially as a service offered to itinerant male miners by local women, or involving a higher degree of intimacy and replicating a domestic partnership. The circumstances vary and many factors are at play together, ranging from questions of age – young miners are more prone to put themselves under the guidance of a Big Woman; to questions related to male miners' social and material resources – would they rather give up a part of their earnings for housing or be on their own in the camps; to reversely, questions related to the women's local social resources and marital status.

I briefly wish to connect the role of women in men's circulation to the discussion in the previous chapter on the residential strategies of male gold miners. I showed that miners who had professionalized their activity to such an extent that it had become their unique source of living, had to find ways to reconcile their mobile livelihood with the fixity of their home. Out of the three strategies identified, all suggested that, as a counterpart to the fixing of a residency, the husband would spend a large amount of time mining far away. From the two different temporary reconstitutions of a hearth-hold I have discussed here, we can get an idea of how men manage their affairs when being away from home. Most often, they reproduce a segment of the family structure, either as sons when young men put themselves under guidance of an elder *tutrice* or are financially supported by a woman *niado*, or as husbands reproducing the couple pair through temporary partnerships such as *fudukuruniw*. These arrangements demonstrate that conventional definitions of a household are especially elusive when applied to mobile production systems, while they also suggest more nuanced gender relations than univocal male domination, especially in social spaces detached from the *fabara*. Ekejiuba (2005) offers a solution to deal with these contradictions by creating a distinction between household and hearth-hold, as a response to the definition of household as “a capitalist institution that secures and guarantees the reproduction of commodified labour; capitalist reproduction being characterized by shared income” (Stauth 1984: 42, cited in Cornwall 2005), which does not fit West African gender ideologies and principles of separate economies. In

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to working with their husbands, most women do processing or washing work on the surface, for which they are rewarded with portions of raw material.

the present case, the arrangements between men and women help constitute temporary hearth-holds that are based on the provision of food, shelter, and possibly sex, but also contribute to the livelihood of larger units, i.e., the major household in the *fabara*, or at least intend to do so. The question of how such a distinction fits with the proposed residential strategies, which all imply enduring yet short journeys from the residence, needs to be looked at.

In the case of “good shot” strategies, if we return to Alhassane, his close contact with other miners in gold mining areas provided him with the necessary support during his relatively short incursions into the gold mines. Mbrema also did not usually seek arrangements with local women, since he usually travelled with one of his wives, with whom he stayed in his own tent rather than with locals. However, Kalou’s story perfectly illustrates the establishing of *fudukuruniw*, for he usually meets up with a woman and rapidly establishes a relationship. I would not reduce affinity and emotional ties to the purely functional benefit of being a couple. However, it is worth noting that it is a recurrent theme in many miners’ discourse, to “better to ally all their [your] needs together, not to spend these with other women”. In other words, what Kalou and his girlfriends did was form a hearth-hold, each still being attached to his or her own household, for the duration of the mining operation.

“Biresidential strategies” are most often deployed in polygynous marriages, which allows the man to set up hearth-holds in two locations – inside and outside the *fabara* – each headed by one spouse around whom the household operates. From the perspective of the male head of the household, one location can be designated as the realm of family duties and attachments, and the other as that of livelihood-making. Again, such a categorization may seem abrupt, since attachments necessarily develop in the second location where more time is spent. However, just as Oussman pointed out, the enduring status of allochthon also limits engagement in the new place, due to the norms that local citizenship would permit, i.e., hardly no voice in collective decision-making processes.

Finally, in the case of emigration to mining areas, due to a wish to reduce one’s travel, the settling down into a new family compound goes in hand with a lesser necessity to travel far, and thus, less dependence on non-kin supports, be they *tuteurs*, *tutrices*, *nyado*, and so on. Jah, for instance, greatly limited his journeys once he settled down, which allowed Mai, his first wife, to travel for business between the village and the markets in Bamako.

Thus, far from being independent adventurers detached from social binds, as some heroic narratives of itinerant male miners would suggest, journeys are, not surprisingly, always embedded in webs of social relations that can be more or less supportive, or constraining, yet always intricate in their composition. What the last section has shown, in particular, is that women, as formal or



informal spouses, *tutrices*, or *nyadow*, play an essential role in supporting the exigence of mobility in the technical system. Interestingly, though I had limited access to their perspective, it seems that many of the economic-intimate arrangements in which men and women engage, in the context of the gold mines, suggest a range of practices where gender asymmetries are either lowered or dimmed by other asymmetrical relations, rather than age or autochthony that often benefit women in terms of access to cash resources.

## 7.4 Conclusion

In their attempt to comply with the different norms of masculinity, including those that are *badenya*-oriented – i.e., which are related to reproduction and which demand their stable presence within the home-place physically or virtually through remittances – itinerant male miners engage in uncertain journeys in which they are highly dependent on women, in terms of all matters associated with domestic work. To sustain such a lifestyle on the long run, they collaborate with different women partners through relatively flexible and precarious residential strategies that are based on economic-intimate arrangements in which their role and status greatly differ according to the security of their position in the context. So, contrary to public discourses, according to which relations between men and women in mining contexts are mainly exploitative (for a critique and for women-centred analysis of gender relations in artisanal gold mining contexts elsewhere, see Bryceson et al. 2013; Werthmann 2009), a closer look at the arrangements between itinerant male miners and women in mining areas suggests a more nuanced and diversified view of gender relations.

First, itinerant male gold miners, especially when they find themselves in rather vulnerable situations, are often highly dependent on local women, a position they would probably not put themselves in, in their home-place. Such a reading, which can be seen as an undermining men's masculinity, is not surprising, in view of the vast literature on gender and migration that repeatedly highlight how gender roles are more prone to be modified in migratory contexts, especially in relation to the changing occupational roles of migrants (Lutz 2010).

Second, the aforementioned process is not straightforward, nor should it be interpreted unequivocally as a possible "loss of masculinity". Depending on their respective positions in these contexts, especially in view of age, local social networks, and financial capacity, male and female miners may engage in relatively horizontal forms of partnering, such as *fudukuruniw*, which, in contrast, provide men with stories of sexual conquest to narrate, thus enabling them to align with masculine norms. Both are not contradictory in the context of the gold mining sites.

Third, what these different forms of arrangements have in common is that they increase women's access to cash resources among other factors, by allowing them to monetize the support

and care they provide, which are usually associated with the domestic sphere, while simultaneously engaging in other paid activities such as petty trade or mining.

Fourth, and consequently, there are several situations in these contexts where the Mandenka gender ideology that privileges elder males and a sexual division of labour between the *grain* (male providing security and long-term subsistence) and the *sauce* (women providing day-to-day complements) finds itself challenged. This is especially visible between (formal or informal) spouses because, in the mining context, wives may be better positioned to earn a regular income and gain security, while husbands' incomes may be less regular and determined by chance.

This chapter highlights cases of institutional change due to the rapid transformation of the economic context of mines, especially in terms of "relative prices" (Ensminger 1992) with the increased influx of cash and gold in pre-existing institutions such as *niado*, *diatiguia*, partnering, and marriage, which redistribute some roles, definitively turning men into migrants and making some women entrepreneurs of men's migrations. These economic transformations, as it was suggested earlier in this dissertation, bring in alternative social norms to those in the village spheres. As Brand (2001: 132–159) argues, there is a strong sense of "harmony" in rural Mandenka society, based on the principles of complementarity (of sexes and generations) and hierarchy (along these lines), which greatly limits the possibility for open conflict, even in terms of gender roles. Consequently, this leads individuals of both sexes to adopt dissimulated strategies to attain their goals while publicly complying with social norms. It is not totally surprising that the spatial separation between villages and gold mining sites is coupled with a social distancing between the two spaces, which was illustrated in the introduction by comparing miners' social networks. Indeed, the intimate economic arrangements between men and women in mining areas overtly undermine the idea of social "harmony", which is based on rigid conceptions of gender complementarity and hierarchy. In their efforts to make a living that complies with both *fadenya* and *badenya*-oriented norms of masculinity, i.e., by engaging in an adventurous and hazardous mobile lifestyle in mining while re-engaging locally in their home-places, the lives of itinerant gold miners illustrate Hoffman's (2002) argument. According to Hoffman, there can be various articulations of gender asymmetry, including near-egalitarian relations and the "mythical male dominance" (Hoffman 2002: 13; see also Leacock 1981; Rogers 1975). Therefore, mining spaces not only grant access to subsistence, but also constitute spaces where alternative norms are built. Through the continuous circulation of miners between the mines and their home-places, this permits the balancing of "harmony" in their home contexts that the socioeconomic context renders increasingly difficult to achieve.

## Chapter 8: Resilient social networks on the move

### 8.1 Introduction: "I was alone, travelling with my wife"

In Chapter 6, I proposed four residential strategies that correspond to different forms of arrangements within the households of itinerant miners; each of these types indicate one form of arrangement within the domestic sphere that allows male miners to maintain their mobile livelihoods in the artisanal gold mines while simultaneously constructing a sense of permanence by re-establishing the centrality of the *fabara* in their continuous journeys. I have thus suggested that full-time miners are permanently negotiating the uncertainty of their lifestyle and the instability of the terrains they move across and their search for stability, which is embodied in the *lu*. In this chapter, I wish to approach this question through the lens of social networks. I investigate the ways miners maintain a relatively stable social space while they are on the move and at how they obtain a certain degree of security in spite of the instability of mining contexts by actively managing their relations in different spheres of their social life. The norms and institutions on which they rely to conduct their work are imbricated in the webs of relations in which they are themselves differently embedded. So, by looking at the different network configurations that emerge along their careers and at how they change with time, I shall argue that there are several ways to professionalize the activity. Whereas the figures of the farmer-miner – strongly rooted in the village life – and of the miner-investor – adequately converting mining outcomes into “sustainable” sources of living “at home” – have been highly mediatized, I shall make the case that the “cosmopolitan itinerant miner” – essentially relying on other peers on the move to cope with “shocks” induced by the changing geography of the mines – is a dominant, though less visible, figure of the industry.

As I have suggested so far, gold miners respond to an ideology of “adventure” in which the making of male individualistic personhood (*fadenya*-oriented), together with the coping with everyday uncertainty (ethos of transience), are valued. I observed how this mindset affects the personal narratives of miners, when my interlocutors recounted their journeys. Indeed, unless I explicitly asked them about those who had supported them, they almost systematically omitted from their narratives those from their home-place who had played a role or who had supported them in their adventure. In line with a certain idea of *fadenya* malehood, I heard numerous stories of men who had left their village to *try their luck* in the gold mines, after “listening to [their] heart” (Moussa) or “just being guided by [their] courage” (Bankal), often against the will of their elders. Later in the discussion, I would find that their journeys had been, at least partly, supported by members of their

family, if not organized by elders. Similarly, I regularly realized in the course of the discussions, that my interlocutors, who had told me they had come to one or another mining site “alone” (meaning without any other male gold miner) were in fact travelling together with their wife (and were consequently not “alone”). I am not suggesting that miners would “hide” decisive relationships that need be “unmasked”, but that it is striking that the roles of others are downplayed in favour of the epic nature of the narration. I propose to take a closer look at the array of support relationships in which miners are embedded, and at how these networks change with time to better understand how specific and recurring configurations arise, and how these relational configurations contribute to supporting, orienting, or constraining miners’ journeys. Indeed, both in the study of migration (e.g. Dahinden 2005a; Schapendonk 2015) and in research on vulnerable populations seeking informal ways to get social protection (e.g. Gardner and Ahmed 2009), conceptual approaches use the lens of social networks to understand how an individual’s embeddedness in social relations orient, constraint, or support the livelihood – and possibly the mobility – of the individual.

In the first part of this chapter, I briefly review the role of social relations in securing livelihoods and overcoming vulnerabilities, especially in contexts of mobility. Then, I explain the network-mapping methodology that I used to research miners’ social networks and the methods by which these data were consequently analysed and interpreted to identify network configurations in miners’ social and spatial trajectories. Finally, I analyse the changing structure and composition of miners’ networks in time and space by inductively comparing them using multiple correspondence analysis (MCA). By comparing their initial networks to their current situations in relation to the experience gained in the gold mines, I elaborate on three configurations of professionalization using three vignettes.

## **8.2 (In)security, mobile livelihoods, and social networks**

The approach developed by Amartya Sen (1981) and followed by many other authors on vulnerability and access to resources has demonstrated that “having a more diverse capability can reduce vulnerability of livelihood to shocks in much the same way that biologists argue that greater biodiversity aids ecosystem resilience to shocks” (Morse and McNamara 2013). Indeed, in 1981, Sen proposed an alternative conceptualization of poverty, which moved away from the assessment of revenues, consumption, and monetary resources towards an approach that focussed on “capabilities of being and doing” (Sen 1981, cited in Gardner 2012). Drawing on the observation that two people with the exactly same incomes could find themselves in dramatically different situations according to their own characteristics (i.e., handicap, age, discrimination) and embeddedness in webs of social relations, Sen proposed that poverty should be considered in terms of “entitlement” to different resources, including social ones. The question consequently comes to the relationships individuals can mobilize to access their means of subsistence. Katy Gardner has adapted this view to social

networks, arguing that poverty is mainly about “connectivity” and power, both through formal and informal systems of entitlement, and through local and transnational links (Gardner 2012; Gardner and Ahmed 2009). In other words, if we apply this view to the present case, the security of a family in a village in upper Guinea does not simply depend on the land and material assets available to the *lu*, but also very much on the connectivity of the *lu*’s members: for instance, whether some of them receive remittances from overseas countries, from West African urban centres, or from the gold mines; how they are connected to the central lineage and thus can or cannot manage mining shafts if there are mining fields in the area; or how they are connected or not to administrative elites.

As it usually happens in rural Guinea and Mali, where the state does not have a presence providing social services in most of the country – at least not in the form of money – they managed their social security through social networks and reciprocities within households and communities, and along kinship and seniority lines. As the literature on mobile livelihoods states (Duany 2002), the spatial extension of a household’s means of subsistence across various local, regional, and national settings helps in securing incomes at the local level for example, young miners give their fathers a large part of their earnings or pay for new equipment in the house when they return from their mining journeys. Thus, at the *lu* level, especially among poor families who can neither count on family members overseas nor have a privileged position within the traditional social structure, having members work in mining areas and possibly remitting small amounts contributes to diversifying livelihoods (i.e., by accessing cash) and improving security.

In the context of the gold mines, itinerant miners working and travelling across West Africa, are also dependent on their embeddedness in different webs of social relations to improve their chances of securing their own subsistence during journeys; these networks may be located in their home-place, but may also be new ones developed in mining areas or built on their way. These social webs help them maintain their mobile lifestyle in constantly changing settings. Security is thus a concern, both at the level of the family that miners are expected to support, but also at their own individual level to perpetuate their continuous journeys in spite of numerous unexpected events such as sites closures, changes in mining regulations, or the sudden enforcement of new mining regulations. Hence, by investigating the social networks that they rely on to maintain their mobile livelihoods, I wish to show that, contrary to the dominant discourse among itinerant miners that mainly draws on the figure of the independent adventurer, there are in fact different ways to make a living in the gold mines, especially considering which relations are maintained and mobilized along their travels and which are not.

The next sections make a detour through migration studies, and in particular studies using a network lens, so as to provide an operational framework for analysing itinerant miners’ support networks in time and in space.

### 8.3 Social networks and the study of (im)mobility

In migratory contexts, social networks, both in the place of origin and of residence, as well as along journeys (Bredeloup 2013; Dahinden 2005a; Schapendonk 2015), provide a vast array of support mechanisms in the everyday life of travellers. I hence consider social networks to be *resources* that enable miners to be on the move, but also as potential *constraints*, since social relations also bring with them duties and moral obligations. These can change in *time* along with the creation of new connections and the suspension or loss of others, resulting in different configurations that will be compared in the empirical part.<sup>1</sup> Such insights should help extend the study beyond adventurist discourses and illustrate different ways of being (or not) supported along mining journeys. I briefly provide more details on these three aforementioned dimensions.

#### 8.3.1 Networks as resources and constraints

The idea that social networks are resources has been thoroughly explored through the concept of social capital, especially by Bourdieu (2006[1980]), who defined it as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” In his view social capital, though it may be unequal in terms of volume or the kinds of resources it conveys, it is not limited to powerful elites, but also operates among the powerless. A good illustration of this concept is Tarrius’ expression of “poor-to-poor” networks (2015), that describes the subterranean and mobile economies of circular migrants on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea.

Although these definitions emphasize the resource-side of networks, a more individualistic approach, such as that proposed by Nan Lin (Lin 1995), emphasizes that networks are necessarily reciprocal. Social resources are exchanged and include the obligation to reciprocate or compensate, which suggests that, as a form of exchange, they structure and are structured by power relations and imply social control. Resources can be obtained from social networks, but obligations also arise from these exchanges. There are hence two dynamics at play. On the one hand, social relations are potential social resources that can be mobilized to obtain different kinds of support, be they material, social, or emotional, while on the other, people are constrained by their embeddedness in networks and the power inequalities formed by their social relations<sup>2</sup>. For example, in Gardner’s and Ahmed’s

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<sup>1</sup> Contrary to *whole networks*, as usually studied in qualitative sociology, *ego-networks* which anthropologists have long studied (e.g. Bott 2014 [1957]; Mitchell 1969) can be compared and can potentially account for both, the strength of the “structure” (or culture) and of human agency in managing relationships.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, in contexts of mobility, scholars have studied social networks in relation to the support they provide for during travels (e.g. Dahinden 2005a; Schapendonk 2015; Singer and Massey 1998) and have also pointed the constraining character of networks, possibly leading to a significant restriction of individual freedoms – an argument which was highlighted in several studies (e.g. Collyer 2005; Guarnizo, et al. 1999, cited in Schapendonk 2015). Indeed, embeddedness in local contexts also comes with constraints that limit possibilities for transnational actions and may be better avoided – an argument that Dahinden illustrated with

analysis of informal social security in Bangladesh, poor people obtain social protection from richer local patrons (who themselves are connected to Bangladeshi migrants in the UK) in exchange of “providing a constant supply of ready labour, political support and other services which are rarely made explicit” (Gardner and Ahmed 2009).

The way reciprocities are institutionalized in existing ties that serve as possible sources of support has been analysed by Granovetter (1973) in his study of the labour market in the US, wherein he theorized two types of relations. “Weak ties”, which are usually interpreted as relatively distant relations that involve little if no mutual obligation, “become not merely a trivial acquaintance tie but rather a crucial bridge between the two densely knit clumps of close friends”, thus acting like bridges and enhancing access to information. In contrast, “strong ties”, structured by intense expected reciprocities, such as family and friends, are less helpful in the search for jobs because of their bonding feature. However, these lasting relations are a better source of material and emotional support. As we shall see, in the case of itinerant miners, the social and spatial distance that sometimes affect their social networks over time render these categories quite permeable depending on the situation.

To account for both, the “positive” side of networks in terms of social support and the “negative” side in terms of social control, I have included measures of multiplexity and network density to roughly evaluate the constraining structure of personal networks<sup>3</sup>. Put shortly, if a miner’s network is very dense, he may be more likely to conform with practices valued among the group, be they more *badenya*-oriented if the networks is rather rooted to the *fabara*, or more *fadenya*-oriented if his network is more closely linked to mining spaces. Yet, these specific configurations can change over time.

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the case of Albanian-speaking transmigrants in Switzerland, whose social capital was not based on “strong” family or ethnic relations – as often discussed in migration studies – but on “weak” relations, yet of trust and solidarity, with friends, colleagues, bosses, and acquaintances rather than with close relatives (Dahinden 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Multiplexity shows the number of support that transit through one relation. As Kapferer (1972) stated in his study on African mine workers in the 1960s, multiple contents in one relation usually indicate strong ties, which, in view of Granovetter’s insights on the strength of weak ties, are less prone to offer new opportunities, but instead, are more likely to furnish support (1973). In consequence, social networks that are composed of multiplex relationships may have a smaller number of ties, but stronger – *multiplex* – ones. Density, which is the interconnectedness of ties within one’s personal network, also indicates possible constraint, by pointing at the strength of social pressure and norms within the network. As Elizabeth Bott showed in her study of working class families, “when many of the people a person knows interact with one another, that is when the person’s network is close knit, the members of his network tend to reach consensus on norms and they exert consistent informal pressure on one another to conform to the norms, to keep in touch with one another, and, if need be, to help one another” (Bott 2014 [1957]).

### 8.3.2 Networks in time

Although the question seems very actual among migration scholars, the evolution of social networks over time has not been studied in great detail (for a discussion see Ryan and D'Angelo 2017; Snijders 2013). Moreover, an analysis only in terms of networks' structure runs the risk of downplaying miners' agency in situations of change and uncertainty. Therefore, as suggested by Schapendonk (2015), a longitudinal perspective on how "networks move" along personal trajectories will help one avoid a reductive "network determinism" by making explicit the active role of the individual in managing their social relations in different and changing situations over time, in which they are actively "networking." This active stance strongly echoes recurrent themes during interviews when miners spoke about the relational skills they had developed in their travels. Indeed, being on the move and detached from usual relations was often described as both challenging and rewarding. For example, some of them described how they would "stick to someone" (*se coller à quelqu'un*), or "approach a group", or learn to present themselves, which suggests an active approach to expanding social relations, that is a "network work" (Pathirage & Collyer 2011, cited in Schapendonk, 2015) to create new relations and maintain old ones that are otherwise relatively fragile. Other authors (e.g. Dahinden 2005a; Gladkova and Mazzucato 2015) have also studied the changing nature of social networks in migratory contexts and the significant role that weak relations developed along the way can play in determining migrants' trajectories.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to dominant ideas in migration studies, these examples show that, in some cases, journeys are sometimes sustained by fugitive relations, which require a certain open disposition and an active approach toward networking to build supportive relationships that may not necessarily last over time.

However, an aspect which is often neglected in such accounts is that the "places" where social interactions happen are not just unstable – they are ephemeral and prone to disappear swiftly (as shown in Chapter 5). The precarious nature of gold mining sites makes them a paradigmatic example of a place where stable social relations are unlikely to last on the basis of locality, as they are usually founded within other systems of migratory circulations (e.g. Schmoll 2005; Tarrius 1992; Walther and Retaillé 2008). A longitudinal view on networks thus helps explain the peculiar temporality of mining geographies: high speed spatial transformations manifest as spatial expulsions due to border closures, the opening and closing of mining sites, or the rapid transformation and creation of corporate leases. This results, paradoxically, in de-territorialized social relations and highly resilient social networks that have the capacity to absorb "shocks" and continuously recompose. Consequently, it can also be hypothesized that some of these support systems, though they are less

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<sup>4</sup> For example, in her study on Albanian-speaking migrants in Switzerland, Dahinden (2005) showed that 14 out of the 15 participants had been mainly supported by people they did not know prior to migrating. Similarly, Gladkova and Mazzucato (2015) have highlighted the role of chance in migrant journeys in their study on African migrants in Ukraine



likely to be locally territorialized, may last over time with active investment in maintaining friendship ties in order to compensate for the ephemerality of places.

Boesen and Marfaing (2007) have pointed out that the increased mobility of the population in the Saharan-Sahelian region contributed to “social and spatial recompositions of the everyday life” that can be read as “cosmopolitanism from below” (2007: 16).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, in addition to being dispersed across vast territories, social relations in translocal/national spaces are also increasingly composed of non-kin and non-ethnic connections. That is, they overtly crosscut social boundaries, thus leading to new “ways of being and belonging”. Similarly, miners’ networks help create alternative normative spaces (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5), across which individuals circulate depending on the spatial extension of their livelihoods. This means that the composition of networks may oscillate between the inner cosmopolitanism of the gold mines and ethnic or *fabara*-centred relationships at different moments in their lives.

#### **8.4 Mapping supports: observing social relations beyond the “network metaphor”**

In his seminal book, Mitchell (1969) warned the reader that it is important to distinguish the network metaphor and the notion of the network as an analytical tool<sup>6</sup>; this chapter’s aim being to go beyond the metaphor, I briefly elicit how I collected network data.

The material I am using in this chapter is of three kinds. First is the ethnographic material that I gathered while doing participant observation. Second are the biographic interviews I conducted with my main informants; I sometimes returned to specific episodes in their journeys and asked them about those who had supported them. I also conducted journeys interviews with itinerant miners I met along the way, who presented a different profile. And third, I conducted network interviews with a name generator centred on social support received along mining journeys (see Appendix II). These were done in two steps: the first focussed on the support network at the time of entering the gold mining sector for the first time, and the second step involved plotting their current network, so as to

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<sup>5</sup> Boesen and Marfaing (2007, 17) argue, in line with Tarrius’ “circulatory territories” (1992), Schmoll’s “everyday cosmopolitans” (2003), and Diouf’s (2000) “vernacular cosmopolitanism”, that scholars should also consider the new cosmopolitanism that emerges “from below” in different parts of the global South. Scholars should make this consideration as a means to overcome the idea of the “cosmopolitan elite” (e.g., Hannerz 1996), for people that engage in “in-between” social spaces independently of the states where “strangers” of all kinds have their own dynamic amongst them and with the local population, which calls into question the very notion of “stranger”.

<sup>6</sup> Referring to Radcliff-Brown, he argues that he was using “network” in a metaphorical and not an analytical sense. His use of the word evoked an image of interconnected social relationships, but he did not go on to specify the properties of these interconnections, which could be used to interpret social actions except at the abstract level of “structure” (Mitchell 1969, 2). As stated above, transnational scholars have taken up this line of argument, which has led to a renewal of interest in social network analysis, especially from a qualitative perspective (e.g. Dahinden 2005b; Gamper, et al. 2011), and the development of methodological tools to literally map social networks (e.g. Gamper, et al. 2011; Herz, et al. 2014; Richter 2012).

get a time comparison on the evolution of their social networks along their “careers” in the artisanal mines. Social ties of support were systematically drawn with a pencil on a paper map with the ego at the centre, which helped in the plotting of contacts and the quality of relations (name generator). In terms of the qualitative perspective, I could always go back to the individual network map and the story that had been related to its mapping.

The categories used corresponded to those used most often by my interlocutors, that is “family”, “friends from the village/town/home-place” and the “friends from the mines”, depending on when the relation first originated. Then, there were “others” whom my interviewees had met on the way or by the mines, but who were not co-workers in the shafts, but who had yet had provided support and could not be grouped into one of the three aforementioned categories. These connections could be, for example, merchants, taxi drivers, local authorities, and quite often *tuteurs* or *tutrices* living in neighbouring villages.<sup>7</sup>

Through this process, social relations were empirically collected. However, it is important to emphasize that they are a subjective representation of the interviewee’s perspective, which was an enlightening exercise in elicitation. Indeed, adventure narratives, which dominate miners’ discourses and are characterized by self-valorization, tend to leave out many a contact. In drawing these network maps, they would then re-appear more clearly and help situate individuals’ journeys in the web of relations that structured them.

In the following sections, I describe miners’ social networks with regard to the dimensions of time and space and agency and constraint, especially in the context of *fabara* and non-*fabara* relations, which have been identified as pertinent in qualifying miners’ careers.

## **8.5 General description of interviewees and overview of social networks’ composition**

### **8.5.1 General characteristics of interviewees**

The interviewees were all men aged between 17 and 52 years; the average age being 29 years. The first journey to the mine was at an age between 15 and 46 years, but in average, the first journey was at the age of 22. Two kinds of recurring trajectories emerged. The first concerns relatively young men who enter the mining sector expecting a transformative experience that leads to adulthood, and possibly marriage and recognition back in their home-place (see Chapter 4). These motives are quite consistent among men who fall within a life phase when the raising of necessary funds for the bride

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<sup>7</sup> The imposition of categories is certainly a potential bias, especially since categories such as “the family” are highly subjective and hard to define. Despite these inevitable reductions of social complexity, the advantage of collecting life stories is that they can help bring back the complexity of relations into the analysis. I present here the map as it looked when it was empty, and then filled.

price is the chief concern. The second one concerns older men, most of whom who have entered into gold mining as a means to complement farm incomes or because they have lost a job in town, that is, those who have been pushed into the sector because of poverty.

In terms of experience in the gold mines, they had between one year and 26 years of experience. The interviewees' average experience in the sector was 6.5 years, and median experience was 5 years, which suggests that, for most of the interviewees, gold mining is far from a one-shot attempt or a temporary job to complement one's income, but rather, it has been fully integrated into their long-term livelihood strategies<sup>8</sup>.

The nationality of interviewees and the diversity of destinations they had travelled to, corroborate the hypothesis that this is a relatively cosmopolitan sector. While 37% had remained in their home country, the majority had worked transnationally; 30% had travelled to one of the neighbouring countries to mine gold, and 33% had moved further to at least two countries other than their country of origin for gold mining. Most of them were Guineans (36) or Malians (10), and the remaining eight were either from Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, or Liberia. The large share of Guineans in the sample population is certainly due to my own embeddedness in social networks that originate in Guinea. Besides, most of my interviews were conducted in Mali and upper Guinea. In sum, the sample of persons whom I interviewed were relatively experienced miners, most of whom were highly mobile and were potentially embedded in relatively cosmopolite networks. The next section provides an overview of the support relations the interviewees mentioned.

### **8.5.2 General distribution of supports**

Interviewees mentioned a total of 439 *alteri* as supports in their mining journeys, totalling 580 ties. *Alteri* were composed of 138 kin (31.4%), 124 friends known prior to mining (28.2%), 128 co-workers met in the mines (29.2%), and 49 others (11.1%) – a relatively high number which often comprises *tuteur* and *tutrices* who are not associated to the mining site as such. Among relatives, the majority of support relations were fathers and brothers, which reflects the gendered structure of the *lu*. Fathers often figured in the decision to move to the mines and also regularly supported their son's first journey, for example, by providing funds for transport and contacts on site to introduce their sons to the sector. It is important to note that “father” here is understood as the head of the *lu*, and they receive 62% of total remittances – the rest of the amount is directed to “mothers” and “wives” – which points to the integration of young miners' adventures into the broader context of the family's livelihood and its administration by elder males. Djibril, for example, explained that his father had

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<sup>8</sup> Hilson (2010) makes a similar point in the case of Ghana, arguing – against conventional wisdom and policymakers' beliefs – that, despite the uncertain income the sector provides, gold mining was often a long-term livelihood strategy rather than the outcome of a desire to just “get rich quick”.

himself been working in the gold mines before had decided to start on his first journey. His departure had been organized by his father in order to complement the earnings of the family; afterwards, as Djibril says, “everything I earned, I would bring it back to my father.” Fode said nearly the same: “I pay my own expenses and all that remain is for my father.” Brothers, in contrast, offer different kinds of material support on the way or in the mines by providing miners information on where to go, helping them find work opportunities, or by housing them. Sekou for instance explains that “between 2005 and 2010, [he] always got informed by [his] brother who advised [him] to move with certain persons he knew. Half I earned was for [him] and half returned to the village with [his brother].” While women are seemingly underrepresented in miners’ accounts, which illustrates the male world of itinerant gold miners (in categories such as friends from the village and co-workers), they are listed under the “others” category, especially since they provide support such as housing. Mohammed, for example, listed the friends with whom he had travelled to Faraloko from another mining site, before explaining that he was living with the elder sister of a friend whom he had just met, and that he was also working with her in her coffee shop.

Considering that certain kinds of supports are required at different “moments” in miners’ journeys, it can also be hypothesized that kin and non-kin support relations are mobilized at different points depending on the stage of the journey. For instance, kin are the providers of monetary support (51.9%) and information (39%), which are required to prepare for the journey. Once on the move, support during travel (53%) or emotional support (53%) are mainly provided by friends from their region of origin – mainly co-travellers with whom they have left their village or contacts they have made in mining areas. Finally, in the context of the mines, co-workers tend to be the support relations that provide aid in terms of accommodation (40.9%) or in helping the miner find a site to work in (41.1%); so do also friends from the home-place met in the mines (43.2%).

Table 8-1 Distribution of support among main categories

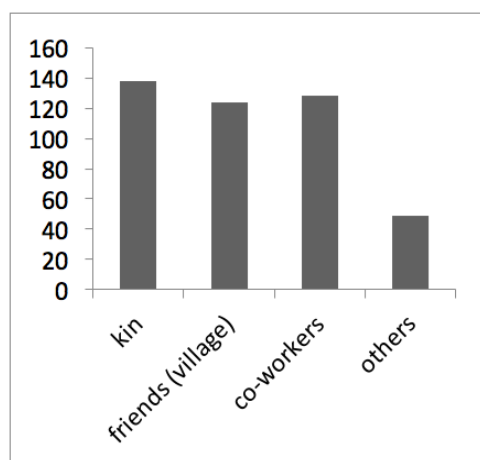
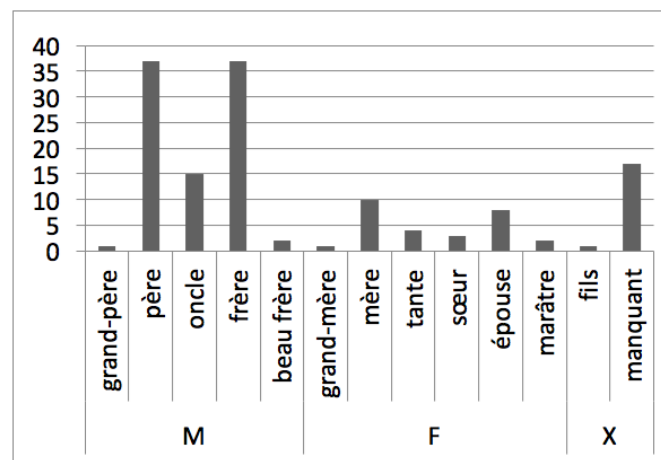


Table 8-2 Types of kin relations



Most support relations appear to be kin relations (36.38%), followed by friends from the region of origin (33.80%). Together, family and friends, both representing relations from the *fabara*, exceed co-workers who account for only 27.07% of the total support relations. Unsurprisingly, remittances (and investment) are done exclusively towards the family, which, conversely, plays an important role in supporting the journey financially. However, the family plays a limited role in terms of emotional support (only 21%) compared to friends and co-workers.

Table 8-3 General distribution of supportive ties by dominant category of relation

|                     | Finance |      | Information |      | Accommodation |      | Work insertion |      | Travel |      | Emotional support |      | Remittances |      | Cumulated supports |       |
|---------------------|---------|------|-------------|------|---------------|------|----------------|------|--------|------|-------------------|------|-------------|------|--------------------|-------|
|                     | Ef.     | %    | Ef.         | %    | Ef.           | %    | Ef.            | %    | Ef.    | %    | Ef.               | %    | Ef.         | %    | Ef.                | %     |
| Other               | 2       | 3.8  | 7           | 6.7  | 4             | 3.6  | 1              | 1.1  | 1      | 1.0  | 1                 | 1.5  | 0           | 0    | 16                 | 2.76  |
| Friend from mine    | 18      | 34.6 | 25          | 23.8 | 45            | 40.9 | 39             | 41.1 | 13     | 13.0 | 16                | 24.2 | 1           | 1.9  | 157                | 27.07 |
| Friend from village | 5       | 9.6  | 32          | 30.5 | 29            | 26.4 | 41             | 43.2 | 53     | 53.0 | 35                | 53.0 | 1           | 1.9  | 196                | 33.8  |
| Kin                 | 27      | 51.9 | 41          | 39.0 | 32            | 29.1 | 14             | 14.7 | 33     | 33.0 | 14                | 21.2 | 50          | 96.2 | 211                | 36.38 |
| Total               | 52      | 100  | 105         | 100  | 110           | 100  | 95             | 100  | 100    | 100  | 66                | 100  | 52          | 100  | 580                | 100   |

Contrary to Table 8-1 which counts the number of relations (each one possibly providing several supports), Table 8-3 counts only the dominant ties in the provision of supports. For example, if *ego* (a miner) has received accommodation support from both “kin” and “others” but “kin” supersede “others”, only the dominant category of relation (kin) is accounted.

Support relations may provide more than one type of support (multiplexity), which may indicate the constraining structure of the network<sup>9</sup>. Among all the relations mentioned in the present case, 57.6% provided only one type of support, 29.2% provided two types of support, and 13.2% provided three or more types of support. Of the total co-worker support relations, 41.3% were multiplex relations; 42.3% of kin-based support relations were multiplex relations; while 44.7% of friends from the home-place were multiplex support relations. The prevalence of multiplexity is surprisingly consistent between the three kinds of relations, given that 53.8% of co-workers are considered distant relations. Social organization in the context of the artisanal mines, and the relatively closed nature of these social spaces (Werthmann 2010), may partly explain why so many multiplex ties exist among apparently “weak” relationships. Being separated from their usual sources of support, miners build new, though ephemeral, relationships in the mining sites. These “weak” ties are nevertheless strongly supportive, especially when miners have little other relationships.

Abou’s relationship with Kalou illustrates these highly multiplex relations with “a priori” distant others. Abou had met Kalou in Senegal, when he had arrived there from Ghana, after having travelled through other mining sites in Burkina and Mali. He spoke broken Mandenka and had very few connections in the mines, other than Kalou and the other workers in the shaft, since he had not met with any other people from his home region. Kalou provided him with most of the support he

<sup>9</sup> To the extent that ego has limited opportunities to form ties, he or she may rely on the same ties for multiple contents (e.g., receiving task advice, strategic information, and social support). Such ‘multiplex’ ties may constrain the individual’s ability to maximize his or her network with respect to any particular content. If an individual receives multiple contents from the same individual, it may be difficult to drop one content without dropping the other (Podolny and Baron 1997).

needed, considering that he had taken him on for work. He provided him with food in the first weeks, and now that he was ill, put aside his shares from the shaft so that he would get his luck anyway. Both spoke about one another as friends and seemed to have a visible relation of friendship because Abou was part of the evening *attaya* (green tea and endless discussions) at Kalou's tent, which most of the other co-workers were not invited to. They were thus friends, and yet, they were also in a sort of client-patron relationship in which Abou was very much indebted to Kalou, though not in financial way.

To briefly summarize, by looking at the total support relations without differentiating the first journey from the current one, that is, without considering the evolution of social networks and the increase in knowledge and experience accumulated throughout miners' careers, the composition of social networks seems strongly tilted toward relations associated to the *fabara*, which, at first glance, tends to contradict miners' heroic narratives. In addition, the networks appear to be largely male, which is no surprise given the distribution of labour in the field. In the next section, I will pay greater attention to the evolution of social and mobility support relations between a miner's introduction to the mining sector and the current period in order to better understand how miners progressively recompose their networks during "careers".

## 8.6 The dynamics of support relations along miners' careers

Miners develop a certain expertise regarding how best to manage their mobile livelihoods over time, or "mobility skills", which can be observed in the evolution of their social networks. While the few scholars who have approached mining contexts from the perspective of mobility acknowledge the different degrees of expertise miners acquire according to the number of mining sites visited (e.g. Jonsson and Bryceson 2009), or their experience and time spent in the mines (e.g. Hilson 2010), little is known about how such expertise translates into different forms of itinerancies and types of social networks. Such a longitudinal view on miners' networks, as developed by scholars interested in African migration patterns,<sup>10</sup> should help illustrate the heterogeneity of their trajectories. In contrast, the dominant image of the seasonal farmer-miner or the miner-investor, both firmly rooted in the social space of their home regions, demonstrates the active role of itinerant miners in developing

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<sup>10</sup> Bredeloup (2013), for instance, has shown that with the process of individualization, which structures the aspirations of many young men, as we have seen with the example of *kountaniw* (see Chapter 5), the social networks of West African migrants have tended to change in form and in time span over the last 20 years. While scholars used to consider migration networks as self-perpetuating, once a pioneer migrant had established a "route" (Haug 2008; Singer and Massey 1998), Bredeloup demonstrates that these networks may also disintegrate while new and less demanding solidarities emerge. Schapendonk (2015), who places a similar emphasis on migrants' active "networking" along their journeys, also points out that the situational aspect of solidarities can erode with time or, by contrast, solidify (for example, by transforming weak into strong ties). Similarly, the trajectories of itinerant gold miners may, for a time, involve the temporary suspension of certain relations in the *fabara* and favour others that are less constraining. In other situations, and at other points in life, individuals may reconnect with their home-places.

relations across space and social categories. The assumptions used in this section are three-fold. First, I posit that an individual's social networks are prone to change with time and that different networks can coexist. Secondly, these changes result from the active engagement of itinerant miners and from their structural positions in more or less constraining social networks. Finally, through miners' active relational work – of building and maintaining friendship ties across conventional boundaries – these networks sustain a social space that traverses national and ethno-linguistic boundaries. Certain shared work ethics and reciprocity rules in these social spaces plays a significant role in creating livelihoods.

