
Changing Environments, Occult Protests, and Social Memories in Sierra Leone

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ABSTRACT

In Sierra Leone, the environmental and economic impacts of extractive industry are a source of great concern for local communities. Through the usual weapons of the weak (e.g., sabotage, thefts, and rumors) and the idiom of the occult, the population expresses dissatisfaction with a modernity which has always been promised but never achieved. By comparing three different cases this paper argues that extractive landscapes are places of great political contest at the local and national level. In the first and the second case I will explore the ways in which the inhabitants of two different mining regions interpret in terms of the occult some unexpected and mysterious events occurring to a large-scale mining company and to a hydroelectric power dam. In the third case I will show how the complex interplay of negotiations between diamond miners and inhabitants of mining areas can be mediated by the presence of spiritual beings locally named 'debul dem'. What I suggest is that mining or extractive landscapes are never neutral sites. They embody past experiences which simultaneously globally connect and locally disconnect places and people. From an anthropological perspective, occult mining narratives can be analyzed as forms of social memory pointing to a history of violence, terror, and uncertainties inscribed in the landscape and dwelling practices. The basic idea of this paper is that the local discourses on the occult are not just ways to make sense of the uncertainties and anxieties of a globalized modernity but are, above all, highly politicized practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Civil War (1991–2002), Sierra Leone has been faced with a period of rapid socio-economic changes. In particular, since its controversial election victory in 2007,¹ the All People's Congress (APC) government led by President Ernest Bai Koroma has been committed to 'changing' the country. Not by chance, the government program, 'Agenda for Change', presented to the electorate, includes structural reforms in the sectors of energy, agriculture, transport, social and health services.

Between light and shade, numerous projects have, in fact, been started or completed in the last few years. Among them, the upgrading of some of the main roads in the capital and main linking highways in the country; the exploration and discovery of new mineral deposits and completion of the Bumbuna hydroelectric power station are worth mentioning. With the support and consultancy of leading international agencies and NGOs, the government of Sierra Leone has also been able to create the conditions to attract foreign investments. Thanks to generous mining concessions (NACE 2009), the attention of foreign investors has focused above all on the mineral resources: diamonds, gold, iron, rutile and bauxite. The mining sector thus continues to be the main source of wealth for Sierra Leone. Contracts for several hundred million dollars have been signed with international companies in the last few years (Gberie 2010).

The government has placed much emphasis on the results achieved and has made its stated objectives it hoped to gain appear within reach. It has thereby contributed to creating and fuelling the expectations of a material well-being shared by all. While politicians and local and foreign businessmen have in fact gained more prestige and power – and in a short time some have also accumulated extraordinary wealth – a large part of the population continues to face the same old difficulties and uncertainties. In a decade Sierra Leone has timidly risen in the United Nations' development index, which at the end of the civil war placed it at the bottom. However, the ambitious aim of halving the number of people living below the poverty threshold by 2015 is still far away. It is worth remembering that even today about 70 per cent of Sierra Leone's population lives on about one dollar a day (UNDP 2012).

As in the past, subsistence agriculture and artisanal mining are the main forms of employment. Despite the contracts for the building of infrastructures, and the agreements signed with the government for small and large-scale mineral exploitation, unemployment continues to be high, especially among young people (Awareness Times 2012). Those who have found a job – for example, in large-scale mining – have to fight to obtain better contract and salary conditions. In the last few years, therefore, discontent among the people has been expressed in various ways. But the reaction has been harsh. In some public protests the police have intervened by shooting on the crowds, killing or wounding some demonstrators.

It is in this context of high expectations and unevenly distributed opportunities, of discontent with conditions of labour exploitation and the risk of environmental degradation, with the violent repression of open forms of protest, that the concern with the role played by the occult in the daily lives of Sierra Leoneans seems to have increased. Rumours of ritual killings (Mansaray 2008; Awoko 2009; Kai 2009; Peep Reporter 2009b; Moiguah 2011), news of mysterious accidents (Fonti 2009, 2011), and findings of ritual material in unexpected places (Awareness Times 2010; Koroma 2010, 2011; Moriba 2011),² have attracted the attention of the local media, confirming and reproducing suspicions, fears and feelings of anxiety and epistemological and ontological insecurity.

The scale of these occult activities has reached such a high level that even the State House in Freetown has not remained untouched. In 2009, for example, it was rumoured that the Security Chief of the President's State Lodge had officially hired a 'traditional witch hunter' (*ariogbo*) (Peep Reporter 2009a). According to local journalists' reports, the latter had discovered that the State Lodge water tank had been contaminated by 'witches', who had also buried several 'evil' ritual objects with the aim of harming and obstructing the President (Awareness Times 2009; Samura 2011).

The hidden forces mentioned by the people of Sierra Leone to explain these occult phenomena often include *devils* [Krio: *debul* (sing.); *debul dem* (pl.)]. These invisible entities, which are not necessarily evil, have recently been made accountable for accidents to people, the breakdown of machinery owned by mining companies, the theft of machinery, or actual sabotage, targeting above all

the main works of 'modernization' (e.g., dams, railway lines, and electricity lines). On the contrary, in other cases these entities have been consulted by ritual specialists in order to identify the humans responsible for these acts of sabotage or theft (Awoko 2011a).

President Koroma has several times publicly expressed his disappointment regarding the manifestations of these occult phenomena. The ambiguous use of certain terms and the ironic tone of his speeches have, however, multiplied the possible levels of interpretation of his messages. In 2011, for example, on the occasion of the inaugural ceremony of the Euros Bio Energy Factory at Makeni, Koroma claimed to know how to capture the *debul dem* which, up till then had continued to sabotage the modernization works in the country: 'My government knows how to catch these devils'. Invited by the journalists to clarify this, the President stated: 'We know how to catch them and prosecute them and we also have the little bottles to keep these devils in Pademba Road and other cells that are meant for them' (Awoko 2011b).³ Aware that he was addressing a heterogeneous audience of foreign investors and fellow countrymen with different religious credos (Christians and Muslims are officially the majority in Sierra Leone) and different stances towards indigenous spiritual powers, the President was therefore claiming occult powers at the very moment that he spoke ironically about their existence (cf. Shaw 2002: 257; Ferme 1999: 171).

