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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-58655

Title: “Effets sociaux et moraux des pratiques magico-religieuses sur la cohésion des acteurs miniers sur le site d’orpaillage artisanal de M’banga au Niger”

Recommendation:

Accept with Minor Revisions.....

Rating	Excel .	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	✓			
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity		✓		
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

Reviewer Report

Overall Assessment

The manuscript entitled “Effets sociaux et moraux des pratiques magico-religieuses sur la cohésion des acteurs miniers sur le site d’orpaillage artisanal de M’banga au Niger” examines the social and moral consequences of magico-religious practices within the artisanal gold-mining community of M'banga in Niger. Situated within a socio-anthropological perspective, the study investigates how beliefs and ritual practices associated with gold extraction influence interpersonal relations, social cohesion, and moral norms among miners. Employing a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions involving 139 participants, the study explores the symbolic meanings attached to gold, the functions of marabouts and diviners, ritual practices surrounding mining activities, and the ways in which these practices simultaneously sustain and undermine social relations within the mining community.

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The topic is original and addresses an important dimension of artisanal mining that has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. While existing literature on artisanal gold mining frequently focuses on economic livelihoods, environmental degradation, health risks, or security challenges, this manuscript shifts attention toward the cultural, symbolic, and moral universe within which mining activities are embedded. By examining the interaction between indigenous beliefs, Islamic practices, and economic uncertainty, the study contributes to anthropological discussions on religion, risk, morality, and informal economies in West Africa. The research is particularly valuable because it situates magico-religious practices not merely as individual beliefs but as social mechanisms influencing trust, cooperation, conflict, and community cohesion.

The manuscript is logically organized and demonstrates considerable familiarity with anthropological literature relating to traditional beliefs, religion, artisanal mining, and social organization in Niger and neighbouring West African societies. The use of qualitative evidence, including numerous interview excerpts and field observations, provides readers with rich ethnographic material that strengthens the authenticity of the analysis. The discussion also attempts to interpret empirical findings through the complementary use of Crozier and Friedberg's strategic actor model, Geertz's interpretive anthropology, and Malinowski's functionalism, thereby providing a multidimensional analytical framework.

Despite these strengths, several aspects of the manuscript require further refinement. Although the empirical material is rich, the analytical discussion occasionally becomes descriptive, and the integration between empirical findings and theoretical interpretation could be strengthened. Greater methodological transparency, more critical engagement with alternative interpretations, and improved editorial consistency would enhance the scholarly quality of the manuscript. These observations concern refinement rather than fundamental weaknesses, and the manuscript represents a meaningful contribution that would be suitable for publication after minor revisions.

Strengths of the Paper

One of the greatest strengths of the manuscript lies in the originality of its research focus. The social dimensions of magico-religious practices within artisanal mining communities remain relatively underexplored despite their importance for understanding everyday decision-making, social organization, and conflict management. By concentrating on the M'banga mining site, the study provides valuable empirical evidence concerning a subject that has received limited systematic attention within African anthropology and mining studies.

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Another significant strength is the richness of the qualitative data. The study draws upon interviews with a diverse range of actors, including miners, community leaders, traders, sex workers, and practitioners of esoteric knowledge. This diversity allows the manuscript to present multiple perspectives regarding the meanings attributed to gold, ritual practices, and social relationships. The numerous verbatim quotations included throughout the findings considerably strengthen the credibility of the analysis and provide readers with direct insight into the lived experiences of participants.

The manuscript also demonstrates strong contextual grounding. The detailed discussion of the historical, cultural, and religious background of the Tillabéri region enables readers unfamiliar with the study area to understand the broader social environment within which mining activities take place. The explanation of the coexistence of Islamic traditions and animist beliefs provides an appropriate foundation for interpreting the emergence and persistence of various ritual practices associated with artisanal gold extraction.

A further strength lies in the identification of the ambivalent character of magico-religious practices. Rather than portraying these practices solely as harmful or irrational, the study demonstrates that they perform multiple social functions. Certain rituals contribute to solidarity, mutual assistance, and collective identity, while others foster suspicion, accusations, interpersonal conflict, and social fragmentation. This balanced interpretation reflects the complexity of the phenomenon and avoids simplistic explanations.

The discussion of specific practices—including geomancy, ritual offerings, occult pacts, sexual rituals, and consultations with marabouts and diviners—is particularly informative because these practices are analysed not merely as isolated beliefs but as responses to uncertainty, economic risk, and competition inherent in artisanal mining. The manuscript successfully demonstrates that the unpredictable nature of gold extraction encourages actors to seek symbolic means of reducing uncertainty and increasing perceived control over outcomes.