Here, I wish to investigate the distribution of different kinds of support and how their provision changes, or not, with time. The tables 8-4 to 8-8 below show two general trends that corroborate recurring themes in the miners' interviews. First, between the two periods, that is, without and with experience, the importance of kin-based relations as sources of support in terms of the organizational aspects of the journey is seen to decrease. In contrast, relationships originating in the mining sector are increasingly relied upon for almost every type of support from getting information, to accommodation, access to work, and transport; in short, every form of support except that directly and explicitly involving money, are increasingly provided by other miners rather than by relations associated to the *fabara*. The first inference that can be made based on these tables is that co-workers progressively replace kin in providing social support. This would make sense considering two aspects: first, young miners may seek to detach themselves, at least temporarily, from the binding ties of the family; second, by professionalizing their activities and acquiring expertise in the field, itinerant miners are less dependent on their kin for support. In other words, this shift from the family to co-workers in terms of social support may both be an outcome of miners' relational choices and a consequence of their progressive immersion in

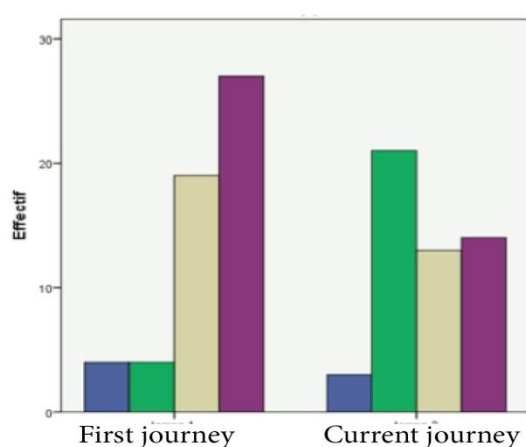


Table 8-4: Evolution in the provision of informational support per category of relation

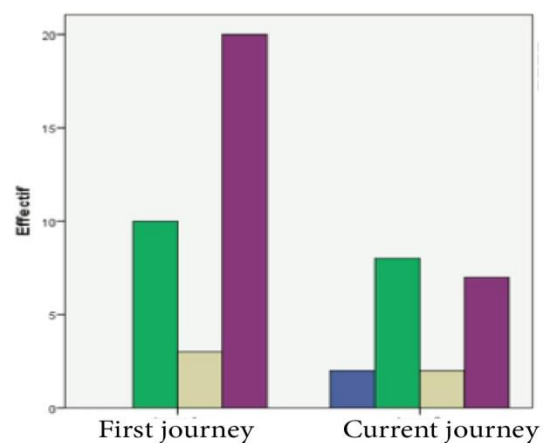


Table 8-5: Evolution in the provision of financial support per category of relation



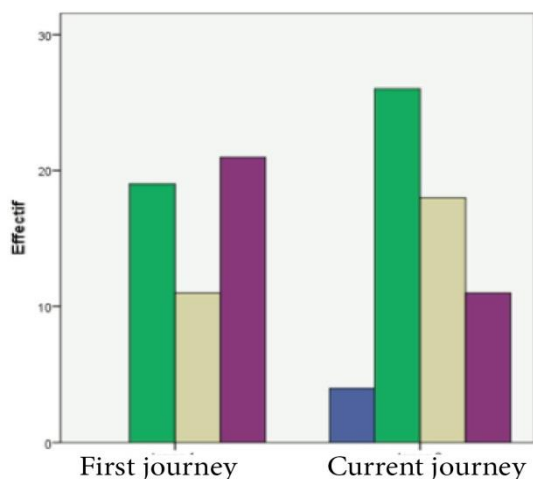


Table 8-6: Evolution in the provision of accommodation per category of relation

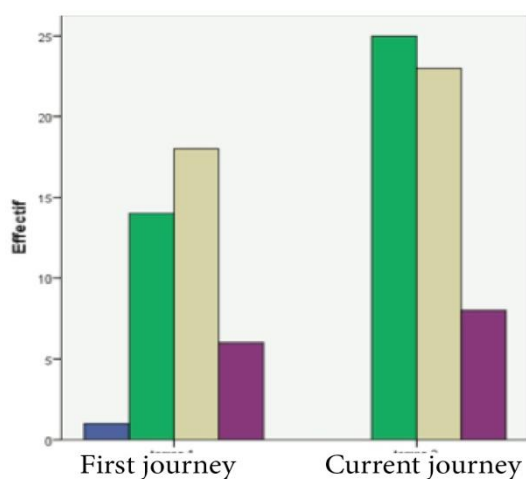


Table 8-7: Evolution in the provision of support for work per category of relation

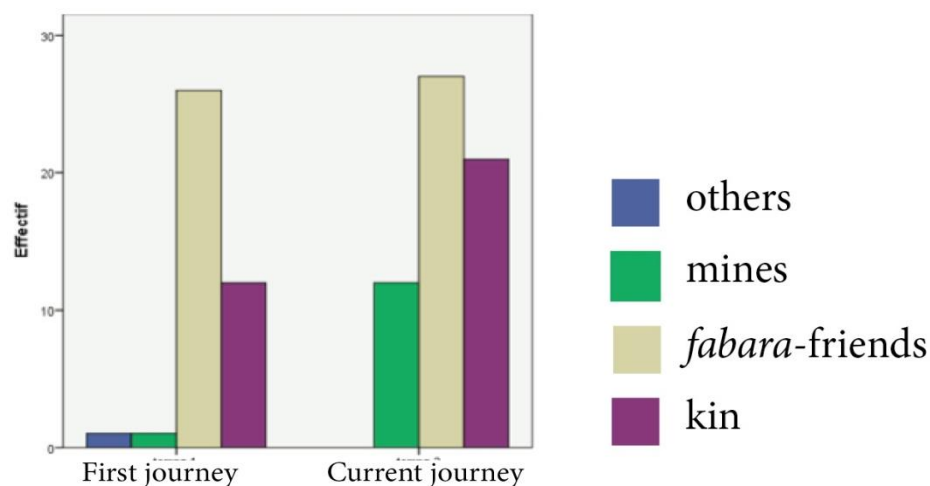


Table 8-8: Evolution in the provision of support for travel per category of relation

transnational occupational networks. I will now briefly comment on each category of support in view of the stories that miners narrated about their journeys.

### 8.6.1 Informational support

As miners' careers progress, they depend less on the family and more on co-workers for informational support. This clearly shows that the family may have organized and supported the miner's first engagement in the sector, and that numerous young men start mining by joining a brother who has had some success in the gold mines or are "sent" by the head of the family to live and work with relatives in the mining areas. In contrast, miners' increasing reliance on co-workers for informational support indicates that they have increased access to more diversified sources of information through contacts built in the gold mines, and thus, demonstrates a potential independence from the family sphere. However, kin-based relations remain important sources of information for

half of the interviewees, which also indicates that some of them prefer to remain within familial networks.

Miners relied on a fairly constant number of friends from the home-place for informational support, which can be linked to another dynamic between young men. Newbies may first have followed their friends, like Jah did during his first journey, and may in turn become “experts” and attract other friends to the mining fields.

### **8.6.2 Financial support**

The financial support received from kin-based relations decreased over the miners’ life course. Since they had become adults in their own right at the time of the interview, most of them were able to secure their own subsistence, and if they were not, they may not say it explicitly for it could be interpreted as a failure on their part for not being able to fulfil their duties. Interestingly, co-workers remain a constant, yet relatively low, source for financial support, which points to situations of high vulnerability. In several interviews, miners who had left to the mines without familial consent or support mentioned episodes of almost total deprivation during which other miners “helped” them either by lending them money or by providing them food. Such stories point to the precariousness of mining trajectories and to the importance of friendships and reciprocal relations in the gold mining sector.

Moral obligations to spend “on site”, like I have argued in Chapter 4, indeed contribute to establishing reciprocities between friends in the gold mines and potentially act as a safety net among workers who temporarily have no contact with their families.

### **8.6.3 Support for housing and accommodation**

Over the course of their mining journeys, individuals rely less on their family for accommodation support, which points to “professionalization” along mining careers. The decrease in familial support with regard to accommodation is partly compensated by support from among co-workers, which shows the gradual integration of the individual into occupational social networks. As the example of Kalou in Karakhena or Kokoyo shows, friends that he knew from other mining fields accommodated him temporarily in the mining settlements. Other interviewees spoke of how they had shared tents or a communal space with co-workers they had met at the new site. In the case of *tutrices*, women living near the site who offered accommodation, they were categorized under “others”, but when the same service was provided by a fellow gold miner, the relationship was classified as “friend from the mine”, even though the agreement would then be managed by their wife. Folon, one interviewee, for example mentioned that he had been hosted by a “native” (male) of Kourouba, and when I asked if he had paid for food outside or ate with the family, which would be the expected

within the *diatiquia*, he explained that the wife of his host dealt with housing matters and the daily preparation of food.

Friends from the home-place are also sources of support in terms of housing, especially persons who have emigrated to mining areas and who regularly host co-villagers from their home-place. Karamo for instance explained that, after years of travelling from mining site to mining site, he would now prefer to stay in “real houses” with friends. This second kind of configuration is hence closer to a “chain” model that builds on existing ties, rather than a “networking” model that which supposes the constantly extending and adapting of the network according to one’s needs. Several experienced miners like Karamo, Alhassane, Sekou D., and Moussa D., who utilize “good shot” strategies of mobility, often have long-lasting ties with other mobile miners who inform them of good opportunities in their own region and host them when they arrive, along with other friends or relatives. Sekou D. puts it so:

My friend sent me the message (through a moto-taxi) that it really was worth coming. We packed on the next day with two other friends and travelled to Djilengbe. We were nearly 15 people sleeping in the house (hut). I did not know the place, but he himself is from Djilengbe and knows everyone there. Before we left, he had assured me that my friends and I could get a place to sleep in the village. I told him that if it’s like that, they it’s okay; but to come alone where I don’t know anyone and to try to make my place in the camp... no. I don’t want that. We were really a lot of people staying at his place, but most of us come from the same neighbouring villages, so it was okay.

Hence, in comparison to the spontaneous socialites of the mining camp, the workers hosted in the village were from les distant regions. They had clearly followed similar routes and had thus formed relatively homogenous groups.

#### **8.6.4 Support for work opportunities**

As I have explained in earlier (Chapters 1, 3, 5), the working sphere, or *daman fano*, is less organized along kinship lines and more along experience or friendship. The mapping of support relations for work corroborates the idea that, neither during the first journey, nor after having acquired experience, is the family, where strong ties dominate in Granovetter’s wording, an important sphere for the creation of work opportunities. Unsurprisingly, the more experience and social capital miners gain within the specific domain of the gold mines, the more they rely on these relations, most of which rather qualify as “weak ties”. For example, they may maintain sporadic contact with other miners with whom they have worked once, and these casual acquaintances can situationally turn into extremely strong ties with whom they share close bonds in the context of the gold mines. Indeed, as I argued in Chapter 5, the specificity of their work ethos, together with their spatial distance from the home-place, often leads miners to suspend contact with some of their close

relations – a part of their social network becomes inactive for relatively long periods, while they instead activate other parts of their social network that may situationally involve strong friendships and reciprocities, yet not necessarily lasting ones.

Kin-based relations offer little support by way of accommodation compared to peers from the home-place who have themselves opened the way to the mines and also play an important role in co-opting newly arrived miners into their teams.

#### **8.6.5 Support for travel**

This category includes those persons with whom itinerant miners travelled to the site where they operated. Friends from the home-place, again, largely offered this kind of support, while other kinds of relations were also mobilized between the first journey and the current one. The large number of support relations that fall within the “friends from the home-place” category for this kind of support suggests a specific mode of engagement, where farmers who wish to complement their farm incomes by working in the mines tend to seasonally organize their travel together. For instance, in certain regions of western Burkina Faso, male co-villagers hire two or three cars and travel altogether to Guinea, where there are abundant gold mining sites, and where the cost of life in the mining settlement is comparably lower.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, after settling down to Koundiana, Jah also episodically travels to larger mining sites with co-villagers. The whole group is usually hosted by one of the expedition members’ relatives.

Though the number of co-workers who are also co-travellers increases over time, they are relatively less likely to offer this kind of support. This can be partly explained by the importance given to the individualistic mindset of itinerant gold miners and the value given to “being autonomous” (see Chapter 4). Indeed, though they may support each other on site in the form of “circumstantial solidarities” (Bredeloup 2013), remain in contact despite the distance, and exchange information about their journeys, they handle their duties towards the *fabara* independently, which implies distinct family and community agendas. By way of example, though they have regularly met and worked together in several mining fields in Guinea, Mali, and Senegal over four years, Kalou and Namori always organized their travel independently according to their own familial obligations in Guinea, for Kalou, and in Ivory Coast, for Namori. Their relationship, which illustrates the most common model of “friendship” among miners, is difficult to qualify as weak or strong ties, for they build on intense reciprocities (material and emotional) which can be disrupted at any time, letting each one “follow its own route,” as I was regularly told.

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<sup>11</sup> According to them; I have not done fieldwork in Burkina Faso and so have no first-hand information on standard prices in mining settlements.

#### 8.6.6 “Weak ties” upside down: obtaining safety from relations outside of the *fabara* sphere

This short survey on the evolution of itinerant miners’ support networks during the course of their journeys reveals a clear trend, which is the decreasing reliance on kin, a priori considered “strong ties” in Granovetter’s definition (1973), and increasing reliance on co-workers with all sorts of social, national and ethnic affiliations in most aspects of mobility. Though miners tend to consider these relations as “weak”, i.e. by categorizing them as “distant” relations on the network map instead of “close ones”, in practice, co-workers perform the functional role of Granovetterian strong ties by offering different kinds of material support and thus maintaining the mobile livelihoods of their peers. This observation is worth briefly pausing on for it shed new lights on safety strategies developed in highly uncertain contexts, such as those experienced by itinerant miners who tend to suspend “strong” kin ties, that potentially provide safety on the long-term, for “weak” ties with co-workers that offer more opportunities, but less safety.

In Granovetter’s theory of weak vs. strong ties, as well in migration studies that employ a network approach, “strong ties”, e.g., friends and family, are usually considered more likely to provide support (e.g., material and emotional), while “weak” ties are thought to offer information and opportunities since they tend to “bridge” different groups. In this view, security, though a family member may have migrated abroad, is provided by relations categorized as “close” ones, such as those attached to the sphere of the *fabara* (kin, co-villagers, etc.). Yet, as we have seen, in many cases, social networks tend to temporarily fracture during journeys, which leads to a disruption in contact with *fabara* relations who usually provide security. The miners’ stories reveal that they give importance to the building of friendships even though they are based purely on circumstantial solidarities. Considering that the more disconnected a person is, the more vulnerable they are, some miners detach themselves from relatively stable *fabara* networks, which offer security in terms of food and to a lesser extent money, and risk severe deprivation. In such circumstances, friendship ties with other miners, though they are usually considered “distant relations” or weak ties, from the subjective perspective of the interviewees, regularly provide crucial support in moments of vulnerability. What can be established so far is that the moral economy of itinerant mine workers – whose ethos of transience values risk-taking and the capacity to adapt – also includes notions of mutual help that are expressed as a moral obligation to spend on site. Instead of obtaining safety through strong and stable ties such as kin, the ethic of lottery that I developed earlier (Chapter 3) supposes that lucky miners, by ostentatiously spending a part of their earning on site with friends, help money circulate and so allow vulnerable miners to access their basic needs.<sup>12</sup> These forms of

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<sup>12</sup> Unless they do not plug into the notion of “game” associated with gambling, such exchanges recall forms of egalitarian redistribution through gambling according to (e.g. Mitchell 1988; Woodburn 1982) for they allow for the circulation of material wealth between weak relations and within loose networks.

assistance embedded in friendship and consumption practices contribute to constructing hierarchies among miners – some are dependent on others at some moments, as Abou was on Kalou, for instance. Yet, these exchanges allow them to maintain a certain sense of “autonomy”, since they usually avoid incurring financial debt, as they would in the sponsorship systems that prevail in open cast mines and diamond mines, thus echoing Graeber stance that “autonomy” lies in creating new ties and dependences (2009: 266) rather than in disrupting dependencies. Let me illustrate this with a few stories gathered while conducting network interviews.

In 2012, we crossed the Malian border from Furu to visit the site at Papara (Ivory Coast). We were curious about the new site, like many others, as everyone was talking about it and it was just starting to attract people, especially from Furu on the Malian side, from where hundreds of people were leaving every day. We met three young men there, two of them from Sierra Leone and one from Liberia, who had just arrived and were boasting in the coffee place about their previous travels, none of which had seemingly brought them any fortune, but they were very optimistic about their new venture. I asked them for an interview and permission to make a network map with them, to which they agreed. In short, their three initial journeys had been very different, for two of them had started from their home-place when they were young, and the third one had “started mining by chance” with no previous experience. Since they had met, their configuration had not changed, since they worked and travelled altogether, and did not rely on any support other than what they could provide one another. They spoke creole, though they had mastered Kuranko and could easily speak to others in other Mandenka languages. They seemed to enjoy this difference and would often emphasize it. Their story was mainly one of friendship, adventure, and travel; they often insisted on how they could “count on one another”, giving examples on when one or the other of the gang had become severely ill. Their “differences”, be it in terms of nationality or ethnicity, were stressed to give even more value to their friendship. Similar to Werbner (1999) argument that cosmopolitanism is not a prerogative of the elites, “working class migrants as well may become cosmopolitans, willing to engage with the other.” These narratives show the value placed in friendships with classified “others”, just like in other stories related by Kalou, Sandaly, or Bankal<sup>13</sup>. They share the same line of thinking, which values a form of otherness in the forming of working teams, or “cliques” of support and travel. This stance echoes what an experienced miner, Moussa S., explained to me when I asked him what had changed since he had first started mining:

Now when I need to go down and cut some gravel deep in the shafts, I can do it easily. This I couldn't do when I was there [in his home region] when I first started. I was more with the family and the friends and they didn't do galleries work. I had a few friends from elsewhere, but it was very little. Now I have sincere friendships with Burkinabes and Malians and even

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<sup>13</sup> The composition of Kalou's team on page 180 illustrates the same argument.

other nationalities. There is a difference between those who travel like I did and the others. Even if we do more or less the same work in the mine, it is not the same between us [travellers and non-travellers]. We don't understand each other on every matter. For example, there is the social side that is important when you are in the mines. The way of being is not the same between someone who travelled and someone who didn't...the way you talk is not the same, because someone who never left, for example, will not know who is superior or not to him in the mine, and if you don't know that, you don't know who can help you or not.

As others, Moussa emphasizes a common sense of adventure and experience in the mines – in opposition to “sameness” which is associated to an incapacity to take risks – to root a vision of “us” as opposed to non-miners or less adventurous workers. Friendships are based on such values. Despite the intensity of these friendships, these ties remain somehow fragile and ambiguous, for they may be broken at any moment.

While such a reconfiguration of supports towards co-workers may simply illustrate a career effect and was predictable for certain kinds of support like those relating to finding information or a team to work with, which imply little proximity, its generalization to other forms of support including financial support or accommodation suggests that, despite extremely diverse social backgrounds and origins, itinerant gold miners construct social spaces of mainly loose relationships that are not associated with a strong sense of obligation and can be disrupted at any moment. These solidarities also translate into work-related identifications and shared norms that empirically echo the somehow cosmopolite thinking that experienced miners value, like when Kalou boasts that he was working in a team made of people coming from as far as Niger, Ghana, Burkina, Mali, and Guinea. Such statements are however quite ambivalent since, at the same time, ethnicity, nationality, and other markers of otherness are sometimes instrumentalized in situation of conflict over resources as Chapter 10 will show.

However, in contrast to this general cosmopolitan narrative, there are singular cases that provide a counter-narrative to this hypothesis; for instance, there are some miners who have maintained *fabara*-centred networks despite the time and distance involved in their mining journeys. Indeed, the general distribution of aggregated support relations as presented here does not address the more complex changes that occur in the structure and composition of miners' individual social networks that would explain, for instance, the kinds of relations and the support extended by them in specific mobility configurations. The next section identifies three different configurations by focusing on the structure and composition of social networks and the changes they undergo along miners' careers.

## 8.7 Differentiated professionalizations

As I have shown in Chapter 6, there are different ways of accommodating one's obligations towards the *fabara* while sustaining one's mobile livelihood. While using the residential approach I focused on the forms of journeys, but the network lens allows me to focus on the social relations supporting the journeys; thus on the reciprocities at stake across social spheres. Between one's initial decision to engage in the sector and the progressive development of a career in the gold mines, miners' journeys are sites of active networking as much as these routes are themselves constrained by existing relationships. In line with Bredeloup (2013) who suggests that networks, or segments of social networks, may lose their efficiency and are not systematically perpetuated over the long-term; some relations are maintained, others are suspended, and new ones are created, which indicates that there are different ways to be mobile. Similarly, I suggest that the travels of miners rely on different arrays of social relations that enable mobility to be perpetuated in time, and whose composition is more an outcome of miners' active networking rather than being simply an inherited and constraining structure. In doing so, and by highlighting the geographical extent of relatively loose networks, I wish to consolidate the case that miners' solidarities and their intense transnational mobility are a form of "cosmopolitanism from below" (Boesen and Marfain 2007, Werbner 1999, Diouf 2000) in the margins of most forms of state regulation; such alternative way of belonging, along with the social and symbolic resources it contains, being also activated as a response to the precarity inherent to their lifestyle. Though they are regularly expelled from their places of work either because of national policies, regional conflicts over resources, or as a consequence of seizure of land by multinational companies, most of my informants who were engaged full-time in sector seemed to have developed a highly resilient mode of living, moving, and relating with others that nevertheless permitted them to sustain their mobile livelihoods, earned in gold mines scattered across national borders and other non-administrative boundaries.

I posit that social networks play a decisive role in the maintenance of such mobile livelihoods and that their structure illustrates different modes of making a living in distant gold mines and of securing individual trajectories against poverty and other vulnerabilities caused by isolation.



In his book about family and social networks, Widmer (2010) makes a useful distinction between family *structure* and family *configuration* that I wish to adapt to my study of support networks. The *structure*, Widmer explains, is the total number of available links, which in the case of families suggests different forms, depending on how large the “family” is.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, family *configuration* refers to significant persons within the whole network, in the sense that it refers to those who have played a role or influenced the ego in one way or another during the year. Similarly, the networks I have mapped are mobility *configurations* for they only represent the relationships that have played an active role in sustaining the miner’s mobility, rather than the total potential links that are available or are perceived as such. Like for family configurations, the time span between two “focus points” (Widmer 2010), which in this case are the “first journey” and the “current one” (with experience), suppose that the configuration may have changed in-between. My aim is to find if there are some patterns in such changes, that is, if there are recurring network configurations – like there are recurring residential strategies (see Chapter 6). The underlying hypothesis is that there are different modes and degrees of engagement in the social field of the mines, and that such engagements mainly vary along a continuum extending from a *fabara*, locally rooted, pole to a “cosmopolite”, professional and circulating, pole.

To inductively compare itinerant miners’ social networks, I have conducted a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) (Duval 2013). The technique is usually associated with Bourdieu’s theory of social fields (1979). Bourdieu used it to visually represent the theoretical spaces or “fields” within the “social space” by “objectivizing structures of relations” between variables, which in “Distinction” (1979) were mainly related to taste (consumption of goods, leisure, etc.), income, and social position. My material and my questions are totally different, yet the strategy is similar since I aim to inductively classify individuals and variables, here their supports configurations, within the (transnational) social space of African artisanal gold mines. The variables I have considered are related to the composition (categories of relations), and the structure (degree of multiplexity and degree of density) of itinerant miners’ social networks, as well as the degree of transnationalism of their journeys (“within the country”, “across one border”, or “across more than one border”). To do so, I have coded the network maps into a database; each network was recoded according to the dominant category of relation for each category of support, to its degree of density and multiplexity (on the basis of three equal classes), and to the intensity of cross-border mobility, for Time 1 (initial journey) and Time 2 (current journey). Then, I used MCA to spatially project variables according to the affinities between them. I projected the variables twice – once corresponding to the first journey (without experience) and once corresponding to the current one (with experience) to identify if there were enduring configurations that would stay constant over time, or if different configurations would emerge along miners’ careers.

The method has been criticized (see Duval 2013 for a discussion) for not being powerful enough to “explain” the processes that lead to one or another classification, yet, it is very useful to inductively classify a large range of variables and eventually identify *types* or *social fields* within the social space. To “explain” these processes, I shall return to the individual trajectories of miners as related by them to understand how configurations emerge and change.

### 8.7.1 First journey: *badenya* and *fadenya* configurations

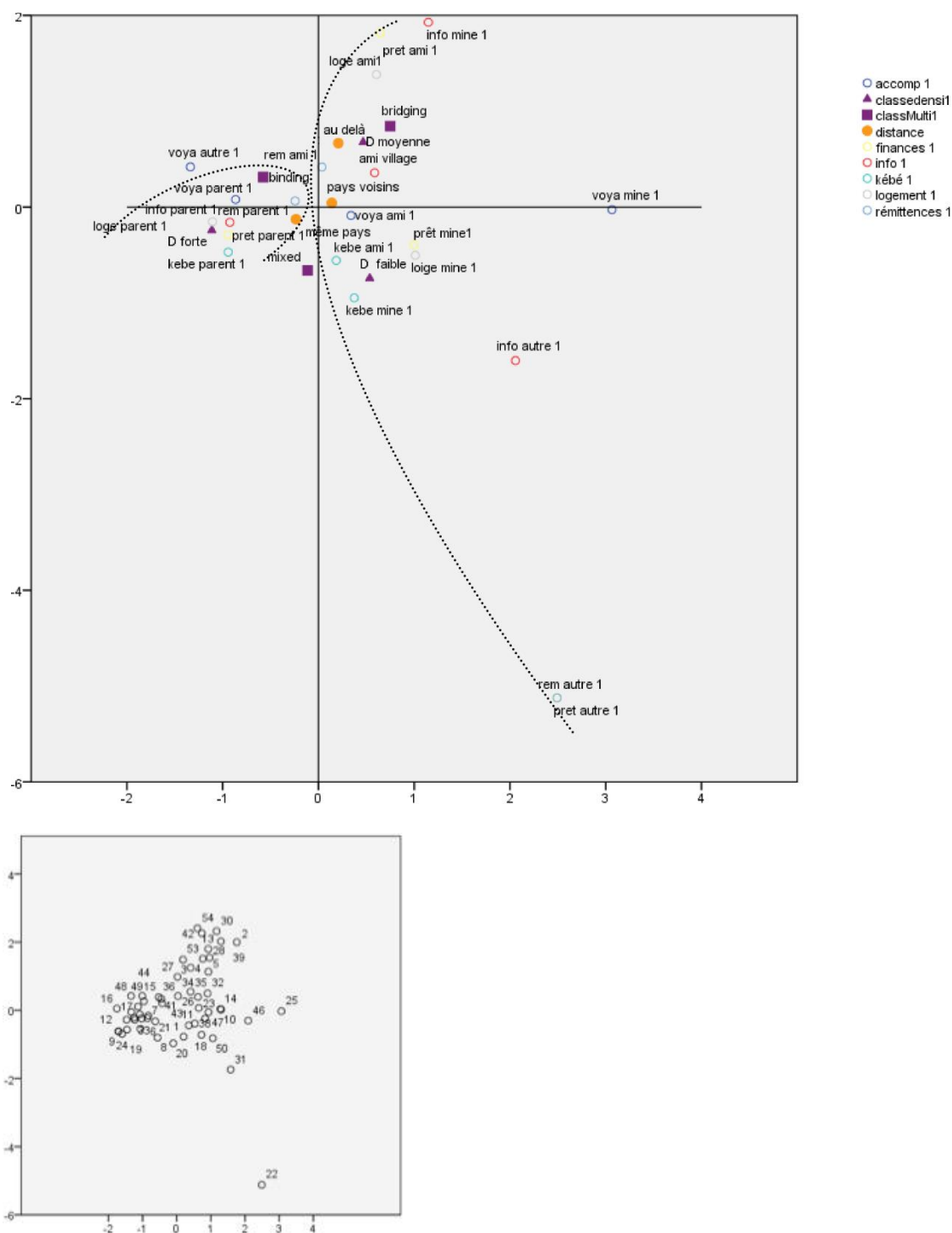
The first journey to the gold mines certainly involves a wide range of motives and circumstances as we have seen so far. Although clear groupings of variables cannot be identified, one tendency can however be identified clearly (Figure 8-1): except “*voya autre 1*” (travelling support from other) on the left of the vertical axis, most kinds of support are provided by kin and are

<sup>14</sup> Widmer defines the family as a “small and lasting group of interacting personalities linked by meaningful social roles, a feeling of shared belonging and a legitimate, though unequal, division of labour” (2010: 2). Although I am not focusing exclusively on the family, I retain the interactional criteria to map networks of active relations of support.

located very close to the highest class of density and highest class of multiplexity, and are closer to “one single country” than “cross-border journeys”. At the right of the axis in contrast, support from friends, other miners, or other people are mixed indistinctly with the other variables. In other words, if there is a recurring type of engagement that can be deduced from a comparison of support networks, it is a configuration dominated by kin (left group), which is logically highly constraining for it comprises a high level of social pressure, is relatively close knit, and implies travelling little distance. Such a configuration can clearly be seen in household strategies of livelihood diversification, in which cadets are sent to gold mines by elders to supplement the farm produce of the *lu* with cash.

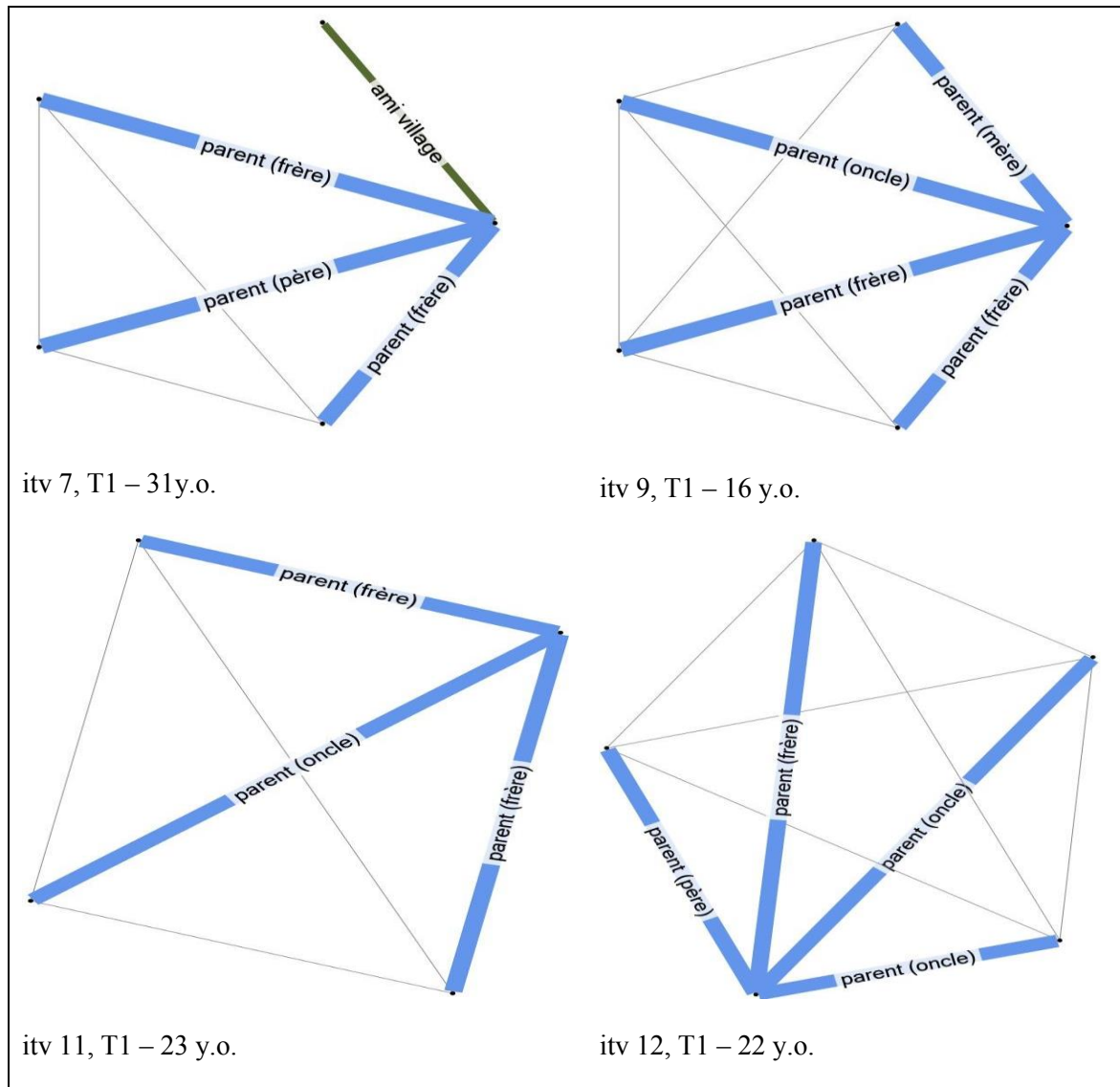
Other ego networks are equally likely to rely on mixed support provided by kin, friends, miners met during journeys, and other people met on the way. Such configurations are hence more heteroclite than kin-dominated ones, and are therefore more difficult to interpret in terms of livelihood strategy and apparently are more likely to reflect more individualistic forms of travel that rely on “circumstantial” solidarities such as those idealistically conceived in discourses of *adventure*. A closer look at the dispersion of interviewees (Figure below) confirms that, except for strong similarities between networks dominated by kin relations (i.e., 7, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 24, 36, 41, 43, 44, 48, 49), there are no other configurations that can be clearly isolated. By way of example, the first networks of this series (7, 9, 11, 12) visually present a very similar configuration (see Figure 8-2).

Figure 8-1 Multiple correspondence analysis of miners' social networks for the first journey



Note on network visualization below: Boldness of ties indicate the degree of multiplexity; the colour indicates the type or relation (blue=kin; red=relation from the mines; green=relation from the fabara other than kin; yellow=other). The age and the reference number of the network are indicated below each visualization.

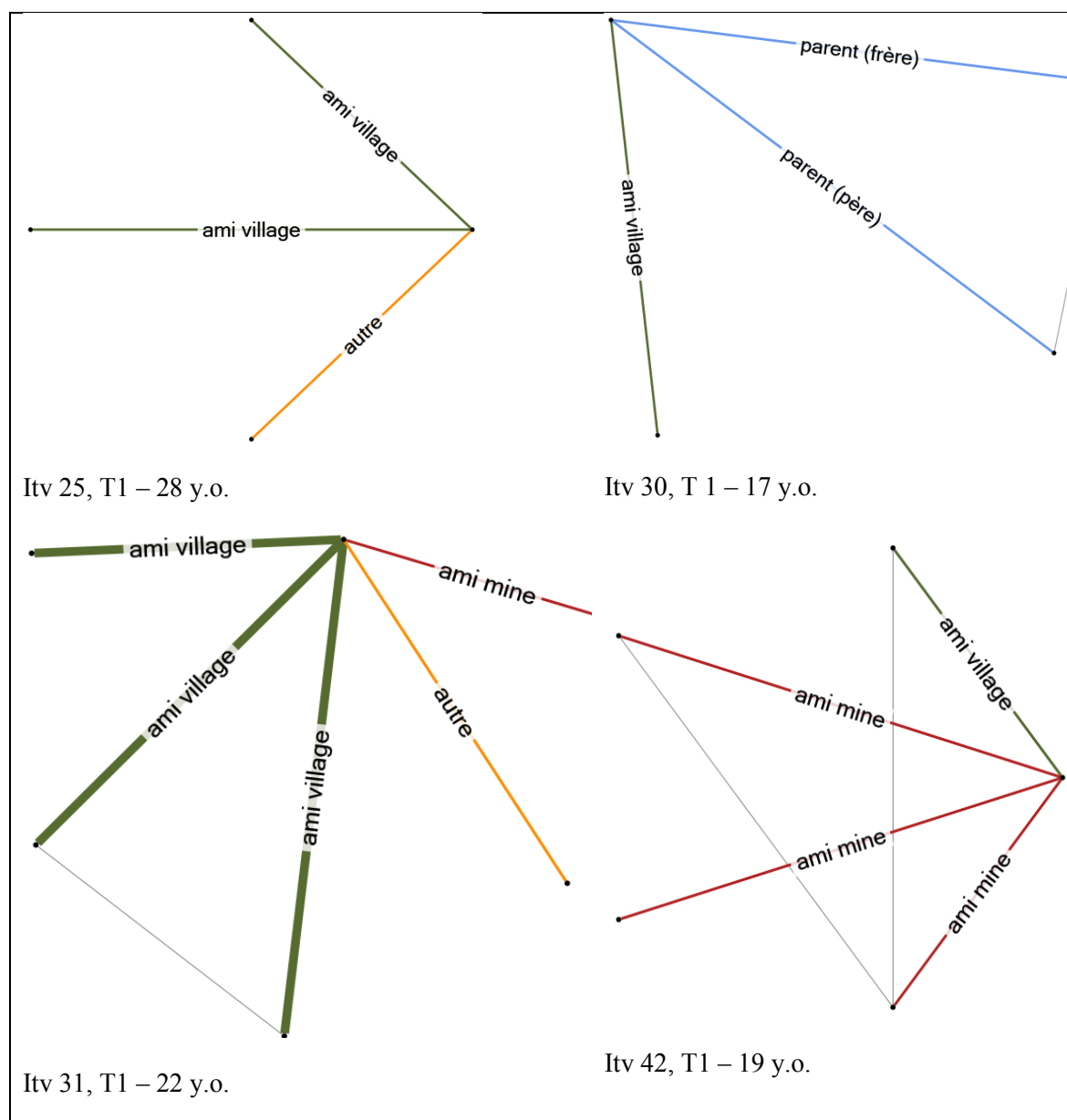
Figure 8-2 Examples of kin-dominated (*badenya*-like) configurations of support networks for miners' mobile livelihoods



In the four random examples above, configurations are extremely close knit and are composed of almost only strong ties of *lu* members, which suggests that the person (ego) at the centre has little room to manoeuvre within such configurations. Thus, by simply looking at the form of mobility configurations and at the affinities of support variables, it can be acknowledged that, among the 57 interviewed miners, one-third were embedded in a very similar mobility configuration dominated by kin at the time of their initial journey.

In contrast, others configurations (see Figure 8-3) are quite heteroclite in their composition and illustrate more individualistic, *fadenya*-oriented endeavours (for example 25, 30, 31, 42).

Figure 8-3 Examples of non-kin-dominated (fadenya like) configurations



In the literature on artisanal gold mining in sub-Saharan Africa, miners' motives to engage in the sector may be interpreted hastily and questions of how mining contributes or not to households' livelihoods may be resolved too quickly. Some authors (e.g. Panella 2007) consider gold mining an extension of familial subsistence which would plug into the same networks and division of labour as illustrated here by kin-dominated configurations. Others emphasize the agency and individuality of miners in making career choices (Bryceson and Jonsson 2010), which is certainly supported by itinerant miners' discourses, and which yet run the risk of overlooking some of the relational constraints which determine these journeys. The MCA suggests a more balanced view according to

which different configurations coexist at the time of the miner's initial journey, whose main criteria of differentiation seems to be whether they fully integrate into the *lu*'s livelihoods or not.

This approach, that looks at configurations through the lens of social networks, thus seems to point to the same ambivalence that was mentioned earlier (see Chapter 5) between *badenya*-oriented behaviours that privilege the family sphere and *fadenya*-oriented ones that favour the search of individualistic accomplishment through fortune-making and the constructing of an intrepid self. As individual trajectories have shown so far, both are not exclusive and can change over time. However, age does not seem to be directly correlated with one or another configuration. Young men who have entered the mining sector at the request of their elders may progressively embrace an individualistic lifestyle, while others who set off "alone", sometimes against their elders' wishes, may then struggle to accommodate their mobile lifestyle with *fabara*-centred activities. In short, trajectories are often shaped by a constant negotiation between these two poles, which empirically reflects the support networks that miners rely when they first join the sector. Given that such configurations are prone to change, the following section looks at the kinds of configurations that emerge with time and experience along miners' careers by looking at the MCA for the "current journey" (Time 2).

### **8.7.2 Journeys of experienced miners: specialization of careers**

With time and experience,<sup>15</sup> journeys are prone to become more distant. Besides, the professionalization of careers, e.g., through the learning of mining techniques and mobility skills and the embracing of an ethos of transience, cause changes in support networks with time. The MCA for Time 2 (see figure 8-4 below) clearly shows three different trends in which different sources of support group together with more or less distant journeys and with different degrees of constraint in the networks' structure. Variables form easily identifiable clusters, increasingly grouped per category of relationship, whose position in the diagram along the two axes varies according to the dimensions of density (along the vertical axis), distance of journeys (along the horizontal axis), and their proximity to the binding-bridging character of networks. Three main types of networks can thus be identified, which calls for three different ways of moving and making a living in the artisanal gold mining sector.