The underlying question to be asked here is however, why is all this happening *now*, in Sierra Leone? What do all these phenomena have in common? President Koroma sees a link between the actions of sabotage harming the mining companies, the protest demonstrations of the workers and the rumours about the *debul dem* infesting the main mining areas in the country.⁴ On official occasions, he has several times made the point that the rumours about *debul dem* serve simply to deceive ordinary people, to mask the true reality of thefts and damage caused by saboteurs, or unscrupulous people who, for personal gain or political rivalry, 'are bent on seeing the downfall of the country' (Turay 2011; cf. Awoko 2011b).

In this paper I would like to put forward a different interpretation. Criminalizing what lies 'behind' the *debul dem's* actions or considering them as mere 'superstitions' may have a triple effect,

to say the least: 1) hiding or underestimating the importance of the historical and socio-political contexts in which such occult narratives arise; 2) underestimating the potential political significance of the actions generically grouped together under the label of '*debul*' and, in particular, their capacity to open up negotiations between unequal subjects; and 3) tacit justifying of the use of force to put down or repress dissent.

My aim is to show the multiple levels of meaning and action necessary to understand the discourses and practices related to the *debul dem*. On the one hand, the narratives on this invisible presence make use of images and symbols incorporating a memory of violence and exploitation which, from the past has prolonged its effects onto the present. On the other hand, a historic-anthropological analysis of these accounts cannot underestimate their political aims. Here, symbols and metaphors are not used simply to express and 'make sense of' the uncertainties and anxieties produced by globalized modernity (*cf.* Marshall 2009). *They act in the world*. Hence, they are *active symbols* composing the weave of 'fantasies of agency' that mediate the (post- or neo-) colonial encounter with the extractive industries (Wardlow 2004: 50).

It is from this point of view that I will analyze the ways in which the inhabitants of a mining region interpreted in occult terms some unexpected and mysterious events occurring around and to a small-scale enterprise. I will show how the complex interplay of negotiations between diamond miners and inhabitants of mining areas in the Kono District can be mediated by the presence of a *debul*. As in other African mining regions in which precious minerals are artisanally extracted (Grätz 2009, 2012; Luning 2009, 2012; Schure *et al.* 2011; Werthmann 2003), the gold and diamond miners of Sierra Leone often refer to these spiritual beings (D'Angelo 2011, 2014; Pijpers 2011: 1077) in order to improve fortune or to explain unexpected contingencies.

What I suggest is that occult mining narratives in Sierra Leone can be also analyzed as forms of social memory drawing from a kaleidoscopic local repertoire of the imaginary. By pointing to a particular history of violence, terror and uncertainties that are inscribed in the landscape and dwelling practices, these narratives are in fact practical ways *to do* things and achieve tangible results;

in other words, they are 'forms of political practice, modes of *action* on the world' (Marshall 2009: 28).

1. MINING, ENVIRONMENTS AND THE OCCULT

When, in anthropology, we speak of miners or mining populations entering into relationships with 'devils' or invisible local spirits, a reference to Michael Taussig's *The Devil and the Commodity Fetishism in South America* (1980) seems unavoidable (*cf.* Sanders 2008). Whether we are dealing with gold, silver or tin mines in South America (*e.g.*, Harris 1989; Sallnow 1989; Salazar-Soler 2006), the diamond and gold mines in sub-Saharan Africa (*e.g.*, Bryceson *et al.* 2010; De Boeck 1998); in Papua New Guinea (*e.g.*, Clark 1993; Jorgensen 1998) or in the remote deposits of New Caledonia (*e.g.*, Horowitz 2001), Taussig's analysis is an important reference point when considering the relationship between ideology and production processes (Gross 1983; Godoy 1985), and a way to bridge the interpretative and politico-economic analysis (Marcus and Fischer 1986).

One of the central theses in this book is that the devil with which the peasants in the Cauca Valley in Columbia and the Bolivian tin miners make a pact is a symbol of the alienation experience of the proletarianized workers (Taussig 1980: xi). For Taussig the proletarianized peasants and the Bolivian miners act as symbolic mediators between two distinct and irreconcilable spheres of exchange: on the one hand, the values and organization of a pre-capitalist society and, on the other, the principles and values of a capitalist economy. The magic-religious rituals and beliefs hinging on the figure of the devil may thus be interpreted as an oblique criticism of modern forms of production (Taussig 1980: 10).

As Sanders notes (2008), *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism* proposes a 'seductive anthropological analytic' which has the merit of showing that certain popular or folklore beliefs – apparently anachronistic and of little interest for an anthropology of contemporary societies – may on the contrary be interpreted as sophisticated cultural forms of resistance to and criticism of industrial capitalism (Marcus and Fischer 1986), or of any other form of exploitation and violent oppression brought by colonialism and economic globalization. Taussig's arguments, however, lend them-

selves to criticism of both a theoretic and methodological and empirical nature (*e.g.*, Austen 1993; Edelman 1994; Sanders 2008), which question their applicability to the Sierra Leonean context. On the basis of my ethnographical experience in Sierra Leone (D'Angelo 2011), I consider that the *debul dem* are neither deceptive images of the true reality of economic exploitation underlying the production relations, nor simply generalized metaphors for these same relations of exploitation and oppression (*cf.* Masquelier 2000: 88; White 1993).

The approach recently put forward by the Comaroffs on the occult economies (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2000, 2003) to explain the dramatic increase 'in the deployment, real or imagined, of magical means for material ends' (*Idem* 1999: 279) does not seem to be a wholly convincing alternative (Moore and Sanders 2001: 13; Ranger 2007; Marshall 2009). From the point of view of the occult economy approach, the reference to invisible beings or mysterious forces is a way to give meaning to what would otherwise remain inexplicable or meaningless from the point of view of those who are excluded from the benefits (reserved for a few) of neo-liberal economy: the production and accumulation of wealth (apparently) created from nothing and without working.

In this perspective the Comaroffs are, moreover, defending a comparative view which they define 'on awkward scale', which is 'neither unambiguously "local" nor obviously "global" – but on a scale in between that, somehow, captures their mutual determinations. And their indeterminacies' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 282; 2003). This proposal is undeniable inspiring. But my aim is to pinpoint the historical and cultural specificity of the narratives on the *debul dem* widespread in Sierra Leone after the end of the civil war, and at the same time to *show* the possible 'family resemblances' (Wittgenstein 1953) between the various (but limited) local cases examined here. Thus, in general, this approach does not misrecognize 'the global forces that (...) are besetting the "little guys"' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003: 155). Yet, it tries to *personalize* these same large impersonal forces by pointing to the specific social actors – visible or invisible, present or past, individual or collective – that have the power to produce certain effects, to de-

fine what is 'religion' and 'superstition', what is 'legal and illegal', and so on. In short, this approach does not give up to the anthropological comparative project; if anything, it concerns for 'a serious regard (...) for contexts' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 12) and it poses once again the question of the relationship between ethnography, history and imagination.