The study further deserves recognition for drawing attention to the broader ethical implications of these practices. The discussion concerning ritual sacrifices, accusations of sorcery, human organ trafficking, and symbolic violence illustrates how economic competition may transform cultural beliefs into mechanisms that undermine trust and peaceful coexistence. By highlighting these dynamics, the manuscript contributes not only to anthropology but also to broader debates concerning social cohesion, informal governance, and community resilience in fragile mining environments.

Areas to be Improved

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Although the manuscript provides extensive ethnographic description, the analytical discussion could be developed further. Many sections carefully describe particular rituals and beliefs, yet the broader sociological significance of these practices is sometimes only briefly discussed. Greater emphasis on explaining *why* particular practices emerge, how they evolve over time, and how they relate to broader theories of risk, symbolic power, or informal institutions would considerably strengthen the analytical contribution of the paper.

The theoretical framework would also benefit from stronger integration with the empirical findings. The manuscript introduces Crozier and Friedberg's strategic actor model, Geertz's interpretive anthropology, and Malinowski's functionalism as complementary theoretical perspectives. However, these theories are discussed primarily in the introductory section and receive relatively limited attention during the interpretation of results. Explicitly relating each major empirical finding to the theoretical framework would improve conceptual coherence and demonstrate more clearly how the selected theories enhance understanding of the observed phenomena.

The methodology section requires greater transparency regarding data analysis. While the manuscript appropriately identifies thematic content analysis as the principal analytical technique, relatively little information is provided concerning coding procedures, theme development, reflexive interpretation, or strategies employed to enhance credibility and trustworthiness. Explaining how themes emerged from the interview material would improve methodological rigor and facilitate replication by future researchers.

Another aspect requiring clarification concerns the interpretation of participants' narratives. Many findings rely upon accounts describing human sacrifice, occult killings, ritual contracts with spirits, and human organ trafficking. These testimonies constitute valuable ethnographic evidence regarding participants' beliefs and perceptions; however, the manuscript occasionally presents these accounts as factual events rather than as reported narratives. From an anthropological perspective, it would be preferable to distinguish more clearly between participants' representations, community beliefs, and independently verifiable events. Such clarification would strengthen the academic neutrality of the analysis without diminishing the cultural significance of these narratives.

The discussion could also engage more extensively with comparative literature from other artisanal mining regions in West Africa. While studies from Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and neighbouring contexts are cited throughout the literature review, the discussion would benefit from more systematic comparison between the findings at M'banga and similar observations reported elsewhere. Such comparisons would

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enable readers to distinguish which practices appear locally specific and which reflect broader regional patterns.

Several sections of the findings are considerably descriptive and occasionally repetitive. Discussions concerning geomancy, ritual offerings, occult practices, and consultations with spiritual specialists sometimes reiterate similar observations across different subsections. Condensing these discussions and emphasizing analytical synthesis would improve readability while preserving the richness of the ethnographic material.

The manuscript also raises important ethical issues concerning ritual violence, human sacrifice, and human organ trafficking. Given the seriousness of these allegations, it would strengthen the paper if the authors briefly discussed the methodological challenges involved in documenting highly sensitive phenomena, including issues of verification, confidentiality, and ethical responsibility when interpreting such accounts.

Editorial refinement is also recommended. Although the manuscript is generally understandable, there are numerous grammatical inconsistencies, typographical errors, spacing irregularities, and occasional repetitions throughout the text. Several tables, photographs, and figure captions would benefit from more consistent formatting, and minor revisions to sentence structure would improve the overall readability of the manuscript.

Finally, the conclusion effectively summarizes the principal findings but could more clearly identify the broader implications of the research for mining governance, community conflict management, and public policy. While the recommendation for comparative research across other mining sites is appropriate, the conclusion could also discuss how understanding local belief systems may contribute to designing culturally informed interventions aimed at strengthening social cohesion and conflict prevention within artisanal mining communities.

Recommendation

This manuscript presents an original and valuable socio-anthropological investigation into the relationship between magico-religious practices and social cohesion within an artisanal gold-mining community in Niger. The research is supported by rich qualitative evidence, demonstrates substantial familiarity with the regional cultural context, and contributes meaningfully to scholarship on informal mining, religion, morality, and social organization in West Africa. Although the manuscript would benefit from deeper analytical interpretation, stronger theoretical integration, greater methodological transparency, and careful editorial revision, these issues are primarily developmental rather than

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fundamental. Subject to the revisions outlined above, the manuscript has the potential to make a significant contribution to anthropological and social science research on artisanal mining. Therefore, I recommend that the manuscript be **accepted with minor revisions**.