Kin-based support relations are less clearly grouped than for the first journey, but share a similar distance to the two other kinds of support, namely those provided by friends and those

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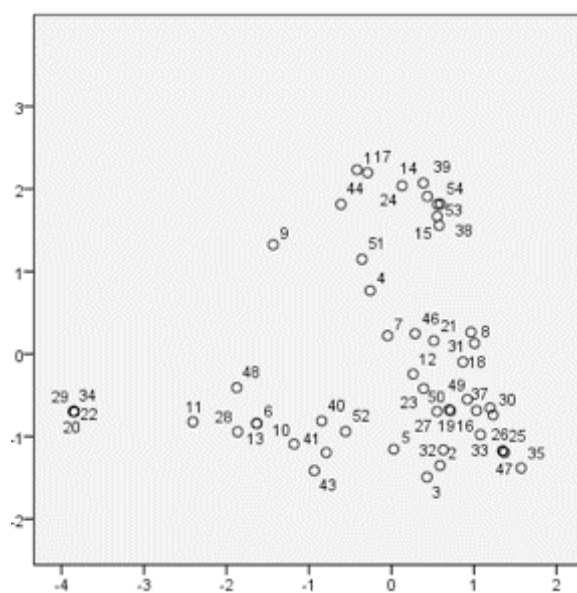
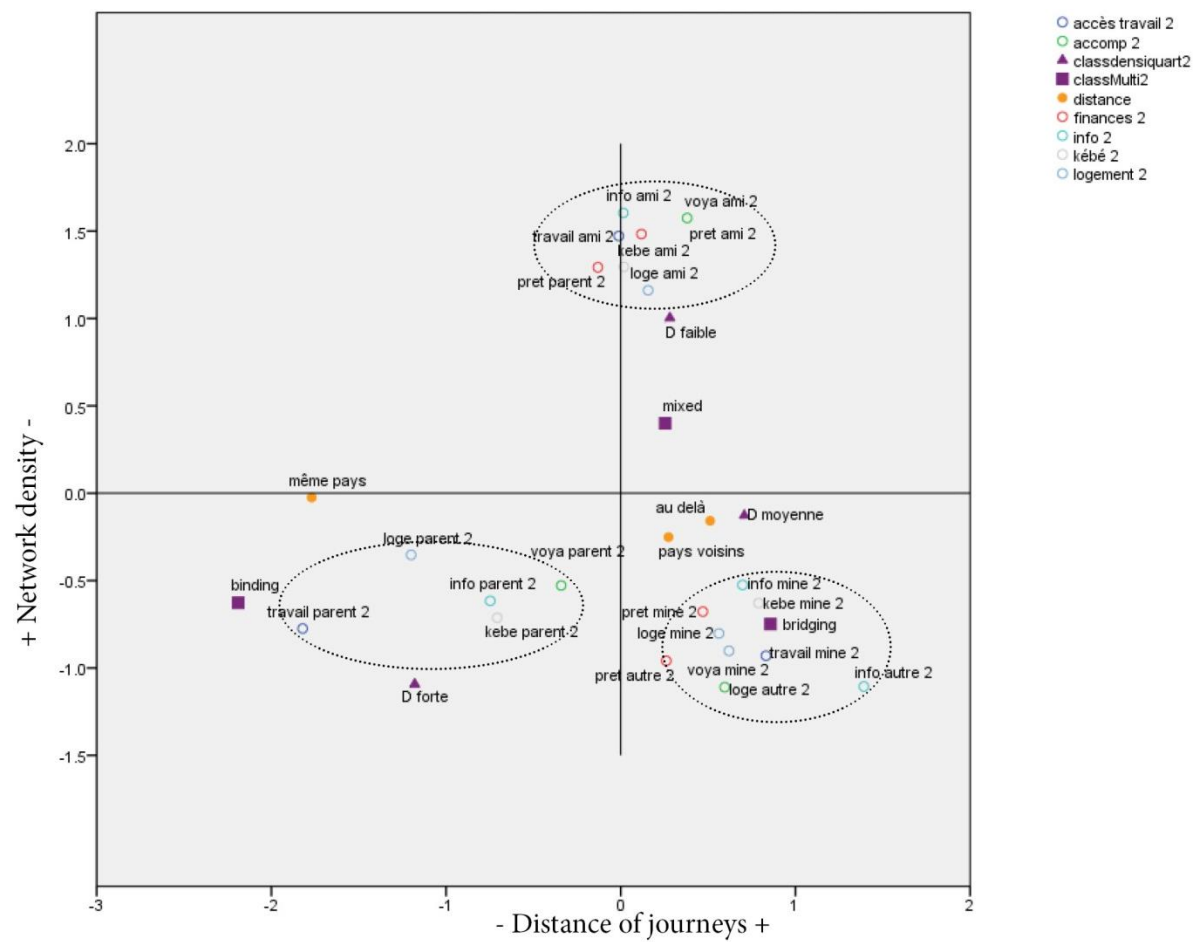
<sup>15</sup> One could argue that variations in experience might induce a certain bias in the MCA. The minimum experience required to participate in the network interviews was at least one year since first joining the sector and gold mining being the primary income during that time. I thus consider these networks comparable for they all imply a certain degree of professionalization, yet with varying degrees of experience, in contrast to retrospective interviews of the individual's introduction in the sector. As a control, I calculated the average experience for each cluster which was relatively similar – 5.4 years for kin-dominated networks, 7.5 years for *fabara*-friends dominated networks, and 5.9 years for the co-workers' networks.

provided by co-workers. Configurations in which kin provide the most support are associated with short distances, usually inside the country or eventually in a neighbouring country. Their composition is characterized by a high degree of interconnection and multiplex ties. It can be said that miners whose mobility network can be characterized as such have limited mobility; their journeys to the mines perpetuate livelihood strategies determined within the *lu*, which limits their destinations to close-by areas where kin are also present. The dispersion of such configurations (see right figure) is greater than in Time 1, and is found for much fewer individuals, which confirms that kin-dominated ties also decrease as dominant configurations. This type of career will be referred to as “family-bounded configuration” in the next section.

The second group relies largely on a support network made of friends from the home-place. The density of these networks is low, and their ties include simple and multiple support relations. Hence, members of these networks are usually selected for specific reasons (support) beyond simple inter-knowledge. The group is equally distant from “inside the country”, “neighbouring country”, and “further”, which indicates that miners whose network is characterized as such mainly use diversified and selected ties to sustain their mobility and are able to maintain transnational engagements and move far from their region depending on the opportunities available. Though their networks are mainly composed of friends both from the home-place and the gold mines, these miners are still connected to their families, from whom they often receive financial support. This type of career which, though it represents very few individuals, illustrates the idealistic conception of artisanal mining as a source of development, wherein gold remains a complementary source of income that is reinvested in other income generative activities. It will further be referred to as “opportunistic occasional engagement”.

The third group, which clearly dominates in numbers, includes support networks mainly composed of co-workers and “others”, which comprises people whom miners meet en route such as taxi drivers, petty traders, gold buyers, etc., most of whom qualify as “circumstantial solidarities” rather than as enduring relationships. These networks are relatively dense, for there is a high chance that these people work in the same mining field and share common friendships, and are mainly composed of ties considered distant, which enables miners situated within this type of network to multiply the support available to them from their peers and build new connections with other miners. These configurations are associated with long distance mobility in neighbouring countries and often much further. Long distance mobility supposes a relative disconnect with relations from the home-place, as well as the development of new relations in other social spheres, such as indicated by the presence of “others” together with co-workers. The bonding feature of these networks of highly mobile workers and also indicates that they are deeply integrated in the ASGM sector. This type of career will further be referred to as “professional configuration”.

Figure 8-4 Multiple correspondence analysis of experienced miners' social networks for the current journey (at time of study)





The spatial extension of livelihoods is nothing new and has been a means of absorbing agricultural stress for decades. However, literature on African migration indicates that the most popular model was of seasonal wage labour. For instance, in the plantations of Senegal or the Ivory Coast, groups of men from the same village would travel together for definite periods of time (Amselle 1976; Konseiga 2005). Here, in contrast, the instability of work places and their expansion in space leads men to engage in more diversified social networks that are also prone to change quickly. This also contrasts the idea of “migration chains” that are necessarily narrow in scope and consequently rely on fewer support relations due to their own “migration-specific human capital” (Singer and Massey 1998). Miners’ itinerancies suggest that the number of support relations do not necessarily decrease, but that their sources change together with the occupational trajectories that miners embrace. This is the biggest distinction between being continuously on the move to make a living as opposed to transmigration between two relatively well-defined places. As we shall see, different configurations complement different ways of engaging in the sector; the more fully miners engage in their field of activity, the more they need to rely on peer networks to assist them in their work and mobility.

In discussions about the role of gold mining in West African populations’ livelihoods, there is a debate about whether gold mining should be considered a source of supplementary income that complements other activities, mainly farming (Cartier and Bürge 2011), or whether it should be seen as a full-time source of income, which would potentially carry a greater risk of severe poverty, especially in case of price fluctuation (see Hilson 2009 for an overview of these debates). In both cases, miners’ situations tends to be analysed individualistically, either as isolated farmers temporarily complementing their incomes with their work in the mines, or as full-time miners detached from any other sources of subsistence. By placing miners’ journeys in the context of the web of social relations that sustain them, I show that, whatever their type of career, miners are rarely isolated from the security provided by kin, nor do they make a living entirely on their own, for non-kin solidarities tend to develop transnationally and provide miners certain security in ephemeral and changing places distant from the *fabara*. In terms of examining livelihoods, the mapping of social networks is thus useful to avoid developing a bias of methodological individualism that certain narratives tend to reproduce, and help acknowledge that both new solidarities can form and old ones can perpetuate through journeys.

Nevertheless, what the structural approach of social networks failed to explain is how and why different configurations emerge. In the last section of this chapter, I wish to return to miners’ trajectories to better examine these and analyse how they form.

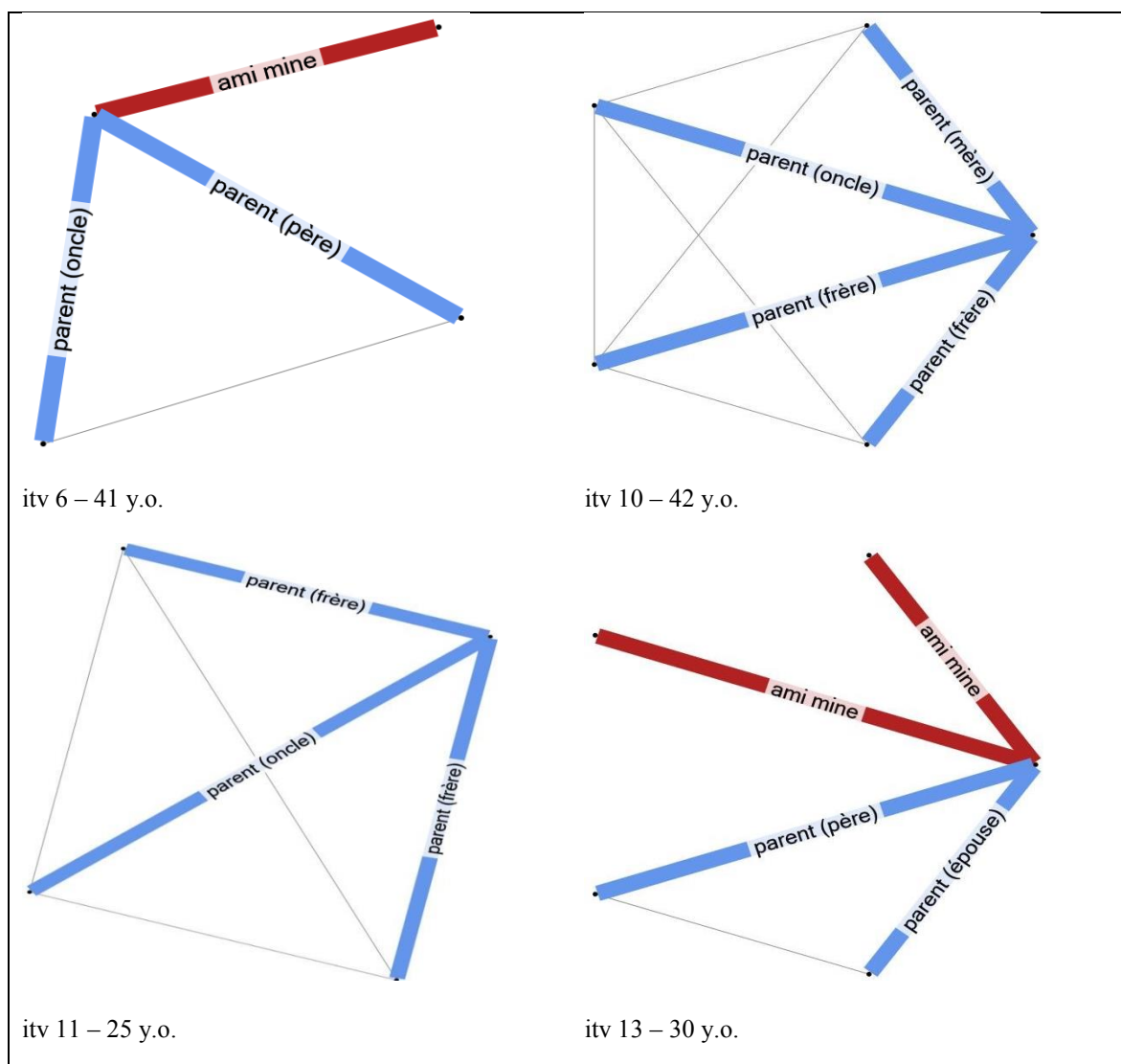
### 8.7.3 Professional configurations among experienced miners

In this last section, I zoom back to miners' individual trajectories. Each type of configuration will be illustrated using the stories of miners whose trajectory resulted in a one of the corresponding network configuration presented above. The geographical map of their journey will be used to better make sense of how such trajectories translate in time and space.

#### *The family-bounded configuration*

Although most experienced miners' configurations tend to rely less on kin, some miners maintain their initial kin-based support mechanisms, that they had developed in their initial journey, during their long-term career (see for example networks in figure 8-5). I relate here the story of Fode with whom I conducted a network interview in 2012 at his home-place in Kantedou Balandou (Guinea) the night before he left to a mining site across the close-by Malian border.

Figure 8-5 Examples of family-bounded configurations among experienced miners



Fode was 25 years old at the time of the interview and had undertaken his first independent journey to the mines eight years before. Like many other young men in the village, he was very familiar with mining work for he had visited the mines along with his father during his younger years. Kantedou Balandou is located a half-day of travel in the northeast of Sieke, which, like Boure, is a region that has been mined for centuries. His father had been working in the neighbouring mines at the Malian border and had progressively taught him the job since he was 14 years old. As a child, he would not descend into the tunnels, but had started working in the mines by pulling up the buckets, carrying ore, and ultimately, had started excavating the initial well. When he was 17 years old, he left for the mines without his father for the first time at his request. His father had decided that Fode would go by himself to his uncle's place in Balato (Boure, Siguiri) while his other brothers would stay close to the village and work in the farms with the rest of the family. Fode unambiguously says, "it is poverty that made me travel." He continues,

When it was not possible to keep on working in the mines around [because of the rains], I would travel to my father's brother's place in Samaya where they do mountain work [thus without having to stop because of flooding of tunnels]. Every day, I would go to the mine and then come back to his place, like that during the rainy season, and then back in Kantedou Balandou. At that time, I was not very used to doing hard work in the mines but my mother insisted that I should learn it properly so that I could bring money back home.

Indeed, as his father – a famous *djeli* (musician) with a reputation that extended to the southern prefectures of upper Guinea but who still had a low status in Kantedou – had explained to Sandaly and I the day before, he could not manage the needs of the family without gold any longer. He had made a living through agriculture and by being a *djeli* for many years, and had even acted in some famous pieces of Guinean theatre that circulated on VCD, but in the last ten years, like most people in the village, he had started mining gold, and could not afford to do without it now. He thus had let no other option to his son than to take over, for he was getting old and too weak for such work. As elsewhere in rural sub-Saharan Africa, accelerated deagrarianization led to a growing need for monetary incomes to compensate decreasing self-subsistence in everyday livelihoods (Bryceson 2002), which came along with new forms of dependencies and power. In this case, it was a dependence on imported rice for example and the dominance of the national and international market over local markets that made Fode's farming production insufficient. When there is such a need for cash, it is often partly covered by migrants' relatives, but none of Fode's brothers had emigrated, and the mines had become the easiest, closest, if not unique, means to obtain cash.

So, coming back to Fode, once in Samaya, he was introduced by his uncle to other workers and stayed in the family compound with his relatives, to whom he gave a small part of his earnings, while the rest was supposed to be handed over to his father in Kantedou. Most of his contacts in

Samaya were in fact members of his extended family, most of whom also knew his father and had previously worked with him. When I asked him how far he was willing to follow his father's instructions, Fode replied that he "couldn't complain about the decisions of the chief of the family", again insisting that "this is the only way to do for poor people." At the same time, when I asked him why no other brother had taken up the gold, Fode expressed a certain pride in "knowing gold," something that his brother who were mainly occupied in farming did not, and that he seemingly found value in distinguishing himself from them, as they were "pure farmers." Though not contesting his father's choices, he explained later – when speaking about a close friend of his in the mining area where he used to work – that he often discussed with his good friend the possibility of migration as an alternative to full-time gold mining on behalf of their fathers, because "you cannot spend your whole life digging for gold." Thus, while gold mining is often seen as an alternative to failed migration, migration is also reversely perceived as an alternative to mining for many of those who started mining at a young age as part of the household economy.

Since then, Fode had spent most of his time commuting between Samaya and Kantedou to financially support his family and supplement farming income. He mostly navigated through the same kin networks within which most monetary flows circulate. Exceptionally, and in accordance with his father, he had left two years ago to Sikasso in Mali with two friends with the hope of saving money to pay for his wedding. He had remained there for one and a half years, and after several difficulties (illness, lack of earnings), he had finally returned to the village with the help of an elder brother. At the time of the interview, just one year after he had finally got married, he had started commuting again between Balato and Saraya, now together with his wife and was followed by one of his younger brothers. His support configuration had thus certainly changed between the two time periods (see Figure 8-7 below), but the changes were more a consequence of the expected changes along the life course, e.g., his wife had thus become a source of support as well as his younger brother with whom he was now travelling, rather than the mark of active networking and specialization. Consequently, his journeys had been restricted to between Samaya and Kantedou Balandou, unless for the Sikasso episode, and thus seemed to have a commuting pattern as the map below shows (Figure 8-6), that resembles the *biresidential strategy* discussed in the previous chapter, yet without the prerogative that comes with formal establishment.

Figure 8-6 Fode's map of mining journeys (2004–2012)

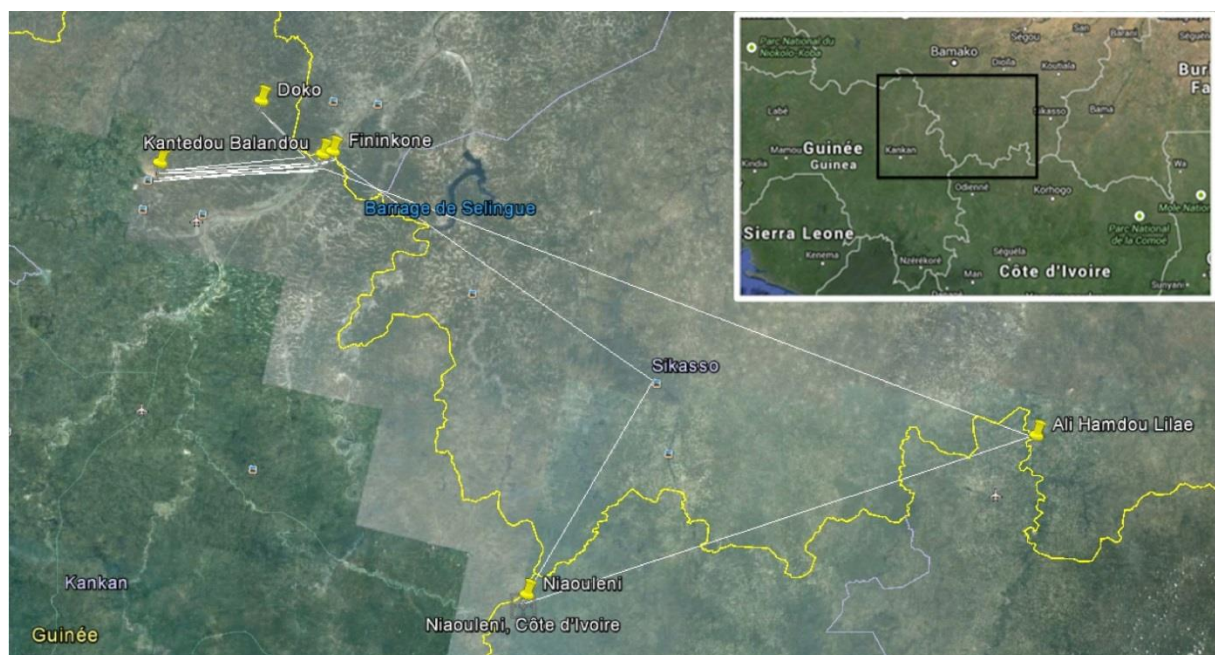
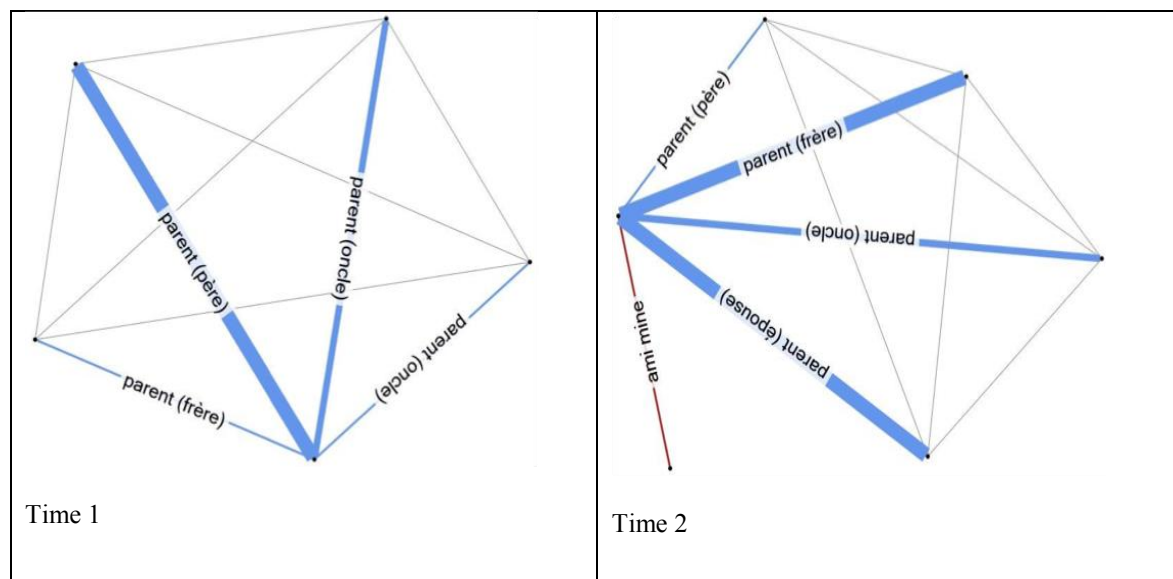


Figure 8-7 Fode's mobility configurations in 2004 (first journey) and 2012 (last journey)



Synthesis: Poverty and everyday subsistence within close knit networks

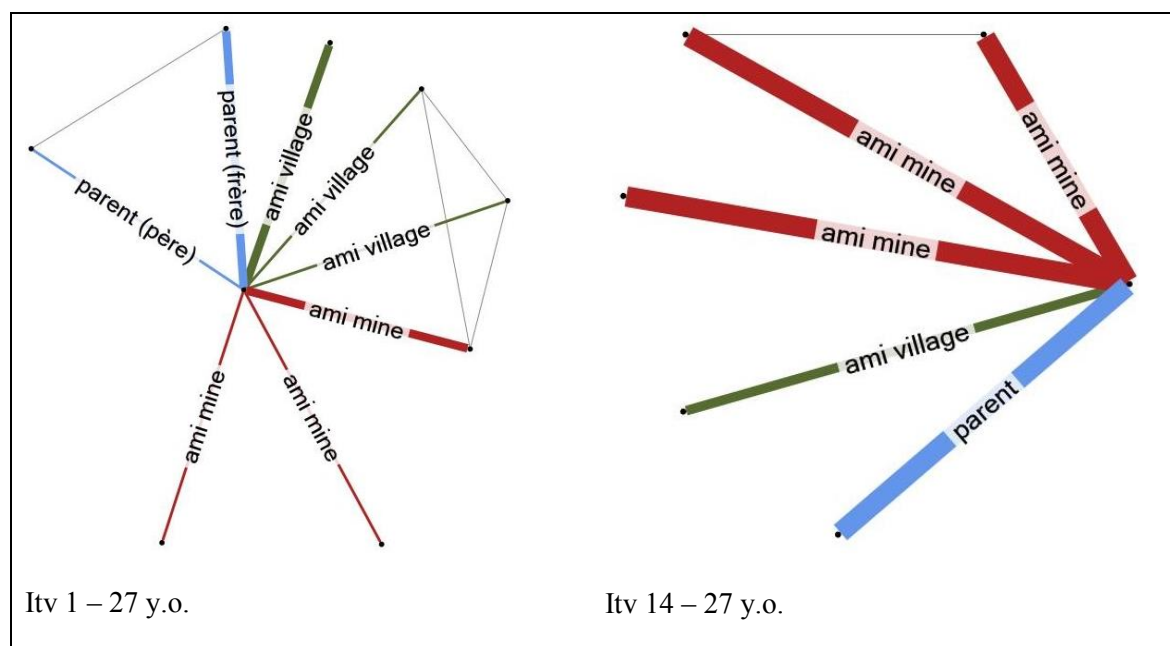
Despite the eight years that separated the two captured configurations, their form, composition, and structure are relatively similar. Poverty is certainly a general driver that motivated interviewees to join the sector, yet, in the light of Sen's approach to poverty, and also in terms of the "freedom" that gold mining may provide, miners who rely on such configurations tend to have nearly no room

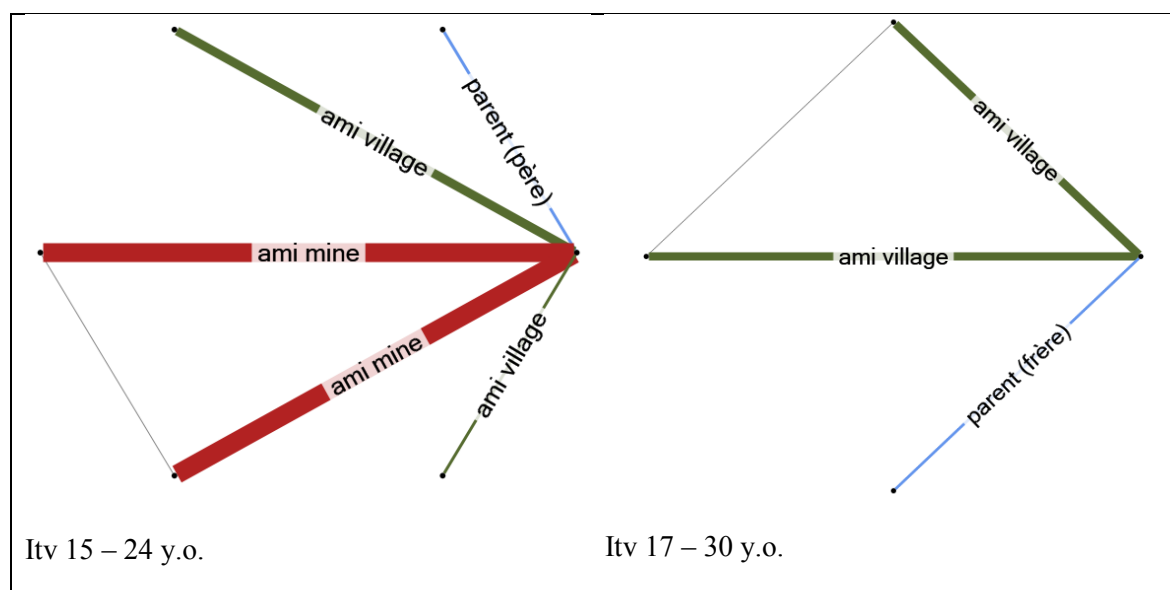
to manoeuvre and little connectivity. In terms of livelihoods strategy, mining gold may be the only means to access monetary incomes that the natural capital of the *lu*, such as agricultural plots, cannot sufficiently provide anymore; the “decrease of relative prices” in Ensminger terms (1992) needs to be compensated elsewhere. Fode’s trajectory, which can be summarized as low distance and low risk, is thus *badenya*-oriented and driven by needs, since, despite his tenuous aspiration to attempt a journey on his own, the family can hardly afford to risk the mining incomes provided by one or several of its members. The commuting between two units (*lu*) within the same family (*clan*) across a relatively short distance is also a means to minimize the risk and expenses further journeys would implicate, and thus compensating for the decrease in farming income in the *luw*’s livelihood.

### *The opportunistic configuration*

The second type of configuration concerns support provided by friends from the home-place, though the individual may still rely on the domestic sphere for financial support and loans (see examples in Figure 8-8). In these configurations, many different sorts of relations, including kin, friends from the home-place, as well as other friends from mining areas, would episodically merge to form relatively loose knit networks. I draw on the story of Sako, who was the son of my *tuteur*’s brother in Koundian (Guinea), and who had spent years travelling and working in different mines, increasingly trading gold rather than extracting it. When we met in 2012, Sako was spending most of his time in his home-place in Koundian, where he would make a living as a small-scale gold trader, yet he would episodically work as a *kalayantigi* when friends informed him of appealing opportunities.

Figure 8-8 Examples of opportunistic occasional engagement configurations





Sako, called “l’Ivoirien” because of his many years of experience in the Ivory Coast and fluent French, was supposed to start working as a tailor after completing an apprenticeship with a brother of his father in the Ivory Coast. When he came back to his home-place in Guinea, “everyone had started mining gold in Koudian”, Sako said. So, despite now owning his own tailoring equipment, he temporarily renounced his tailoring job and followed the *rush* with a friend who had already travelled to the mines and was planning to return to the same *tuteur*. They left together with a third acquaintance from the same region, and spent the whole season living and working in several mining fields not very far from Koundian, where they became close friends with another co-worker who happened to travel with them. Sako returned to Koundian (Guinea) with his accumulated earnings, and despite his father’s insistence, postponed the starting of his tailoring business for one more year and instead moved to Siguiri and stayed with a relative who was involved in the business of gold. Sako decided to invest his earnings in his parents’ business to manage his own part of it, instead of depending on cash advances<sup>16</sup> from his brother. From then on, he spent the next few years travelling between his home-place in Koundian, where he had set up a younger brother and made him in charge of buying gold, and Siguiri, from where he kept on buying gold from neighbouring sites. At that time, he usually travelled with a weighing scale and balanced his time between his work as a *kalayantigi* and his work as a small-scale gold buyer. He travelled very regularly, following seasonal rushes to Mali and Guinea, or to Sierra Leone and Liberia, or “resting” between Koundian and the Siguiri area and buying small quantities of gold to be traded in Siguiri town. After nearly ten years of this mobile existence and a first marriage in Koundian, Sako decided he would try a new adventure and move to Angola, for he had heard that they were good opportunities there, and he knew that he could work in the mines on the way. This last journey stopped instead in Ghana, where he found

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more detailed description of artisanal gold production networks.



himself relatively deprived of support to keep on going since he had not struck any consistent shaft since he had left Koundian. The poor health of his mother at that time eventually convinced him to come back to Koundian after less than a year.

So far, contrary to Fode, Sako sees his engagement in the gold mines as being his own decision. Yet, like Fode, a consistent part of his earnings was sent back to his parents. Sako's father is head of one of the largest family compounds in Koundian, from where he manages a large rice production operation. Although they suffered due to the food crisis like most Guineans, Sako's family situation is relatively better than that of Fode, and allows him room to manoeuvre. Being less constrained by structural factors, Sako's family structure is less constraining as well. His journeys are still mostly attached to the home-place, which he supports financially but by which he is also potentially supported (e.g., by his brother who maintains the business when he is away), which allows him to mix different sources of support for different purposes, either to mine gold outside or trade gold inside.

After getting married, Sako regularly travels with his wife, who engages in petty trade, manages a coffee shop in a mining settlement, or trades goods between Mali and Guinea, depending on their destination and the possibilities it offers them. Although they are considered unconventional in view of traditional livelihood making in Koudian, their lifestyle is relatively well accepted within the context of the family for they have continuously maintained contact with the family. By engaging in small-scale gold trading, and therefore by also maintaining contact with friends whom he had met in past journeys, he could stay on top of information from different mining sites. Sako was soon seen as a mining "expert" in his home-place. Some of his friends in Koundian would then rely on him for information and would sporadically follow him when he would travelled with his wife to join acquaintances in the gold mines. Throughout his professional career in the gold mines, Sako's mobility configurations seem to have been enriched by numerous and diversified sources of support (see Figure 8-10), especially one friend in the Kankan area who often hosted him and one in the Siguiri area who also regularly hosted him and sponsored his little gold buying business in Koundian. His journeys extended geographically through his long career, as compared to Fode, yet are also clearly centred in upper Guinea (see Figure 8-9). The major difference between them is that, while Fode's connections were limited and he travelled to-and-fro between his family relations, Sako developed and maintained new contacts in several mining areas and increasingly performed a bridging role between his *fabara*-based relations and his acquaintances in mining areas. This position benefits him in at least two ways. Co-villagers and other acquaintances in the region would prefer to sell him their gold, and he would conversely get information through them of new opportunities while remaining firmly rooted in his home village where he progressively built his gold buying business along with the rise of mining activity locally.



Figure 8-9 Sako's map of mining journeys (1998–2012)

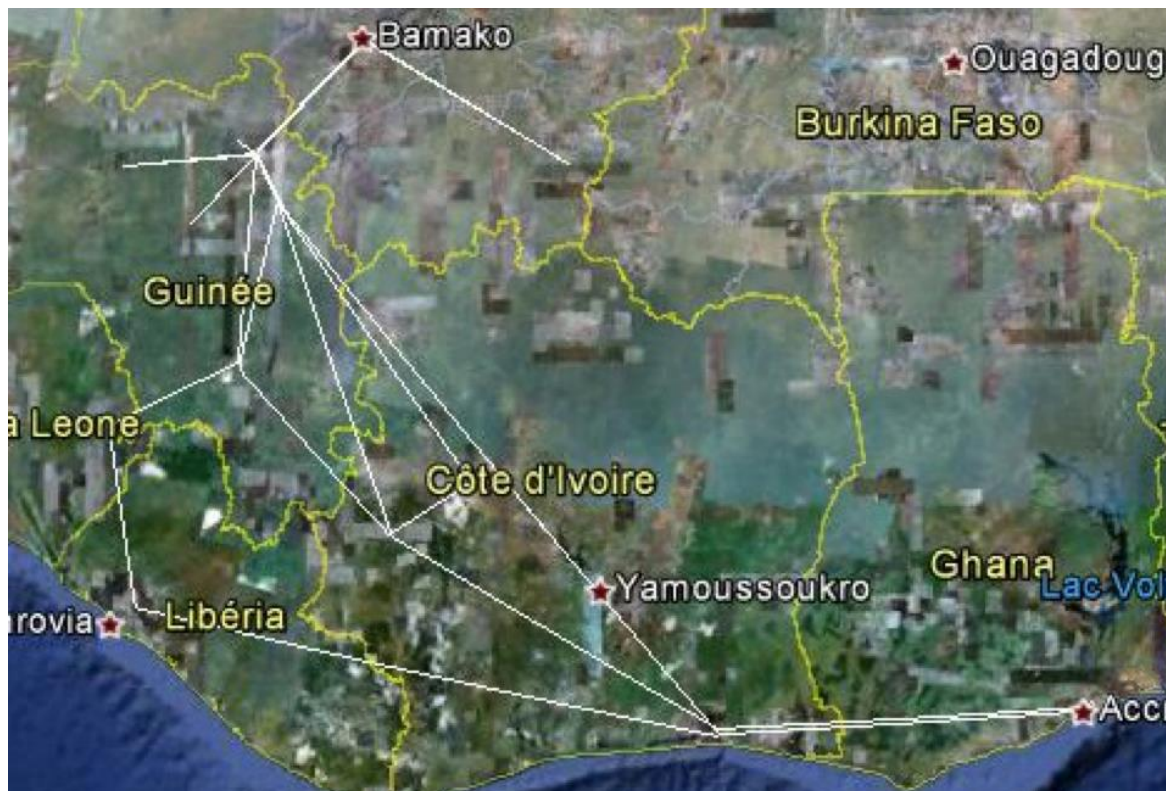
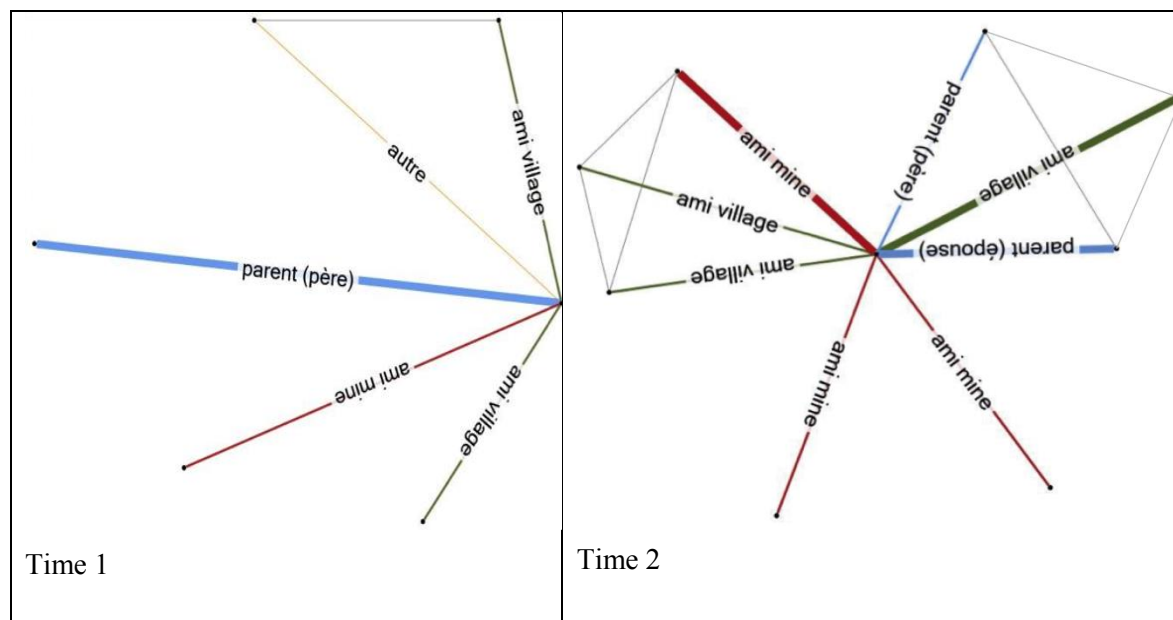


Figure 8-10 Sako's mobility configurations in 1998 (first journey) and 2012 (last journey)

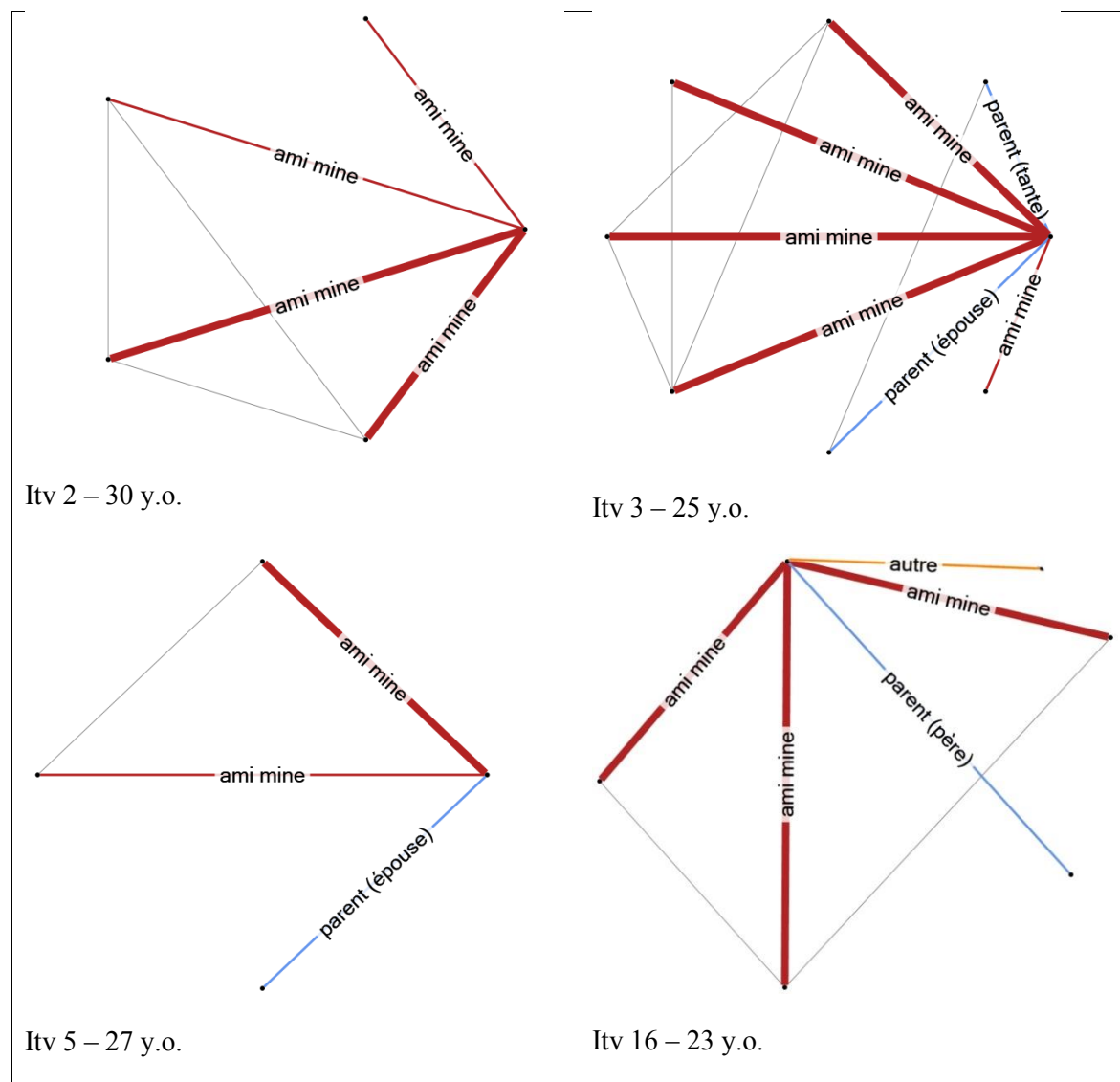


Sako's journeys and network configuration correspond to an ideal image of mining as a potential source of development for the poor by giving them access to monetary incomes to be invested "productively" elsewhere (see e.g., Jaques, et al. 2005). Such an ideal trajectory, it should be noted, occurs in very few cases (10 out of 57). In such a configuration, family members are mobilized as an optional support mechanism in case of individual needs, in contrast to configurations where young men are mobilized to support the family. There is usually a lesser stress on subsistence so that individuals, like Sako, can deviate from their expected trajectories and undertake adventurous travels without necessarily having to constrain their movements to only fulfilling the parents' needs. Also, by diversifying their sources of livelihood by combining gold mining with other activities, they also extend their social capital in and outside the social field of the gold mines and acquire a greater capacity to convert personal endowments. The example of Sako highlights another possible trajectory within mining careers – a transition from digging to trading. Again, the shift from one activity to the other requires financial resources that tend to be more easily available when everyday basic needs are not endangered, or, in a less likely scenario, if a good gold strike has been made. In many such configurations, mining gold is not the only occupation. On the contrary, it supplements or is associated with other activities. From such a perspective,

### *The professional configuration*

The third type of configuration, which is by far the dominant one in numbers, includes mobility support networks mainly composed of other artisanal miners and "others" (see examples in Figure 8-11 below). Such networks are usually developed by miners whose journeys were especially distant, including more than two other countries than their country of departure. Both, the support networks and mobility of these miners, are highly transnational as compared to the previous two types. I call such configurations "professional configurations" since they largely feature occupational peers and transnational others met on the way rather than persons associated with the *fabara*, be they kin or friends. I draw on the story of Salim to highlight the peculiarities of such configuration.