In line with Comaroff and Comaroff (1992: xi), I maintain that 'no humanist account of the past or present can (or does) go very far without the kind of understanding that the ethnographic gaze presupposes'. Accordingly, I draw upon my field research to discuss the case presented in greater detail in the second part of this article, but I also rely on second-hand accounts extracted from reports and newspaper articles to contextualize *historically* the same experience. Indeed, what these reports reveal is that the economic, social and environmental changes occurring in Sierra Leone in the last few years have been of great concern for its inhabitants; not surprisingly, multiple chains of events have aroused *the occult imaginations* of many people.

Central to the understanding of the relationship between history and ethnography is the concept of *historical imagination*, that is, 'the imagination (...) of both those who make history and those who write it' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: xi). Through the interstices and the conjunctures of these imaginaries we can recover a kind of 'synoptic illusion' – to use an expression of Pierre Bourdieu's mentioned by the Comaroffs (1992: 6), – a consciously partial sense of *wholeness* or *unity* from an otherwise (*i.e.*, so often) fragmented and (at times) alienated and contingent ethnographic experience. While I was in Kono, for example, having limited access to mass media and being focused on my daily life routines, I was not fully aware of the possible connections between what was happening in my field and what was going on in other mining areas of the country. Paradoxically, my proximity to the field and my ethnographic myopic focus on very specific micro-local events, twisted my anthropological analysis. Consequently, I was not fully aware that episodes apparently disconnected or unrelated to each other could be instead significantly linkable. Only in the months and immediate years later, when I started to sort out the interviews recorded in the mines, did the incoherent fragments

of speeches caught in the streets and from local radio, the images, the silences and the sounds of the mining landscapes, as well as the many newspaper clippings collected as fetishes of *my being there*, only then, did these heterogeneous materials begin to display the contours of a living mosaic with different entangled scenes.

The first scene or case considered is set in the Bonthe and Moyamba Districts, where rutile, a mineral from which titanium is obtained, is mined. This case of large-scale mining, compared with the artisanal diamond mining in the Kono District, anticipates and implicitly questions the idea that the occult idiom only emerges in situations of conflict between different spheres of exchange or production. The occult narratives are transversal to the modes of production as they are to the kind of minerals mined.

The second case instead concerns a site where minerals are not mined, but energy is 'extracted' by exploiting the water resources in the region. The case in question refers to the voices of a *debul* which was supposed to have impeded the completion of the Bumbuna hydroelectric station. With this case I intend to show that the question of the *debul* is not even a purely 'mining' one. The accounts of the *debul* seem instead to have to do with a complex game played around drastic environmental changes, the failure to make forms of compensation, and the protests and discontent strategically and obliquely expressed by the local population.

As with the members of a family, in all these cases we note similarities, or rather, 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail' (Wittgenstein 1953: 32). To pinpoint and understand some of these shared features, it is, however, necessary to first describe the more general politico-social context of my fieldwork in Sierra Leone between 2007 and 2011 and, in particular, in the Kono District (2007–2008).

1.1 Election violence, protests and demands for compensation in the Kono District

About 70 per cent of diamond production in Sierra Leone is estimated to come from the Kono District (Bermudez-Lugo 2007). Considering that mining is the main industry in this country, and that diamonds may also be retrieved with an easily available ar-

tisanal technology, many Sierra Leoneans consider Kono as the 'breadbasket' of Sierra Leone. Travelling along the dusty, unpaved roads in this region on the borders with Guinea, and observing the surface mines in which men hunched over the sieves search for precious stones, we realize how tinged with sarcasm this expression is. The landscape is studded with holes in the ground indicating a history of exploitation of the area and local labour lasting since the thirties when the first precious stones were discovered. In the capital, Koidu Sefadu, there were no asphalt roads until 2012. The level of violence and crime was one of the highest in the country (Gberie 2010).

During the period of my fieldwork in the Kono District (2007–2008), there was an atmosphere of political and social tension fuelled by a series of violent episodes. Between August and September 2007, the situation was particularly tense due to the presidential elections. Skirmishes between the supporters of the two main opposing parties, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and APC, were reported in various parts of the country. But in Kono the wake of these tensions continued after the national elections, also due to several promises made during the election campaign. In April 2008, for example, the police in Koidu Sefadu intervened to disperse a crowd of several hundreds of young miners angrily claiming the right to sieve the mound left behind by the former National Diamond Mining Company (NDMC), the so-called 'Mountain of Hope' (NMJD 2010). During the previous election campaign some candidates had promised that if elected they would allow the exploitation of that mound of earth, potentially rich in small precious stones. In the meantime, however, a local mining company had obtained a concession to work the deposit in question. The local authorities had therefore sought to dissuade the illegal miners from continuing their work and, failing to do so, had asked the police to intervene. The situation soon became white-hot, to the point that the local police asked for the intervention of the army (Kamara 2008a). Things returned to normal only after the curfew had been imposed and several dozens of people arrested (Cocorioko 2008). Among those arrested, the police identified some former ex-combatants and seized a war weapon (Kamara 2008b).

The most serious episode in that period, however, took place several months earlier, in December 2007, and involved the leading large-scale diamond mining company in Sierra Leone, Koidu Holdings (KH). In 2004, the latter had obtained a concession to take up the mining work, interrupted during the Civil War, in the main kimberlitic deposits in the country. One of these deposits is situated within the Koidu Sefadu town boundaries. Since the mining of precious stones from kimberlitic rock often calls for the use of explosives, the population around the Company's plant frequently had to be evacuated from their homes to enable the continuation of mining operations. To offset the evident inconvenience and risks caused by these explosions, the Company had built new homes in an area at a safe distance, and offered them to some of those living near the mines. The inhabitants, however, were wholly dissatisfied with the quality standards of the new homes provided, which had no water facilities, were far from schools and markets and did not meet the needs of all the persons affected by the inconveniences caused by the Company. A group of inhabitants in Koidu Sefadu therefore organized a protest demonstration to call attention to the problems caused by KH. During the protest the police intervened with tear gas to disperse the crowd of some 400 people. In the confusion a dozen people were wounded and two demonstrators lost their lives to bullets fired by some policemen (NACE 2009; PAC 2009).

