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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-55892

Title: PRATIQUES MAGIQUES ET EXTRACTION DE L'OR SUR LE SITE ARTISANAL DE MÂ'BANGA AU NIGER : QUAND LE SYMBOLISME GUIDE LES ORPAILLEURS

Recommendation:

Accept as it is
Accept after minor revision.....Yes.....
Accept after major revision
Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

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

Reviewer Name: Dr. Jyotika Singh

Reasons for minor changes: Minor changes are recommended to enhance clarity, consistency, and professionalism without altering core content. These include fixing typos and grammatical errors for a polished appearance, standardizing numbering and formatting in tables/figures to improve navigability, shortening repetitive phrases in the introduction and discussion for better readability, ensuring citation consistency to uphold academic integrity, and aligning visuals for a cohesive layout. These quick edits will elevate the manuscript's quality, making it more accessible and suitable for publication. Estimated implementation time: 2-4 hours.

Review: This manuscript offers an original interdisciplinary exploration of magical practices in Niger's artisanal gold mining, providing valuable socio-cultural and environmental insights with strong empirical data. While the mixed-method approach is solid, minor limitations in sample size and theoretical depth slightly detract from its potential. Clarity and significance are commendable, but the text could benefit from concise editing to reduce repetition. Overall, it merits publication pending minor revisions for polish and consistency, contributing meaningfully to West African mining studies. Estimated revision time: 2-4 hours.

REVIEWER'S REPORT***Detailed Reviewer's Report*****Introduction**

The manuscript's introduction effectively sets the stage by contextualizing artisanal gold mining (orpaillage) in West Africa, emphasizing its economic importance alongside significant risks (sanitary, security, and environmental). It introduces the symbolic and magical practices among gold panners as a novel lens, linking them to social prestige and cultural representations of gold. The discussion of gold as a "dirty" metal tied to occult forces is compelling and grounds the study in socio-cultural dynamics. However, the introduction could be more concise, as it spans multiple pages with repetitive details on risks. It would benefit from a clearer thesis statement early on, explicitly outlining the paper's unique contribution to existing literature on West African mining (e.g., building on works by Grätz and Bohbot). Overall, it engages the reader well but could better integrate the study's theoretical framework (e.g., actantial, hermeneutic, and functional models) to foreshadow analytical depth.

Objectives

The objectives are clearly articulated: to analyze the use of symbolism in gold extraction at M'Banga, focusing on motivations for magical practices, actor profiles, consulted experts, practice types, and environmental impacts. They align with the research questions posed (e.g., what motivates recourse to magic, who are the actors, and what are the negative effects?). The objectives are achievable given the mixed-method approach (documentary research, observation, interviews, and questionnaires). However, they could be more specific in linking to broader theoretical or policy implications, such as how these practices exacerbate environmental degradation in a Saharan context. The manuscript successfully ties objectives to the symbolic role of gold in social ascension, but refining them to emphasize interdisciplinary intersections (e.g., anthropology and environmental science) would strengthen their scope.

Results

The results section provides a solid empirical foundation, detailing actor profiles (e.g., demographics, nationalities, marital status), consulted esoteric experts (e.g., marabouts, féticheurs), and specific magical practices (e.g., sacrifices, amulets, sexual rituals). Data from 271 respondents (including 131 questionnaires and qualitative interviews) is presented through tables, graphs, and narratives, offering insights into motivations like social prestige and wealth accumulation. The discussion of unethical practices (e.g., human sacrifice, sorcery) and environmental impacts (e.g., deforestation for rituals) is well-supported by quotes and observations. However, some results feel anecdotal, relying heavily on qualitative excerpts without deeper quantitative analysis (e.g., correlations between practices and outcomes). Visuals like graphs are clear, but the manuscript could integrate more statistical rigor (e.g., regression on practice prevalence). The low response rate (131 out of a calculated 246) due to security issues is acknowledged, which adds credibility, but results on child labor and prostitution could be expanded with ethical considerations.

Discussion

The discussion effectively interprets results in light of literature, comparing findings to studies by Grätz, Bohbot, and others on West African gold rushes. It highlights how magical practices reflect social transformations, such as monetized relationships and individualism, while critiquing their ethical breaches and environmental toll (e.g., habitat destruction). The linkage to theoretical models (e.g., Crozier and Friedberg's actantial approach) is insightful, showing how actors strategize for gold.

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However, the discussion could deepen comparative analysis—e.g., contrasting Niger's practices with those in Burkina Faso or Côte d'Ivoire—and address counterarguments, such as potential positive cultural roles of rituals. Environmental impacts are well-covered, but implications for policy (e.g., sustainable mining regulations) are underexplored. The section is coherent but occasionally repetitive, and it would benefit from a clearer synthesis of how symbolism "guides" panners beyond description.

Limitations

Several limitations undermine the manuscript's robustness. Methodologically, the small sample size (131 quantitative responses) and reliance on snowball sampling may introduce bias, particularly in a volatile security context, potentially skewing results toward accessible or cooperative respondents. The mixed approach is appropriate, but data triangulation could be stronger—e.g., more quantitative metrics on environmental degradation (e.g., deforestation rates) rather than qualitative observations. The manuscript acknowledges mobility and insecurity but does not fully address how these affected data reliability. Theoretically, while models are cited, their application feels superficial, lacking in-depth hermeneutic analysis of symbolic meanings. Language barriers (the manuscript is in French) may limit accessibility, and some sections (e.g., results on unethical practices) raise ethical concerns without discussing researcher reflexivity or informed consent. Finally, the study is site-specific to M'Banga, limiting generalizability to broader Nigerien or West African contexts.

Strengths

The manuscript's primary strengths lie in its interdisciplinary approach, blending anthropology, sociology, and environmental science to explore an understudied topic: magical practices in artisanal mining. The rich qualitative data (e.g., interviews and observations) provides authentic insights into actor motivations and cultural nuances, supported by clear visuals and a logical structure. It contributes valuable knowledge to literature on West African gold economies, highlighting symbolic dimensions often overlooked in policy-focused studies. The ethical critique of practices (e.g., human sacrifice) and environmental impacts demonstrates critical awareness, while the demographic profiling adds empirical depth. The use of theoretical frameworks grounds the analysis, and the manuscript's timeliness—addressing a booming yet risky sector—enhances its relevance.

Conclusion

Overall, this manuscript is a commendable contribution to understanding the socio-cultural underpinnings of artisanal gold mining in Niger, offering fresh perspectives on symbolism and its consequences. It merits publication with revisions to address limitations, such as expanding methodological rigor, deepening theoretical application, and enhancing policy implications. Minor edits for clarity, consistency (e.g., fixing numbering and typos), and English translation could broaden its audience. I recommend acceptance pending revisions, as the work has strong potential to inform sustainable mining practices and cultural studies in West Africa. Estimated word count for revisions: aim to condense the introduction and discussion by 10-15% for conciseness.