Figure 8-11 Examples of professional itinerant configurations



When he was about to start his apprenticeship as a driver, as advised by his father, Salim left his family to go on an “adventure”, not necessarily to the gold mines, whose proximity did not sound as exciting as other destinations. Being from a gold mining area himself and suspecting that his family would not let him leave, Salim decided to move first to Abidjan, where a friend of his was staying, and to search for job in the capital city. Disappointed with the lack of opportunities to “earn money” there, Salim quickly followed Guinean friends he had met in Abidjan who were leaving to mines in the north. He spent nearly a year there, earning just enough to sustain his daily needs, until he decided that his earnings were too less to be “worth it”. As he was thinking of putting an end to his adventure, one of his co-workers convinced him to move to Ghana. This proposition provided him a valuable reason not to return, as he explains, “I did not know what I was going to do there, but

it was not too far with the money I had. I knew I could do mining work as well there, because there are many Guineans that have been there too. With the currency, whatever you do it is better for you than Guinean franc.” Like his previous experience in Abidjan, Salim first started looking for job in the capital city, but he quickly returned to the gold mines, which, he says, “bring better money”. These experiences at the beginning of his long journey induced him to travel further to Nigeria and then back to the Ivory Coast; during his travels, he increasingly spent his time in the gold mines rather than searching for a job in town as his initial plan had been. He insisted many times that he had been “alone” and had had to manage many of his journeys by himself. In fact, Salim was rarely “alone” for he travelled, worked, and built friendships with other mine workers, who, by the way, were not necessarily Guineans nor Maninkakan speakers. During his long stay in Nigeria, he befriended a team of workers composed of Nigerians and Burkinabes and worked with them for two years as an apprentice to learn mining techniques and improve his knowledge until the site they were working in suddenly closed down because of a governmental decision.<sup>17</sup> During this period, he was supported by his direct co-workers. When he says he was “alone”, Salim means that he did purposely not have contact with friends and family back home, thus could reversely not rely on the support they could have provided. He thus seems to perfectly embody the individualization of journeys and livelihoods, and has increasingly relied on circumstantial solidarities, as argued by Bredeloup (2013). To him, the suspension of certain relations does not occur by coincidence, which echoes Zelizer’s (2005) notion of relational work; rather, it is the outcome of choices and classifications to invest differently in certain relations and not others. In this case, relations categorized as distant but which can improve work opportunities or possibly provide safety in times of need are preferred to those embedded in the sphere of the *fabara*, which – because of village-based institutions, amongst others – might be more demanding and less rewarding for those in the mining context.

Professional configurations illustrate the recomposition of support in distant locations, both as a consequence of distance and as an outcome of selection and relational investment. Contrary to “opportunistic configurations” which largely build on existing relations that result in relatively loose knit yet partly linked to *fabara* networks, professional configurations are rather close knit, which indicates a strong dependence on peers. Though it may potentially enrich their social capital,<sup>18</sup> these miners risk periods of high vulnerability since their usual sources of support are suspended while they are far away. The example of Salim shows that, though they are “circumstantial”, the solidarities that emerge on the way and in the mining fields are often rooted in intense but fragile friendships that sometimes persist over time and distance. For example, Salim had first met the man who would

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<sup>17</sup> Salim could not explain in detail why the mine was closed, except that it had been decided so by “the authorities” and that the decision had been subsequently implemented militarily.

<sup>18</sup> The case of Salim as well as the one of Kalou shows that parts of these friendships built along mining journeys are maintained in time and provide valuable sources of information for future journeys, accommodation, or joining new teams.

become his master in Nigeria totally by chance, and yet, had remained tied to him for two years, depending on him for everything from food to shelter and cash. Just when their work was about to come an end in Kebbi, because the agreement the artisanal miners had made with a mining company had run out, his master had financed Salim's return to Guinea so that he would not lose too much of what he had won. Since then, though he says he does not keep in touch with acquaintances, he remains in contact with his master.

The relationship between Namori (from the Ivory Coast) and Kalou (from Guinea) also serves as an example of a friendship that thrives despite distance and which is regularly reinvigorated by sharing information and working together. In several cases, Namori supported Kalou after he was expelled; this is how they were united in Kokoyo, for example. The reverse was also true, when they were reunited in Senegal three years later, and Namori decided to leave Karakhena for health reasons and go rest in Bamako, Mali. Kalou took over his friend's shaft to try and find the deposit before the site was closed. The interpretation of such ties as "weak", in the sense that they are usually categorized as more distant than *fabara* relations, seems inappropriate considering the intensity of the friendship on which these ties are based.

On the other hand, Salim had recently broken up a long-term friendship; the transience of these friendships makes him value them differently as I suggested in Chapter 5. So, while *fabara* relations are rooted in obligations and in village institutions, friendships in the mines depend on continuous relational work and can end unpredictably. At the time of the interview in 2012, I was surprised to find that Oumar, whom I had met the year before and who had spent the last two years working with Salim, no longer worked with him. Salim explained with apparent sadness that they had broken up because they had work-related disagreements. Salim's claims that, "I really liked him" and that "He was my real friend," testified to the strength of their friendship; and yet, there was the fact that Oumar had left and that they would probably never meet again. Thus, my point is that "circumstantial solidarities" such as this one are central – they provide the most support in professional configurations, but they can be broken at any moment and are hence relatively fragile. Thus, Granovetterian "weak" ties can function as effectively as "strong" ones at specific moments; they can be highly supportive rather than simply playing bridging roles and connecting individuals with new social relations and opportunities; in fact, networks indicate exactly their rather bonding than bridging structure.

I briefly return to the end of Salim's journeys. After having disappeared again from his homeplace for nearly three years, Salim returned to his native region but did not tell his family that he had been working in the mines, which would have been considered shameful. Instead, he made up a story of having obtained a job in aluminium recycling in Liberia. Not feeling quite at home, Salim left again to the mines, pretending that he had to travel for trade back in Liberia. He went to Liberia and,



for more than two years, worked in different gold mines in Liberia, Mali, and the Ivory Coast with different teams, and progressively built up his own team and took on apprentices, but kept his activities secret from his family.

Only when he wished to get married for the first time did he tell his family about his activities in gold mining. By this time, they had consistently benefited from his regular remittances, which had allowed them enlarge the family house and invest in a transport business. According to Salim, “they had nothing to complain about.” Indeed, when I once visited his parents’ house in Siguiri with him, I saw that he was received with high honour. All his brothers had come, some of whom had completed high school, and as “élèves” (students who achieved a secondary grade) would have normally been granted a higher status, yet, they were visibly indebted and thankful to him, since he was the main source of money for the entire family. In his following journeys, Salim would, as he usually did, rely solely on his acquaintances from the mines and temporarily disrupt contact with his parents back home. His mobility configuration at the time of the interview highlights such a trend. According to him, there are only four people on whom he relied for support. One of them was a petty trader in Kangaba (Mali) with whom he had been friends from a year previously, second was his brother with whom he had done mining work in the region, and the other two were miners he had met in Mandiana and with whom he had been working successfully and sharing a part of their everyday expenses. Being relatively autonomous during his travels, his network configuration consequently includes few ties of little inter-knowledge – yet, most of his significant contacts are not included in the configuration since they do not actively provide support.

Figure 8-12 Salim’s map of mining journeys ( 2001–2012)

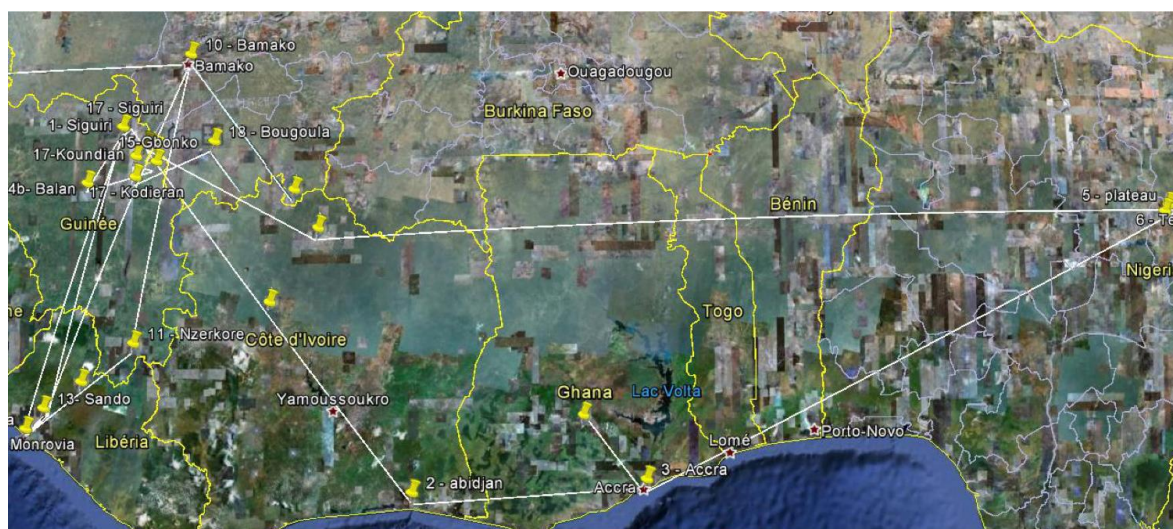
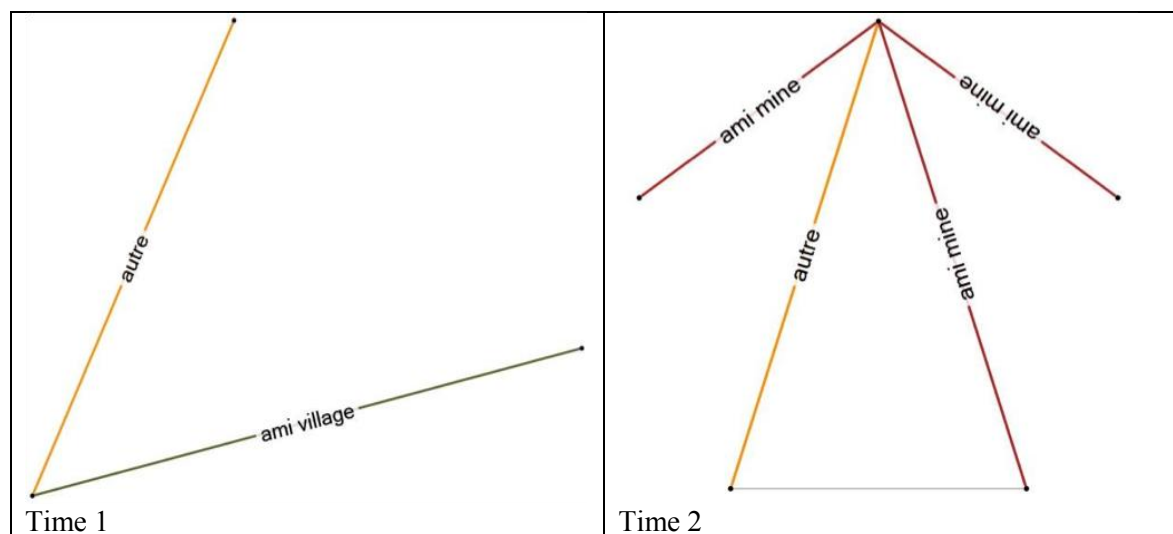


Figure 8-13 Salim's mobility configuration (2001-2012)



Kalou's network, whose configuration is similar, illustrates the security that circumstantial solidarities provide when journeys are unpredictably interrupted. For example, in the five-year study period, his operations were repeatedly stopped and he was forced to relocate. Other itinerant miners helped facilitate his relocations by contributing to “minimize the costs” in Ensminger terms (1992) of such transitions (see next chapter).<sup>19</sup> Therefore, building resilient social networks composed of not very demanding yet potentially highly supportive relations cannot be separated from the constant threat of expulsion that artisanal miners face.<sup>20</sup> Not only might other full-time itinerant miners share valuable information about new opportunities, but they can also facilitate transitions to new mining sites and provide security in cases of expulsion. Therefore, as illustrated in Chapter 5, it is thought to be important to diversify the composition of teams – a strategy which is discursively elaborated through “cosmopolitan narratives” which value the engagement with otherness incarnated by plurality of local origins, nationalities and ethnic affiliations (see for instance p. 195).

Synthesis: Continuous mining and transnational supportive networks of “weak” ties

The professional configuration, which is numerically far more important, is different from the two other configurations mainly because, though it potentially contributes to the *lu*'s livelihood back home through remittances, the networks that support such a livelihood are totally detached from the home-place for all other aspects. In such settings, friendship is essential for it also provides mutual

<sup>19</sup> The table also shows that movements are equally due to expulsions as they are strategic moves to improve opportunities; in both cases, peers are involved.

<sup>20</sup> For example, in Guinea, a decree instated in 2012 prohibits artisanal gold mining during months with heavy rains. In the Ivory Coast, more than 400 mining sites have been closed in the last two years along with a plan to formalize the artisanal sector. In the gold rich regions of eastern Senegal (Department of Kedougou), several sites have been closed down; the increasing enforcement of formalization policies thus increases situations of expulsions in the artisanal mining sector.

help. These loose networks of peers continuously on the move thus operate within a transnational social space whose geographical anchorages and boundaries are constantly redrawn by successive expulsions, new discoveries and rushes, and political decisions at the local and national levels. From this perspective, professional miners pretty much move like squatters, depending on the legalization and illegalization of their sources of livelihood.

Their relations of support are merely “circumstantial,” as understood by Bredeloup (2013), because these relationships do not necessarily persist over time, and many miners insist that they support their mobility that they experience individually or “alone”. While they appear to be at least as supportive as *fabara*-based relations and may for some time involve an equal, if not higher degree of intimacy, their temporality is highly uncertain since they can end at any time. Besides, although miners may enrich their networks with new ties that they can potentially utilize to obtain advice, information, and possibly infrastructure support at new sites, these links do not always translate into valuable social capital in the long-term. Contrary to “opportunistic configurations”, these relations usually have little local entitlement to land (or none at all), *niadow*, local authorities, and so on, that they can directly benefit from. This distinguishes them from the hierarchical relations between “notaries” and movers documented in many cases of migratory circulation (e.g., Tarrius 1992), i.e., wherein support systems are valuable mainly because of their local entitlements.

#### *Changing supportive networks at home and/or away as a response to the instability of the sector*

To sum up, the three configurations that clearly emerged through the analysis bear distinct features in terms of form and composition, from highly dense networks to relatively open ones, from kin-dominated networks to those made of a mix of miners and transnational others (see summary on Table 8-9 below).

*Table 8-9 Configurations of mobility support network and their main features*

| Family-bounded configuration                                                                                                                                                      | Opportunistic configuration                                                                                                                                                                            | Professional configuration                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Mainly composed of kinship ties</li><li>- High social pressure</li><li>- Short distance of journeys</li><li>- Existing networks</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Mainly kin and village ties</li><li>- Low social pressure</li><li>- All kinds of journeys</li><li>-Extension of existing networks through networking</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Mostly composed of miners and transnational others</li><li>- Suspension of pressuring ties</li><li>- long distance journeys</li><li>- Continuous networking, diversification or relations</li></ul> |                     |
| Low risk low gain                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | High risk high gain |



It is worth recalling that these types illustrate *configurations*, that is, *moments* along one's career in which certain links are activated. I have chosen three illustrative vignettes that showcase trajectories that would boldly stress and accentuate the initial configuration in time (e.g., kin-dominated remaining kin-dominated, adventurer to livelihood diversification, part-time mining to full-time transnational mining). However, shifts from one type of configuration to another along one career is possible and frequent. What the passage from MCA 1 to MCA 2 showed is that many miners are actively *networking* through their journeys and that such relational work benefit not so much in terms of new opportunities but rather in terms of possible security in moments of vulnerability such as expulsions from ongoing operations.

This is especially the case in the third configuration – the “professional” one – that also happens to be the most common. The family-bounded and the opportunistic configurations illustrate documented forms of artisanal mining that roughly correspond to two recurring images of “the gold miner,” either as a seasonal farmer-miner reproducing the familial organization in the mining context (e.g., Panella 2007) or as a strategic actor who complements his regular income within mining revenue (e.g. Cartier and Bürge 2011). In contrast, what I describe as a “professional configuration” – i.e., full-time miners travelling long distances and relying almost exclusively on peers – is nearly absent in the literature on artisanal mining despite its importance in sustaining the ASM sector in parallel to the LSM frontier. By developing a normative space that favours explicit as well as hidden forms of assistance,<sup>21</sup> and by investing relationally in cosmopolitan networks detached from home-based institutions, itinerant miners secure their livelihoods and achieve a certain degree of resilience against the constant threat of removal.

## 8.8 Conclusion

Three main observations can be made from this chapter. First, in contrast to the individualistic tone of miners' stories or to the widespread belief that miners opt to join the sector merely from of a desire for quick money, an analysis of miners' social networks showed that miners' trajectories usually integrated with other sources of familial livelihood – thus also allowing poor households greater room to manoeuvre and privileging strategies that allow one to secure an income while taking the least risk in terms of travel duration, distance, and possible disconnection. This observation is not surprising and conforms to the general deagrarianization (Bryceson 2002) of sub-Saharan Africa and the tendency to compensate the decrease in farming incomes with artisanal extraction of minerals (not only of gold, but also diamonds, coltane, tin, tantalum, and tungsten in other regions) (Banchirigah and Hilson 2010).

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapters 3 and 5 on the ethic of lottery and the work ethos of transience that miners develop as an alternative to village institutions.

Secondly, a closer look at the evolution of miners' social networks suggests that there are dynamics of diversification and of specialization that affect their networks. While development studies tend to focus on how "diversification" and income complement one another, I pointed out the importance of specialization dynamics.<sup>22</sup> Some of the most visible signs – in addition to the informal mining institutions depicted in Chapters 1, 3 and 4 – are the relational choices that many full-time itinerant gold diggers make, which are reflected in the composition of their networks. In this way, they manage to rely on their own networks of peers, relatively detached from their close relations in their home-places, which are comparatively less supportive and more constraining.

Finally, most miners who professionalize their activity do it by engaging in heteroclite relations, many of which are the result of both chance and active networking on the part of miners to build new connections along their journeys. These apparently "weak" relations, in Granovetter's wording (1973), often turn into substantial sources of support that are less constraining compared to close relations. The diversity of identifications – in terms of social background, nationality, and ethnic affiliation – point to a form of work-based cosmopolitanism that arises from a necessity to compensate conventional solidarities. Over time, such solidarities based on common work practices and the sharing of a similar lifestyle are not necessarily abandoned, but can be (re)activated during moments of particular vulnerability such as when facing expulsion from ongoing operations. From this perspective, trans-ethnic or national identifications that have historically been stressed in very diverse contexts of industrial mining worldwide where they were a result of recruitment strategies (Godoy 1985) can be interpreted in the artisanal sector as more than a consequence of everyday co-working and cohabitation in highly heterogeneous social settings, but also as fulfilling a functional role among miners by rendering their mobility systems resilient to "shocks" induced by different forms of expulsions.

Instead of viewing the two sectors as antagonists, the transnational space built by West African itinerant gold miners should also be considered as part of the global supply chain of gold. From this perspective, the continuous relational work they undertake can be seen as a necessary task of network maintenance in the margin of the expansion of the industrial gold mining frontier – a considerable cooperative work without which substantial amounts of gold unreachable to large scale operations would stop being produced. In a discussion of the notion of "operation of capital", Mezzadra and Neilson (2015) call for an extension of the concept of extraction beyond its purely physical forms – i.e. extraction of natural resources – to include the logistics through which a rent is also extracted from social cooperation. In the present case, miners' geographically widespread and resilient social networks illustrate how both forms of extraction – physical and social – can be tightly interconnected.

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<sup>22</sup> National governments – for example the public statements by the Guinean president – would like to limit this trend in order to prevent rural dwellers' excessive dependency on gold. In spite of a clear move towards livelihood diversification, gold is often the most rewarding source of income.

Primary industrial extraction continually redraws the territories of circulation where itinerant miners' networks deploy. To cope with these constantly changing geographies, artisanal miners make demanding efforts to maintain relations of support for work and safety on their own means, that is an intensive cooperative work from which the industry indirectly extract a secondary rent by reabsorbing their production later in the supply chain.

Insofar as artisanal miners are placed in illegality and as long as their work locations are ephemeral enough never to appear on maps, their extensive social networks have no visible existence and can be assimilated to the forms of "discrete globalization" documented by Choplin and Pliez (2015). Contrary to the straightforward idea of global value chains, the logics of governance that traverse these peripheries has become more complex they affirm. The interactions that emerge in the peripheries of production networks need as much attention as the one in their centres. This is what the next two chapters seek to analyse more closely by looking empirically at how miners' expulsion is governed through a case of contested access to gold resources putting at stake a "company", the "local population" and the "itinerant gold miners."

## **PART FOUR**

### **The workings of expulsions**

# **Chapter 9: The securitization of an industrial mining enclave: creating local partners and removable illegals**

## **9.1 Introduction: Kalou, 8 moves, 4 expulsions**

In general, there are three possible factors that can cause the expulsion of artisanal miners, corresponding to different forms and levels of mining governance. The first kind of expulsions occurs due to conflicts at the local level – i.e., between neighbouring villages claiming access to the same land,<sup>1</sup> or between artisanal operators and the local population. The second kind are massive expulsions that result from changes in regulations and the enforcement of formalization policies at the prefectural, regional, or national level, leading to site closures.<sup>2</sup> The third kind are expulsions that result from conflicts between “illegal” artisanal miners and “legal” industrial mining companies. In fact, the stories of professional itinerant miners indicate that their moves are increasingly more likely to be the result of site closures and miners being expelled from the places where they work, rather than their “rush” to new sites. For example, Kalou’s movements during the time of the study clearly show that he is more likely to relocate because he was forced to leave his current site of operation, rather than because he was attracted by the possibilities a new site offers (see Table 9-1).

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in 2010, between Missmana and Balan in Guinea, or between the residents of Kantedou Balandougou in Guinea, and Sanafra in Mali.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in Guinea, a 2012 decree prohibited artisanal gold mining during the rainy season. Or in the Ivory Coast, more than 400 mining sites have been closed in the last two years in line with a plan to formalize the artisanal sector.

Table 9-1 Kalou's movements during the time of the study, either "spontaneous" or "after expulsion"<sup>3</sup>

|      |                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2009 | Koundiana, Guinea    | <b>Expulsion</b> by village authorities because of a disagreement regarding shaft allocation.                                                                                                                  |
| 2009 | Djigouroumba, Guinea | <b>Expulsion</b> ordered by the local government because of a dispute regarding land tenure and prospection work involving a Canadian junior company, WEGA.                                                    |
| 2010 | Mandiana, Guinea     | <b>Spontaneous</b> move to Kokoyo (Mali) as part of the "rush" after receiving information of potential high-quality ore. Leads an open operation with friends in Mandiana.                                    |
| 2011 | Mandiana, Guinea     | Closure of the site following national decree to close down the mines during the rainy season. <b>Expulsion</b> of thousands of miners to neighbouring Mali. Joins acquaintances in the Malian site of Kokoyo. |
| 2012 | Kokoyo, Mali         | <b>Spontaneous</b> move to Doko (Guinea) where he settled for a while.                                                                                                                                         |
| 2013 | Doko, Guinea         | Return to Kokoyo on friends' advice.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 2014 | Kokoyo, Mali         | <b>Spontaneous</b> move to Karakhena (Senegal) as part of the "rush" and based on advice from friends.                                                                                                         |
| 2014 | Karakhena, Senegal   | <b>Expulsion</b> by the government after the land was claimed by junior company AfriGol .                                                                                                                      |
| 2015 | Selingue, Mali       | <b>Spontaneous</b> move to Selingue.                                                                                                                                                                           |

This chapter, thus, aims to investigate processes of expulsion which, with increasing land titling, have become a major cause of artisanal miners' movements. To do so, I change of scale and approach. I use an "extended cases study" approach (Burawoy 1998) focused on the Siguiri area to explain the relations between different actors – the itinerant artisanal miners, the local population, and the industrial mining company, Société Aurifère de Guinée (S.A.G., whose controlling shareholder at 85% is the South African corporation AngloGold Ashanti) – who all operate within the same space. In particular, I focus on the various methods used by the mining company – especially via its CSR branch – to control the land defined by its lease; I intend to show that the company, depending on what best suits its expansion strategy, either expels itinerant miners or incorporates them into peripheral areas but excludes them from health and safety statistics. To do so, I investigate what is defined as the "local community" and the "artisanal mining community" in the company's terms, and how these shifting definitions are used to engage with segments of the neighbouring population or expel others. The chapter thus deals with one recurring paradox of contemporary large-scale mining, which is that the company seeks to "enclave" itself from its surroundings (Ferguson 2005), while being simultaneously compelled to "engage" (Gardner 2012; Rajak 2011; Welker 2014) with the population at large to enforce the enclave.

In the first part of this chapter, I will show how the company employs a securitization discourse – i.e., the discursive construction of a threat over its operations and staff – to legitimize its use of two very different forms of engagement – partnership programmes and security measures – when

<sup>3</sup> I have limited the excerpt to the five years of the study, but a more in-depth record of Kalou's journey would reveal many such episodes of expulsion (e.g., in the Ivory Coast, in Mali).

managing the local population. In the second part, I demonstrate how these shifting categories are used to facilitate the expansion of the company's operations and legitimize the removal of certain populations. But first, let me establish the context for the extended case study.

## **9.2 Artisanal and industrial mining in Siguiri: an example of a complicated cohabitation**

First in November 2008 and again in the beginning of 2009, 13 and 23 people, respectively, died in two shaft collapses in artisanal mining fields located within the leased land of a company operating in upper Guinea, S.A.G. – Société Anglogold de Guinée, a tributary of South African Anglogold Ashanti Ltd, the world's eight-largest gold producer in 2016. These dramatic accidents were covered widely in the local media as well as in faraway regions. Shaft collapses regularly occur in the area,<sup>4</sup> but these incidents are usually neither reported nor are they covered by the media. However, in this case, the accidents made the news not only because of the significant number of fatalities they caused, but also because they had occurred on the land of one of the largest gold mining companies in Guinea. The media blitz that followed suddenly raised the question of the company's "responsibility" toward neighbouring collectives, especially independent, artisanal gold diggers, most of whom are itinerant workers. The response of the company was quick, clear, and easy to formulate: yes, the accidents had taken place on the land of the company, but no, they were not the company's responsibility, as they were trespassers who had no right to be there in the first place. In the media, the casualties were described the same way the company described them: "illegal gold diggers coming from abroad." This positioning absolved the company of any responsibility and hinted that the blame lay with a specific group designated as foreigners.

Five years later, exactly in the same area, the same company made headlines again when it extended its open cast operations to a new portion of its leased land. This caused the displacement of several compounds in a neighbouring village and the expulsion of many artisanal miners. While little was said about the displacement of part of the village, the expulsion of artisanal miners generated much more noise because it implied that the company had the support of the Guinean army and intended to "wipe off all the illegals" and chase them away from Guinea, as stated by the prefectural head of Siguiri.

These statements can be read in different ways. First, they suggest the invasive presence of untitled persons, so-called "illegals", within the legal territory of the company. Second, besides promoting a reading that places "locals" in opposition to "strangers," they also add a nationalistic element by suggesting that these artisanal miners have also crossed another kind of border, that is,

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance fatalities recorded by the *tombolomaw* of Bouréka mining sites in 2011, p. 62

that of the nation-state. The company promoted the idea that the miners affected by the accident were illegal non-Guinean robbers who were trespassing on S.A.G's property to steal its gold.<sup>5</sup> Being foreigners, the company alleged, they should not be confused with the "local communities" with whom the S.A.G. was making so much progress. Thus, the main message of the company was that it was only trying to protect its own territory, and that the local communities that the company was working with were facing the same invasion of strangers – i.e., non-nationals. These events, thus, draw attention to the complicated relations between mining companies and the neighbouring populations, which, as is usually the case in artisanal mining settings, composed of both, local dwellers and a large number of itinerant gold miners.

The removal of people to make way for mining projects is not new. Yet, it is usually analysed from the perspective of the "local population," that is, the people who can claim ownership of the land and thus will be included in the corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes of mining companies (see e.g. Golub 2014; Jorgensen 1997; Luning 2012a; Welker 2014). What is less talked about, however, is the perspective of labour, as Tania Li (2011) rightly argues in the context of agricultural foreign land deals. Her claim – that land deals and massive mining projects not only deprive the local population of their livelihoods but also displace and destroy labour – is also very much pertinent in the case of gold extraction for, as was demonstrated in the previous chapters, the sector relies on a huge labour force composed mainly of itinerant workers who have no claims over the land but are integrated into complex systems of cooperation with the local population. Any new venture, or the conversion of existing exploration leases into exploitation ones, or the expansion of current operations, thus goes hand-in-hand with the expulsion of artisanal miners engaged in the informal sector.

In this chapter, I will focus on a new actor who plays an important role in the livelihood generation of artisanal miners – the industrial mining companies that are granted control over the vast swathes of land through mining leases. I will use the lens of securitization, i.e., the discursive construction of a security threat in relation to certain categories of people (Buzan 1998, Waever 1995), to look at how S.A.G. switches between twin discourses – security and community engagement. In line with this approach, the chapter's hypothesis is that depending on what best suits the corporation's strategy for extending its mining frontier, CSR programmes stress either the need to increase security in a context where "foreigners" are construed as a danger, or focus on "community" in a context where their work involves extending CSR benefits.

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<sup>5</sup> In the present case, though I am aware that the S.A.G. is not a monolithic actor, I will adopt the perspective of my informants who often speak of the company as an individual subject: "la SAG".



### 9.2.1 Case study area: The region of Bouré and the S.A.G.

In 1988, S.A.G. was granted an enormous area of land, 8,890 km<sup>2</sup>, on lease for exploration; this was described as “absurdly huge” even by Guinean officials at that time (Soumah 2010) (see map in Figure 9-1). It was the first industrial mining corporation to set up in Guinea and was later merged with AngloGold in 2004 and became part of AngloGold Ashanti Ltd.; however, it is still known as S.A.G. in the region. The merger resulted in an escalation in mining operations in the region, with the construction of the new processing plant. This resulted in the resettlement of two villages, including the entire village of Kofilani, and the expulsion of several artisanal miners, among whom Jah was one.

Figure 9-1 A. Map of the study area, B. Limits of the SAG's lease



The company is predominantly owned (85%) by the South African company AngloGold Ashanti, which also operates in Sadiola in neighbouring Mali. As determined by the Guinean Mining Code, the Guinean state owns the remaining 15% of the venture. The company's location in Bouré, whose political history is intimately linked with gold extraction in local narratives, has accentuated questions of legitimacy regarding the corporation's presence and operations. In this particular case,

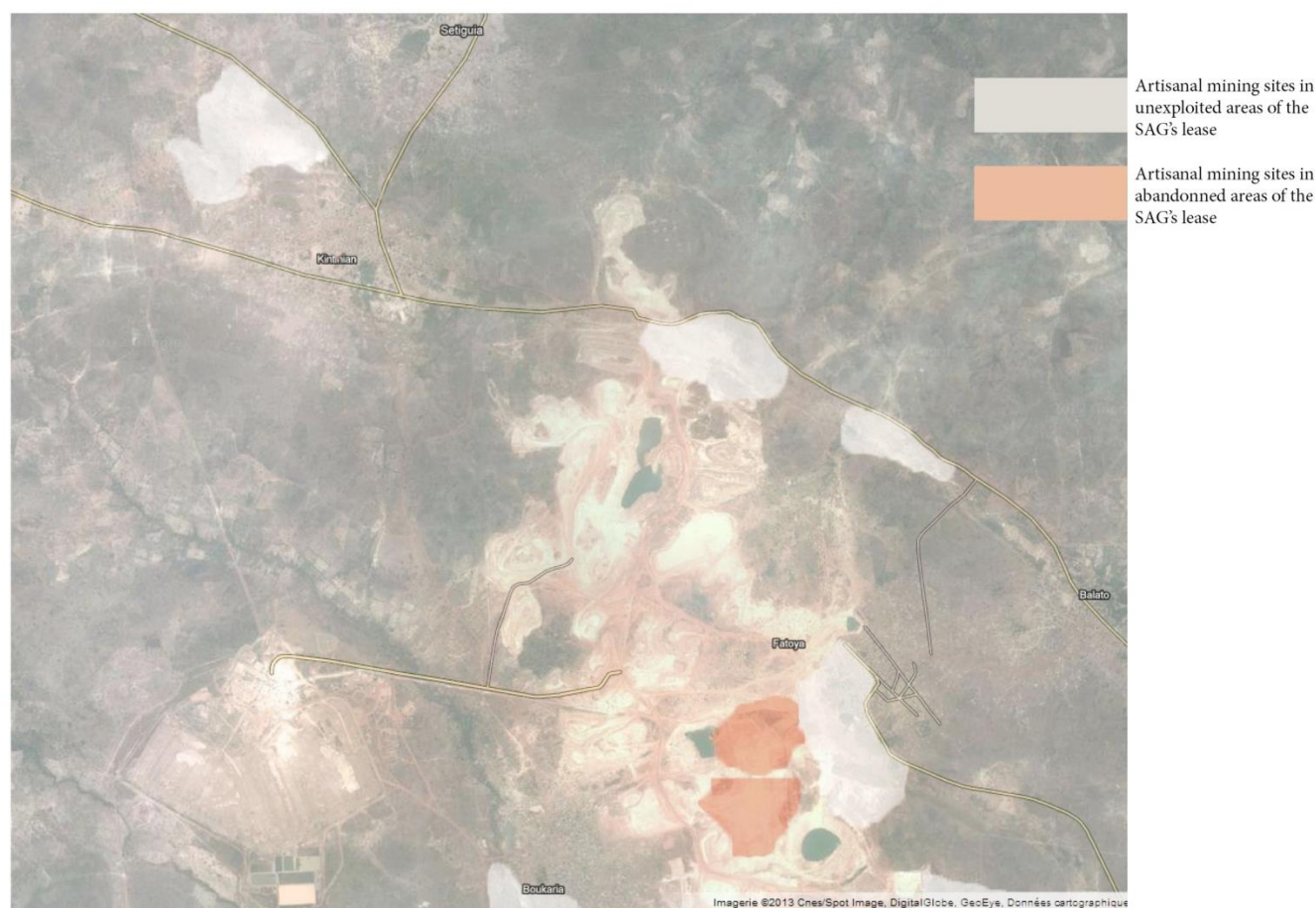
the company cannot claim to have “discovered” these deposits that were supposedly famous even at the time of Mansa Musa (emperor of Mali) 700 years ago, and over which locals consequently have a great sense of ownership. Bouré, around 30 km west of Siguiri, is rich in gold reserves and has been a popular site for gold mining for centuries (Tamsir Niane 1960). Artisanal gold extraction has been a long-established source of income in the region, and, as is the case elsewhere, it has become particularly important over the last decade with increasing gold prices, either directly in the form of artisanal mining, or indirectly through numerous related activities, such as trade, transport, foundries, and housing. Currently, five villages are directly involved in mining activities because of their proximity to mining pits and, in total, nine villages and fifteen hamlets are located within the boundaries of the lease that has been granted to the S.A.G. This population, in entirety, is under threat of resettlement depending on the expansion of the company’s operations. The company’s relations with the population of Siguiri and the neighbouring villages of Bouré have since turned conflictive, with frequent protests by the population of Siguiri and Bouréka villages, among whom many are part-time or seasonal artisanal mine workers who work informally within the limits of the company’s lease (see Figure 9-2).

For many years, the company had nearly no contact with the surrounding populations and it operated like a fortress, with military protection within its lease limits (Soumah 2010). However, this approach has changed since the merger and, following the strategy promoted by the World Bank<sup>6</sup> (see ICM 2006), of systematically integrating CSR into mining projects in order to construct a “social license to operate,” the company has increasingly engaged in various community-oriented projects; it has provided financial support to build schools, invested in research on prevention of malaria, and implemented electrification projects (see Chapter 10).

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<sup>6</sup> Mining companies are now increasingly encouraged to interact with the artisanal sector. This approach has been promoted by the World Bank, which issued a document called “Working together: How large-scale mining can engage with artisanal and small-scale miners?” (Wall 2010) This 100-page toolkit was intended for the CSR branches of mining corporations. The document mainly focuses on rendering support to the “formalization” of artisanal mining, “resettlement” of artisanal miners, and even to purchasing their product – which might appear contradictory with the fact that, in line with formalization policies, their work is simultaneously labelled illegal. The document encourages “engagement” with communities, including the artisanal miners, while leaving it open to the companies to decide on their definition of “community” as well as the form of the engagement. The issue, then, is the categorization of certain segments of the population as members or non-members of the “local community” by the company.

Figure 9-2 Overlapping ASM and LSM operations within the S.A.G.'s lease in 2012



### 9.3 Who competes for what? – the rules of the game

#### 9.3.1 Dispossession and expulsion

The displacement of people and the dispossession of land under the head of “development” is usually scrutinized from the perspective of the local indigenous population who manage land collectively. This has been seen in the past, in the case of customary land tenure in West Africa (Peters 2013), and the struggle to prevent the piecemeal dispossession of land by capitalist development. In such contexts, indigeneity very often becomes a defensive response to land dispossession for creating large-scale enclosures for dams, mines, logging, or plantations (Li 2010a). Besides in defending land against dispossession, claims of land ownership are also often mobilized by local elites who use naturalized group affiliations, i.e. lineage, clan, etc., to access resources, such as financial compensation, paid out through the CSR branches of companies (see e.g. Filer 2007; Jorgensen 2007; Luning 2012b). These studies show that there is no consensus on the positive or negative impacts of mining projects, nor does the present study aim to assess it here. Compensation programmes and CSR schemes often reveal the local power balance; while some individuals are better positioned to directly or indirectly access benefits, others are excluded from them. The

assumptions that dictate inclusion in CSR programmes are hence often ambivalent and contradictory. What they have in common though is that CSR programmes attempt to mitigate dispossession and expulsion through “displacement and resettlement” programmes (Downing 2002) and are primarily focussed on the “local community,” namely, the future recipients of benefits, despite the often contested nature of such affiliations.

The mining sector, in particular, has to address “mining-induced displacement,” a term derived from “development-induced displacement,” wherein displaced populations are compensated financially (for a review see Owen and Kemp 2015). The focus of such programmes is almost invariably the local residing population – also termed “autochthons” or “indigenous populations” – those who can make claims of land ownership and whom CSR programmes and compensation schemes target. All those who cannot make such claims, which population often includes labourers, are consequently excluded from such schemes. So, for full-time itinerant miners who cannot make claims on the land, instead of “mining-induced displacement” which is experienced as a one-time event by the local population, the expansion of the mining frontier translates into a continuous “expulsion-induced mobility,” as illustrated by Kalou’s case in the introduction of this chapter. Therefore, a focus on labour in processes of dispossession is especially pertinent in the case of gold extraction.

As Sabine Luning has argued in her research on junior mining companies, “The capabilities of exploration companies to access hitherto untouched deposits make artisanal mining look like *insignificant scratches on the surface of the earth*,” (my emphasis) (2014: 73). From this perspective, “local communities,” in particular the local population, are a visible source of great concern in CSR programmes because of their capacity to make claims over the land and thus grant companies a social licence to operate.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, “mining communities”, in particular artisanal labour mainly composed of itinerant miners, are totally “invisibilized,” to echo Sassen’s phrasing (2016 [2014]), as soon as an industrial mining project takes over spaces that have been mined artisanally, sometimes over years, rightly because “their claims to land are generally not recognized by governments” (Hilson, et al. 2007). Yet, despite being downplayed rhetorically, artisanal mining, or the labour component of the supply chain, often remains the major burden for mining companies both during ongoing operations – for artisanal miners may operate clandestinely in the same space and possibly

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<sup>7</sup> Hilson defines this fuzzy notion that populates NGO, CSR, and government vocabulary, as “a phrase conjured by multinationals to suggest that companies must gain the ‘approval’ of communities in order to operate,” (Hilson, et al. 2007: 426). Anna Zalik (2004) traces the notion back to the concept of a “leverage buy-in,” wherein a company can achieve greater leverage (to win social consent) at lower costs through debt; for instance, by subsidizing authorities through development and compensation. Moreover, she adds, “The employ of NGOs as consultants to the [oil] industry also serves to subsidise the cost of attaining a ‘social licence to operate’,” (ibid: 418).

get injured or die in collapses, thus causing bad publicity – and when they seize new portions of land – which would often lead to their eviction by force, as the introduction of this chapter showed.

In Siguiri and the neighbouring regions, it appears that S.A.G. is not “enclaved” in all aspects. First, S.A.G. could not totally get rid of the artisanal miners who worked within and around its areas of operation. Secondly, and most importantly, the size of the lease – which covers the main three villages of the Camara clans (Kintinian, Balato, and Setiguia), and the six other villages and 15 hamlets that have resulted from clan segmentation<sup>8</sup> – makes material enclavement, with total fencing and border patrols, unrealistic and unachievable. As I have briefly mentioned above, though its operations and personnel are isolated from the surrounding villages and artisanal mining settlements, S.A.G. itself has become increasingly involved in different kinds of community programmes and in the provision of services (a hospital for the family members of S.A.G.’s employees and its subcontractors, electrification of Siguiri). The company believes that this may give it the legitimacy to govern within and around its leased land, and protect itself, possibly with force, from putative invaders. Similarly, in her study on the CSR branch of the gold mining corporation, Newmont, Marina Welker (2009) showed that “defence”, from the perspective of Newmont Mining – the third largest gold producer worldwide – in fact included “partnering” with the neighbouring populations, as “an evolving corporate security strategy that consciously enlists local elites as the first line of corporate defense” (2009: 143). She adds later, “although downplaying militarized approaches to security, the CSR industry implicitly endorses drawing civilians into the sphere of corporate security through community development” (Welker 2009, 147) As we shall see, the merging of CSR and corporate security has now become a common strategy that S.A.G. has also overtly adopted. My focus is similar to the one of Welker (2009, 2014) in Indonesia, Zalik (2004) in Nigeria, and Hönke (2010) in Democratic Republic of Congo: corporate security is increasingly implemented through rhetoric and practices revolving around partnership with communities; however, my perspective is slightly different for it approaches the topic from the view of the artisanal miners rather than the company. Another difference is that, contrary to the examples above, in the context of Bouré, the greatest hurdle for S.A.G. is not activists, NGOs, or local governments, who could concretely jeopardize the company’s operations, but the numerous artisanal miners who live and work in the surrounding areas; this “threat” to the company usually manifests when they accidentally die within its leased land, thus turning their inherent vulnerability into an unwanted but powerful PR menace.