The newly elected government seized the opportunity offered by this episode to revoke KH's mining license and set up an enquiry committee. The Jenkins Johnson Commission of Enquiry produced a report one year later, in which it sought to reconstruct the dynamics of the events leading to the killing of the demonstrators. The Commission also proposed compensation for the victims' families, and the charging of the policemen responsible (PAC 2009). At the same time, President Koroma and his ministers nominated a task force to review the mining sector and renegotiate the tax payment agreements with the main foreign large-scale companies (NACE 2009; PAC 2009). In this delicate phase, an incident occurred in another part of the country where the mining of rutile and other minerals has been causing enormous environmental damage for decades.

1.2 The Sierra Rutile incident

In January 2008, the Sierra Rutile mining company completed the production of a sophisticated dredge to sieve and extract minerals such as ilmenite, zircon and above all rutile, in the Moyamba and Bonthe districts. The colossal machinery, worth 27 million dollars, was symbolically baptized with the name of Solondo, a powerful legendary warrior who lived around the second half of the nineteenth century (Alie 2001; cit. in Akiwumi 2012). In July that year, however, the hugely expensive structure collapsed due to a technical fault, injuring several employees and killing two (Koroma and Hill 2008).

From the newspaper accounts it appears that the incident did not entirely take the inhabitants of this mining region by surprise. In the previous months there had been signs of a growing tension between residents of Moyamba district and the management of the Company to the point that, in late February 2008, a large number of residents were planning a demonstration (Life Herald 2008). The residents complained mainly about the environmental damage caused by the dredges, the massive consumption of palm oil (which was used by the Company for its machinery), and for the lack of adequate compensation to the land owners (Awareness Times 2008a; Life Herald 2008). This tension was also reflected in the escalation of rumours about occult activities in the region. The inhabitants' dreams began to be peopled with spirits of their ancestors or invisible beings, generically described as *debul dem* demanding greater respect for their dwelling places. Through the medium of the inhabitants of the mining areas, these spirits warned the Company directors to make sacrifices to compensate them for the trouble caused (Awareness Times 2008d).

When rumours of attacks by witches and ritual killings among the residents spread, fear and indignation also grew. One month before the accident, for example, the inhabitants of the Moyamba District demanded the investigation of the suspected 'secret killing' of a local trader which, it was rumoured, involved some unspecified employees of the rutile company (Awareness Times 2008c). The Paramount Chief of Imperi (Bonthe District), Madam Hawa Kpanobom Sokan IV, also stated that the very day before the collapse of the dredge, the Company's director was ap-

proached by a young woman predicting what was about to happen in the mine (Awareness Times 2008d; Massaquoi and Hill 2008). It was subsequently discovered that on the day of the disaster, in a coincidence described by the local newspapers as 'mysterious', the Sierra Rutile's head geologist, on vacation in Australia, had died of a heart attack (Awareness Times 2008d). Furthermore, a group of workers declared that they saw a 'strange giant viper snake' near the Solondo dredge few days after the accident, at the very point where the structure collapsed (Sierra Express 2008). This event also contributed to increasing the anxiety and mystery caused by what had happened because, in particular circumstances, the sighting of a snake (*e.g.*, cobra) can be interpreted as a bad omen and its presence as an epitome of an angry *debul* (D'Angelo 2011). For all these reasons the Imperi Paramount Chief declared that the tragic event had been caused by the negligence of the Sierra Rutile directors, who had not allowed the carrying out of a traditional ceremony to placate the anger of the 'Ancestors' spirits' (Massaquoi and Hill 2008). Thus, in August 2008, about a month after the Solondo disaster, the Sierra Rutile Company decided to provide the communities of Imperi Chiefdom with 20 bags of rice, four bulls and other ritual materials for preparing libations and sacrifices (Standard Times 2008).

It must be stressed, however, that these protests expressed in terms of occult phenomena are not simply part of 'myths' or 'religious belief' (*cf.* Rahall 2008), that is, appendixes of something more 'real'. As Comaroffs note: 'it is never possible simply to prize apart the cultural from the material' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 235). Hence, we are not surprised that these concerns arose in the context of a subsistence farming economy with widespread poverty affecting 72 per cent (Moyamba District) and 85 per cent (Bonthe District) of the local population, a lack of asphalted roads, access to electricity, healthcare and teaching materials in schools (NACE 2009: 24). In contrast, the roads linking the Sierra Rutile mines to the rest of the country are well maintained and the expatriates live in 'prefabricated enclosures' which, equipped with all modern comforts, appear to the local people as paradoxical happy isles set in the middle of the savanna (*cf.* Ferme 2001: 39; Akiwumi 2012: 66).

Moreover, the Company's mining activity has profoundly modified the biophysical and cultural order of the environment. The enormous inconvenience created for the population at environmental, economic and cultural level (Akiwumi 2012), does not, however, seem to have been adequately compensated. The loss of farming land and sacred places, the relocation of entire villages, poor compensation for the economic damage caused by the controlled flooding of vast mining areas, are but a few of the main concerns of the local population (Akiwumi 2006, 2012). Similar concerns are not new for these communities which have an experience with the impact of rutile mining on local agricultural production, gender relationships, and family subsistence dating back to before the civil war (Williams Ntiri 1992). Although the Company now maintains that it is working 'for a better Sierra Leone' and helping the communities in many different ways (Standard Times 2008), the NACE analysts note that in this country: 'Companies are working in, and local communities are living in, a legal vacuum' in which the companies' obligations are not clear regarding what is voluntary on their part to do regarding reparation or compensation for the mining populations, how much they earn and how much they must pay the government in taxes to enable the latter to construct infrastructures, refurbish the schools, create work and reduce poverty (NACE 2009: 23–30).

As was mentioned above, a few days after the accident on the Sierra Rutile premises, and less than a year after the one in the Kono District, the Government of Sierra Leone announced that, in collaboration with the British Department for International Development (DFID), it had set up a task force to review the agreements with the main mining companies operating in the country and in particular with Koidu Holdings, African Minerals and Sierra Rutile (Kargbo 2008). The task force concluded its work in a few months. The consultations led to the drawing up of the Mines and Mineral Act 2009, taking the place of the previous 1994 Act.