Thus, instead of assuming that S.A.G. needs “security” from an alleged “threat” to operate, I take a closer look at what and whom the company constructs as a security threat over its operations, or as a partner to cooperate with in different circumstances. I thus suggest that “security” is a means

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<sup>8</sup> For more details on the history of population settlement and political organization in Bouré, see Arnaldi di Balme (2013).



to an end, rather than an end in itself in S.A.G.'s expansion strategy. In the corporate language of the company – and regardless of the effective forms of cooperation and real governance that have been established in the artisanal sector – “traditional opailleurs” from the “local population” are seen positively and are the recipients of CSR programmes while so-called “illegal artisanal miners” are framed as a common threat that can rightfully be expelled.

#### **9.4 The securitisation of large scale gold mining: the making of the partner community of traditional *orpailleurs* vs. the illegal miners coming from abroad**

*The communities and societies in which we operate will be better off for AngloGold Ashanti having been there. We uphold and promote fundamental human rights where we do business. We contribute to building productive, respectful and mutually beneficial partnerships in the communities in which we operate. We aim to leave host communities with a sustainable future. (Anglogold Ashanti website, Core Values).*

In its Guinea country report, as well as on its website, Anglogold Ashanti reiterates that its presence benefits the population that lives in and around its areas of operation. By claiming that the company promotes human rights in the regions where it does business, it implicitly suggests that human rights are not available to all in the context where the company works, and that their “host communities” will thus not only benefit materially from the company’s presence, but also morally, by achieving “fundamental human rights.” This phrasing is the first indication of AnglogoldAshanti’s (AGA) discursive positioning toward neighbouring communities: it designates a part of the population as a threat, against which the majority needs to be protected; to do so, the company first uses a humanitarian-inspired discourse that suggests that local communities need protection, i.e., in terms of basic social services, which the company can provide. Such a standpoint, which is replicated across their PR material, is reproduced yearly in country reports, sustainability reports, community engagement reports, and websites, leaflets and other open access documents. These statements are no dead letters without recipients; the idea of “development” they espouse, at least in terms of material improvement, widely circulate in distant regions like Conakry, the capital city, where the residents of Siguiri are perceived to be the lucky “host communities” of Anglogold Ashanti.

In most of AGA’s reports, however, the definition of what or who constitutes this “host community” remains quite vague. What is clearly stated, instead, in all the reports that address AGA’s “community engagement” in the period between 2008 and 2014, is that the most significant challenge the company faces is “dealing with artisanal and small scale miners on the one hand and illegal miners on the other” (AnglogoldAshanti 2008). Are these miners the “community”? What is the difference between “artisanal miners” and “illegal miners” from the perspective of the company?

In a legalist view such as that promoted by the S.A.G., none of the artisanal mine workers are formally licensed, which means that they are all “illegal” from a legal standpoint.

To better understand these distinctions, I shall return to what the AGA’s reports identified as the main problem for the company: artisanal miners trespassing on its leased land and the accidents and fatalities that occurred subsequently. In response, AGA construed the artisanal miners as a threat. I came to hear of these issues from several standpoints. First, friends in Balato and members of the *tomboloma* in Fatoya and Balato (villages adjacent to the S.A.G.’s operations and located within – or partly within – the lease granted to the S.A.G.) often complained about their powerlessness regarding accidents that were occurring in these areas: Since the company held the lease over this land in legal terms, they could not edict any rules concerning these spaces.

In Siguiri, at Eddy’s home and in the coffee places in the neighbourhood, the issue was widely discussed after the aforementioned accidents. It was usually framed as either resulting from artisanal miners’ irresponsibility – allegedly the work of *kountaniw* who had no sense of risk – or alternatively (and more plausibly), it was seen as a consequence of the intensive drilling and massive use of explosives by the S.A.G, which has rendered the underground artisanal tunnels on the edges of the company’s operations far more hazardous. According to local opinion, this land, which has been mined for gold for centuries, has never witnessed so many accidents, until the S.A.G. set up its plant. Finally, the company’s response, which was disseminated both in global (i.e., Agence France Presse) and local media (radio), clearly absolved it of its responsibility since the casualties were labelled “illegal gold diggers coming from abroad,” in contrast to the “traditional artisanal miners” of the neighbouring “communities.”

Clearly, recurring accidents and fatalities are not very convincing signs that communities are “better off for Anglogold Ashanti having being there.” However, AGA is reiterating the discursive divide between bad “illegal foreigners” on the one hand, and good “traditional miners” on the other, in a bid to drive home its stated intention of helping local communities. In a commissioned study on artisanal gold mining, AGA gave a scientific touch to this argument.<sup>9</sup> Drawing on a “sample of miners”, the study would show that a greater proportion of them were not “natives” of the villages. Further on, it was said that:

These two separate artisanal mining groups operate at Siguiri—the local, traditional *orpailleurs* and the artisanal miners who come from outside the Siguiri area and, in most cases, are not Guinean. Specifically, [the report] highlighted the existing tension and conflict between these two groups who compete for the same mining sites. (AnglogoldAshanti 2009)

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<sup>9</sup> See Kirsch on “corporate science” in the mining industry (2014: Chap. IV), that is, how corporations strategically produce scientific facts independently, thus sometimes affirming highly contradictory claims, i.e., “corporate oxymorons,” such as conducting “sustainable mining” (Benson and Kirsch 2010).

According to the report, these “strangers” were thus not only a threat to the company since they trespassed on its land to steal its gold, but they were also a threat to the locals as they were allegedly untitled foreigners who artisanally mined the land, consequently depriving the locals of their livelihoods. In the previous chapters of this work, I have described in detail the cooperative relationships between natives and temporary itinerant miners; hence, there is no doubt that AGA’s interpretation of the situation, if not necessarily wrong in suggesting that there is tension, is certainly fanciful in framing it in terms of competition between two different groups. Yet, it brings to light a competing representation of the actors involved in gold mining: it categorises stakeholders into legitimate players (the S.A.G. itself and the invented group of “traditional *orpailleurs*,” or the “host community”) and illegitimate players (illegal miners, especially those “coming from abroad”). What such a representation achieves is that it defines “illegal” miners as a common threat to the security of both the corporate and the local population. Thus, whereas CSR discourses are often framed using the development language of “poverty reduction,” the S.A.G. seems to be one step ahead and has added a “security” lens to frame its activities.

Interestingly, after 2011, “security” was addressed together with “community engagement” in the company’s yearly sustainability reports. In another “case study” in the AGA’s 2011 yearly report, unnamed researchers stated the following:

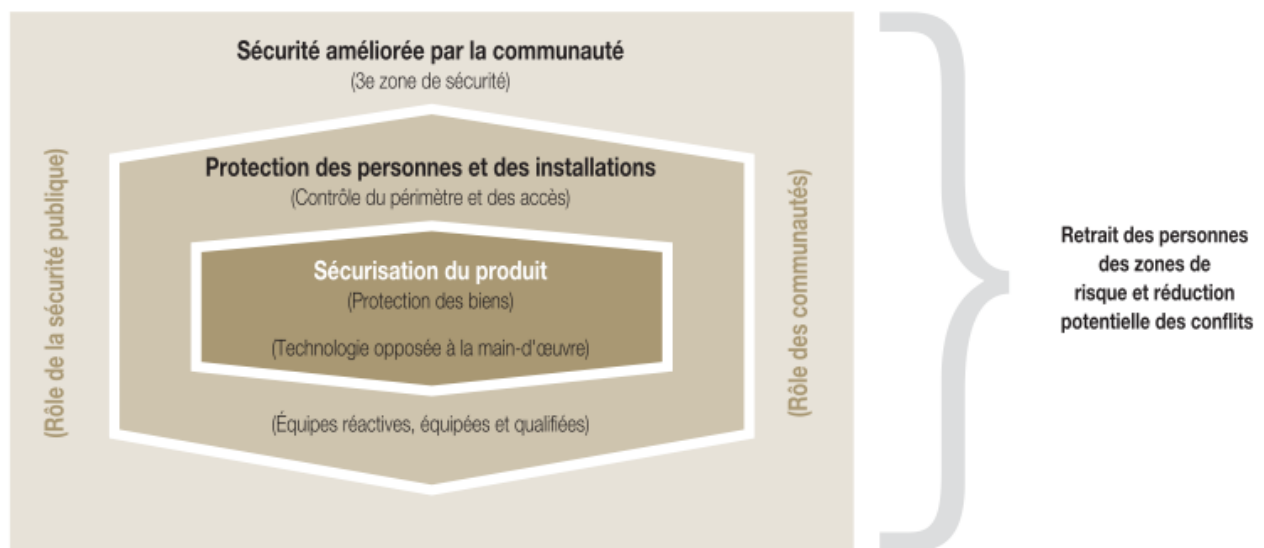
Illegal miners represent a serious threat to [the company’s] extraction sites. In 2011, the number of intruders arrested doubled and it keeps rising. The board of operations has kept on dealing with these problems, but social structures and the messages of the leaders in the communities have been difficult to interpret and to take into consideration in relation to community engagement. For instance, local governmental structures for communicating with autochthonous communities have not been working efficiently. (AnglogoldAshanti 2011)

From there on, the 2011 report addresses “community engagement” and “corporate security” as being two sides of the same coin. The same move has been observed elsewhere (Hönke 2010; Welker 2009), as I mentioned earlier, and is now a standard of corporate governance. As the figure below shows (see Figure 9-3), AGA conceives it as concentric security circles with different assets to secure (gold, infrastructures, people) using different devices ranging from security technologies and qualified persons (militaries, security staff) to improved “community” security, which in this model is seen as both a source of a security and a potential threat to inner circles.



Figure 9-3 Security strategy of AngloGold Ashanti (AGA 2011: 37)

### Stratégie sécuritaire d'AngloGold Ashanti



Since AGA's reports repeatedly refer to "illegal miners coming *from abroad*," which echoes autochthonic and anti-immigration discourses across the globe, I propose to read their statements through the lens of *securitisation* which, besides its use in critical border studies (e.g. Andersson 2014; Huysmans 2006), is also a conceptual tool used in political ecology (Gautier and Benjaminsen 2012). According to Wæver (1995), securitisation can be defined as such:

We can regard 'security' as a *speech act*. In this usage, security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance *itself* is the act. By saying it, something is done (as in betting, giving a promise, naming a ship). By uttering 'security' a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it (Wæver 1995: 55 cited in Williams 2003: 513).

In fact, the security strategy of the S.A.G. aims to achieve exactly this, though it is not a "state-representative" but a private foreign corporation. The company provides the discourse and the state subcontracts it its military means. After constructing a population to help and protect, it constructs an external threat despite the fact that, in reality, there have never been any actual incidents of violence targeting S.A.G. personnel, which points, as Buzan, et al. (1998: 24) note, to the "self-referential character of security," wherein an "issue becomes a security issue – not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat." For instance, this is how AGA explains the necessity to deploy military force on a "quasi-permanent basis":

Our aim is to improve the coverage and efficiency of security by using our own security measures. Military force will only be used as a last resort. However [in several countries

including Guinea and Mali], recent risk assessments have classified threats as high priority so as to require the support of the military forces of these countries on a quasi-permanent basis (AGA 2011, 38, my translation from French).

Moreover, in its reports, the security apparatus developed by the S.A.G. uses war-like vocabulary (“injuries” and “deaths” are categorized into the camps of “staff” and “communities”; fatalities usually fall into the category of “parties involved in illegal activities”). In practice, it also relies on a war-like deployment of military and private security forces led by a former US military officer.<sup>10</sup> Considering that the injuries among personnel and the fatalities among clandestine miners are both forms of work-related accidents, this framing, which is outlandish compared to the artisanal miners’ own perception of the situation, is odd if it is not read in light of the fabricated threat over S.A.G.

So, to sum up in the company’s corporate language, “illegal miners” (AnglogoldAshanti 2011), putatively qualified as “mainly coming from abroad” (AnglogoldAshanti 2009), are seen as the main threat to the extraction sites of the company. In contrast, the category “traditional orpailleurs” is invented and equated to “local populations;” the company, in turn, claims to aid this “local population” through its CSR programmes. In terms of security, the narrative promoted by AGA suggests that the “local community” stands with the company as opposed to the threat represented by the “illegal miners” who threaten the security of the company assets and personnel as well as the livelihoods of the locals. This construction can be seen as a form of “historical revisionism” (Rajak 2014), where the company revises the local history of the place where it has settled. Indeed, as I have shown through this dissertation, these affiliations are fluid and rather serve as lines along which people – locals and itinerant miners – cooperate than constituting separate groups competing for the same resource. Moreover, a reading of the history of gold extraction in Bouré supports exactly the same view. As evidenced by Luning, et al. (2014), artisanal mining was a mobile activity that was embedded in flexible relationships of hosting and cooperation before colonization, and it continued as such despite the efforts of the colonial administration to settle labour through the promotion of politics based on autochthony in mining areas. Just as the promotion of autochthonic politics in mining areas during the colonial era, though they were entirely invented, had effects on local structures (Luning, et al. 2014), so do the current CSR practices and rhetoric of the S.A.G. in Bouré.

In the following section, I move from discourses to practices and investigate how the shifting category of “communities” is used either in terms of security or in terms of partnership to manage

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<sup>10</sup> I wish to recall here that, though it may be presented as a monolithic entity, the corporation is not an “integral, coherent, unified, bounded and autonomous agent” (Welker 2014: 3). In a discussion I had with a former consultant working for the S.A.G., it resulted that, inside the company, the head of security and the head of community relations were continuously at loggerheads because of the contradictive approaches they promoted. Outside the corporation though, these approaches are presented quite coherently within a single framework.

the expansion of the company's operations and to mask the presence of artisanal mining within its lease.

## **9.5 The management of expulsion**

As Jah, who had been expelled from Kofilani (the village where the plant was set-up) at that time, recalled, those who were "natives" were compensated financially, but the majority of artisanal miners who worked there – some of them who had settled there for years – could not claim autochthonic prerogatives of any kind and were expelled with nothing. For instance, Jah had lived for nearly three years in Kofilani but had to move with his wife and son to the Wassoulounka village in Koundiana so that he could keep mining gold artisanally. With the growing demand for CSR engagement, especially in the extractive industries (Hilson 2012), S.A.G. has also progressively integrated such practices into its array of operations by enclaving itself from the neighbouring population while engaging with some of its segments. In the following sections, I move from the company's PR material to the experiences and practices of those living around the S.A.G. I focus on episodes that involve the company's territorial control and discuss how the two approaches intertwine in the way the S.A.G. deals with the presence of artisanal mine workers around and within its leased land and areas of operation.

### **9.5.1 *Ratissage*: Security-inspired expulsion**

As I have shown in Chapter 3, the artisanal excavation of mining shafts is quite an uncertain operation, especially considering the amount of time it requires and the unpredictable outcomes it offers. Artisanal miners usually prefer working in spaces that have been industrially mined, as they permit easier access to the deposit because the first layers of ground have been removed already; quantities may be smaller but are more easily accessible, which leads many artisanal miners to attempt incursions within the company's lease limits at night or when surveillance is off. Two forms of incursions are quite frequent.

In the first case, small groups engage nightly in operations that are not always very rewarding in view of the gold mined; however, these expeditions tend to be shows of skill and courage, especially among young men who tend to emphasize the risk associated with such operations. A member of the *tomboloma* in Balato explained it thus in 2011:

Ever since the S.A.G. set up here, we have had people digging in their pits. For us (the *tomboloma*), it is not a problem if they want to try their luck there. If they get caught it is their own problem; that is why they go at night. Most of them work in the *faro* during the day and during the night they move to the [company's] pits.

In the eyes of the local authorities, trespassing onto the S.A.G.'s property or ongoing operations is not seen as morally condemnable, but rather, it is seen as unnecessary risk. Indeed, shaft collapses are more likely to occur in these zones that where intensive drilling has been done. Besides, beyond physical hazards, trespassers who are caught may be fined and jailed in the container which is used as a prison in the neighbouring police post of Balato; their family would have to intervene to have them released. From such a stance, the "risk" is also social for it can endanger the family's livelihoods. In these cases, though it has its own security forces, S.A.G. also relies on governmental support. Indeed, since 2010, a part of the surveillance was subcontracted to military forces and private security agencies; the S.A.G. also relies on the cooperation of the local police (i.e., in Balato), into whose custody so-called trespassers are transferred. Although they do not represent any measurable loss for the company, these incursions are treated as a security threat to what is defined as the first cycle ("security of product and material") in AGA's security evaluation.

Secondly, during periods of unrest over the presence of S.A.G., especially regarding the services the company was expected to provide such as road maintenance or power supply,<sup>11</sup> the residents of the neighbouring villages as well as from Siguiri would "go on strike." By "strike" one could also understand "protest," since the demonstrators were mainly the unemployed inhabitants of the area, many of whom were engaged in artisanal gold mining, rather than being employed by the S.A.G. The objective was to make the company's work stop in the area, in particular by blocking the road from Koron to Siguiri, through which the employees and the trucks of the company transited. Such episodes regularly happened between 2009 and 2014. In April 2009 and again in July 2011, more or less the same scenario repeated itself. In the coffee stall where I used to have breakfast in Siguiri, Selim, a young (unemployed) man who lived across the street and who particularly enjoyed – and, in view of the large audience he would gather, was very good at – commenting on the news, explained to me that there had been quite a lot of complaints about recurring power cuts, but to no avail. Like most other men at the coffee stall, he believed that the blockade was the only way to pressure the S.A.G. to comply with what was seen as an unpaid debt to the population. Whilst I had so far heard a certain recognition of the S.A.G.'s legitimacy to operate within its lease – especially at Eddy's home – in the discussions at the coffee stall, this was replaced by the idea that the company was extracting the gold of Bouré, that is "theirs" and should hence do more for the population. The potential benefits of CSR programmes was something "due" in an exchange process, rather than it being a "gift" to the community as the S.A.G. would frame it (see next chapter).

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<sup>11</sup> The next chapter addresses this question separately.

I briefly return to some excerpts from my field notes on the first day of the strike to illustrate how I perceived the move by the residents of Bouré – amongst whom a large number were artisanal miners – and the response of the company, which aimed to protect the integrity of its territory.

We knew by thursday that the strike would start on Saturday. In Siguiri town, most of the youths at the coffee shop intend to join the march to Koron. In the neighbouring villages, from what I gathered from Drissa during a call, the plans being made are more concerned with occupying the pit than blocking the road. I hence decide to remain in Fatoya for the night in order to avoid being held up by the protest. On Saturday morning, I join Seydoujan and go to the pit, which is already totally occupied when we arrive. Most people are collecting the left-overs of the ore on the edges of the pit, while others are attempting to dig small trenches at the bottom of the pit. Women do instantaneous washing and fill bags with the ore that looks most promising. In a few hours, the whole population of the neighbouring mining fields of Fatoya, Boukaria, Kofilani, and Kintinian seems to have rushed there and replicated the organization of the *faro* (artisanal mining field) in the unoccupied pits. No later than one hour after our arrival, Seydou spots three military vehicles approaching one of the pits. At the same moment, all the trenches empty and everyone runs in the opposite direction. Seydoujan advises us not to run and to walk quietly out of the pit. It is just “*ratissage*,” he says, they cannot arrest everyone so they usually arrest no one, or they make them sit for a while to frighten them. When we come back to Balato, Seydoujan explains that this scenario (*ratissage*),<sup>12</sup> is repeated several times during the year and is increasingly associated with the protests in Siguiri town (translated and adapted from field notes, April 2009).

The whole event had occurred as if it was following a well-known three-act script. First, the road would be blocked so as to stop work at S.A.G. Second, now that the company’s pits were empty, hundreds of workers from the neighbouring villages who would try to mine as much of the ore as they can from the open pits. Third, military vehicles would disperse the miners, usually without arresting anybody; arrests were made only when they caught small groups operating independently. Two years later, during another visit, the same scenario would repeat itself, as it had many times in between my visits as well; although I did not visit the pit this time, Seydoujan describes the events to me similarly.

“Strikes” occasionally bring together people from distinct social fields, including rural dwellers like Seydoujan, urban educated unemployed young men like Selim, as well as the numerous men and women from neighbouring regions involved in artisanal gold mining, many of whom were itinerant miners living in the camps and villages nearby. Their actions are not driven by the same motives – at least according to my informants – but these motives converge towards a common outcome, which is the temporary halting of operations of S.A.G. Regardless of their social affiliations, occupation, or place of origin, protesters are all labelled “trespassers, mainly coming

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<sup>12</sup> In French, “*ratissage*” refers to the action of using a rake, meaning to collect whatever falls into the teeth of the rake. Metaphorically, it refers to the practice where security forces to apprehend by chance a few people from the entire crowd.

from outside the Siguiri area” in AGA’s vocabulary (e.g. AngloGoldAshanti 2011). Following the distinction Brubaker makes between “identification” and “categorization” (2000), it is possible to state that in this situation, such ascriptive categorizations are far from protesters’ own identities. Furthermore, this blanket labelling of mine workers as “trespassers” even contradicts the very distinction the company’s PR machine seeks to make between legitimate, local, traditional miners on the one hand and illegitimate, foreign, illegal miners on the other. In other words, while S.A.G. has the power to act as a categorizing agent (i.e., differentiating legitimate traditional locals and illegitimate illegal foreigners) when it uses these categories to determine which groups get access to certain resources and services, as I will discuss in the next chapter, this power is more likely to be questioned if the company uses these same categories to restrict locals’ access to gold resources; in other words, the company’s power in this regard cannot supersede the strong feeling of ownership locals have over the gold mined from the land.

*Picture 9-1 Artisanal mine workers collecting bags of ore from an occupied open pit during a day of strike*



In such a context, trespassers on the company’s territory, though the lease boundary itself may be an invisible line most locals physically cross several times a day without even noticing it, become, for the company, the main reason why it is necessary to protect the “security” of ore by deploying military force. The distinction made by Zolberg and Long (1999 cited in Lamont and Molnár 2002: 185) between boundary crossing, boundary blurring, and boundary shifting to address how in- and out-group classifications are subject to constant negotiations can be useful in understanding the reconstruction of a lease’s limits into a border through a securitization device. Indeed, as group

boundaries are particularly blurred in such contexts, constructed categories such as “traditional orpailleurs” versus the illegitimate “illegal miners,” lose their hold in framing the situation. By fabricating a threat over its stock and infrastructure – though the effective losses in gold are in fact too tiny to be evaluated – S.A.G. shifts the boundary which previously excluded only illegitimate illegal miners to excluding all protesters regardless of their occupation, local affiliations, and statuses. Furthermore, this discursive shift also manifested in a very visible way – what had previously been only a social boundary became a military one, with military forces suddenly patrolling its edges.

Through these two examples, I have shown that in defending itself from the “threat” allegedly posed by “illegal miners,” the company has operationalized security-inspired defence strategies against the very same population that, a little earlier, it described as “the local community.” Despite discourses of partnership, therefore, the use of force against the neighbouring population is legitimized if it is constructed in terms of defence from an external threat – although such an external “threat” has, in fact, very local roots.

In the next section, I look at a reverse process where the presence of gold diggers within the S.A.G.’s leased land is no longer seen as illegal.

#### **9.5.2 Tolerance: participatory-inspired expulsion**

In 2011, the extensive media coverage of the accidents that took place on its property, as well as the increased intensity of the local strikes, had become burdensome to the company’s public image.<sup>13</sup> Besides, an increasing number of miners were being arrested and transferred to the police in Balato, and their imprisonment was being criticized by local elites.

In parallel with the arrests, the CSR branch of S.A.G. started roundtables with the neighbouring villages’ authorities and related *tomboloma* committees to find “solutions” to what was increasingly described as “human rights issues” by the Radio Rurale Locale in Siguiri. While so far the company had chased away miners from its areas of operations, according to Seydoujan, who participated in the discussions, S.A.G. now proposed to tolerate artisanal mining in areas that were no longer being actively mined by the company; this strategy was also promoted in the World Bank toolkit as “segregation of mineral concession” (Wall 2010: 67). Instead of fencing off the area, the company would withdraw its security patrols from these areas so that artisanal miners would be free to access these zones; though it was still formally within the company’s lease, the company would

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<sup>13</sup> AGA 2012 PR report makes a great case for finding solutions to reduce conflict and prevent accidents within the S.A.G.’s lease.



longer monitor what happened in these areas, thus also freeing itself from its main burden: its “responsibility” concerning the deaths of artisanal gold miners on its land.

While this move was welcomed by gold miners, it posed several problems for the village authorities. First, artisanal mining fields represent an important source of income for the village administration and *damantigiw*. They would lose a significant part of their income if miners migrated to spaces where the *tombolomaw* would not be allowed to officially collect taxes because the land legally still belonged to S.A.G. Consequently, the local *tomboloma* would not be able control these new spaces dedicated to artisanal mining. Secondly, the risk of shaft collapses was significantly higher in places that had been mined industrially using means such as drilling and explosives. This new “tolerant” approach of the company towards artisanal gold miners hence suggested a shift in control and a (unilaterally decided) redistribution of responsibilities, leading to a situation where miners had “*de facto* open access” (Haller and Chabwela 2009) to gold resources; however, this also meant the invalidation of local institutions of cooperative governance, such as the *tomboloma*, without providing any new form of regulation as an alternative. This policy of indifference had two consequences for the day-to-day lives of artisanal gold miners. First, the most vulnerable segment of the population started digging in these areas, since ore was now easily accessible but in smaller quantities. In particular, this activity became popular amongst itinerant mine workers without a stable network of peers or mining experience. Second, accidents in these zones increased. According to numbers collected by the local Red Cross and police reports, at least 50 fatalities occurred outside the artisanal mining fields controlled by the local militia during this year<sup>14</sup>. However, the S.A.G. did not report these casualties as occurring on their land since the company was no longer “responsible” for miners’ activities in these areas; thus, following the pattern described by Sassen (2016), these fatalities were made statistically invisible. The outcome of this new strategy is clear in the following year’s report, where the number of fatalities drops from 29 deaths to two. Considering that the company subscribed to the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights in 2007, and in turn claims that local communities are “better off for AngloGold Ashanti having been there,” it is easy to see why these new numbers are more profitable for the company.

Of course, it is too dangerous [to dig shafts in the remaining areas of the company]. We often come here and tell them to get out of the shafts, but the following day they are back. We already have to manage the village plots and decide where people can dig and not dig, but there it is the S.A.G. which decides. We don’t take taxes there; it is not for the village, so we cannot prevent their working there (A *tomboloma* in Balato).

This unambiguous statement shows that the company’s decision to tolerate the presence of gold diggers in abandoned pits also means that local authorities would not be able to extend their

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<sup>14</sup> In a note established by the local Red Cross for the prefecture of Siguiri in 2009, numbers where as high as 200 fatalities per year.



control to these areas. Therefore, by placing artisanal miners in a legal space out of the reach of local regulating institutions such as the *tombolomaw*, the company makes artisanal gold mining a “real informal” sector – alienated from the practices of “real governance” (Olivier de Sardan 2011) that prevail in artisanal mining sites. Indeed, as Lindell puts it, “viewing the informal as unregulated contributes to a black box understanding of the informal economy that renders invisible power and solidarity relations at work within it” (2010). Put differently, “informal” can also be understood as being out of the reach of regulation, and subsequently, no longer the “responsibility” of whoever is supposed to govern: in this case, since the company had absolved itself of its responsibility, there was no one to take its place. Local authorities could not exercise their governing capacities because the artisanal mining fields were located within the lease of the corporation. Paradoxically, while the company had been quick to refer to “the law” (enacted by the possession of a mining title) while addressing issues such as relocation and expulsion, it was curiously eluded, or more flexibly understood, now that artisanal miners were not permitted to work in abandoned pits.

*Picture 9-2 Tolerated zone for artisanal gold mining in an abandoned pit in Boukaria, 2012*



In the second example, the company’s “community engagement” was in fact a disengaging from the local communities. If governance supposes the control of bodies, including their maintenance, reproduction, and circulation, then this is exactly what the S.A.G.’s shift in policy, when it decided to deregulate its borders, enabled it to side-step. Such a rapid change in policy sheds light on the constructed nature of “illegalisms” (Foucault 1975: 84-89) – i.e., illicit practices associated with distinctive social groups – and how these artificial categories are used by multinational corporations that exercise seemingly undisputable sovereignty within its territory to

remain disconnected from certain groups at certain moments. S.A.G. has demonstrated the artificiality of these “illegalisms” by successively using the same legal terms to illegalize miners, by qualifying as “illegal outsiders,” and to again de-illegalize them later by qualifying them as “local traditional orpailleurs.” In both cases, its unilateral decisions were framed with moral arguments – in the first case it argued that it was protecting itself from an external threat, and in the second, that it was morally right to “tolerate” a “traditional” practice.

*Picture 9-3 Tolerated zone for artisanal gold mining in an abandoned pit in Fatoya, 2010*



## **9.6 Capital expansion, labour expulsion**

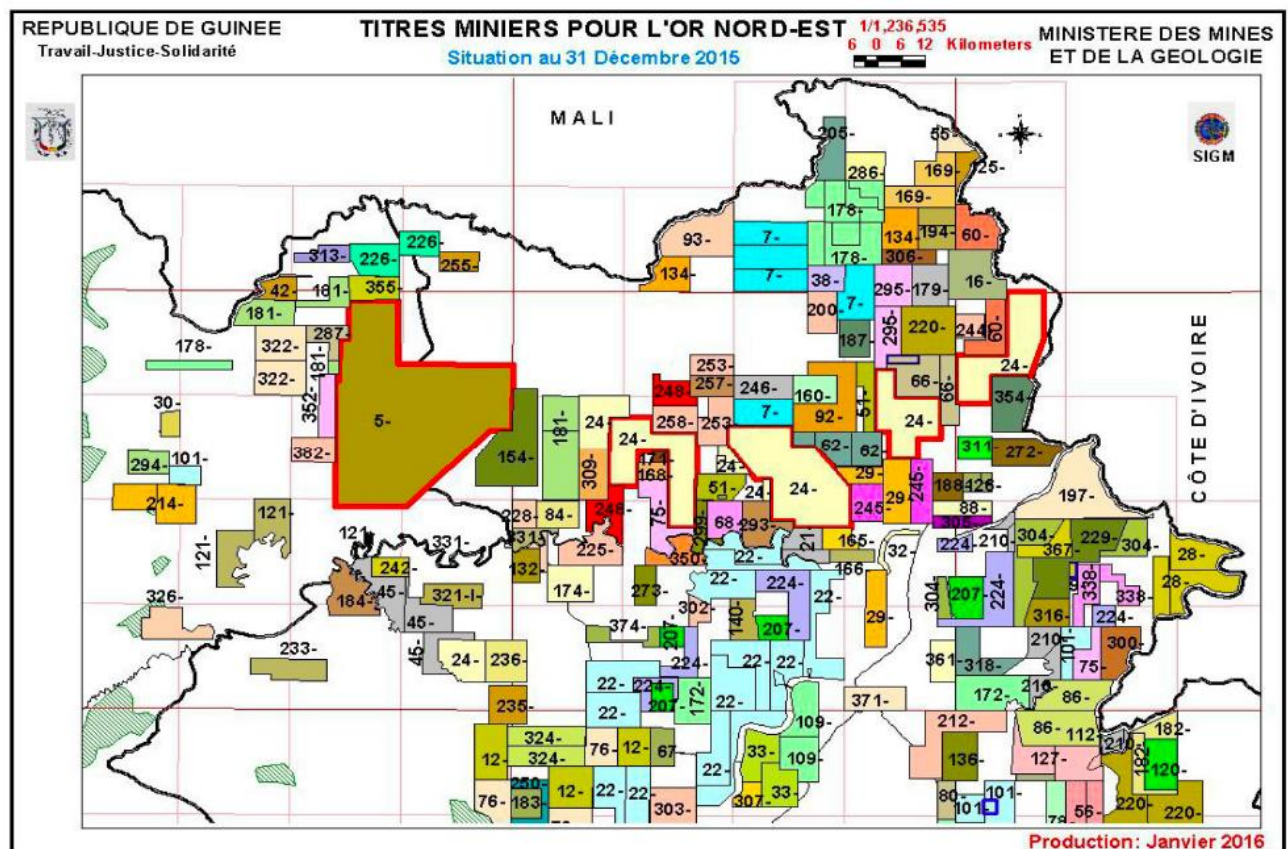
From these three interrelated examples, it is possible to conclude that the company diversified the means by which it controlled its territory by leveraging government technologies that either plugged into a strategy of security-inspired enclavement or participatory-inspired community engagement. Indeed, in contrast to the oil or gas extraction industries, which usually operate in relatively well-defined areas that are fenced off and have heavy surveillance (see e.g., Ferguson 2005), so as to produce bounded spaces of “Afrique utile” like under the colonial regime (Boone 1998 cited in Hönke 2010), gold mining leases are usually much larger on a geographical scale; thus, it is much more difficult to physically monitor the entire lease area. The mining pits currently under operation form only a small portion within the larger area and almost always include villages and



hamlets. And if they do not, these lands will probably be occupied by itinerant miners living in temporary camps.

In the case of AGA's operations in Guinea, after the initial research permit of 1988, the lease, which was granted in 1998, was for 1,500 sq km. The area is so enormous that it covers several dozens of villages, but only certain portions of it are being actively mined. Completely evacuating the local population or fencing off the lease area are not practical options, and hence, S.A.G. has had to come up with strategies to manage the neighbouring populations. However, from a purely legalist standpoint, any part of the surrounding population – no matter whether they are locals or itinerant workers – can be rendered “illegal” if S.A.G. chooses to exercise its powers within its land. I suggest that the twin strategies of engagement and enclavement, as this chapter has shown, are used by corporations in view of the spatial expanse of gold mining projects, which, de facto, simply cannot be fenced (See Figure 9-4 below for an understanding of the share of land covered by mining leases in Guinea).

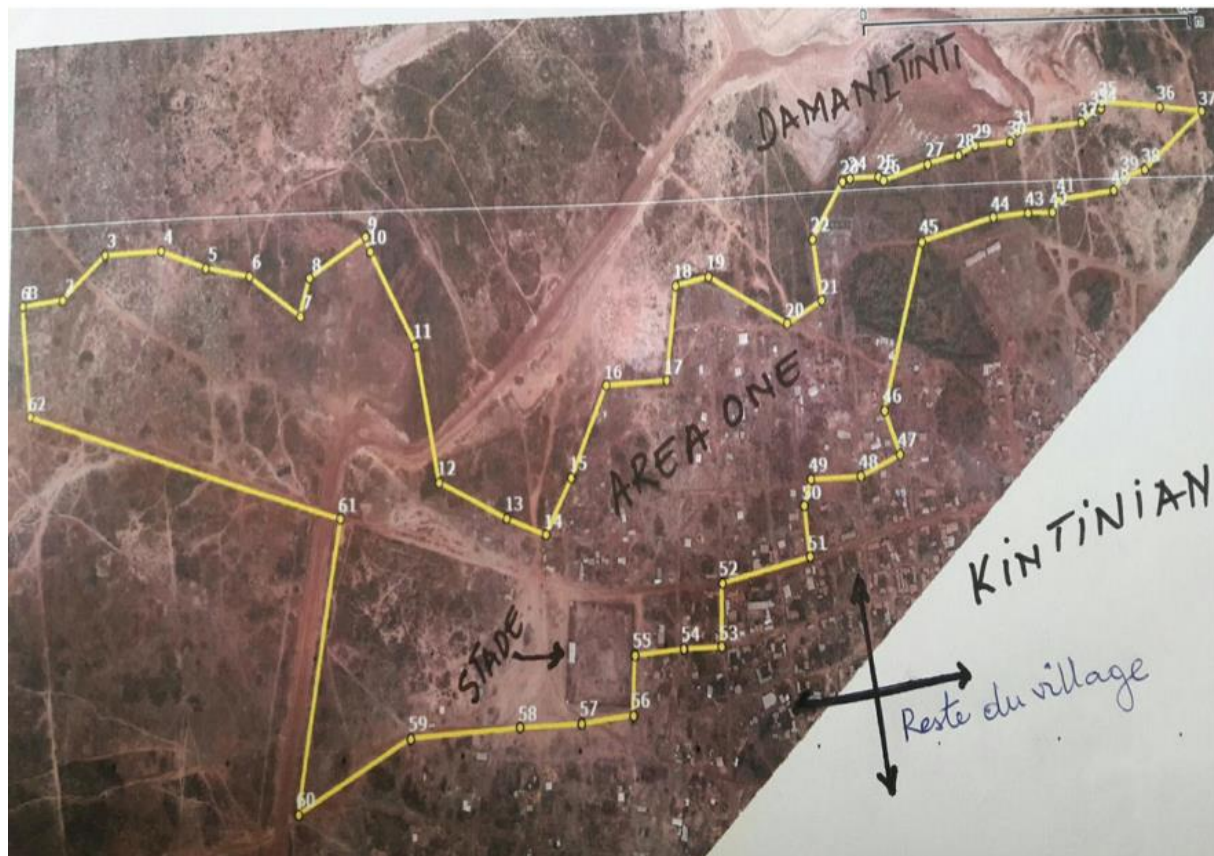
Figure 9-4 Mining titles for gold, North-Eastern region of Guinea



Moreover, discourses of partnership, though amplified by the company's PR machinery, constitute only an additional layer, and have not rendered coercion obsolete. When community engagement does not generate consent amongst the neighbouring population, such “participatory

approaches,” “consultations,” and “dialogues” are swiftly replaced by coercive measures backed by military force. The most recent example of this kind of use of force occurred between the end of October and the end of November 2015, when a new piece of land located in Kintinian was reclaimed by the S.A.G. to open a new pit in the so-called “Area One” (see Picture 9-4 below).

Picture 9-4 Figure 1 5: “Area One” as planned by S.A.G.



Source: Fodé Sanikayi Kouyaté 2015, *Un oeil sur la Guinée*

The operation required the relocation of part of the village and the eviction of all the artisanal mine workers who were working in the informal site named *damantini*.<sup>15</sup> Despite resistance from village authorities and protests by villagers and artisanal mine workers, it did not take more than a week for the company to carry out first round of evictions. The rhetoric changed, and rather working with the “community,” the company, now with the support of the Ministry of Mines and Geology, claimed that it was dealing again with “illegal gold diggers.”<sup>16</sup> Although the protests were mainly

<sup>15</sup> I base this short account on Fodé Sanikayi Kouyaté who relates the events with great details in his blog “Un oeil sur la Guinée. Elle change ou pas”. Sandaly, who was present in Siguiri at the time, relates the event in a similar manner. The events were perceived by many as an act of violence of the government that would not let the population benefit of the subsoil and favoured instead the S.A.G.

<sup>16</sup> Eviction occurred rather violently since the army used firearms, which caused the death of at least two persons (see i.e. RFI 6.12.15).

held at the village level and had the support of village authorities, the use of military force was justified by officials who claimed that it was necessary to evict the semi-mechanized operations in the area that allegedly involve Russian financiers and burkinabés workers. While this episode may have been the exception, it shows how the discourse of “illegal gold miners” is used to justify the use of state-sponsored military force to evict artisanal miners.<sup>17</sup> These events illustrate how the company uses its securitization strategy to act on registers of both, partnership and security. Besides, the company shares ambivalent relations with different local groups who have access to the benefits offered by CSR programmes – and subsequently have varying responses to the company – depending on in- or out-group community classifications.

Here, the discursive and practical categorization of the population into different groups (legal, tolerated, illegal) strongly echoes Mezzadra and Neilson’s argument about the role of borders in the “multiplication of labour” (2013). They state that the expansion of corporations goes hand-in-hand with the shifting of social and territorial boundaries: “the *illegal* status of workers produce another border that crisscrosses and multiplies the already existing diversity of the workforce” (2013: 2). Looking at gold mining sites from a supply chain perspective renders the functionality of labour multiplication more obvious: as discussed earlier, industrial mining operations systematically take over existing artisanal mining sites (see e.g., Luning 2014) and illegalize workers to make room for the company. As this chapter showed, the same labour force is de-illegalized and is permitted to work in abandoned pits once the company expands to a new portion of the territory.

## 9.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described three kinds of encounters between a gold mining company and the surrounding artisanal miners. I have thus shifted the focus of the discourse from the relation between corporations and local populations – understood as indigenous populations who can make claims on the land – to include artisanal labour, who are usually neglected in this picture. Each of these encounters highlights the different ways corporations control spaces through the discourse of securitization; to further its own profits, the company categorizes artisanal workers into legitimate and illegitimate groups in different regions of its lease and at different phases in its operations.

The lens of securitization thus helps make sense of S.A.G.’s twin strategies of enclavement and engagement, which in turn create contradictory streams of discourses and practices that subsequently structure its CSR politics. Just as migration is simultaneously framed as a humanitarian

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<sup>17</sup> In other cases when the territory allocated for large scale-mining does not involve villages and persons entitled to making claims on the land, such as in the mining site of Djikouroumba in Kankan, where there is no village but only a huge temporary mining camp, evictions are much quicker. In this case, the government directly sent the army in 2010, and have the artisanal miners one week to leave the place with the guarantee that the whole camp would be burnt afterwards.

and a security issue, which Agier (2003) qualifies as the “left and right hands of empire” – one hand that is caring, manifested through humanitarian discourses and practices, and the other that is expelling, manifested through the use of force and security – mining companies adopt a similar strategy at the scale of their industrial leases. On the one hand, they “care” through “partnerships,” while on the other, they expell with “force;” however, which groups who are cared for or expelled keeps changing with the expansion of S.A.G.’s operations. Thus, from a supply chain perspective, the invisibilization of miners by excluding their fatalities from statistics, their relocation to high risk and unregulated zones, and their systematic illegalisation and de-illegalisation suggest forms of “adverse incorporation” (Hickey and Du Toit 2007) concomitant to the industry’s needs along the typical phases of a mining project life-cycle; this points to a much higher porosity between the artisanal and industrial sectors than policy and industry discourses tend to affirm.

Finally, when engagement does not generate the expected consent, such “participatory approaches,” “consultations,” and “dialogues” are swiftly replaced by coercive measures backed by state-sponsored military force. The next chapter will bring the state back in the management of expulsion and show in detail how analyses of territorial and governmental issues in mining areas in Africa tend to be framed only in terms of “corporations” and “local populations.” Following the analysis of the S.A.G. practices of CSR as a device for the expulsion of artisanal miners, the chapter will question the assumption that the enclavement strategies of companies have led to the “hollowing out governments” (Clapham 1996, cited in Ferguson 2005: 379).

# Chapter 10: Governing with power lines: the externalization of expulsions

## 10.1 Introduction: “Governance is cheap, cheaper than defense”

“Governance is cheap, cheaper than defence,” claimed the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) chairman for Guinea in a recent tweet (9 December 2016) at the Open Government Partnership (OGP) summit; in the neoliberal perspective, this kind of view, which is typically a self-justifying argument for costs reduction, is always placed as a primary objective in achieving the highest profit (the same argument being developed in Andrew 2003; Franks, et al. 2014). This illustrates a fundamental paradox: mining corporations seek to establish extractive enclaves while attempting to engage with neighbouring populations so as to lower the overall costs of exploitation; it is cheaper to subsidize local populations than pay private security forces in the long run. As Paul Gilbert observed in his research on mining finance (2016), corporate social responsibility (CSR) is considered by its practitioners an ineffective public relations exercise but a powerful diplomatic tool. In a piece based on field research on mining finance, Gilbert quotes from the speech of a lawyer at a mining trade show: “Use your CSR programmes as a defensive weapon. Housing, healthcare, education, and increasingly environment. Buy-in from the local community is your first line of support against the less significant political clowns.”<sup>1</sup>

In this last chapter, I wish to focus on one such “social investment” programme conducted by the S.A.G – an electrification project that covered the neighbouring villages of the Bouré area. Using this example, I analyse how the company, with the support of the state, established a new status quo that, amongst other things, lead the local population to take charge of expelling segments of the miner population. I thus move from the security aspect of CSR, addressed in the last chapter, to how it functions under the label of “partnership” in the governance of people and spaces in mining areas. In order to set the stage for the issues surrounding electricity provision and CSR, I briefly return my first days of fieldwork in Guinea.

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<sup>1</sup> See [blog resourceworlds.org](http://blog.resourceworlds.org), « Generating extractive industry capitalism: Corporate foreign policy and the resource frontier »

## 10.2 Siguiri, the “modern” city

In the days following my arrival in Guinea, I spent most of my time in Sandaly’s jewellery workshop, answering questions about what I was planning to do; and for my part, I asked questions about gold and the mines, which inevitably led people to suggest that I visit Siguiri first. Though most of my interlocutors were Malinké from upper Guinea, many lived in Conakry and had not travelled as far as Siguiri, which is located at the northern extremity of the country. However, they reiterated that, contrary to Conakry, where electricity is accessible only for one or two hours a day, which renders all activities dependent on this sporadic supply, the town of Siguiri is a “modern”, “developed” city, “where everyone has access to the grid and where electricity runs all day.” Besides, for most people, Siguiri was not only a well-developed city, but it was also a place where jobs were thought to be abundant. Indeed, the fact that the S.A.G. had set up there was considered evidence of the northern region’s development. While the volume of foreign investments, in particular in mining projects, has dramatically increased in the last few years, the S.A.G., together with the Société Minière de Dinguiraye (S.M.D.), a subcontractor of Russian Nordgold, and the Canadian corporation SEMAFO (Société d’Exploitation Minière d’Afrique de l’Ouest”) in Kiniero, had been operating in upper Guinea even at the time. Their distance from Conakry probably explained why my interviewees believed that these operations would create positive returns for the lucky population of upper Guinea. Thus, in the view of my friends at the jewellery shop, Conakry, the capital of the country, somehow represented the failure of the state, unable to maintain its infrastructure or provide basic services, while Siguiri, the northern city of Bouré, was the lucky beneficiary of private investments and was the recipient of modern and “free” infrastructure.

Unsurprisingly, the idealized image I had been drawn in Conakry substantially changed as we approached the location of S.A.G.’s operations. In Siguiri, which is located 40 km away from the S.A.G.’s mines, the ambiguities in the relationship between the people and the mining company became clearer; this was particularly so at the home of Eddy. He had worked as a mechanic for a subcontractor of the S.A.G. for several years but had left the company four years ago because he was “too badly paid”; at that time, he had been planning to start on his own in the informal artisanal sector where he thought he would earn more. In spite of a certain bitterness towards his former employer, two work certificates were proudly displayed in the main room. He would take any opportunity to speak about the S.A.G. to let flow a slew of recriminations – low salaries, night shifts, and poor work conditions – and yet, there was also a certain pride in being among the few who had worked for the company. These conversations mainly occurred when the electricity would cut off. As I had been told in Conakry, there was an almost continuous supply of electricity in Siguiri, which was “offered” by the S.A.G. Power cuts were frequent, however, and would prompt diatribes on the unfulfilled promises of the S.A.G., especially concerning recurring issues such as the provision of jobs, the



maintenance of the road to the villages in Kintinian sub-prefecture (where the S.A.G. operates), and the insufficient capacity of the plant that was supplying power to the town. Such complaints, which were levied again the government in Conakry (i.e., supplying and maintaining infrastructure), were directed toward S.A.G. in Siguiri. On many issues, the CSR governance provided by the company there seemed to have progressively supplanted state governance. This led me to follow Ferguson's proposition in my analysis: "It is necessary to treat state and non-state governmentality within a common frame without making unwarranted assumptions about their spatial reach, vertical height, or relation to the local" (Ferguson 2006: 112).

Although most of the promises that the S.A.G. had made have not been fulfilled, Siguiri remained the only electrified city in Guinea for a long time. Siguirinkaw inhabitants have continuously complained about their unfulfilled demands, but they also often stress their special status and thus fuel "modernization narratives" (Ferguson 1999) by positioning themselves as participating in something "more modern" than the rest of the country. As Ferguson has put it, and it is particularly true in this case, "popular legitimacy in Africa requires a perception not simply of 'good government' (efficient and technically functional institutions) but 'a government that is good' (morally benevolent and protective of its people)" (Ferguson 2006: 85). Therefore, the corporation was never considered completely bad in the eyes of most of my interlocutors in Siguiri, since, in many aspects, it was considered better than the state. Indeed, as Rajak (2011) also points out, in many cases, CSR is effective at achieving particular goals and is often more efficient than state-run services – a comparison which is frequently used as a justification to bolster this model of private sector development.

While at first sight, the corporation and the state are two well separated entities, each providing different services to the population, the electrification project questions this dichotomy. In facts, the "corporate gift" of the S.A.G. blurries the boundaries between the parties involved, as the Guinean state directly subsidizes the costs of the project. By tracking this ambiguity and bringing the state back into the picture, I wish to question the assumption that CSR necessarily undermines state governance. I will look at how the "corporate gift" (Rajak 2011, Gardner 2012) of electrification is fabricated with the participation of the state and, by doing so, I also seek to examine the implications the gift has for its recipients and those excluded from it. The notion of the "gift", as used by Rajak (2011) and Gardner (2012), will help me re-establish the groups, actors, and roles at stake in the process. By considering CSR as a governmental technology, I will argue that the redistribution of power brought about by these new governmental policies leads to the externalization of expulsion – that is, the internalization of the opposition between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" miners by the population, and the subsequent expulsion of the latter by the former without the direct involvement of the state or the company.

### 10.3 CSR programmes and “community partnership”

Encounters between the artisanal and the industrial sector are usually construed as necessarily conflictive (Hilson 2011; Hilson, et al. 2007). Previously, mining companies employed a “fortress” approach (Hönke 2010) to secure their operations, while artisanal miners operated following their own institutions on their margins. As the previous chapter revealed, this approach has progressively been replaced by discourses of cooperation and partnership, such as that promoted by the International Council on Mining and Metal and the World Bank (CASM), to avoid the “costs of conflicts” (Franks, et al. 2014). Encounters between mining corporations and the inhabitants of the land, often framed as “indigenous people”, are seen as competing for the same resources (Hilson 2011). In this context of competition, conflict seems unavoidable between three apparently well-defined parties: the mining corporation, the local community, and artisanal miners, while the state remains strikingly absent from this picture; this absence makes sense if we follow Ferguson’s argument that corporations seek to precisely minimize the presence of the state while establishing extractive enclaves.

However, Ferguson’s definition of an extractive enclave is not fully satisfying in the present case. According to him, an enclave is the on-shore implementation of an off-shore production system, wherein “the strategic goal [of corporations] seems to make on shore production as off-shore like as possible. This effort involves the spatial enclaving of production sites with the use of foreign crews of skilled workers and private security forces” (Ferguson 2005: 203). The image associated with this “defensive positioning,” as the EITI puts it, is that of a privatized fortress that aims to avoid any interaction with the surrounding populations whether they are the local population, small-scale labourers, and even the local administration, state agents, and so on. This model of extraction, which also became known as “petro-violence” (Watts 2001, cited in Zalik 2004) in reference to the militarization of oil enclaves in Nigeria, has been criticized for not taking into account “the mobility of people and the intricate web of social relations and material transactions that transgress these boundaries” (Gilberthorpe and Rajak 2016: 6). Besides, to nuance Ferguson’s model point, the extractive sector has certainly changed in the last 15 years along with the emergence of discourses of partnership. Zalik pointed out in 2004 that oil extraction in Nigeria no longer only revolves around establishing defensible enclaves, instead, corporates systematically “engage” with the local population through partnerships so as to get social consent for their mining operations; however, she insists that this does not mean that they have renounced “pre-modern” practices of siege and violence in negotiating the social license to operate (Zalik 2004: 419).

The shift that Zalik (2004) identifies can be seen in the current CSR discourses of “partnership” and “engagement”, which is the strategy now promoted by EITI, World Bank, and the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) for being “cheaper than defence.” Dinah Rajak

(2011) precisely analysed the governmental role of CSR in her ethnography on the extractive corporation Anglo American – the parent of Anglogold, the majority stakeholder of S.A.G. – in which she argues that the (re)emergence of a moral economy of responsibility at the heart of the market economy goes hand-in-hand with the creation of new regimes in which power is accumulated and exercised through the practise of CSR.

As Rajak summarizes in the introduction to her monograph, debates around the rise of CSR regularly compare transnational corporations and the state in terms of which is more efficient in reducing poverty and providing development; one recurring argument is that corporations should stick to making profits and leave development to governments, thus raising questions of legitimacy. In her words the debate opposes the following questions, “Is CSR the long-awaited magic bullet to poverty, companies stepping into the breach, where the state has failed to deliver social improvement? Or rather, as critics suggest, the usurpation of state authority by transnational corporation?” Instead of answering these questions, I take them on board to question the belief of two separate strands of governance. I first suggest, that in the case of S.A.G., approaching the electrification project as a “corporate gift” allows us to redraw the role of the “giver” by bringing the state back into the process. Then, by looking at the “receivers”, I show how the CSR programmes of the S.A.G. have led to the internalization and substantialization of the categories of legitimate and illegitimate miners, allowing the company to divest itself of the task of expelling artisanal miners.

#### **10.4 The state sponsored “corporate gift” of electrification**

Though the power supply was never stable, the S.A.G. had quickly satisfied the demand for electrification in Siguiri by connecting the city to its own plant. The initial deal that had been struck between AGA and the prefectural authorities when the company had first set up there in 2004 only covered the prefecture centre where political power was concentrated; the electrification of the villages of Bouré, which were directly affected by the operations, came later as part of the second deal. The announcement that S.A.G. would acquire a new generator and provide electricity to the nine Bouréka villages closest to the mine came as late as 2010. The population of Bouré were discontent that only Siguiri benefited from the company’s CSR activities; their non-inclusion into the first electrification plan somehow strengthened their sense of ownership of the land. In their view, not only were they negatively impacted by the mining company (displacement, land seizure, dust, etc.), but they were also deprived of compensation. So, in 2011, in spite of having – at least temporarily – appeased the population of Bouré with promises of providing better access to electricity, the S.A.G. was still being heavily criticized by those in neighbouring villages.

The second deal, which was mediated through the CSR branch of the company, was portrayed as the rectifying of an error. However, though it was displayed as a gift from the S.A.G., it was the

outcome of a financial package in which the Guinean government was expected to pay back AGA for the construction of the line. Ironically, the Guinean government was indebted to AGA, which extracted 8 tonnes of gold per year from its subsoil and made substantial profits out of it. Unlike the first generator, the second was invoiced to the Government of Guinea to whom “a schedule of payment was submitted in order to ensure that the *debt* accrued within the context of the project is re-absorbed progressively” (AnglogoldAshanti 2013: 105). In other words, the S.A.G. had moved from a “gift” approach to a “service” one in its relationship with the government, enacting what has been called elsewhere an “ethic of detachment” (Cross 2011) or “disconnected development” (Gardner 2012); yet, in the eyes of the population, the company was still the “giver”, and its role included providing services that the state was incapable of furnishing. Since S.A.G. was laying the lines, though the generator was in fact paid for by the government, and since it was located within the infrastructures of the S.A.G., the extension of the power plant was perceived as its initiative and the provision of electricity was framed as the company’s “gift”. In terms of reciprocities between the state and the corporation, it is an absurd situation in which the Guinean government permits the extraction of gold from its own subsoil to honour its “private debts” towards the transnational corporation.

Although I do not have information on how the deal had been negotiated between the government and the S.A.G., its surprising outcome could be interpreted as follows, according to a local politician in Siguiri: the government, whose 15% share in the company made it a consistent revenue, benefited of peaceful relations between the population and the S.A.G. However, since electrification was a cornerstone of the state “biopolitical project” (Gupta 2015), the regional government preferred to not be accountable to its possible failures. So, while CSR and the state are often construed as competing for authority and sovereignty (see Rajak 2011), a close reading of the Bouré electrification project suggests that, in some cases, the state consciously remains in the shadow of the company. Rather than being a helpless victim whose sovereignty is being usurped, it seems to accommodate well with this position in some cases.

## **10.5 Power lines (re)activating lines of power**

In this section, I look at the implementation of electrification in some villages of Bouré, and at how the provision of new infrastructure enabled the company to redraw “community” boundaries, and how it challenged artisanal miners’ inclusion in the community, regardless of their itinerant, local, national, or non-national affiliation. Since the physical process of installing the poles and lines was undertaken on behalf of the S.A.G., the entire operation was perceived by most people to be another form of “corporate engagement.” Electrification was clearly attributed to the AGA. Indeed, many discussions were held across Fatoya, even at Drissa’s place, about which village would be the first to be “electrified by the S.A.G.,” and whether the S.A.G. was really going to electrify every

village? All these practical concerns regarding the upcoming changes were associated with the company; I never heard any mention of the E.D.G (Électricité de Guinée), the governmental agency in charge of invoicing electricity supply, nor of the local government, although they were bearing the costs of the operation.

The case of power supply has peculiarities distinct from other sorts of infrastructure. As Boyer mentioned in his note on “energopolitics,” “power over energy has been the companion and collaborator of modern power over life and population from the beginning” (Boyer 2011: 5). From such a stance, the provision of energy is linked to biopolitics, since it allows for production and for a society to reproduce under conditions dictated by those who provide energy. At the lowest level, it defines a population by electing those who can access power and those who cannot. While in the previous chapter we saw that the in- and out-community boundaries that had first been drawn between “traditional local *orpailleurs*” and “illegal miners from abroad” were blurred so as to broadcast the idea of one mining community, these boundaries became very clear again when the S.A.G. began determining who to connect to the power lines. As suggested earlier, the late addition of Bouréka villages to the project had reawakened their sense of ownership over the land and its subsoil resources. This sense of ownership was expressed in everyday discussions and was also reiterated by the administrative departments of local villages who constantly referred to the mythical past of Bouré’s gold, including its discovery and exploitation already at the time of the Malian empire (see e.g., Picture 10-1 below).

Picture 10-1 Welcome sign at the entrance of Kintinian (the main village of Bouré), which refers to the Malian Empire: "Kintinian welcomes you in middle age Bouré"; in front, a vehicle of the S.A.G. in charge of the electrification project; behind, electricity pole installed by the company



The power distribution was to be supervised by administrative and local government authorities, meaning that “natives” would administrate their village independently; this is not very surprising, until we consider the political history of the region. The ex-Bambara villages of Bouré were conquered by a Malinké elite at the end of the eighteenth century and have since then witnessed waves of temporary workers, many of whom were integrated into the initial Camara clans. Autochthonic notions of “native” have thus continuously been contested and readapted more rapidly here than in less gold-rich regions. Arnaldi di Balme (2013), for example, shows that, during the last century, clan segmentation was frequently used as a political strategy to get a greater share of the mining rent among the Camara families of Bouré. Such an instrumentalist view of autochthony could also be applied to the current situation. Indeed, the S.A.G. recognizes clan affiliation and, according to the inhabitants of Bouréka villages, has turned it into a systematic means of resource allocation, for instance, by recruiting staff along such channels. Consequently, the more the main lineage segments into more clans, the greater are its members’ chances to get access to not only jobs, but also to other resources such as control over certain infrastructures. Seydou, for instance, who counted among the Djallonka who had integrated into the Camara clans long ago, could say with certainty that the concession where he was living would be connected to the line. In fact, it was not really a question for him. In contrast, the son of my *tuteur* in Siguiri, a Soninké whose grandfather had moved to Siguiri and who had himself moved to Bouré, hoped that his home, which was located along the

main road where the lines would surely run, would get connected. He was certainly not counting on his ethnic affiliation or *jamu* (family name, which shows one's clan affiliation) to claim direct access to the power line. Though the lines did not cross the mining fields, the power lines literally represented the lines of power that traversed the population and structured the living sphere of the village.

Finally, I shall add one more element to the picture. Mossi workers from Burkina Faso had a quasi-monopoly on generators and supplied power for crushers and water pumps and also provided energy to some teams in the mining fields. The *tomboloma* had so far accepted this and were collecting weekly taxes from them, just like they would with any sort of machinery in the artisanal mining site, whether it was a "native" or "non-native" who possessed them. Most of these itinerant workers from Burkina Faso, just as those from other Guinean regions and neighbouring countries, lived in camps around the villages or paid to be hosted by local families<sup>2</sup>. To them, there was no question of getting access to electricity; at best, for those who lived in houses, their *tuteur* would, and by extension, they would too.

In the context of such intense immigration and a large floating population, where equilibriums based on cooperation practices usually predominate, many people found themselves in between traditional categories of local affiliation or suddenly realized they were in the wrong category. Boundaries that they thought had become blurred were bright again. For example, Bakari, who was married to a sister of Seydoujan and who had been accepted as a member of the *tombolomaw*, that is, as a full member of the community with regard to mining affairs, had his status as a member of the community questioned by the elders of the clan, when he asked for a line to his familial concession that was a little distant from the clan's main neighbourhood. Of course, he would be able to later extend the line, but that would be at his own expense. Examples of this kind abound and, by becoming part of everyday ethnicity talk, they make autochthonic lines of belonging more salient and become the source of enduring tensions. Most of these tensions, however, were subsumed by the consensus on belonging and affiliation, in which "newcomers" accepted a little less favourable treatment so as to be granted other resources.

## 10.6 Externalizing expulsion

More problematic were the effects of this surge in autochthonic claims on those who could not claim any such affiliation or cumulative sign of otherness. In particular, Mossi workers, whose language, nationality, and extractive techniques differ from the majority, were accused of overcharging for energy. With regard to this, I shall show that the intensification of artisanal mining

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<sup>2</sup> see Chapter 1 on the concept of *tutorat* in the gold mining contexts.

in Burkina Faso since the 1980s has been accompanied by an acceleration in the use of mechanized technologies (Werthmann 2012); like in Ghana, many Burkinabé have started exporting to gold mining sites across West Africa. In addition to providing electricity for semi-mechanized mining using the large generators they transported there from Mali, they also provided basic power supply services. Their business, which relied on their private gas supply, was challenged by locals who, in parallel, were developing another informal energy market through the S.A.G's lines. In other words, the distinction between the living sphere, dominated by ethnic and lineage-based affiliations, and the working sphere, characterized by cooperation and cosmopolite identities,<sup>3</sup> was being erased and both spaces were increasingly ruled by essentialist claims on autochthony. In 2012, the tension reached such a point that Kalou told me, a few months later when I joined him in Siguiri, that "All Mossi [who were associated to electricity provision before the S.A.G. installed the lines] were expelled."<sup>4</sup>

In this case, the corporate engagement of the S.A.G., through the provision of infrastructure and power, acted as an "anti-politics machine" to use Ferguson's expression (1990); it sought to provide a technical solution – power supply – to an eminently political problem without considering the underlying politics of it. In doing so, it built on preconceptions of who and what was "the community," what such a "community" needed, and how resources had to be allocated; in this process, its CSR procedures mimicked the guidelines laid for providing support to communities (for example the ICOMM Toolkit 2010). After the seizure of the land, including that of the subterranean gold resources that were managed as a common resource by local population before the company came (see Chapter 2, 4 and 6), compensation measures in the form of electricity provision would appear as a new form of common resource. Yet, by using essentialist conceptions of "native" vs. "stranger" to determine access, the CSR programme undermined long-standing institutions of access and activated new lines of power. The local government, though financially indebted to the S.A.G. for the electrification project, was itself acting as a subsidiary of the company; the company's "community development," in turn, was facilitating an increase in tensions between the neighbouring populations until a point where many foreigners had to leave, thus recasting the expulsion of segments of the population as an internal issue among the miners.

Similar issues relating to the distribution of CSR benefits have been raised in other extractive contexts (e.g. Jorgensen 2007; Luning 2012b), which in some cases have led to tragic consequences (Frynas 2005). However, in the eyes of many of my interlocutors in Bouré, electrification was an unquestionable improvement in their everyday lives. And retrospectively, similar tensions related to questions of access may have emerged if the state – rather than the company – had undertaken the

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 3 on cooperation, and Chapter 5 on identifications in living and working contexts.

<sup>4</sup> I was not present during these events and can therefore not comment more on their details, but others provided similar reports; most of them, like Eddy, expressed no concern about the eviction of Burkinabé who, after all, "are strangers."



same project. My aim in this chapter was not to assess the working of the project itself, but rather to investigate its effects. It can be seen that it helped extend the control of the company over the social life of the surrounding populations, made autochthonic boundaries more solid and, eventually, caused an externalization of the conflicts that used to occur between the miners (in general) and the company to a new arena of conflict *among* the miners themselves. There is a lack of voices from inside the S.A.G. to hypothesize whether these outcomes were anticipated, but I rather think they were not. Indeed, as Sharp argues, CSR practitioners – like artisanal miners – are certainly “able to work within two or more different, and even diametrically opposing, discourses at the same time” (Sharp 2006: 219); i.e., they can engage with “native” communities, expel illegitimate ones when framed as an external threat, or tolerate them when they are framed as practising a traditional activity; each of these activities are paired with a more or less security or partnership positioning of the company. What my analysis of the electrification project surely shows, and which might integrate into a rational strategy of the S.A.G., is the unequivocal power of the company in naming and categorizing groups by providing access to spaces and resources. The artificial categorization presented in the previous chapter, between “legitimate” local, traditional miners and “illegitimate” foreigners – categories that the company had been promoting through its own literature and “corporate research” (see Kirsch 2014: Chap. IV) – somehow became a self-fulfilling prophecy in the course of the electrification project; that is, it served as a basis for the subsequent implementation of programmes and distribution of infrastructures that progressively substantialized this line of divide; this finally resulted in the expulsion of Mossi-speaking artisanal miners by other miners, and served to let space for the company to operate.

## 10.7 Conclusion

This final chapter looked at another – more “partnership-inspired” – way of managing the expulsion of artisanal miners; that is, by activating and strengthening autochthonic identities within the local population, the company managed to transform typical institutions of cooperation among miners. CSR is used in a similar way as described by Welker (2014) – that is, by enrolling (segments of) the local population as the first line of defence. Although this peculiar case does not reflect a systematized way of using CSR in the gold sector to deal with the presence of artisanal gold miners, it does illustrate what occurs when dominant conceptions of “partnership as governance”, such as those presented in the beginning of this chapter, manifest on the ground. Physical expulsions from artisanal mining sites, which workers like Kalou experience as a core part of their way of earning their livelihood in the West African gold mines (see table p. 303), occur in local political settings that are transformed by CSR practices, which are themselves rooted in the recommendations circulating through World Bank partnership toolkits and in conferences such as the OGP summit.

I have depicted the need for caution in deploying certain theories regarding CSR in the mining sector – that engagement with communities would essentially serve to protect companies “from the shadow of anarchy” (Mayntz and Sharpf 1995 cited in Börzel and Hönke 2012; Ladwig and Rudolf 2011) in areas of “limited statehood.” These theories, which view CSR with a rather positive *a priori* lens, suggest that mining companies “fill a governance gap” (Börzel and Hönke 2012: 16). Indeed, as I have stated earlier, relations are often ambivalent, and the engagement of the company is not “all bad” from the perspective of my interlocutors, especially when they consider it in light of the lack of services provided by the state. However, such pro-CSR theories miss two central points that have been proposed in this chapter. First, instead of a “shadow of anarchy,” it is clear that artisanal gold extraction, though being legally informal, is highly regulated through complex institutions of cooperation that have allowed very different groups to mine in the subsoil in ways that blur the conventional boundaries that separate them in other contexts; this argument has been demonstrated through the different chapters of this dissertation. Second, it also calls into question the assumed “absence” of the state in these processes. As Johannes Knierzinger (2016) argues in a recent analysis of the implementation of the new Guinean mining code, in particular the replacement of local taxes by CSR measures, the Guinean government is not absent nor is it a “victim” of mining corporations, but rather opportunistically, it opts to “discharge” itself (Hibou 1999) of certain governmental activities, including particularly unpopular ones such as removing artisanal miners in search of livelihoods whose activity provide no state revenue, or providing crucial services like electricity, whose failure could backfire on the local government.

# Conclusions

This dissertation set out an analysis of the spatial and temporal itinerances of West African gold miners. By locating their journeys at the intersection of various kinds of expulsions, this study has shown that miners' expulsion-induced mobility aids in functionally articulating the two modes of production – artisanal and industrial – within the gold supply chain. Approaching the topic through the perspective of *kalayatigiw* – itinerant and independent artisanal miners who travel from mine to mine – allowed me to look at the productive effects of expulsions, i.e., the new subjectivities that emerged in terms of miners' work ethos and social organization, evolving and transforming social institutions, and new social spaces that developed across social and political boundaries. I sought to understand how people, whose social and material environments are so precarious, construct a certain social and economic stability for themselves across extremely uncertain terrains. To answer this question, I examined their relations with their peers in the industry, with kin and community, with the host communities they stayed with, and with the mining corporations that also occupy the same land.

I began my research by following gold vertically across various scales, starting from the micro level – locating gold particles in their underground environment – to the macro level of mining regulations and policies. I also moved horizontally across various spaces, mainly between informal mining sites, villages, gold trading sites, and various political spaces located in different national and regional territories. Located at the crossroads of these scales and spaces, this thesis was centred on the aspirations and the work of itinerant miners, and how they extract gold informally to make a living in the ever-changing geographies of the artisanal gold mines of West Africa, and how they use their mobility skills to ensure that they earn a stable livelihood in these settings. To synthesize the overall argument I developed, I propose to reconceive it the other way around: from the abstract structure of the global economy of gold and its circuits of production to the concrete aspirations and choices of miners in their journeys.

## **Extraction and expulsion-induced mobility**

Extraction – the system that I have described at the scale of the persons who individually engage in it by artisanally mining gold – illustrates at a micro scale what has been defined elsewhere at a macro scale as being the dominant economic logic of contemporary capitalism. According to Bauman, humans are like the potentially rich ore of mining deposits (Bauman 2006[2004]:43);

depending on their perceived worth, they are placed on one or the other side of various kinds of borders – i.e., Africa vs. Schengen, national borders within the African continent, or corporate enclaves within African countries. Their removal is then justified by claiming that they represent a threat – i.e., to cohesion in Europe, to food security in African countries, to corporate assets in mining enclaves. All kinds of borders – symbolic, social, and material – produce different and unequal mobilities; for example, there are “vagabonds” who travel in search of a livelihood, who “move because of the difficulty of settling down” (Bauman 1996: 29), and there are “tourists”, those who come from the consumer side of the boundary, and who own a home and “use it as a place to take off” and move around (Bauman 1996: 30). In line with this idea, I have located miners’ movements within a general system of expulsion that, according to Sassen (2016 [2014]), rationalizes the “renewed mechanisms of primitive accumulation” which characterize extraction. In the thesis, I have argued that miners face at least three forms of expulsion that structure their lives as gold miners.

First is their expulsion from the local agrarian fields of value in rural Mandenka society, since the paths to progress through traditional life stages have been jeopardized by continuing economic crises coupled with deagrarianization and decreasing options for migration. Events that are expected to aid in the formation of personhood are postponed, i.e., marriage (Hertrich 2007), as is access to positions of status that permit the accumulation and distribution of wealth. To make things more complicated, many of these positions have now been decoupled from farm labour (Bryceson 2010). From this perspective, many young men opt to mine gold as it is a means to avoid stagnation: it gives meaning to life by giving them access to a certain sense of “freedom”, sometimes money, or even merely the option of doing something rather than staying put. So beyond the neoclassical explanation of push and pull factors, I have shown that miners have a much wider range of motives to seek gold, wherein the value they seek to acquire in their journeys is certainly material, but oftentimes it is not only, and is rooted in the performance of the journey itself.

Mining journeys involve the display of all sorts of valorised masculine behaviours, including bravery, solidarity, spontaneity, and endurance, which can all be grouped as *fadenya*-oriented behaviours in the Mandenka dualistic conception of the social male person. At the same time, the regular income that their mobile lifestyle gives them allows them to meet their economic obligations towards the family; this points to *badenya*-oriented values, which form the other side of male personhood. The various fields of value that gold mining allows them to join, and the alternative forms of social organization it contraposes to the traditional Mandenka social structure,<sup>1</sup> are often

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction made between both terms is reiterated by Graeber, citing Raymond Firth (1964), “who really ended up developing the idea, suggesting it might be possible to conceive two analytical levels, the one of ‘social structure’, the fixed world of clans, lineages, age-sets, village moieties and the like that anthropologists had got so good at describing, and another of ‘social organisation’, where individuals pursue value in a more loose, pragmatic fashion” (Graeber 2005: 445).

viewed positively by miners. Despite the harsh work conditions and the unpredictable gains mining offers, miners emphasize the benefits they get from the mines in terms of lifestyle rather than earnings, which are far more elusive.

Second is their physical expulsion from living and working spaces in mining areas. Miners' journeys indicate that, contrary to the pervasive image of "gold rushes" where people are believed to move due to an irrational desire to make quick money, mining has emerged as a steady source of income for a significant number of people whose massive movements are more likely to be induced by expulsions rather than the discovery of new sites. In the last two chapters, I have focussed on the role of mining corporations and their use of securitization techniques in this process. Though corporations are more visible than other actors in processes of dispossession (e.g. Holden, et al. 2011), I have shown that they work with the state and "local communities" to practically implement these expulsions. Many *kalantigiw* explained that they had to relocate due to internal conflicts among villages communities, but a closer investigation reveals that such conflicts were originally rooted in different groups competing for access to real or imagined CSR benefits. The CSR practices were analysed as securitization devices that strategically allowed mining companies to illegalize artisanal miners and legitimize their expulsion.

In addition to the expulsion of people due to the territorial expansion of mining companies, formalization policies at the national and regional levels were another recurring reason for expulsions. These recurrent expulsions – and the threat that they could be expelled at any time – has resulted in a highly uncertain geography where different sorts of boundaries emerge or disappear, according to the enforcement or not of national and administrative borders, the implementation of enclavement practices and land seizures by mining companies, and the claiming or downplaying of autochthonic boundaries by local populations. Navigating this uncertain terrain produces subjectivities among miners who internalize their condition of "expulsability" and make it part of their work ethos and identities; through this process, they craft in and out group identities for themselves, which transcend conventional boundaries based on nationality, ethnicity, lineage, and age. Itinerant miners' livelihoods are hence characterized by the need to cope with the ephemerality of the places through which they travel, and the changing boundaries that define them.

So, as opposed of the myth of the gold rush which reproduces a sedentary perspective on gold mining, from the perspective of miners who pursue the activity as a source of long-term income, movements sustained by heterogenous informal social networks are more often a pragmatic response to frequent expulsions. On a theoretical level, unlike most circulatory networks, which are structured around relatively stable places such as commercial centres that are firmly rooted in time (e.g. Schmoll 2005; Tarrius 1992), these resilient informal networks precisely permit to cope with the ephemerality

of places like gold mining sites that can appear and vanish swiftly<sup>2</sup>. They produce social spaces across these various kinds of boundaries that provide them with the support and safety to circulate between ever-changing centres of extraction.

Third, there is their expulsion from formal circuits of production, which is paradoxically coupled with the incorporation of their produce into these very same formal circuits. Despite the existence of effective local institutions that regulate access to resources, artisanal gold mining is entirely informal from a legal standpoint. New mining codes and formalization policies have placed the activity in the realm of illegality: a process that can also be read through the lens of dispossession (Harvey 2003), wherein various property rights, such as a common pool of resources managed by local institutions, are not recognized and are turned into private property through licensing schemes. The same policies that illegalize artisanal mining simultaneously formalize the integration of artisanally mined gold into the supply chain.

On the one hand, such systems ensure that labour in these industries remains informal by ensuring that the conditions necessary to formalize are unattainable; while on the other, they incorporate the produce of the sector into their circuit elsewhere. Other examples abound; they include for instance e-waste pickers (e.g. Grant and Oteng-Ababio 2012), dump workers (Millar 2014), or matsutake gatherers. According to Tsing (2015), the image of coherent factory-driven chains built in cooperation with nation-states, such as those promoted in mining policies, fails to account for the fact that raw material is increasingly transiting through “unexpected assemblages” that involve no rationalization of wage labour or material transformation, but where, instead, extra value is created through the “translation” of the material across sites of difference, or what I called zones of qualification in Chapter 2. Tsing call this “salvage accumulation”:

This is what I call 'salvage', that is, taking advantage of value produced without capitalist control”, i.e. with control, instead, of associational structures like those of *kalayantigiw*. 'Salvage accumulation' is the process through which lead firms amass capital without controlling the conditions under which commodities are produced. Salvage is not an ornament on ordinary capitalist processes; it is how capitalism works (Tsing 2015: 63).

From this viewpoint, miners’ mobilities are productive in the sense that they articulate the two modes of production – informal artisanal and formal industrial – within the chain; artisanal miners operate on lands before companies seize them, on the edges of large-scale mines during operations, and finally in abandoned pits vacated by companies; their removable presence being thus integrated into mining projects’ life cycle. Their work, which makes up as much as 20% of the gold supply

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<sup>2</sup> This observation is comparable to other contemporary forms of mobile dwelling in other parts of the world which are also characterized by the expulsability of those engage in these activities, e.g., squatters, dump workers or e-waste pickers, wherein mobility is turned into a livelihood strategy first and foremost because of the informal nature of the work, and thereafter, the illegalization of work spaces.

chain, is comparable to what other studies that have identified as a the hidden rent on labour made through non-capitalist institutions (e.g. Elwert 1983; Meillassoux 1975) wherein value which was created through institutions of social cooperation out of direct capitalist control, like those organized by artisanal miners, is transferred to the formal supply chain.

In contrast to other “informal” domains, like those documented by Tsing (2009), where individuals operate relatively independently from the formal segments of the industry, artisanal gold production usually happens side-by-side with formal industrial production, wherein the latter produces the illegalization of the former. Verbrügge (2015), who proposed the idea of “functional informality” in mining, observed that in the Philippines, this informalization paradoxically even reaches a certain standardization to impose lower standards of employment and control of labour through forms of debt bondage. In contrast to his case wherein “informalization” serves to control the workforce, *kalayantigiw* are not “employed” by corporations. Their work is also far more flexible for they operate without infrastructure. From this viewpoint, their informality serves another function. Artisanal miners can operate with greater flexibility in spaces where there is gold left – at the edges of mining leases, in lands that have not yet been assessed as valuable enough for industrial mining, or on lands that have not yet been granted an exploitation permit. By working in these spaces, as Luning (2014) has pointed out, artisanal miners play the role of “pathfinders” – their presence indicates the existence of deposits, and yet, they can easily be chased away when the company sets up its operations. The observations in this thesis add that once itinerant miners are removed from a space, they also play a valuable role downstream by contributing to the recovery of the leftovers.

The three forms of expulsions that I have just addressed here – i.e., from agrarian fields of value, from living and working spaces, and from formal circuits of production – serve to explain the structural context that shapes itinerant miners’ mobile livelihoods as developed throughout the dissertation. This top-down reading, very much in line with Bauman (2004) and Sassen’s (2016) grand theories, suggests quite a deterministic understanding of the production of precarious lives and downplays the role of human agency, thus doing little justice to the ways miners put their aspirations into action. The next three sections return to the concrete ways itinerant miners deal with their precarious life conditions, in particular by adapting old and crafting new institutions of cooperation and distribution, by sustaining resilient support networks through continuous personal investment in fugitive relations, and by recasting the social values associated to age phases, labour and autonomy.

### **Adaptation and transformation of local institutions in a context of accelerated extraction**

In the enormous number of studies published on artisanal gold mining in the last decade, order vs. putative chaos serves as an entry point to depict the peculiar social organization of artisanal

mining in one or another areas (e.g. in Sénégal see Doucouré 2015; in DRC see Geenen 2015; in Benin see Grätz 2009; in Tanzania see Jönsson and Fold 2011; in Mali see Panella 2007; in Burkina Faso see Werthmann 2003b); this contrast helps to go beyond the “black box of informality” (Lindell 2010) and stress the effective regulation mechanisms that exist in artisanal mining, and I chose to make this the entry point in this thesis as well. By focussing on institutions of access and their evolution, this approach circumvents rigid formal vs. informal categories that are often naturalized in policy talk, thus downplaying their normative character.<sup>3</sup> Instead, I have focussed on practices of “real governance,” as de Sardan phrases it (2008), although they are often discredited and are not recognized because they are “informal” in the narrowest sense of the term, i.e., that they have no direct linkage with the state.

In line with theories of development by dispossession (Harvey 2003; Makki 2014), I see formalization policies and land titling as devices that affected, transformed, and possibly extinguished, pre-existing institutions that regulated access to resources. As I have shown in the dissertation, artisanal mining is increasingly rendered illegal when there is decreasingly valuable land for titling: the case of Mali and Guinea shows how miners are compelled to formalize when the government runs out of land to give as mining titles.<sup>4</sup> Besides, as in other domains where workers are pressurized to formalize (see e.g., Bryceson 1996), the transaction costs are socially and financially unsustainable for most miners. While the concept of formalization is usually seen in a dualist way, encompassing legal and normative perspectives wherein the “extra-legal” should enter the “legal” (Siegel and Veiga 2009), the Foucauldian notion of illegalisms points to the production and plurality of ways to be placed out of the law; this was an effective tool to account for the concrete effects of formalization policies on artisanal miners’ livelihoods, where formalization equalled illegalization most of the time. This study has also showed that whilst illegalisms are usually associated with the state which produces and applies the law (Fischer and Spire 2009), corporations are now implementing similar practices in context-specific and opportunistic ways through CSR governance.

The lens of institutions was hence useful to account for institutional change (Haller 2002a) in three ways: first, by taking into consideration what regulations existed before the growth of the

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<sup>3</sup> Siegel and Veiga (2009), for instance, have pointed out that the formalization of the sector would help “capitalize” miners’ activities so that it would “permit them to move from transient artisanal mining, to more sustainable small- and medium-scale mining” (Siegel and Veiga 2009: 51). Such a statement, which illustrates the dominant policy discourse today may seem ironic, if not cynical, in the many areas of the world, like in Guinea and Mali, where gold has been mined artisanally and managed as a common-pool resource for decades and sometimes centuries. This usually involves legal titles, financial loans, and support to create cooperatives<sup>3</sup> or other legal entities. The World Bank recommendations on the topic are clear: “With legal land tenure, miners are more likely to access credit for operational improvements, and access support from government agencies” (Hinton 2006), which are presented as a win-win for both miners and the state.

<sup>4</sup> Hilson made a similar case for Ghana, where, he says “artisanal mining comes to attention only once and after large-scale mining has been established” (Hilson 2013:57).



mining sector accelerated; second, to tease out the competing interests at stake that shape access to resources and access to new resources; and, third, to depict the new rules and norms crafted by itinerant miners in contexts of expulsion.

Agrarian-based institutions have proved to be quite adaptable to “endogenous changes” (Ensminger 1992: 10) in mining, such as local changes in power imbalances – i.e., between genders or between generations (*fasiya* or *diatiguia*) – and the increased incorporation of monetization into social relations. They have consequently maintained their power to distribute access to resources. However, they have resulted to be much more fragile in terms of the “exogenous change” (see Ensminger 1992:10) induced in particular by the CSR practices of mining companies, including partnership programmes or security measures. For instance, the thesis describes a case wherein local institutions of access to resources and their distribution were invalidated by a CSR programme that turned land into a situation of “open access” (Haller 2002a), or another one which exacerbated the native–strangers divide, resulting in the expulsion of the latter by the former, mirroring forms of community violence observed elsewhere (Frynas 2005; Welker 2009). Though other studies have noted the disruption of local institutions through the use of CSR policies (Banerjee 2008; Frynas 2005; Luning 2012a) that act as an “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 1990), these studies tend to focus on the company and neglect the role of the state that takes part, though indirectly, in such processes. Here, in both cases, the state, which clearly intends to accelerate the growth of the mining sector, remains present but somehow “hidden” behind the company; in one case it provides military support and jail infrastructures to the company, which acts as the “front”, and, in another case, it helps subsidize the CSR programme, which suggests a form of “indirect discharge” as Hönke calls it<sup>5</sup>.

### **Resilient networks in the transboundary spaces of artisanal gold mining**

The journeys of *kalayantigiw* show that itinerant miners’ movements are restricted by various kinds of boundaries – e.g., autochthonic, corporate, and administrative ones (including national borders) – and that their movements are far from random. This study attempted to account for the variety and changing structure of boundaries – of villages, mining sites, corporations, and nations states – by adopting the perspective of the itinerant miners who traverse them.