1.3 The Bumbuna *debul*

In October 2007, the newly elected President Ernest Bai Koroma visited the Bumbuna dam during his first official visit outside the capital. On that occasion, before an international delegation made

up of donors and exponents of civil society, he declared in the Krio language that he would eliminate ‘the bad spiritual devil’ which for several years had prevented the completion of the Bumbuna Hydroelectric Project (BHP): ‘I made meself come see for meself de *debul* that holds this project. We go kill am’ (Manson 2007). As far as we know, this was the first time that the President had referred to this invisible being on an official occasion.

In any case, the President sought to keep his promise in March 2008 when he returned to the Bumbuna hydroelectric station and activated the device to flood the dam's reservoir with water from the River Seli. A large green area where, shortly before, homes, economic trees, sacred places and agricultural land had existed, gradually turned blue. As a local Sierra Leonean journalist commented: ‘The word of the lips of Tonkolili indigenes was that indeed the President and his team had overcome the mysterious Bumbuna Devil that had long inhibited the realization of the wonderful dream’ (Awareness Times 2008b).

There are no ethnographical investigations into the Bumbuna *debul*. We do not know exactly how this rumour grew up and spread. We only know that an invisible being, generically described as *debul*, had for years been opposing the construction of the Bumbuna hydroelectric station, and the flooding of its reservoir. It is clear that, with the official speeches and local media the Bumbuna *debul* had become a *reality*, a social actor which is part of a complex game played between foreign construction companies, local and national politicians and the local populations. To avoid misunderstandings, it does not concern us here whether the President and his team truly believe in the *debul*'s existence. The evidence points to the contrary. What count are the ‘effects of truth’ which the rumours about the *debul* produce on local political life. For this reason, it is interesting here to shed light on the recent historical context acting as a background to the rumours about the Bumbuna *debul*.

The BHP feasibility studies were financed by the UNDP in the early seventies when President Siaka Stevens was still in power and the APC was the only party in government. Out of 22 potential sites identified by the experts, the stretch of the River Seli near the village of Bumbuna was considered the most suitable for the construction of a hydroelectric power station to supply the capital and

north of the country with electricity. The first preparatory work on the dam, however, started only in the 1980s, after the World Bank consultants advised the downsizing of the initial project due to the country's precarious political and economic situation (Mazzei and Scuppa 2006).

Since then, various politicians and leaders alternating in power in Sierra Leone have in turn promised the rapid completion of the hydroelectric power station. The main construction work on the dam, however, started only in 1990, when the Italian government – among the main international donors of this project – decided to make a loan of 138 billion Italian liras (about 110 million dollars). This financial support was joined by that of the African Development Bank which in 1993 decided to co-finance the project. Despite the Civil War beginning in 1991, the Italian company in charge of the construction of the power station predicted the completion of the works by 1998. Between 1995 and 1997, however, the situation in the north of the country drastically worsened. The area around the dam was the centre of clashes between the various armed groups involved in the conflict. The village of Bumbuna was sacked and destroyed by the rebels and the dam became a strategic target. The construction company's directors therefore decided to hire mercenary troops to protect their staff and prevent further theft and destruction of equipment and machinery. Despite these measures, the safety conditions did not improve. The constructors decided to suspend work in May 1997, when 85 per cent of the building had already been completed (Mazzei and Scuppa 2006). The site was abandoned and subsequently repeatedly sacked. In particular, the pylons and precious copper cables, which were to convey electricity to the capital, began to disappear.

With the end of the war and the consolidation of peace, the completion of the Bumbuna power station once more became a national priority. At that point, the World Bank also decided to support the project financially. The power station was considered one of the necessary infrastructures to industrialize the country and reduce poverty, and to supply renewable, low cost energy to business and the citizens in general.

For all these reasons, in 2003 the representatives of the Italian government, African Development Bank and World Bank decided

to finance the completion of the works, which therefore were resumed in 2005 with completion forecast for the end of 2007 (Mazzei and Scuppa 2006). After trials and the solving of a few technical problems, the 50MW turbines of the power station started up in November 2009. Since then, however, technical problems and polemics due to the frequent interruption of the station's supply have not failed to appear. Despite this, the second phase of the project is planned for the increase in supply from 50MW to 350MW by 2017.

As has been mentioned above, over the years the BHP construction work went on, accompanied by a series of promises made by the politicians in power: jobs for everyone and free electricity, tourism and economic prosperity, monetary compensation for the damage incurred by the flooding of the dam's reservoir and the expropriation of land, and so on. As we have seen, for a long time the Bumbuna dam long risked remaining only a collective fantasy, at most an unfinished colossus exposed to the erosion of time. The word 'Bumbuna' thus became for the people of Sierra Leone a synonym of 'a never-ending story' (*cf.* Mazzei and Scuppa 2006: 15). 'Bumbuna', ironically sang the well-known Sierra Leonean singer Emerson Bockarie in the years immediately following the end of the war – 'will be finished only at the end of the world' (Awareness Times 2008b).

The irony and disappointment over the actual benefits obtained with this project have become mixed with mistrust and suspicion. According to an enquiry undertaken by the World Bank, there was a widespread opinion among the inhabitants of the Tonkolili District that the works to complete the power station had been deliberately slowed down by the Italian constructors themselves (Mazzei and Scuppa 2006). In this way they would have had more time to secretly mine and smuggle out the gold and diamonds found during the construction of the dam. It is also interesting to note that the local population was convinced that the dam belonged to the same construction company. As Mazzei and Scuppa observe (2006), the latter had sought to build up over the years a relationship of 'good neighbourliness' with the inhabitants of the villages near the dam, making gifts of various kinds. In this way a paternalistic relationship in which the local communities 'were begging the constructor instead of asking for their rights, of which they were not fully

aware' (Mazzei and Scuppa 2006: 16) was, however, set up. Tensions and suspicion also spread among the owners of lands and homes situated along the route where the high tension pylons had been built, connecting the power station with the capital. In 2009, for example, word was spread about some 176 homes being demolished along this route. To motivate this operation, the authorities explained that there was a high health risk. But a local satirical newspaper questioned the scientific grounds for this explanation, describing it as an urban myth. Since the owners of the houses in question affected by the demolition had obtained permission to build from the Ministry of Lands – the journalist wondered – who was responsible for this problem? Hence, the doubt was that the medical reason for demolishing the house might only be an excuse to 'disturb, harry and terrorize other people' (Kamara 2009). Crossing swords with the decision made by the government authorities, the journalist again involved the Bumbuna *debul*:

There are those who seem determined to ensure that Bumbuna cannot be opened without a ritual sacrifice of some people's dwelling places. Such people should enter the twenty-first century. No devils or demons demand that we cannot have light unless our fellow citizens suffer (Kamara 2009).