By investigating the role of these boundaries in the production system of gold, this study was able to arrive at alternative interpretations of miners’ movements, objectives, strategies, and options. I have used a transnational lens for the theoretical and methodological framing of the study to first, move beyond nationalist and sedentarist assumptions (Dahinden 2017), and second, to shed light on

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<sup>5</sup> Although I did not make it a central point of analysis, it should not be forgotten that states, by passing mining decrees and distributing licenses, are well positioned to profit from the “boom of extraction”(Knierzinger 2016).

the social institutions that enabled artisanal miners to circulate in between mining sites. While the transnational approach offers a methodological and theoretical route that circumvents normative conceptions about movement and nations, which are usually found in migration studies (Amelina and Faist 2012; Dahinden 2017; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), it paradoxically reproduces the national discourse of migration, where national borders are privileged over any other sorts of boundaries (see Dahinden 2016). As Mezzadra and Neilson have pointed out, after the initial enthusiasm of the 1990s for the study of transnational phenomena, little attention has been paid to other boundaries, that is, to the power dynamics and struggles that are not caused by, between, or within the national borders of the international system of states. I thus adopted their view according to which, “in changing border and migration regimes, national borders are no longer the only or necessary the most relevant ones for dividing and restricting labour” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 2).

I was, however, inspired by the idea of a transnational social space (see e.g., Bauböck and Faist 2010: 15), which I consequently repurposed as “transboundary social space” to account for the variety of borders traversed by miners. Indeed, artisanal miners typically operate in a space marked by “normative pluralism” (Chauveau, et al. 2001), wherein it is difficult to establish hierarchies between local, corporate, and state normative registers, and the strength of these plural forms of governance, since, in the perspective of the artisanal miners, it is quite context-specific.

Beyond its inherent descriptive strength, the concept of “social space” allowed me to take into account dimensions that are neglected in neoclassical approaches: the first being “the ability of movers to creatively pattern their personal and collective experience” (Faist 1998: 216). Indeed, the movements of *kalayantigiw* are not just driven by external forces, but they actively design their own routes, network, and exchange with other workers and the other people they meet on their way. Secondly, the “space” in which they actively engage is defined, using Faist’s terms (1998: 217), not “only by its physical features but also by the larger opportunity structures, the social life and the subjective images, values and meanings” that it represents, which, as I have demonstrated, shape the moral values and social norms enacted in institutions such as the ethics of luck in work agreements or miners’ ethos of transience through which they enable cooperation in precarious and fast-changing settings. Their movements are affected by the appearance, disappearance, enforcement, or lack thereof, of different kinds of boundaries, of which national boundaries, including their broad regulatory frameworks, are not necessarily the most salient in their view. Rather than focussing on what is “inside” local or national entities – for example, the possible resources these entities contain in terms of identifications, norms, values, etc. – to the itinerant miners, it is rather the outside, that is the exclusionary feature of their boundaries, which matter to them the most and which lead them to

build cooperative ties across them, i.e., to borrow Sassen's terms "to create spaces of making" in situations of expulsion (2016: 296).

As I stated previously in this thesis, miners experience the places they circulate through as highly elusive, and consequently, their temporary locations within one or another nation-state, or the specific ways of doing things in one or another place, are of secondary importance to them. Locality, in the sense of social, economic and political rootedness (Dahinden 2010), does not appear to play a role in influencing these transnational circulations, as I have described throughout the thesis. This differs from other studies on migratory circulations in Europe (e.g. Morokvasic-Muller 1999), in Africa (e.g. Choplin and Lombard 2010; Walther and Retailié 2008) or in between both (e.g. Schmoll 2005; Tarrius 2002) in this regard; those studies document migratory circulations that are clearly established around core localities, usually commercial centres which have a long history and where social networks become sources of social support precisely because of their territorial anchorage. The gold mines, whose existence – like other precarious spaces (see e.g., Millar 2014 on dumps in Rio, Grant and Oteng-Arabio 2012 on e-waste pickers in Ghana, Tsing 2015 on mushroom gatherers in the US, Agier 2013 on informal urban settlements in Europe) – tend to be relatively short termed, demonstrate that the social networks of people on the move do not always rely firstly on intermediaries with strong local anchorage, so-called informal "notaries" (Tarrius 1992), who provide support to movers. When a locality loses its importance in a mobility system, as it does among the fully mobile whom I have documented, their social networks recompose into smaller configurations of close ties, whose pattern, contrary to those organized around so-called "notaries" or other intermediaries, have nearly no bridging potential but are highly supportive. I contend that it is this capacity to quick recompose without relying on regular intermediaries in fixed places but rather on ambiguous relations on the sort-term –in particular with women who play a decisive role in supporting miners' itinerancies – that is the source of networks' resilience.

The resilience of networks, as I have shown, comes from the supportive resources embedded in miners' institutions and moral economies. While the notion of moral economy has often been used to indicate a situation of resistance (for a discussion see Fassin 2009), a "weapon of the weak" in Scott's words (2008), in the case of itinerant miners, it helps them adapt to ever-changing conditions. In line with Hall and Lamont's understanding of social resilience (2013), I argue that it is rather the need to respond quickly to the rapid economic, social, and physical transformation of their environment that lead miners to build alternative social spaces which can change quickly within a short timeframe. There is no explicit resistance in miners' discourses, practices and stories; rather, they engage in successive opportunistic moves which need relational investment to be efficient. Their experiences stress the ambivalence of their position, as they simultaneously try to maintain continuities with the *fabara* through *badenya* expected behaviours while also constructing alternative

ways of life that, despite difficult conditions, they highly value. Paraphrasing Levitt and Schiller (2004), the “ways of being” that they are compelled to adopt – because of expulsions – open spaces for new “ways of belonging,” especially in terms of the values and meanings they convey.

These are enacted amongst others in new institutions, i.e., *furukuruni* or women’s *tutorat* that have also emerged among the miners as a means to sustain their mobile lifestyle over time. Friendships and partnership ties, both of which imply a high degree of intimacy, are central sources of support within these networks. They differ from similar relationships in non-mining contexts because of their admitted transience, which is a defining feature of mining institutions. These institutions help provide stability in precarious contexts – by performing the roles of friends or partners – though these relationships can be dissolved unpredictably. A longitudinal analysis of miners’ support networks – a topic that is underresearched in terms of qualitative and mixed method social network analysis (for an overview see Ryan and D’Angelo 2017; Snijders 2013; for a convincing analysis of social networks’ dynamics in contexts of mobility, see Schapendonk 2014) – has been extremely enlightening with regard to this issue. By tracking the evolution of miners’ support networks over time, I demonstrate that those who had professionalized their activity clearly treated the home and mining social fields as separate, which points to complex strategies to navigate potentially antagonist normative environments. Secondly, the most important ties in terms of support, which can be classified as “strong ties” in Granovetter’s words, were classified by miners as being “distant” ones, despite the high degree of intimacy they involved. In addition to questioning assumptions regarding the roles of so-called “strong” and “weak ties,” this finding also highlights the ambiguity that comes with social relations in spaces from which one can be expelled at any time. Networks here tend to be composed of relations characterized by close proximity and high intimacy, but linked into relatively bounded configurations that are categorized as distant so as to anticipate their unpredictable disruption.

The institutions on which miners’ social spaces rely, despite the looseness of their social networks, perform functions of support and protection during their journeys, and exhibit what can be seen as a cosmopolitanism from below (Boesen and Marfaing 2007; Werbner 1999). It is the shared “condition of uncertainty” (Beck and Sznaider 2006) rather than local, national, or ethnic affiliations, which is invoked and performed by miners in the camps and when they build teams. In particular, every day forms of cooperation are based the ethics of luck, which promote an egalitarian social organization that is highly valued. The ethos that is promoted is that “anyone can get lucky, whatever the status or the origin.” Such a statement, though subsumed in practice by situational power inequalities, nevertheless indicates a radical breakthrough compared to dominant models of social organization and distribution of power, such as the gerontocratic *fasiya*.

The “newness” of such arrangements which contrast highly hierarchized agrarian norms in their relative horizontality and openness must be taken with caution. As I was told once by an elder man, “they [the miners] are doing transhumance. They move from one place to the other to find their needs.” In fact, it is not new to move to cope with various risks; indeed, cattle herders and nomads have done this for long in the region, or keep doing so in some cases. Also, the social organization of nomad groups – including gatherers – has often been characterized less vertical than that of agricultural societies<sup>6</sup>. As I have demonstrated by comparing the hierarchies among miners with those of the *donsolow*, the Mandinka hunter society, they share similar traits in terms of performing ideals of egalitarianism, which, in the perspective of itinerant miners, are experienced and discursively framed as a form of liberation from “traditional” social structures. This leads me to the last point that I wish to make, which concerns the ambiguous conceptualization of “freedom” among itinerant artisanal miners and the performance of agency in contexts of expulsion.

### **Age and Agency in precarious conditions**

“I love mining (...) I am like free like the wind in the desert”, Issa told me once in Karakhéna. This metaphor is especially striking in the Sahelian context, where strong winds sometimes traverse the Sahara and end up in the Swiss mountains where they leave red traces upon the snow – Switzerland, through which lots of gold transits before being locked up in vaults, but through indirect and tortuous paths. Issa embodies one of the main enigmas that I explored through the thesis: what meaning has the use of a vocabulary of “love” to qualify work in an exhausting, dangerous, and uncertain sector such as artisanal gold mining? This query raises further questions about the ambiguous value of “freedom” in contexts of important precariousness.

In an article on “unfree labour,” Calvão calls to reformulate the question not in terms of exclusion or marginality, but in terms of the “ethical problem of practicing freedom” (Calvão 2016: 461). This is not to say, as Hall and Lamont argue in their comparative analysis of “social resilience

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<sup>6</sup> With regard to the hypothesis that egalitarianism is a common trait of so-called hunter gatherers groups, Bernard Arcand reviews the main works of Woodburn, Ingold and Testart. The author’s main argument follows and summarises the one of Testart (1982), which is that the category of “hunter gatherers” itself is to be questioned. A careful comparison of groups labelled as hunter gatherers shown that the main criteria mentioned in the foundational book *Man, the Hunter* (Lee and DeVore 1968) and replicated afterwards – high mobility (nomadism), absence of storage, forms of distribution, and forms of gathering – all greatly varied in degrees (not all groups are mobile, some do storage, gathering is sometimes coupled with horticulture, etc.) in such a way that, in the end, the typology is invalid unless all such groups are described as being “characterized by the relative egalitarian form of their social organisation” (Arcand 1988, 13). “Egalitarian” certainly doesn’t mean absence of power, but the adjective suggests the existence of mechanisms of cooperation and distribution that prevent the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a minority. Hence, this analogy can be applied to gold miners, whose cooperation and sharing agreements bear similar traits (see Chapter 3). Ingold (1988 cited in Arcand 1988) also critiqued the established typology of 1964 because, in his view, no society can be reduced to a “mode of subsistence”; a “society” (a group) always characterizes itself at the junction of subsistence and the social relations within relations of production: in the case of gatherers, it is thus not so much the action of gathering itself that is determinant of their culture, but the social relations based sharing and companionship.

in the neoliberal era” (2013), that miners believe that “freedom” means being a self-sustained individual. As we have seen, building new links and interdependencies remains central to itinerant miners, and it is also a great source of value; in line with historical Mandenka ideology, power over people was always considered more important than power over things, resources, or territory (as far as land tenure was not privatized which, as we have seen is changing fast). Yet, as Kalou would insist, he could endure the life in the camps precisely because he considered that he was “on his own deciding of his actions” – the idea of autonomy is very important for miners who understand it in terms of making choices rather than in terms of “independence” – as produced by neoliberal subjectivities of self-sustainability. Indeed, institutions such as the ethics of luck which regulate work agreements, as I have shown, first and foremost favour connections and cooperation while emphasizing a sense of ownership where product is obtained individually.

This celebration of autonomy, often stereotyped in contrast to the alleged constraints of village life, is illustrative of three things. First, contrary to the idea that expulsions only have negative effects, many miners regard these spaces positively; they see them as spaces where they can actively create new relations and live in a normative environment that is less constraining, in terms of choices and actions, compared to their home place. Second, though it is highly exploitative, mining provides many miners the feeling that they fully possess their means of subsistence – again in contrast to production structures in villages where seniority is the rule – and gives them the option to spend their gains in ways that would have been condemned otherwise. And thirdly, these discourses are clearly connected to age and anxieties of stagnation at youth and of stabilization once older. Altogether, these three aspects are concretely enacted in miners’ everyday lives – i.e. actively networking and cooperating, earning cash and spending it fast, constructing socio-spatial arrangements to reconcile the space of the mines and the one of the *fabara*.

In other words, far from discourses that frame artisanal mining in terms of so-called “modern day slavery” (see e.g. Calvao 2016), West African itinerant gold miners value their autonomy. In the cultural context of rural Mandé, there is a strong negative connotation associated with providing labour to others, which is theoretically supposed to change with time while moving throughout age groups<sup>7</sup>. With the pervasive importance of seniority rules, subaltern groups’ status as “slaves”, youth, and apprentices fall into the same category of the productive order (Viti 2009). Not attaining more autonomy as one grows older, that is remaining stuck in the status of labour provider, i.e., the same status as youths or general apprentices, is associated with the same lack of status of those, like slaves, who don’t enter into the right category in the age group division of labour. In this context, gaining autonomy effectively, or at least displaying it (e.g. Fioratta 2015), is especially important at certain

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, masters–slaves relations were formally codified in a structure where those who did not belong to powerful families and were incorporated as cadets into labour structures and remained in this position disregard of getting older (Bertho 2016; Cissé 1964).

moments of life. So, despite their exploitative work conditions, the mines offer spaces for action and agency to be deployed and displayed.

Contrary to conditions of precarity in post-Fordist societies (see Allison 2012; Neilson and Rossiter 2008), where personal detachment induced by local manifestations of the neoliberal regime turns into new forms of “unfree labour” (Calvao 2016), West African miners are not moving from a situation of employment and relative security to a one of detachment and exploitation. However, as Millar (2014, 34) argues, the notion is pertinent and offers a transversal comparison for “in many countries of the global South, in contrast, precarious work has arguably always been a part of the experience of laboring poor.” Indeed, the ambiguous relation between freedom and uncertainty that miners navigate in their journeys can be compared with other situations across the globe (e.g. Millar 2014; Grant Oteng-Arabio 2012; Tsing 2015) that share this ephemerality, where workers can be removed at any time from their spaces of work and where mobility produces a certain stability. Interestingly, in these three examples – the dump, e-recycling, and mushroom picking – all three being forms of modern foraging, involve environments of indeterminacy and risk; and yet, workers emphasize the sense of “freedom” they gain from these environments. While Tsing’s matsukate gatherers describe it in terms of value, referring to the “greater value in the social relationships and reputations of which they are part” (Tsing 2015: 122), the dump workers documented by Millar (2014) insist on the functional advantages of informality, which they claim are less constraining than formal circuits that impose structures that render such work irreconcilable with the inherent instability of life and its varied moral obligations. Similarly, though their mobile lifestyles are marked by a high degree of risk and indeterminacy, paradoxically, many a man in West Africa prefer it for it allows them to reconcile contradictory moral imperatives – *fadenya* and *badenya* obligations – and to build a certain sense of stability that age-based structures do not provide anymore; they (re)gain a sense of agency in settings characterized by their “spatiotemporal inequality,” to paraphrase Bear (2016), which the continuous possibility of expulsion incarnates.

## Epilogue

As this thesis has demonstrated throughout its various chapters, one of the main transformations that the expansion of gold extraction has brought in rural West Africa is the acceleration of the temporal order and a blurring of individuals' future paths through life. Acceleration of change is intimately linked to the expansion of capital and technological change (Rosa 2012). Extraction in particular illustrates this exponential growth and acceleration (Eryksen 2016), meaning that the socio-technical system and the afferent social structures I have described are not just unstable but have already consistently changed between when I started this research and now, when I am finishing it. This epilogue is hence a good occasion to briefly pause and reflect in two directions. First, what are the main limits of the thesis, especially considering that it was intended to capture processes assembled across various scales at a particular moment and that it was done from a particular – mobile – perspective? Secondly, what are the paths for future research, especially considering the current changes that are affecting – or have the potential to affect – the lives of itinerant miners most profoundly?

There are certainly uncountable limits to my account of miners' expulsion-induced mobilities. However, I will centre on two which I consider the most obvious, as they result from theoretical and methodological choices that – although they were constantly adapted – have oriented the research in certain directions and consequently led me to ignore other aspects. The first limit is related to issues of scale, in particular the ambition to research and address various social fields and their interconnections from micro, meso and macro perspectives and to locate these fields at the local, regional or global levels. The second limit, which is partly a consequence of the first, is a possible “mobility” bias in my descriptions and analysis of artisanal mining spaces.

In her seminal article on “scale-making”, Anna Tsing (2000) warns against the pitfalls of “globalism” and the vocabulary of “circulation”. She argues that the focus on flows and circulation neglects the often hidden relations of production on various tracks and grounds, implicating various scales and units of agency which render flows possible (2000:337). Therefore, she advises looking at specific processes, or “coherent projects” (347) – in my case, for instance, this is the SAG industrial mining project, the trade chain and the exploitation of an artisanal mining site – and analysing how they are emplaced and how they interact with one another. In other words, in order to deal with processes traversing various scales, her advice to account both for the strength of macro structures and for the various agencies at play in framing and supporting flows (of people, things and knowledge) is to conduct serious multilocal fieldwork that renders visible the frictions between



these fields and scales. This means not only “following the thing, the people or the rumour” (Marcus 1995) by multiplying fieldwork and tracking the interconnections between the places where processes are located but also conducting consistent field research in each of these social sites: outstanding ethnographies like *Friction* (2005) or *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015) are beautiful examples of this theoretical position. At my modest level, this ideal was neither realistic nor achievable. Instead of conducting several instances of fieldwork at several places, as a research team might be able to do, I instead opted for the Marcusian “tracking” principle of conducting fieldwork at multiple sites to shed various lights and perspectives on the same process. This necessarily implied that some segments were privileged over others; for instance, my information on the end of the supply chain is quite anecdotal and merely serves to contextualize the study in a wider context. By contrast, I compiled precise information on technical processes of extracting gold, on institutions that provide access to resources and on miners’ social networks, for example. Despite the precision of such information and the longer time it requires to be collected, it also runs the risk of becoming anecdotal, depending on whether the analysis relates it with larger processes. In other words, there are two ideal-typical positions from which to study processes that span scales: either to study their manifestations from one locational perspective with in-depth fieldwork at one site, such as Piot’s monography of “village modernity” in Togo (“Remotely Global”), or to multiply perspectives yet assume to lose thickness on some aspects of the scales at play, e.g. peoples, places, agencies and trajectories. In my case, I necessarily lost some thickness in the description of some specific “sites” (e.g. some artisanal mining sites and trade sites) that I simply traversed without conducting in-depth research; each of them would have revealed proper historical, social, political and environmental trajectories. Thus, my decision to follow my informants as much as possible beyond the single mining site necessarily made me lose sight of some of the uniqueness of particular sites and thus fail to systematically investigate processes’ “emplacement”, as advocated by Tsing. However, this approach provided me with valuable and unique insights into the social spaces produced by itinerant miners, with their journeys being my main “field site”.

The second limit I wish to address is a direct consequence of the one I have just evoked. By choosing to track the miners’ trajectories in time and space, I may have introduced a mobility bias in my analysis. My aim was to go beyond “sedentary metaphysics”, to borrow Mallki’s expression (1992), and account for the fact that ephemeral mining sites only existed through the meshing of the various mobilities of the actors who traverse them. I also aimed to locate mobility as a defining feature of everyday life, especially among itinerant gold miners who use it as a resource to create stability in precarious and changing life settings. In doing so, I clearly privileged their perspective over those of less mobile workers like seasonal farmer-miners, of local residents who also gain from the gold mines complementary to other activities, of villages and mining sites’ authorities and of other less mobile actors. The itinerant miners – whose identities are constantly constructed in relation

to “the village” and to “farmers”, construed in their view as “non-travellers” – tended to stereotypically present village life as a bounded, sedentary place of conventional pathways to reversely stress what I have grouped as “*fadenya* aspirations”. As I myself was often on the move and primarily embedded within groups of movers, I have given more weight to their own representations and may have sometimes not systematically replaced their constructed nature in relation to village-based narratives. The same goes to social organization in the village sphere, which is comparatively overlooked compared to institutions regulating itinerant mining labour<sup>1</sup>. However, I fully assumed this position given that vast literatures on both village life and mining sites already exist, whereas the in-between spaces of miners’ mobility had, in contrast, not yet been explored. Moreover, definitions of mobility go hand in hand with definitions of locality, as the literature demonstrates (de Bruijn et al. 2001, Kluter and Hale 2007, Bilger and Kraler 2005, Bjarnesen 2007, 2013). In rural West Africa in particular, although it might seem stereotypical, many other ethnographic accounts have observed the symbolic opposition between the bush – construed as a space for mobility and relative freedom – and the village – representing sedentary, normative constraints and continuity in (e.g. Jackson 2002, 2012; Hoffman 2011, Vigh 2006, Bredeloup 2007, 2008, 2014, Kedzierska-Manzon 2010) and revealed continuities in how miners interpret mining environments in opposition to village life. However, to avoid simply reproducing these categories, I have considered the different temporalities that they convey from miners’ perspectives (ideals of permanence in the village sphere vs. fast change and elusiveness in the mine). In doing so, although I was enmeshed in the position of the movers, I have sought to account for the construction of the two social spaces of the village and the mine in a relational way, i.e. not through stillness vs change or sedentariness vs mobility but by illustrating the efforts of itinerant miners to construct a positive representation of themselves in relation to how they conversely depict others (those in the village) in a context of temporal change.

As I suggested, fast change suggests various paths for future research. I will briefly mention three research avenues that implicate various segments of the gold supply chain. First, as in neighbouring Burkina Faso (see e.g. Lanzano and Di Balme, forthcoming, Côte and Korf, forthcoming), the increasing capitalization and mechanization of artisanal mining operations in Guinea and Mali put existing “formal” and “informal” norms into question and complexifies the already existing regulative pluralism. From the perspective of the official national laws, these operations neither qualify as industrial nor as artisanal, which allows them greater room to manoeuvre by putting into question the established divide between the formal-industrial and

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Dessertine’s PhD thesis « Présences imminentes. Mobilités et production des espaces dans un village malinké de Guinée » (2016) offers a complementary view and an in-depth analysis on a very similar set of questions – including mobility in the context of artisanal gold mining – yet approaching them from the perspective of the village.

informal-artisanal sectors. Most such operations have emerged locally and rely on emerging capitalist relations, in what was so far an “indigenous frontier”, to paraphrase Li (2014), and which directly undermines institutions of cooperation and distribution like the ones described in this thesis. As a consequence of these labour regulations emerging from below, access to subsoil resources is being transformed and privatized locally, and the workforce is consequently becoming increasingly immobilized. These changes also suggest deep transformation in the values and moral economies of the artisanal mines by associational labour based on reciprocal obligations turning into monetized forms of indebtedness through various forms of wage labour. The lens of institutional change (see Haller 2010, 2012) could offer a fruitful entry point with which to analyse the capitalization of previously commonly managed subsoil resources.

Moving from the ground level to the other extremity of the chain, the last five years have witnessed a rise in initiatives of “corporate ethicizing” (Dolan and Rajak 2011) aimed at the gold supply chain as a whole through fair-trade schemes and transparency initiatives (e.g. the Better Gold Initiative, Fairtrade gold, Fairmined gold, Chain of Custody, Certified Trading Chains; for an overview see Hilso, Hilson and McQuillen 2016). These initiatives are not rooted in corporations’ own CSR branches, like the cases depicted in this thesis, and are reminiscent of what has been coined in the Latin American context as a post-neoliberal turn in extractive politics (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014) because they contain prescriptions towards the practices of corporations. Similar schemes have been introduced in diamond mining through the Kimberley Process, which largely served as a blueprint for the gold sector. The deployment of these new bureaucracies, whose effects have been analysed in terms of “ethics of detachment” by some (see Cross 2011), also suggests new “black boxes” (Latour 1987) that, through rhetoric of transparency, environmental protection and fair trade, possibly have the power to expel and invisibilize segments of processes of production. Using Sassen’s (2014) framework of expulsions, wherein discourses of inclusion are increasingly coupled with practices of exclusion and invisibilization, might be an apt way to critically document the exponential rise of such initiatives.

Finally, as I proposed in the conclusion, miners’ expulsion-induced mobility shares many traits with other informal social formations that use mobility as a means of achieving a certain idea of stability. Indeed, evidence suggests that in many of the spaces that Sassen (2014) terms as “of expulsion”, people cope with precarity through various and increasingly intense forms of mobilities that evoke nomadic-like ways of dealing with structural uncertainty. From a mobility standpoint, a more systematic comparison with other forms of modern transhumance relying on “independent” forms of labour and intense mobility to pick and make their means of subsistence wherever they are best accessible – e.g. neo-nomadic truckers in postindustrial societies, mushroom pickers in destroyed U.S. forests, e-waste collectors at the edges of megapoles, mobile sex workers, migrant

plantation workers in agribusiness – might contribute (see e.g. Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) to bringing new transversal insights into how notions of locality and mobility are entangled in the increasing spaces of expulsion. As an anthropological project, such cross-regional comparisons would contribute to acknowledging the Comaroffs' strong statement that it is the North that is heading towards the South (2012). To different degrees, expulsion-induced mobilities in the so-called South may prefigure the functional role of flexibilization and mobility in Western economies.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix I : Entretiens semi-structuré type expert - 2012

#### A. Introduction

1. présentation et explication de la recherche
2. explication sur l'entretien et le type de questions, confidentialité
3. Présentation de l'interlocuteur (nom, fonction, etc...)

#### B. Entretien

1. cadre légal et institutionnel relatif à l'orpaillage : orientations et perspectives
  - ⤴ Actuellement, quelle est la législation (quels codes) qui encadre les activités d'orpaillage, et de quelle manière ?
  - ⤴ Pourquoi est-ce important de formaliser le secteur artisanal ?
  - ⤴ Quels sont les moyens mis en œuvre pour son application ? limites et adaptations ?
  - ⤴ Quels sont les relais de l'état dans la mise en œuvre de ces différentes politiques (villages, ONG, sociétés d'exploitation, autres) ? **exms**
  - ⤴ Dans quelle mesure et comment l'extraction artisanale représente-t-elle une recette pour l'état (impôt, taxes, exportations, trafic, commerce)? Comment celles-ci sont-elles enregistrées et encaissées aux différents niveaux administratif (CRD, districts, province, états) ? À qui doivent-elles bénéficier (redistribution) ? **exms** concrets ?
  - ⤴ Quelles sont les orientations politiques actuelles relatives à l'extraction artisanale ?
  - ⤴ Comment est-ce que cela a changé selon vous ? Moments décisifs ? (encouragement-restriction, formalisation, développement vs effets négatifs) ?
  - ⤴ Qu'est-ce que les mesures touchent principalement comme domaine ? e.g. les revenus des mines, les conditions de travail et/ou de sécurité, le développement local, l'environnement ou d'autres aspects ?
  - ⤴ Quels sont les relais de concertation dans l'élaboration de la législation relative à l'orpaillage ? (villages, ONG, sociétés d'exploitation) ?
  - ⤴ Et dans son application ? exemples
  - ⤴ Quels sont les principaux changements du nouveau code minier par rapport activités d'extraction artisanale ? Quelles sont les principales nouveautés et changements qui ont lieu sur le terrain ? ou qui devraient avoir lieu ?
  - ⤴ Y a-t-il des formes de collaborations inter-étatiques (sachant que les pays voisins ont aussi des zones aurifères) dans l'élaboration des normes?
  - ⤴ Et y a-t-il des coopérations spécifiques dans les zones frontalières par rapport à l'orpaillage ? Comment et lesquelles ? e.g. Kourémalé, Kantédou, etc. et pour la gestion des conflits ?
  - ⤴ De votre point de vue, en quoi le contexte guinéen/malien est-il différent de celui de ses voisins ?

## 2. Migrations et travail

- ⤴ Quelles sont selon vous les principales personnes (profils) concernées (régions, temporaires-plein temps, nationaux-non nationaux, jeunes-vieux, hommes-femmes) sur les sites miniers?
- ⤴ Dans quelle mesure et comment l'orpaillage implique-t-il des mouvements voulus de population ?
- ⤴ Et pour le déplacement de populations ? qu'est ce qui amène l'état à intervenir dans ce sens ?
- ⤴ Y a-t-il beaucoup de personnes non-nationales impliquées dans les activités d'extraction artisanale ? Comment, à quel niveau, de quelle provenance ?
- ⤴ A l'inverse, y a-t-il à votre connaissance beaucoup de ressortissants guinéens actifs à l'étranger pour ces mêmes activités ?
- ⤴ Quelles différences y-a-t-il concrètement en termes d'accès aux ressources des mines au regard de la nationalité ? que dit la loi à ce sujet ?
- ⤴ Sachant que certaines zones sont à cheval sur plusieurs états (Mali, Sénégal, Liberia, Sierra Leone) qu'en est-il de ces régions ?
- ⤴ Dans la mesure où les législations sont différentes, dans quelle mesure cela joue-t-il un rôle dans le mouvement des populations vers les différents sites en Guinée et ailleurs, ou d'ailleurs vers la Guinée ?
- ⤴ Dans quelle mesure les migrations vers les mines constituent-elles des remittances (internes ou transnationales) ?
- ⤴ Peut-on identifier des mouvements/flux particuliers relatifs aux mines artisanales ? Les quels, comment ? (saisons, contexte économiques, temporalité)
- ⤴ Tous les orpailleurs-ses sont-ils-elles sujets aux mêmes règles qu'ils soient nationaux ou pas (nationalité, permis, etc) ? en pratique, qu'est ce qui est autorisé ou non, et qui y est autorisé ou non ?
- ⤴ Y a-t-il des groupes formalisés (interlocuteurs) représentant les intérêts des orpailleurs ? Lesquels ? Quelles formes de collaboration/interaction y a-t-il dans l'élaboration des normes ? ou sur le terrain ? exemples
- ⤴ Y a-t-il des conflits et de quels types (populations villageoises-orpailleurs, zones frontalières) dans l'accès aux ressources ou dans l'installation ? De quels types ? exemples ?
- ⤴ Selon vous, quelles sont les motivations des travailleurs-ses à se rendre vers les zones aurifères ? à certains moments ? dans certaines régions ? qu'est-ce qui les oriente ?
- ⤴ Sachant que dans certaines régions l'orpaillage représente la principale source de revenu, y a-t-il des dispositions particulières au regard de la fermeture saisonnière des sites en période d'hivernage ?
- ⤴ De même, qu'en est-il des orpailleurs « professionnels » itinérants dont certains sont issus d'autres régions ou pays ?
- ⤴ De votre point de vue, quels sont les principaux enjeux actuels pour l'état au regard de l'extraction artisanale (sociaux, économiques, développement, etc.) ?
- ⤴ Et pour les gouvernements locaux ?

## C. Commerce

- ⤴ Si les personnes se déplacent, qu'en est-il de l'or lui-même ? Vers quelles destinations et par quels canaux ?
- ⤴ Comment le commerce est-il organisé et quel y est le rôle de l'état ? Et pratiquement, comment cela fonctionne-t-il ? Limites et enjeux ?

PS

- ⤴ Est-ce qu'il y a des données disponibles relatives aux mouvements migratoires dans les zones aurifères ?

Je vous remercie beaucoup de m'avoir consacré du temps ? Y-a-il d'autres choses qui vous semblent important dont on n'a pas discuté ?



## Appendix II : Network Map – 2012

Soc.dém.

prénom:

âge:

lieu rés. (famille):

temps s/ mines:

travail:

destination 1

de:

à:

Dernière destination

Codes

1 = Premier départ

2 = Dernier départ

I = Informations et conseils

\$ = Soutien financier, prêts, dettes (F=financier)

R = Rémittences, investissements hors mine

L = Logement, nourriture, tuteur

T = Partenaires de travail

K = Kébés, loisirs, temps libre

S = Soutien émotionnel

A = apprentissage

amis (pas mine)

amis (mine)

autres/connaissances

parents

proche

+/- proche

distant

Notes

### Appendix III : Interview grid « JOURNEYS » 2011, 2012, 2014

#### 1. Présentation:

Je suis étudiant à l'université et je fais une recherche sur les expériences des migrants dans le domaine des mines d'or. Je m'intéresse surtout à comment les gens s'organisent pour se déplacer et savoir où aller, et comment ils gèrent ces déplacements avec leur famille.

Si vous êtes d'accord, j'aimerais que vous me racontiez vos propres expériences; sentez-vous libre de vous exprimer sur les sujets qui vous importent, puis je reviendrai sur plusieurs sujets qui sont importants pour ma recherche.

Je vais enregistrer ce que vous allez me raconter, mais ce sera ensuite traité de façon anonyme.

#### 2. Question d'ouverture narrative:

Pouvez-vous me raconter comment vous avez commencé à travailler dans le domaine des mines d'or ? puis comment se passe votre vie depuis que vous avez commencé le travail de mine et quels voyages vous avez fait dans les mines?

Vous pouvez vraiment prendre tout votre temps pour me raconter...étape par étape, je vous écoute.

#### 3. Relances:

Engagement dans le domaine de l'orpaillage :

Projet personnel ?

Au début, qu'est-ce qui vous a décidé à commencer le travail de mines ?

Qui a contribué à votre décision?

Quels étaient vos objectifs ? vos projets ?

Comment vous imaginiez-vous la mine et les travaux de mines avant de commencer ?

Dans quel état d'esprit étiez-vous lors de votre premier départ ?

Rôle du réseau ?

A qui avez-vous parlé de votre premier départ ?

Qui vous a conseillé ? donnez des informations, et de quels types ?

Comment vos proches (familles et amis) ont-ils accueilli votre décision (rejet/acceptation)?

Définitions publiques ?

Comment est-ce que vous définiriez votre travail ?

Que pense vos proches de votre activité?

Est-ce positif ou négatif ? pourquoi ?

Comment avez-vous l'impression que l'on considère généralement les mineurs/clans?

#### 4. Parcours et itinéraires au sein des mines

Insertion :

Qu'est-ce qui fait que vous avez commencé à travailler dans les mines ? un ou des **événements** en particuliers ?

Où, quand et comment avez-vous **commencé** ?

Comment et avec qui avez-vous **appris** ?

Quelles ont été les étapes importantes/marquantes dans votre parcours dans les mines?

En regardant en arrière, comment décririez-vous votre **évolution** dans les travaux de mines (apprentissage, position sociale, reconnaissance, etc.) ?

Quelles **difficultés** avez-vous rencontrées et comment les avez-vous dépassées (ou non) ?

- personnellement?

- avec votre famille?

-avec les autorités?

#### Formes de déplacements :

Quels ont été vos **déplacements** ? pourquoi vous vous déplacez en général ? --> exms

Avez-vous **d'autres activités** que la mine ? Comment vous organisez-vous entre celles-ci et la mine ?

Vos **déplacements** sont-ils plutôt continus ou saisonnier ? qu'est ce qui fait que vous décidez de continuer ou de rentrer ?

**Rentrez-vous** fréquemment chez-vous ; quand ?

Avez-vous fait des mines **à l'étranger** ? où ?

Comment est-ce que vous organisé vos voyages? et comment se passent-ils?  
vous pouvez de donner des exemples ?

Avec qui vous déplacez-vous habituellement?

Comment-vous déplacez-vous habituellement (**moyens de loco**), et pourquoi si changements ?

Quels types d'obstacles ont pu empêcher vos déplacements ? comment les avez-vous surmonter ?

#### Itinéraires

**Avec qui** vous êtes-vous déplacé ? est-ce souvent avec cette/ces même(s) personnes ?

Votre **femme/enfant** vous accompagne-t-elle ?  
quand ? pourquoi ou ou pourquoi non ?

Actuellement, quels sont selon-vous les **lieux qui valent le déplacement** ?  
Après de qui avez vous obtenu des **informations sur le lieu actuel** ?

- Comment avez-vous décidé de vous y rendre ?

#### TN/TL :

Comment vous arrangez-vous avec votre **famille** par rapport à vos déplacements ?

Y-a-t-il des **négociations** à ce sujets?

Entretenez-vous des **contacts réguliers avec vos proches** ? comment entretenez-vous ces contacts?En quoi est-ce **important** ou non selon vous ?

Renvoyez-vous parfois de **l'argent** chez-vous ? comment? à qui ? En quoi est-ce important ?

**Comment vos relations avec votre famille ont-elles évoluées** depuis que vous êtes dans les affaires de mine ?

Vos **amitiés** sont-elles plutôt au sein des mines ou dans votre lieu d'origine ?

Gardez-vous **contacts avec les autres mineurs** rencontrés ailleurs ? comment ?

#### Autochtonie :

Comment cela se passe-t-il habituellement pour trouver un endroit où loger?

Comment êtes-vous accueilli dans les endroits où vous vous installez?

Comment vous y prenez-vous lorsque vous n'avez pas de contacts à l'avance?

Y a-t-il des droits différents pour vous que pour les résidents? lesquels?

#### **Conventions/normes/valeurs**

##### Reconnaissance :

Vous vous décrivez comment comme mineur ? (officier, kalayanti, etc)

Qu'est-ce qui fait la bonne ou la mauvaise réputation dans le travail de mine ?

Qu'est-ce qui fait selon vous un **bon travailleur** sur les mines ? qu'est-ce qu'il faut savoir maîtriser et connaître pour être reconnu ?

Comment **décrieriez-vous votre position** dans le travail de mines?  
Comment faites-vous pour **favoriser votre chance** d'avoir des gains?

- Personnes ? marabout ou féticheurs ? autres

Qu'est ce qu'il ne faut pas faire pour garder sa réputation?

Est-ce que c'est important **d'avoir voyagé** ? Quelle importance ça peut avoir auprès des autres mineurs ?

Quelles sont les **difficultés** qu'un nouveau venu risque de rencontrer ?

→exms pour vous ?

Comment pouvez-vous décrire votre évolution personnelle dans les mines ?

### **Valeurs :**

Qu'est ce qui est important de faire quand **vous commencez à travailler** avec une équipe ? et qu'est-ce qu'il ne faut pas faire ? pourquoi ?

Pouvez-vous m'expliquez en quoi la **confiance** est importante à la mine ?

--> Dans votre cas, comment décidez-vous de faire ou non confiance aux autres gens?

Est-ce que la mine est un **travail ou un métier**, quelle est la différence ?

Comment peut-on avoir un avantage sur les autres dans le travail de mine ?

**Comment décrieriez-vous la mine comme travail** ? quels sont les avantages et les inconvénients dans le travail de mine par rapport à d'autres activités (agriculture, petit commerce, etc ?)

Comment reconnaît-on un **bon kalayanti** ?

Comment vous décidez avec qui vous travaillez ?

Si c'est le cas ; Pourquoi choisissez-vous de **voyager de façon continue** ?

Quels sont les **avantages ou et les inconvénients de voyager** (en général) ?

### **Mobilité sociale :**

Pouvez-vous décrire votre **évolution** dans les mines?

Quelles conséquences votre propre **évolution** dans les mines a-t-elle **au village ou dans votre famille**?

Comment **utilisez-vous les gains** que vous faites dans les mines? (exemples)

Quand vous serez plus âgé ou trop vieux pour la mine, qu'est ce que vous pensez faire ?

Qu'est ce qu'y a-t-il comme **alternative** selon vous ?

→leurs avantages/inconvénients ?

En cas de **maladie** comment faites-vous ?

Avez-vous pu **investir** chez-vous ou ailleurs ? dans quoi, auprès de qui ?exms

Par rapport à votre famille et vos proches, **comment considèrent-ils votre activité** ? est-ce que certains vous ont-ils rejoint ? pourquoi ?

Du point de vue des relations avec la famille, comment **vous sentez-vous perçu** par rapport à votre activité ?

Comment pensez-vous qu'il faut faire pour avoir de la réussite ?

### **Etat et autochtonie**

#### Rapport à l'état :

Quelles sont les **autorités** à qui vous avez le plus affaire dans le domaine des mines?

Que font-elles pour vous qui vous arrange ou vous dérange ?

Que pensez-vous de la **politique de remontée** ?

Avez-vous déjà été pris dans un **ratissage** ? comment et pourquoi ?

Quelles sont les **différences selon les pays** entre ce que l'on peut faire ou non ? ou est-ce le mieux de travailler et pourquoi ? et dans quelles régions ? pourquoi ?

Qu'est-ce que l'état devrait **faire pour les orpailleurs** selon vous ?

#### Autochtonie : Quel est le rôle de l'autochtonie dans l'accès aux ressources ?

Comment cela se passe-t-il en tant qu'"**étranger**" lorsque vous travaillez sur un nouveau site? et dans un autre pays?

Quelles sont les différences entre les **natifs et vous** (ou le contraire) ? lesquelles (droits, logement, travail)?

Qu'en pensez-vous ?

Merci beaucoup d'avoir pris le temps de me parler de votre expérience. Est-ce qu'il y a d'autres choses importantes selon vous ?

### **Données socio démo :**

Nom, âge, activités de revenus, situation de famille, lieu d'origine et de résidence, lieu d'entretien

## **Appendix IV : Thematic grid « Authority, autochthony, access » - 2014**

Présentation:

Bonjour, je m'intéresse dans ma recherche de doctorat aux migrations liées aux mines d'or en Afrique de l'ouest. Comme c'est souvent le cas, de nombreuses personnes peuvent arriver rapidement dans un lieu, et se pose alors la question de comment accueillir ces populations...et votre expérience à ce sujet m'intéresse.

Je vais d'abord vous demander de me raconter librement selon votre expérience comment cela se passe, et je reviendrai ensuite sur quelques thèmes au cas où ne les avons pas abordés.

### **1. Question d'ouverture**

Pourriez-vous me raconter comment vous avez accueilli jusqu'à présent les populations de mineurs venus de l'extérieur?

### **2. Précisions et reformulations en fonction des notes**

### **3. Relances**

Comment définiriez-vous un "autochtone"?

Et un "étranger"?

Quelles différences y a-t-il entre les autochtones et les étrangers ou d'autres personnes?

Et au niveau du droit ?

p. exm

- dans l'accès au logement?

- dans l'accès aux puits?