As in the two previous cases, in the Kono District and between the Moyamba and Bonthe Districts, one of the central issues is the relation of exchange and reciprocity which the local populations seek to construct with powerful international and local social actors. But who are the *debul dem* involved in these situations?⁵ How do the social actors involved in this complex game played on the distribution of wealth obtained by exploiting the environment and its multiple resources actually behave? I would now like to show that the infrapolitics of subaltern groups may be composed of highly symbolic cultural tactics. Faced with the contingent, aleatory and unpredictable, the various levels of interpretation intercross in various ways, generating a confusion and uncertainty which risks paralyzing the collective action and stalemating relationships. Nevertheless, faced with this risk, the social actors – in this case, a group of small-scale diamond miners in the Kono District – show their ability to find practical, concrete solutions. Indeed, keeping in

mind the lesson of Evans-Pritchard with the *Azande*, the occult idiom can explain the contingent, but not all the contingencies.

2. THE MAMU *DEBUL*

The village of Mamu (imaginary name) is situated in the Kono District, not far from the river where the first diamond was discovered in 1930. From January to April 2008, I followed the excavation work in an area close to this village and the preparation for the gravel washing by a team of diamond miners with a small-scale mining license.

A nephew of the license owner was also working in this team. He was a young lad I had met by chance in the Offices of the Ministry of Mineral Resources. A few weeks after meeting him I accepted the young man's invitation to visit him at his uncle's mine, where he also worked as a technician in charge of the machinery.

2.1 The mine and the uncle's work force

The area of the mining site where the uncle was searching for diamonds near the village of Mamu was largely occupied by a small lake. The man considered that the area was still productive despite the previous mining activity. In the 1980s, the NDMC's production activity had fallen and during the war the village had been abandoned. Although there were rumours that some rebel groups had reached Mamu to look for precious stones during the war, the uncle was convinced that the water of the lake and some large rocks had protected that particular area from large-scale operations on the part of the NDMC, and also from the pickaxes and spades of illegal miners. And so the uncle intended to dry out the lake in order to excavate its bottom.

The uncle's home was in Freetown where he lived with his wife and children. He was about forty and he had accumulated twenty years' experience in the diamond mines. Thanks to his financial resources, the man had sufficient capital to purchase a mining license for small-scale excavations and to hire expensive equipment (*e.g.*, a caterpillar, a few diesel oil pumps, and various semi-automatic machinery to sieve the gravel). As far as labour agreements were concerned, the uncle had adopted a system of wage-type payments. He thereby committed himself to pay labour-

ers a fixed wage whatever the earnings actually made. Although he was not obliged to offer anything more, the uncle preferred to also provide meals and a few benefits such as cigarettes and alcohol for his men. He considered it essential for the successful outcome of the work to have a team of workers who were happy to work for him. 'Diamond mining is a chain', the miners often repeated to underline the linking of roles and responsibilities necessary for the success of a diamond mining concern. Well aware of this, the uncle once told me: 'To find diamonds you have to make everyone happy'. If everyone is happy, in fact, no one is tempted to steal any diamonds found, and the gang works without creating problems.

About a dozen people from the various districts of Sierra Leone worked in the mine. The uncle had therefore rented a hut in the nearby village of Mamu to house them all. In another hut, situated next to that of the miners, every day a woman and her young daughter prepared the meals for the men.

Since the miners were mainly interested in extracting the gravel from the lake bed, they decided to build a bank to divide it into two parts. Once the lake was divided in two, it would be easier to proceed to dry out one of the two halves. If the results of the excavation of the first dried out half proved to be encouraging, work could go on to the subsequent stage which, firstly, involved widening the hole already dug, and then secondly drying out the remaining half of the lake.

To build the bank, the uncle hired a powerful, expensive tracked scraper for about a week. He also fetched from Freetown various diesel pumps he owned, connected to long moveable pipes used for drying out the lake. As the weeks went by, the mining landscape was transformed at incredible speed; holes which became increasingly large and deep, dried up swamps, trees and bushes cut down or burnt. The whole surrounding area was considered by the miners 'very promising'. They often repeated to me that they would find many diamonds in that site. Although the sharing out of the money gained by selling the precious stones was not 'their business', as the license owner told me, they trusted in their employer's generosity. If things went well for him, as a result there would also be extra gains for them in terms of tips or gifts of various kinds.

But the miners' intense activity and the mobilization of powerful, noisy machines also affected the inhabitants of the nearby village of Mamu.

2.2 The *debul's* anger and the miners' sacrifice

One day I went to visit the Mamu mine. I noticed almost immediately that the site had not undergone the usual drastic landscape changes I would have expected after nearly a week since my last visit. Two white ducks had appeared on the lake, while a he-goat had been tied by the miners to the hut (*bafa*) where they usually rested between work shifts. Instead the uncle, owner of the license, was standing under beneath the branches of the hut, visibly worried.

He explained to me that one of the pumps was not working well. For a couple of days the miners had been waiting for a spare part which should have arrived from a repair shop in Koidu-Sefadu. While he was informing me about the situation, his nephew, who, as I may recall, was also in charge of the machinery, added that he himself had tried out and tested the pumps several times, before bringing them to the site. Their poor functioning was therefore completely unexpected. Due to a truly unfortunate circumstance the hired scraper was also useless. One of the hydraulic arms raising the steel blade had in fact suddenly broken. With the few rudimentary tools available, a group of men and a mechanic called from a nearby mining town were working ceaselessly to repair the damage. The mining operations were therefore interrupted and consequently the uncle was very worried about the extra costs of what apparently seemed like an unfortunate sequence of setbacks. It was then, when I asked the reason for the goat's presence on the site, that the uncle's nephew took me aside, and told me for the first time that the mine was inhabited by a *debul*. I thus learned that a young girl from Mamu had recently dreamed about it.

The girl was the daughter of the woman hired to prepare the miners' meals. Although she was approximately 15 years old, she had already been promised in marriage to a man with a regular job who lived in a nearby village. The mother and daughter lived alone, and so the woman had been trying to find a good match for her daughter. My friend, the uncle's nephew, had, however, fancied the girl and tried to take her away from her betrothed. He made her

small gifts, promised to take her away from the village; he was ultimately trying to win her love.