- dans l'accès aux infrastructures du village (eau, forage, etc)?

- dans l'accès aux terres?

Comment faites-vous la différence entre "autochtones" et "étrangers"?

- Et dans le cas où une personne n'a jamais vécu là mais y a de la famille?

- Et dans le cas où une personne s'est installée ici de longue date?

Pourquoi ces différences entre étrangers et autochtones sont-elles importantes?

Qui prend les décisions pour savoir qui a le droit d'accéder à quoi?

Quel rôle joue la nationalité (la fait d'être malien, guinéen, sénégalais, ivoirien, etc) dans l'accès à certains droits?

Quel problème cela pose-t-il concrètement lorsque des gens de l'extérieur viennent travailler chez vous? et, quels en sont d'autre part les bénéfices?

Quelles mesures particulières avez-vous eu à prendre par le passé par rapport à l'orpaillage ?

- pourquoi? comment vous y êtes-vous pris? etc.

Où avez-vous du soutien pour cela ?

- Avez-vous du soutien de l'administration dans ce genre de cas?

- sous quelle forme?

Comment la cohabitation devrait-elle se passer pour être la plus harmonieuse selon vous?

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et vos explications!

## **Appendix V : Thematic interview grid « Material, prices, qualifications » - 2014**

Présentation:

Bonjour, je m'intéresse au mercure parce que la première fois que je suis venu il n'y en avait presque pas. J'aimerais à savoir comment les gens ont commencé à utiliser le mercure sur tous les sites. Si vous êtes d'accord, je vous propose d'abord de me raconter vos expériences avec ce produit, ce qu'il vous apporte ou non, comment vous avez appris à l'utiliser et comment vous vous le procurez... Ensuite, je vous poserai sûrement quelques questions si on ne les a pas abordées avant.

### **1. Question d'ouverture:**

Pouvez-vous me raconter comment vous avez commencé à utiliser le mercure pour nettoyer l'or, et comment vous avez appris?

- Pourriez-vous vous présenter et expliquer comment vous avez commencé à travailler dans les mines?

### **2. Relances:**

#### Réseaux

A travers qui avez-vous appris à utiliser ce produit?

Qui vous a initié?

Auprès de qui vous le procurez-vous généralement? est-ce difficile?

D'où vient le mercure à votre connaissance?

#### Utilisation

Comment l'utilisez-vous?

Y-a-t-il des précautions particulières à prendre? quelles sont-elles et pourquoi?

Tout le monde peut-il en utiliser ? est-ce réservé à certaines personnes? (H/F, balanciers, adultes/efes, etc...)

Qui le paie ? quel arrangements faites-vous avec la balanciers ?

Y a-t-il différentes qualités ? lesquelles ?

Comment savez-vous si son utilisation vaut la peine ? aussi par rapport au prix à payer en plus pour le lavage ?

Pourriez-vous vous en passer? et pourquoi?

Quelles sont selon vous les avantages et inconvénients à son utilisation?

Avez-vous des moyens de le réutiliser?

#### zones

Avez-vous à votre tour appris à d'autres gens à l'utiliser?

Comment vous en procurez-vous dans des endroits que vous ne connaissez pas?

Connaissez-vous d'autres façons de l'utiliser? où? comment est-il utilisé?

Y a-t-il des différences de coûts selon où vous vous le procurez? à quoi sont-elles dues selon-vous?

#### Représentations

Le produit a-t-il d'autres vertus que pour le lavage de l'or à votre connaissance? lesquelles?

A-t-il aussi des désavantages, des risques ou autres liés à son utilisation? Lesquels ?

Dans certains endroits - pas ici - son utilisation est interdite, qu'en pensez-vous?

Lorsque vous vendez l'or, y-a-t-il des différences lorsque l'or a été lavé au mercure ou sans mercure?

### qualifications

Comment évaluez-vous la qualité de l'or que vous sortez?

Comment savez-vous si le prix que vous obtenez est "juste"?

Comment expliquez-vous que le prix change selon les endroits où vous travaillez ? exemples

Est-ce que cela a changé durant ces dernières années? comment?

Quel est le rôle des balanciers et des fonderies dans la fixation des prix? Est-ce que vous pouvez négocier ? comment ?

Quels moyens avez-vous pour en obtenir un meilleur prix? (vente différée, vente de gros, etc...)

Est-ce que vous utilisez votre téléphone portable pour connaître les prix? comment?

Ya-t-il des différences de prix et ou de façon de les fixer selon les lieux où vous travaillez? lesquelles?

Qu'est-ce qu'il se passerait si quelqu'un trichait sur les prix selon vous?

Aurez-vous d'autres choses à ajouter par rapport aux thèmes que nous avons discuté?

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps, cela m'a été d'une grande aide et je vous en remercie.



## **Appendix VI : Thematic interview grid « Protection and prospiation » - 2014**

### **Présentation**

Bonjour, je m'intéresse au travail dans les mines d'or, et aux migrations qui sont liées à l'exploitation de l'or. Comme il y a beaucoup de question de chance et aussi car le travail est parfois risqué, j'aimerais mieux comprendre les savoirs pour se protéger (le maraboutage ou fétiches par exemple). Si vous êtes d'accord, j'aimerais beaucoup en savoir plus sur votre expérience pour vous protéger.

Je vais d'abord vous demander de me raconter très librement vos expériences dans ce domaine, et je compléterai ensuite en vous posant des questions plus précises.

### **1. Question d'ouverture narrative:**

Pourriez-vous me raconter en général comment vous pouvez vous protéger ou améliorer votre chance dans les mines ?

### **2. Relances**

#### acquisition et apprentissage

Comment avez-vous acquis ces savoirs (définis dans narration)?

Est-ce qu'il y a un rapport avec la religion ? lequel ?

Avez-vous vu des prévoyants avant de commencer? dans quel but et quelles ont été leurs recommandations? Est-ce que vous avez d'autres personnes qui vous conseillent ?

Est-ce que vous avez d'autres secrets qui vous viennent d'ailleurs ?

Pour quelles choses les fétiches ou le maraboutage sont-ils mieux ?

Comment est-ce qu'ils vous servent au quotidien? (chance, protection, etc...) exms

Et dans le travail de mine en particulier ?

Est-ce que tout le monde peut les acquérir ou est-ce limité à certaines classes de personnes?

Est-ce que vous-même vous pouvez, à votre tour transmettre des secrets?

Est-ce que vous vous êtes parfois déplacé spécialement pour acquérir certains fétiches ou pour rencontrer un marabout en particulier? Pouvez-vous me raconter?

Quelles sont les régions/endroits où l'on trouve les meilleures personnes pour ce genre de choses?

Y a-t-il des marabouts/féticheurs "spécialisés" dans les affaires de mines? Il y en a bout dans les mines, qu'est-ce que vous en pensez ?

A quel moment faites-vous appel à leurs services? (avant d'y aller, sur place, etc..?)

Quand vous êtes dans le trou, est-ce qu'il y a des signes que vous observez régulièrement? lesquels ? pourquoi?

Et est-ce qu'il a des actions qui vous permettent de vous protéger ou d'avoir plus de chance qu'il faut faire dans le trou ?

Est-ce qu'il faut nécessairement rencontrer la personne ou est-ce aussi possible par téléphone?

Je vous remercie beaucoup !

Est-ce qu'il y a d'autres choses qui vous semblent importantes en général ? et sur la protection en particulier ?

## **Appendix VII 7 : Grid supply chain - trade (Switzerland) - 2016**

### **Grille d'entretien – Fin de filière : processus de négoce de l'or de l'Afrique vers l'extérieur**

Brève présentation de la recherche ; étude pas centrée sur le négoce mais volonté d'en avoir une image générale pour mieux situer mes propres résultats.

Anonymat et confidentialité bien entendu préservés.

#### **Présentation**

- Pourriez-vous me présenter votre société ? Son histoire, comment vous y êtes entré ? Son fonctionnement général ? Ses spécialités ?
- Depuis combien de temps votre société est-elle active ?
- Comment la situeriez-vous en terme de volume d'activité ?
- En quoi vous distinguez-vous d'autres sociétés de négoce ? Avez-vous des spécificités que vous valorisez auprès de vos clients ? → **exms**

→ y-a-t-il d'autres choses ou thématiques qui vous semblent importantes qui vous définissent ?

#### **Fonctionnement du négoce en général**

- Pourriez-vous me décrire pas à pas l'ensemble du processus de négoce de l'or ?
- En quoi consiste la « facilitation des transactions » ? en particulier dans le cas de l'or lorsque vous intervenez entre des pourvoyeurs africains et des clients Suisses, Emirati ou autres ? quelles différences y-a-t-il entre ces partenaires ? cela implique-t-il différentes pratiques selon les personnes avec qui vous traitez ? Quel intérêt particulier avez-vous pour ce métier ? → **exms**
- Quel est votre rôle dans la transaction ? comment concrètement « facilitez »-vous les transactions ? → **exms**
- Quelles compétences particulières (vous en particulier ou votre société en général) êtes-vous amené à mobiliser ? Quel « service » proposez-vous à vos clients ? qu'est-ce qui vous différencie ? → **exms**
- Facilitez-vous le commerce d'autres matières premières ? Si oui, quelles sont les spécificités de l'or ? En quoi est-ce différent d'autres types de commodités ? Quels sont les avantages et inconvénients des différentes ressources ? → **exms**
- Dans le cas de l'or, comment fonctionne le « marché » ? Comment entrez-vous en contact avec vos partenaires et clients ? Comment intervenez-vous dans la mise en relation de l'offre et de la demande ? Comment se décident les prix des transactions ?

→ y-a-t-il d'autres choses ou thématiques qui vous semblent importantes ?

#### **Fonctionnement spécifique au négoce de l'or**

- Traitez-vous directement avec les « comptoirs » ou autres partenaires africains ?
- Avez-vous dans ce cas des interactions « directes » avec vos partenaires ? en personnes ? cela vous demande-t-il éventuellement de vous déplacer sur place ?
- N'étant généralement pas raffiné en Afrique, comment qualifiez-vous l'or que vous négociez avant de l'importer ? ... carat, poids, provenance... ?
- Y-a-t-il des risques d'arnaques ? y-a-t-il des possibilités que des transactions n'aboutissent pas ? pourquoi ? → **exms**

- Le type d'extraction est-il généralement connu ? Si oui, s'agit-il généralement d'or issu du secteur artisanal, petite-mine, ou industrielle ? cela fait-il une différence de votre point de vue ? de quelle façon ?
- Dans quelle mesure (jusqu'à quel degré) connaissez-vous la provenance du matériau (région, pays, type d'extraction, site d'extraction,...) ? est-ce important ?
- Y-a-t-il à votre connaissance des différences entre les différents pays producteurs ? Privilégiez-vous les relations avec certains plutôt que d'autres ? si oui, pour quelles raisons (exms. pratiques – i.e. douanes, morales, connaissances pré-établies, ...) ?
- Y-a-t-il des demandes spécifiques de vos clients (pourvoyeurs et acheteurs) ? de quels types ?
- Comment se passe concrètement le processus une fois la transaction décidée ?

- Douanes et bureaucratie – pays d'envoi, lieu de transaction, pays d'achat
- Envoi-délai de livraison, etc
- paiement
- transport
- Définition du prix de la transaction – avant ou à réception ? comment établissez-vous un profit sur la transaction ?

- Quels sont les risques financiers de parts et d'autres ?
- Les notions de « confiance » entre partenaires/clients sont-elles importantes ? si oui, pour quelles raisons, et comment savez-vous à qui faire confiance ou non ? ou dans quelle mesure
- A votre connaissance, l'or est-il destiné à une fin spécifique pour vos clients (industrie, investissement, ...) ? Comment pourriez-vous généralement qualifier vos clients au regard de leur situation dans la filière (raffineurs, autres intermédiaires de négoce, autres... ?)
- Sur le plan légal, y-a-t-il des critères particuliers que vous devez remplir pour exercer votre activité ? plus particulièrement en Suisse ?
- Estimez-vous être représentatif d'autres sociétés dans le secteur ? si oui ou non, en quoi vous distinguez-vous ?

→ Y-a-t-il d'autres choses ou thématiques qui vous semblent importantes ?

### Spécificités de l'or par rapport à d'autres ressources

- Facilitez-vous le négoce d'autres commodités ? si oui lesquelles ? EN comparaison, y-a-t-il des spécificités pour le cas de l'or ? si oui, de quel type (pratiques, marché, etc) ? → **exms**
- A l'inverse, vos clients (acheteurs) sont-ils généralement spécialisés sur un type de commodités ou investissent-ils aussi bien dans différents secteurs ?
- Le fait d'être basé en Suisse joue-t-il un rôle particulier pour être un acteur du négoce en général et de l'or en particulier ? si oui, pour quelles raisons (avantages et inconvénients notamment au regard d'autres acteurs du négoce ailleurs) ? avez-vous le sentiment que cela change ? de quelle façon ?
- En quoi le marché de l'or est-il distinct de celui d'autres ressources ? quels en sont les avantages ou difficultés particulières ?

→ Y-a-t-il d'autres choses ou thématiques qui vous semblent importantes

## **Débats éthiques relatifs à la production de l'or**

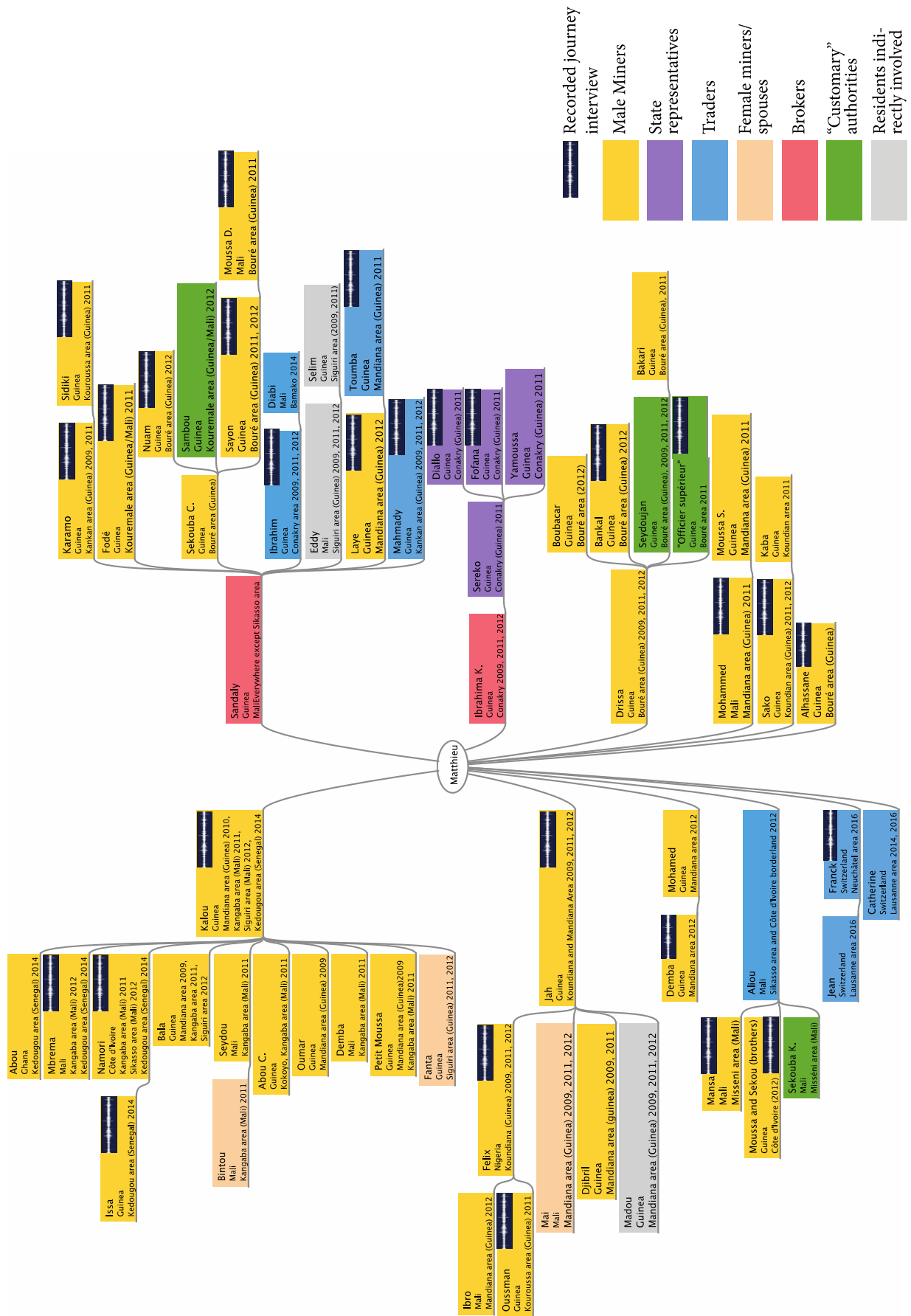
- Ces dernières années, des notions d'éthiques sont régulièrement entrées dans le débat sur la production de l'or (i.e. impacts sociaux et environnementaux notamment), dans quelle mesure cela affecte-il ou non le commerce en général de votre point de vue ? et dans votre cas particulier ?
- Vous semble-t-il important de vous positionner sur ces débats en tant que société (cf website, mais aussi d'autres initiatives – cartier, transp, arm, etc) ? Si oui, comment est-il concrètement possible de le faire selon vous ?
- Sur quels objets/thématiques en particulier pouvez-vous ou souhaitez-vous inclure une dimension éthique ? Comment vous y prenez-vous ? dans quelle mesure y parvenez-vous ?
- Quels sont les obstacles selon vous (en CH et ailleurs) ?
- Quelles pistes votre expérience vous suggérerait-elle de privilégier pour dépasser ces obstacles ?

→ Y-a-t-il d'autres choses ou thématiques qui vous semblent importantes ?

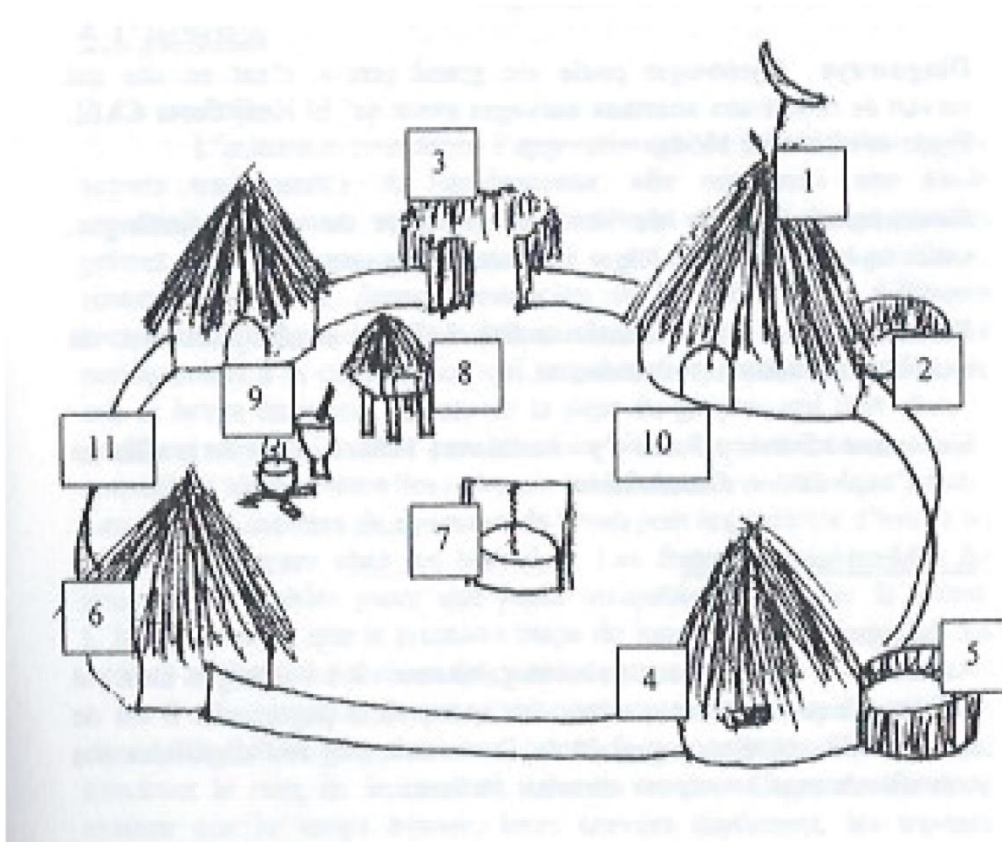
**Un immense merci pour votre temps et votre aide extrêmement précieuse !**

- S'il y a d'autres questions et thématiques que vous souhaiteriez ou pensez utiles d'aborder, n'hésitez pas à les soulever.
- Y-a-il d'autres acteurs du négoce qui pourraient selon-vous compléter votre perspective ? qui sont-ils et dans quelle mesure serait-il possible de me mettre en contact avec eux ?

## Appendix VIII – Map of main informants and interviewees



**Appendix IX – Sketch of a familial compound (*lu*), source : Mamadou Camara, 1999**



1. *kebon*, House of the male head of the familial compound
2. shower
3. toilet
4. *muso bon*, House of a woman
5. shower
6. *bolon*, communal house
7. *kolon*, well
8. chicken house
9. *gba*, kitchen
10. *lu kene*, compound court
11. wall of compound

## Appendix X – Glossary of *maninkakan* terms

Terms are written according Mamadou Camara dictionary (1999). In the text of the dissertation the French and Malinké writings of maninkakan words have been used interchangeably; I used the Bamana –w suffix to mark plural forms.

### Vernacular

| Maninkakan terms        | Meaning in english                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bon (Bo)                | House within a familial compound                                                                                                                           |
|                         | Burun (Bougou) Literally Brush/scrubs; Temporary hut made of straw, by extension any accommodation in a mining settlement                                  |
|                         | Burunfe (Bougoufe) Literally “Town of temporary straw huts”; temporary mining settlement                                                                   |
| Daman                   | Artisanal gold mining operation; one vertical well and its subsidiaries tunnels                                                                            |
| Daman faro              | Literally “field of mines”; artisanal informal gold mining site                                                                                            |
| Damantii (Damantifi)    | Literally “head of the mine”; official owner of the land devoted to gold mining in customary tenure                                                        |
| Jatiguia (Diatiguia)    | Institution of “hospitality”; relations of reciprocities between hosts and guests                                                                          |
| Duuti (Dugutigi)        | Literally: “Head of the land”; administrative village head (function created during the colonial occupation)                                               |
| Fabara                  | Literally “Place of the father”; notion of home place in reference to the village where the lineage has vivid roots                                        |
| Fasiya                  | Literally “father’s authority”; institution of elder male domination over women and cadets                                                                 |
| Furukuruni              | Literally “small marriage”; institution of temporary partnering in gold mining settlements                                                                 |
| Koroya                  | Literally “elder brother’s authority”; extension of the <i>fasiya</i> to a general principle of seniority                                                  |
| Hörö (Horon)            | Historical class including families of nobilities and warriors                                                                                             |
| Kalayantii (kalyantigi) | Literally: “holder of a long pickaxe.” Mine worker specialized in tunel works whose success highly depends on his ability to move to prosperous operations |
| Lu                      | Familial compound composed of several houses and family units                                                                                              |
| Lutii (Lutigi)          | Literally “Head of the familial compound”; elder male within the <i>lu</i>                                                                                 |
| Numu                    | Smith                                                                                                                                                      |
| Nyamakala               | Historical class composed of families of specialists (smiths, leatherworkers, potters)                                                                     |

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Nyado                   | Litterally “mediator”; local intercessor or financier of an artisanal operation                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Siaki                   | Jeweller; smith ( <i>numu</i> ) specialized in jewellery                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Solikurinitii           | Literally: “holder of a small pickaxe.” Digger of the initial well in an artisanal operation, usually workers with little experience and/or local residents that can afford being present during the whole initial phase of excavation which does not provide direct financial income. |
| Sotii (Sotigi)          | Literally: “Village head”; customary village head, head of elders’ council                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Tom boloma              | Literally: “holder of the constraint, the strength.” Local police composed of local residents, usually ex-miners, in charge of implementing gold mining regulation and norms, collecting taxes and mediating conflict in informal artisanal mining sites.                              |
| <i>Tuteur</i> (French)  | French word for “host”, which encapsulates a complex system of reciprocity between alleged first comers (“natives”) and late comers (“strangers”)                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Tutorat</i> (French) | Institution regulating the integration of immigrants (“strangers”) through relations of allegiance towards the owners of the land.                                                                                                                                                     |



## Appendix XI – Detailed table of contents

|                                                                                                                    |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Abstract.....</b>                                                                                               | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Table of contents.....</b>                                                                                      | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Lists of figures, tables and pictures.....</b>                                                                  | <b>11</b> |
| <b>Acknowledgements .....</b>                                                                                      | <b>13</b> |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>                                                                                          | <b>19</b> |
| Pictures of an extractive economy.....                                                                             | 19        |
| Dyesse: less farming, more mining .....                                                                            | 19        |
| Koumban: leaving to and returning from the gold mines.....                                                         | 21        |
| Koundiana: industrial exploration and the threat of expulsion.....                                                 | 24        |
| Towards an ethnography of gold mining journeys .....                                                               | 27        |
| Deagrarianization and the acceleration of artisanal extraction .....                                               | 27        |
| Artisanal mining labour and spatial mobility .....                                                                 | 29        |
| Mobility and masculine aspirations in the cultural context of rural Mandé .....                                    | 31        |
| Heterogenous relations of production within global supply chains .....                                             | 33        |
| Systematic expulsions at the mining frontier .....                                                                 | 35        |
| Researching gold journeys .....                                                                                    | 38        |
| State of research and conceptual framework.....                                                                    | 39        |
| Mining, supply chain capitalism and <i>expulsions</i> : bringing agency and subjectivity back in the picture ..... | 40        |
| Gold mining, capital and labour.....                                                                               | 40        |
| Supply chain capitalism .....                                                                                      | 42        |
| Agency and the productive effects of expulsions .....                                                              | 43        |
| A mobility lens on artisanal mining labour .....                                                                   | 45        |
| Mobility and artisanal gold mining .....                                                                           | 45        |
| The value and timing of mobility in West Africa.....                                                               | 45        |
| Towards an operational definition of mobility .....                                                                | 47        |
| The transnational dimension of mining mobilities .....                                                             | 49        |
| Risk, Institutions, social networks and social spaces .....                                                        | 51        |
| Approaching mining mobilities through institutions .....                                                           | 51        |
| Social networks and transboundary social spaces.....                                                               | 53        |
| Construction of the field of study: the transnational spaces of artisanal gold mining in West Africa .....         | 54        |
| Doing ethnography, co-constructing knowledge.....                                                                  | 54        |
| The material: working with stories .....                                                                           | 57        |
| Everyday conversations, life stories, myths and PR narratives .....                                                | 58        |
| The languages of miners' stories .....                                                                             | 59        |
| Beyond the story of the "suffering miner" .....                                                                    | 60        |
| The "fieldwork": working with mobile people.....                                                                   | 62        |
| The "sample": itinerant male gold miners in West Africa .....                                                      | 65        |
| Presentation of the main informants .....                                                                          | 66        |

|                                                                                                                                             |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Presentation of the interviewees .....                                                                                                      | 67         |
| Outline of the dissertation .....                                                                                                           | 68         |
| <b>PART ONE.....</b>                                                                                                                        | <b>70</b>  |
| <b>Disentangling gold circuits of production .....</b>                                                                                      | <b>70</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 1: Gold, labour, and the coproduction of artisanal and industrial mining spaces in West Africa .....</b>                         | <b>71</b>  |
| 1.1 Introduction: “Guinea is the richest country in West Africa” .....                                                                      | 71         |
| 1.2 The organization of artisanal gold mining labour in the Mandenka speaking area.....                                                     | 74         |
| 1.2.1 Organization of labour in the artisanal gold mines.....                                                                               | 75         |
| 1.2.2 Major institutions regulating labour in ASGM operations.....                                                                          | 80         |
| 1.3 West Africa’s gold in the world’s production.....                                                                                       | 84         |
| 1.3.1 The parallel development of artisanal and industrial gold mining .....                                                                | 85         |
| 1.3.2 Neoliberal enclaves and the segmentation of space: Itinerant miners across the territorial boundaries of states and corporations..... | 87         |
| 1.3.3 Mining codes and the bordering of mining spaces .....                                                                                 | 89         |
| 1.3.4 National borders and administrative boundaries within the ECOWAS .....                                                                | 95         |
| 1.4 Conclusion .....                                                                                                                        | 98         |
| <b>Chapter 2: Gold and its transformation through the supply chain .....</b>                                                                | <b>99</b>  |
| 2.1 Introduction: merging the formal and informal circuits .....                                                                            | 99         |
| 2.2 Some elements of context .....                                                                                                          | 100        |
| 2.3 The four zones of qualification along the supply chain.....                                                                             | 102        |
| 2.3.1 Buying and amalgamating gold powder: organic qualifications .....                                                                     | 102        |
| 2.3.2 Cleaning, purifying, titling: metric qualifications .....                                                                             | 105        |
| 2.3.3 Paperwork for <i>dorés</i> : legal qualifications.....                                                                                | 109        |
| 2.3.4 Refining to the four “9s”: international standards qualification .....                                                                | 113        |
| 2.3.5 Mapping the zones of qualification.....                                                                                               | 115        |
| 2.4 Conclusion .....                                                                                                                        | 117        |
| <b>PART TWO.....</b>                                                                                                                        | <b>118</b> |
| <b>Materializing masculine aspirations .....</b>                                                                                            | <b>118</b> |
| <b>Chapter 3: Is gold mining a lottery? Gold materiality and the micropolitics of its extraction.....</b>                                   | <b>119</b> |
| 3.1 Introduction: The story of how <i>Damanba</i> became the “big mine” .....                                                               | 119        |
| 3.2 Changing seniority rules in rural Mandé .....                                                                                           | 121        |
| 3.3 The social life of a gold particle (from underground mines to market stalls) .....                                                      | 123        |
| 3.3.1 The allocation of mining locations: Restating statuses and local citizenship .....                                                    | 123        |
| 3.3.2 Association and extraction of the orebody.....                                                                                        | 126        |
| 3.3.3 Distribution, processing, and selling .....                                                                                           | 129        |
| 3.4 Gold materiality: a dense yet fluid resource .....                                                                                      | 132        |
| 3.4.1 Fluid gold.....                                                                                                                       | 133        |
| 3.5 Luck and cooperation.....                                                                                                               | 134        |
| 3.5.1 Spaces of inversion? A heuristic detour through the <i>donsolow</i> .....                                                             | 139        |
| 3.6 Conclusion .....                                                                                                                        | 140        |
| <b>Chapter 4: Going for gold, making personhood?.....</b>                                                                                   | <b>143</b> |

|                                                                                        |                                                                                                            |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 4.1                                                                                    | Introduction: “Another <i>kountani</i> ! There are an increasing number of hotheads in these mines!” ..... | 143        |
| 4.2                                                                                    | Age, transitions, and mobility .....                                                                       | 147        |
| 4.3                                                                                    | <i>Kountaniw’</i> ambivalent aspirations.....                                                              | 150        |
| 4.3.1                                                                                  | Escaping inactivity: betting on the journey.....                                                           | 150        |
|                                                                                        | A very concrete bet: extracting gold from the samasen .....                                                | 152        |
| 4.3.2                                                                                  | Absence and expenses .....                                                                                 | 154        |
|                                                                                        | A very concrete expense: buying a motorbike .....                                                          | 158        |
| 4.3.3                                                                                  | Lost bets and disappearances .....                                                                         | 162        |
|                                                                                        | Giving up.....                                                                                             | 165        |
| 4.4                                                                                    | Never-ending navigations .....                                                                             | 168        |
| 4.5                                                                                    | Conclusion .....                                                                                           | 171        |
| <b>PART THREE.....</b>                                                                 |                                                                                                            | <b>173</b> |
| <b>Perpetuating precarious circulations .....</b>                                      |                                                                                                            | <b>173</b> |
| <b>Chapter 5: Mining impermanence, <i>kountigiw’</i> technologies of mobility.....</b> |                                                                                                            | <b>174</b> |
| 5.1                                                                                    | Introduction: Kalou four years later, a “professional” miner in Senegal .....                              | 174        |
| 5.2                                                                                    | Two approaches of the mobility-locality nexus .....                                                        | 179        |
| 5.2.1                                                                                  | Miners’ territories of circulation .....                                                                   | 180        |
| 5.2.2                                                                                  | Miners’ uneven im/mobility.....                                                                            | 181        |
| 5.3                                                                                    | Technologies of mobility across impermanent terrains.....                                                  | 182        |
| 5.3.1                                                                                  | Mining settlements: relational skills .....                                                                | 182        |
|                                                                                        | Social relations in the mining camps .....                                                                 | 183        |
|                                                                                        | Spontaneous and ephemeral dwelling .....                                                                   | 185        |
|                                                                                        | Threatening neighbours: junior mining companies.....                                                       | 188        |
|                                                                                        | Synthesis .....                                                                                            | 191        |
| 5.3.2                                                                                  | Mining sites: technical skills .....                                                                       | 192        |
|                                                                                        | Silent cooperation among miners.....                                                                       | 192        |
|                                                                                        | Recited cooperation with djinns.....                                                                       | 193        |
|                                                                                        | Networks of transmission .....                                                                             | 195        |
|                                                                                        | Synthesis .....                                                                                            | 198        |
| 5.3.3                                                                                  | Routes: mobility skills.....                                                                               | 199        |
|                                                                                        | Flashing borders .....                                                                                     | 199        |
|                                                                                        | ...and changing political climate .....                                                                    | 200        |
|                                                                                        | Synthesis .....                                                                                            | 202        |
| 5.4                                                                                    | <i>Kountigiw’</i> work ethos: everyday transience .....                                                    | 203        |
| 5.5                                                                                    | Conclusion: making a living out of the ephemerality of mining journeys.....                                | 207        |
| <b>Chapter 6: Mobile livelihoods between scattered households .....</b>                |                                                                                                            | <b>210</b> |
| 6.1                                                                                    | Introduction: "Any time I hear echoes from the mines, I take my bike and I go" .....                       | 210        |
| 6.2                                                                                    | Strategies of mobility and residence.....                                                                  | 213        |
| 6.2.1                                                                                  | Mobile livelihoods and centrality of the <i>lu</i> .....                                                   | 213        |
| 6.3                                                                                    | Theoretical types of residency .....                                                                       | 215        |
| 6.3.1                                                                                  | “Good shots” movements: arrangements within the household - Alhassane .....                                | 216        |
| 6.3.2                                                                                  | Biresidential strategy: the duplication of attachments - Oussman .....                                     | 218        |

|                                                                                |                                                                                                          |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 6.3.3                                                                          | Emigration strategy: the paradox of “success” - Sidiki .....                                             | 221        |
| 6.3.4                                                                          | Stuck immobility – Felix.....                                                                            | 225        |
| 6.3.5                                                                          | Synthesis: scattered households.....                                                                     | 227        |
| 6.4                                                                            | Conclusion .....                                                                                         | 229        |
| <b>Chapter 7: Intimate and economic arrangements along mining routes .....</b> |                                                                                                          | <b>231</b> |
| 7.1                                                                            | Introduction: Meillassoux reloaded? .....                                                                | 231        |
| 7.2                                                                            | Labour mobility and the sexual division of labour .....                                                  | 232        |
| 7.3                                                                            | Hearth-holds and intimate transactions .....                                                             | 233        |
| 7.3.1                                                                          | <i>Tutrices</i> : the feminization and monetization of the <i>diatiguia</i> .....                        | 236        |
| 7.3.2                                                                          | <i>Niado musolu</i> : local wives associating with itinerant miners and managing mining operations ..... | 237        |
| 7.3.3                                                                          | <i>Fudukuruniw</i> (small marriages): temporary partnering.....                                          | 239        |
| 7.3.4                                                                          | Formal spouses: from itinerant hearth-hold to scattered households.....                                  | 247        |
| 7.3.5                                                                          | Synthesis: women enabling men to circulate and making money out of it.....                               | 249        |
| 7.4                                                                            | Conclusion .....                                                                                         | 251        |
| <b>Chapter 8: Resilient social networks on the move .....</b>                  |                                                                                                          | <b>253</b> |
| 8.1                                                                            | Introduction: "I was alone, travelling with my wife" .....                                               | 253        |
| 8.2                                                                            | (In)security, mobile livelihoods, and social networks .....                                              | 254        |
| 8.3                                                                            | Social networks and the study of (im)mobility .....                                                      | 256        |
| 8.3.1                                                                          | Networks as resources and constraints .....                                                              | 256        |
| 8.3.2                                                                          | Networks in time .....                                                                                   | 258        |
| 8.4                                                                            | Mapping supports: observing social relations beyond the “network metaphor” .....                         | 259        |
| 8.5                                                                            | General description of interviewees and overview of social networks’ composition .                       | 260        |
| 8.5.1                                                                          | General characteristics of interviewees.....                                                             | 260        |
| 8.5.2                                                                          | General distribution of supports.....                                                                    | 261        |
| 8.6                                                                            | The dynamics of support relations along miners’ careers .....                                            | 265        |
| 8.6.1                                                                          | Informational support .....                                                                              | 267        |
| 8.6.2                                                                          | Financial support.....                                                                                   | 268        |
| 8.6.3                                                                          | Support for housing and accommodation .....                                                              | 268        |
| 8.6.4                                                                          | Support for work opportunities .....                                                                     | 269        |
| 8.6.5                                                                          | Support for travel .....                                                                                 | 270        |
| 8.6.6                                                                          | “Weak ties” upside down: obtaining safety from relations outside of the <i>fabara</i> sphere.....        | 271        |
| 8.7                                                                            | Differentiated professionalizations.....                                                                 | 274        |
| 8.7.1                                                                          | First journey: <i>badenya</i> and <i>fadenya</i> configurations .....                                    | 275        |
| 8.7.2                                                                          | Journeys of experienced miners: specialization of careers .....                                          | 280        |
| 8.7.3                                                                          | Professional configurations among experienced miners.....                                                | 284        |
|                                                                                | The family-bounded configuration .....                                                                   | 284        |
|                                                                                | The opportunistic configuration .....                                                                    | 288        |
|                                                                                | The professional configuration.....                                                                      | 292        |
|                                                                                | Changing supportive networks at home and/or away as a response to the instability of the sector .....    | 298        |
| 8.8                                                                            | Conclusion .....                                                                                         | 299        |
| <b>PART FOUR.....</b>                                                          |                                                                                                          | <b>302</b> |
| <b>The workings of expulsions .....</b>                                        |                                                                                                          | <b>302</b> |

|                                                                                                                                                                          |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Chapter 9: The securitization of an industrial mining enclave: creating local partners and removable illegals.....</b>                                                | <b>303</b> |
| 9.1 Introduction: Kalou, 8 moves, 4 expulsions .....                                                                                                                     | 303        |
| 9.2 Artisanal and industrial mining in Siguiri: an example of a complicated cohabitation .....                                                                           | 305        |
| 9.2.1 Case study area: The region of Bouré and the S.A.G. ....                                                                                                           | 307        |
| 9.3 Who competes for what? – the rules of the game .....                                                                                                                 | 309        |
| 9.3.1 Dispossession and expulsion .....                                                                                                                                  | 309        |
| 9.4 The securitisation of large scale gold mining: the making of the partner community of traditional <i>orpailleurs</i> vs. the illegal miners coming from abroad ..... | 312        |
| 9.5 The management of expulsion.....                                                                                                                                     | 317        |
| 9.5.1 <i>Ratissage</i> : Security-inspired expulsion .....                                                                                                               | 317        |
| 9.5.2 Tolerance: participatory-inspired expulsion .....                                                                                                                  | 321        |
| 9.6 Capital expansion, labour expulsion .....                                                                                                                            | 324        |
| 9.7 Conclusion .....                                                                                                                                                     | 327        |
| <b>Chapter 10: Governing with power lines: the externalization of expulsions .....</b>                                                                                   | <b>329</b> |
| 10.1 Introduction: “Governance is cheap, cheaper than defense” .....                                                                                                     | 329        |
| 10.2 Siguiri, the “modern” city .....                                                                                                                                    | 330        |
| 10.3 CSR programmes and “community partnership” .....                                                                                                                    | 332        |
| 10.4 The state sponsored “corporate gift” of electrification .....                                                                                                       | 333        |
| 10.5 Power lines (re)activating lines of power.....                                                                                                                      | 334        |
| 10.6 Externalizing expulsion.....                                                                                                                                        | 337        |
| 10.7 Conclusion .....                                                                                                                                                    | 339        |
| <b>Conclusions .....</b>                                                                                                                                                 | <b>341</b> |
| Extraction and expulsion-induced mobility.....                                                                                                                           | 341        |
| Adaptation and transformation of local institutions in a context of accelerated extraction ...                                                                           | 345        |
| 10.8 Resilient networks in the transboundary spaces of artisanal gold mining .....                                                                                       | 347        |
| Age and Agency in precarious conditions .....                                                                                                                            | 351        |
| <b>Bibliography .....</b>                                                                                                                                                | <b>354</b> |
| <b>Appendixes.....</b>                                                                                                                                                   | <b>384</b> |
| Appendix I : Entretiens semi-structuré type expert - 2012.....                                                                                                           | 384        |
| Appendix II : Network Map – 2012 .....                                                                                                                                   | 387        |
| Appendix III : Interview grid « JOURNEYS » 2011, 2012, 2014 .....                                                                                                        | 388        |
| Appendix IV : Thematic grid « Authority, autochthony, access » - 2014 .....                                                                                              | 392        |
| Appendix V : Thematic interview grid « Material, prices, qualifications » - 2014 .....                                                                                   | 393        |
| Appendix VI : Thematic interview grid « Protection and prosapiation » - 2014.....                                                                                        | 395        |
| Appendix VII 7 : Grid supply chain - trade (Switzerland) - 2016 .....                                                                                                    | 396        |
| Appendix VIII – Map of main informants and interviewees .....                                                                                                            | 399        |
| Appendix IX – Sketch of a familial compound ( <i>lu</i> ), source : Mamadou Camara, 1999.....                                                                            | 400        |
| Appendix X – Glossary of <i>maninkakan</i> terms .....                                                                                                                   | 401        |