The news of the breakdown of the machinery had therefore also reached the other inhabitants of the village, who were always attentive to all the news coming from the camp. An explanation was readily found for the events which had occurred, an explanation which seemed plausible to many of the miners. According to the villagers, the *debul* who lived in the uncle's mine was angry with the workers because since they had arrived they had not offered it anything. This was why it had punished them by damaging the pumps and bringing about the breakdown of the scraper. An elderly woman in the village had thus advised the uncle to buy a white sheep, a white goat and two white ducks, to offer in sacrifice. In a dream the mine's *debul* had in fact appeared to the woman, explaining that the white goat should remain in the mining camp as long as the mining operations continued, and so should the ducks. Before finally leaving the camp, the miners would have to sacrifice, by butchering, all the animals. The sheep, on the other hand, would have to be sacrificed as soon as possible to placate the *debul's* anger and prevent more serious problems for the miners, such as accidents or even deaths on the job.

Whether or not the *debul* existed, whether everyone or only a few believed it, the uncle preferred to go along with the demands for sacrifices coming from both the villagers and the workers. To avoid bad feelings, misunderstandings or, worse still, the accusation of being greedy, he had thought it advisable to go through with the advised rituals and ceremonies. 'There is a belief...', his nephew repeated to me on that occasion, '... if everyone is happy, it is easier to find diamonds'. In this way he summed up the spirit with which his uncle, and the other miners in general, backed up the villagers' suggestions even when they were not convinced about the existence of dangers or threats coming from invisible presences, such as ancestors, *debul dem* or witches.

2.3 The *debul's* disappearance

A couple of weeks later, work was resumed at full rate. The embankment was completed and the level of the water in one of the two halves of the lake went down so considerably that, in some

points, the ducks were able to take a walk on the muddy earth. In one spot in the hole the diggers had therefore started to extract the gravel to test it for the presence of diamonds.

Despite the progress, many miners were still worried. The village girl my informant was in love with had warned the miners that the *debul* had in the meantime abandoned the mine. The young girl, who was to also leave the village in a few weeks to go and live in the village of her future husband, had in fact dreamt of a group of *debul dem*. In her dream the *debul dem* were sad and weeping. They said they had come to look for their friend. Then they had gone away, making it clear, however, that they would be back.

When the miners told me of this dream, during a break in work, I immediately thought that the girl had in some way described her own imminent departure, loading the dream scene with images and cultural meanings which in part escaped me. The dream was, however, interpreted by almost all the workers as a bad omen.

The workers employed by the uncle gave two main interpretations. According to some, the *debul* was dead, probably owing to the intense mining work in the previous days: his friends had come to celebrate the funeral and the promise to return was considered as a threat addressed to the miners, indirectly responsible for his death. Another interpretation, which seemed more convincing to the majority of the miners, was that the *debul* had simply moved away, disturbed by the noise of the machinery and, in particular, by the noisy water pumps constantly operating. In both the interpretations, however, the reason for the *debul's* disappearance was in any case linked to the human activity. When the suggestion to prepare another sacrifice came from the village, the miners realized that the *debul* was still present, but angry. This suggestion was in fact accompanied by a veiled threat: if the workmen did not carry out the proposed sacrifice, someone might die in the mine. A discussion arose among the miners to decide whether it was better to carry out the sacrifice. For some of them it was clear that the villagers were trying to demand something more from the licensee in terms of gifts, while others considered that the situation should be solved in the 'traditional way', that is by carrying out the sacrificial rite. The danger of an accidental death frightened several workers. In the end, the uncle, convinced that he had lavished

enough gifts, and having met his spiritual obligations, merely bought a white chicken and 'sacrificed' it in the mine.

2.4 The miners' doubts and concerns

The ritual component is crucial to understand the meaning of the diamond seekers' actions. The sacrifices to propitiate the discovery of diamonds, and to ward off the dangers of the work, are therefore central to the rituals carried out by the miners. These sacrifices⁶ reveal a profound moral link between the act of giving and receiving which, in turn, relates to a whole system of relations between human and non-human agents. This system of relations escapes from the dichotomies of 'humanity and nature', 'society and environment' or 'natural and supernatural' and 'animate and inanimate'. The environment is not 'a passive container of resources' separated from human and non-human beings which live in; it is alive (Ingold 2000: 66) and diamond miners behave accordingly. Thus, if miners' ritual practices entail a form of animism, it is not because they mistakenly attribute social characteristics to objects or environmental features. In line with Bird-David's revisited concept of animism as 'relational epistemology' (Bird-David 1999), and with the idea that agency cannot be restricted just to humans (Ingold 1996), we agree once again with Tim Ingold when he states that in many non-Western societies – as well as for many people living in Western countries – the relationships between human beings are not very different from the relations with other entities or non-human agents. In both cases, relations are based on mutual *trust* rather than on *domination* (Ingold 2001: 161; 2000).

We must, however, underline that not all the miners were convinced of the effectiveness or utility of the sacrificial offerings. Some of them expressed skepticism, while others went further, making insinuations on the real intentions of the villagers who, on certain occasions, seemed to be taking advantage of the generous gifts and sacrifices made by the licensee, by continually raising the stakes. The licensee's nephew, for example, openly asserted that the demands for sacrifices were the villagers' way of asking more from his uncle, who, in showing off the highly expensive machinery and equipment in his mine, clearly demonstrated that he had considerable financial assets. The cost of a sheep was, of course,

not comparable to that of hiring a caterpillar and, hence, from the villagers' point of view, the frequent demands for sacrifices did not appear so greedy. The chance that the ducks and he-goat might sooner or later 'disappear' due to the *debul* did not exclude the possibility that the animals might be 'in reality' made, so to speak, to 'disappear' through the agency of the villagers themselves. This was a possibility which many miners saw clearly, but it did not concern them unduly. They knew that if someone had stolen the animals offered to the *debul*, the thief would draw upon himself the vindictive anger of the *debul* himself. On the other hand, even if this had happened, the important thing was that the sacrifice should be made and that someone, in one way or another, should benefit. If the beneficiary was not liked by the *debul*, this was not their business. And even if the *debul* had not existed there, once again, the most important thing was that someone should benefit and be happy for their offer. This generous action could be rewarded by the Supreme Creator with some luck on the job.

The miners therefore attentively, but not uncritically, followed all the suggestions coming from the village. But they were cautious in interpreting any contingency occurring in the mine in terms of invisible actions made by *debul dem* or evil attacks of witchcraft. One day, for example, one of the mine's supervisors noticed that several gallons of fuel needed to run the scraper had been stolen. The uncle had been informed and had immediately instigated an enquiry to see who and how many the thieves were. Since it did not seem possible to find out who had taken the fuel cans, some people started to speak about witchcraft and a possible occult theft by some nocturnal witches. This explanation enraged the mine supervisor, who started to suspect some of the main supporters of the 'witch hypothesis'. Having no means to discover those responsible, the uncle merely repurchased the missing fuel.

CONCLUSION

The memory of the past is not necessarily expressed through public monuments or explicit verbal forms. In particular, according to Shaw (2002), in Sierra Leone the memory of the Atlantic slave trade has not been lost, as might appear when talking to ordinary people or seeking evident traces of that period in the landscape.

There are objects, images and ritual processes which have incorporated the local memory of the transcontinental predatory flows of the past. There are, in short, various ways to remember (or forget) (Shaw 2002: 3–5).

Mariane Ferme enriches this perspective on the ethnographical level, analyzing the material and immaterial culture of the Mende in Sierra Leone (Ferme 2001). In this cultural context, discourses, daily practices and social relations are contextual elements. Or rather, they are embodied in an environment: they make sense in relation to a landscape in which an ancient colonial history of violence, terror and exploitation is tacitly written. Analyzing the traces of memory of the past disseminated in the forests (*e.g.*, fruit trees, remains of homes, railway lines and abandoned roads), Ferme reminds us that landscapes are not neutral places. They bear the traces of their use; they tell stories, using the environmental elements as words. In this way, holes in the ground may witness to the mining activity of illegal miners in the past; fruit trees planted to a geometric plan point to the work of generations of expert farmers, and so on. Thus, modifying an environment signifies participating in a collective history of practices which has a language of its own, made up of specific metaphors, ways of doing, saying and confuting. Those who have the power to leave a mark or to modify this environmental grammar have the power to re-design and impress a new socio-cultural order. For this reason mining sites are obvious places for economic and political, but also symbolic dispute (Ballard and Banks 2003; Bridge 2004; Werthmann and Grätz 2012).

The textual metaphor of the environment or the landscape as written history here, however, has a limit. As the *debul dem's* actions testify, the environment is not a passive element, a blank sheet of paper on which human activity traces its indelible drawing. It acts and interacts with the multiple social actors dwelling in it who contend for its resources. The idiom on the occult is rich in images and narrations which lend themselves to iconizing the risks and the contradictory possibilities of extracting *value* from human labour and from the environment; it points to an 'agrarian order' that, as Peters and Richards acutely remind us, 'emerged from the West African social world shaped by the Atlantic slave trade' (Peters and Richards 2011: 377; see also Richards 2012).

With their invisible presence, the *debul dem* indicate the existence of a hidden world supporting the order of things and regulating access to the wealth. This access is inevitably unequal, uncertain and as precarious as the finding of diamonds: rare and distributed in an aleatory manner. It is no coincidence that miners describe the *debul dem* helping them to find these diamonds as ‘good’, thus giving a sense of casualness and fortune to the finding of these precious stones – and defining as ‘bad’ those *debul dem* who instead keep the diamonds hidden or ask the highest price in exchange for them: human life. This type of interaction therefore reflects the situation of risk and uncertainty linked to working in an artisanal mine – a job which is physically dangerous, where the possibilities of success are often linked to the degree of hazard which the miners are prepared to accept. But it also reflects a specific local concern for a balance between egalitarian and non-egalitarian values where the former are usually associated with rice farming and ‘collective survival in a harsh forest environment’, and the latter with the regional and international trade (Richards 1996: 139).

At this point it is clear that it would be reductive to consider the *debul dem* as simple projections of individual or collective anxieties or personifications of features of the natural landscape enacting these anxieties. It is true that these active symbols enter the individual imaginary, enacting personal worries – as in the case of the young girl of Mamu who dreamt of the *debul*'s disappearance while she was preparing to leave her village to get married – but they have above all a shared political and social meaning. The girl's words activated discussions among the miners on how to interpret the dreams and what actions to take. The *debul dem* accounts are in fact highly politicized moral discourses, able to reflect, and to cause reflection on the responsibility of human actions as well as on the principles of distribution of resources. Moreover, they are not only moral commentaries or ways to give meaning *to* the world; they represent *practical* forms of politics, ways to act *in* the world.

What therefore do the *debul dem* do? A link which thus joins the stories and situations involving the *debul dem* mentioned in this article is the sabotage or damage to the machinery of the miners or of those transforming the landscape to take possession of its

wealth. The *debul dem* also act as mediators for communities worried and angry about what is happening in the spaces they inhabit. The disturbances enacted by the *debul dem* thus seem inspired by a revengeful justice based on a criticism of the predatory extractive practices. These are predatory because they greedily enrich few without respecting the principles of the distribution of the wealth which, instead are clearly present in local ideology.

In short, it is the *debul dem's* very action of invisible disturbance which reveals the occult nature of the forces governing the visible world. Paradoxically, here it is the occult which reveals the *occult*. The occult phenomena remind us that reality is not always what it seems. Only by questioning what is taken for granted can we overturn the ideological character of the reasons justifying both human exploitation, unequal distribution and environmental degradation.

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NOTES

¹ For more details about the 2007 election, see Gberie (2010).

² According to some journalists, the Lungi Airport and the Queen Elizabeth II Quay in Freetown were recently cleared by some ritual specialists who found several witch tools in these sites (Awareness Times 2010; Koroma 2011).

³ ‘Pademba road’ refers to the main prison of Sierra Leone.

⁴ During the inauguration ceremony of the Euros Bio Energy factory, in 2011, Koroma stated that: ‘We had a terrible experience of people undermining investment programs within the community through sabotage, through connivance, through labour disturbance and through stealing of equipment (...). Anybody who destroys the property of an investor or undermines their activity is a criminal and will be sent to the cells that we have reserved for criminals’ (Awoko 2011b).

⁵ I describe in more detail the appearances of the *debul dem* in (D’Angelo 2011, 2014).

⁶ Following Strathern and Stewart (2008: xiii), by ‘sacrifice’ I mean ‘a material offering of some kind presented to a spirit entity’.

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