

## The Murky Trail

I made a number of trips to Sierra Leone in 2001 to document the country's implosion from the trade of what has come to be known as 'blood diamonds'. I planned to follow the murky trail<sup>1</sup> of the diamonds from the time they're mined to when they enter the mainstream trading channels. I wanted to see for myself the shocking contrast between the insufferable living conditions of the majority of Sierra Leone citizens and the beguiling allure<sup>2</sup> of the diamonds being pulled from the muddy earth of the rain forests. Sierra Leone hosts the world's largest and most expensive deployment of United Nations peacekeepers in history – more than 17,500 soldiers from 31 countries are stationed in a nation the size of South Carolina, and \$612 million was spent on the mission in 2001 alone. I wanted to see if the diplomacy, military aid, and money being spent on a country that has been torn apart<sup>3</sup> over diamonds were having any effect on the rampant bloodshed, inhumanity and corruption.

Before I arrived in Sierra Leone, like most people, I had no idea where the world's most valuable gemstones came from. I knew little more than what I was told by television commercials, that diamonds were apparently forever, that they were rare, and that many of them were priceless. But since 1999, reports had been circulating that some diamonds weren't as pure as their reputation proclaimed. The term 'conflict diamonds' was bandied about<sup>4</sup> and it gradually became known that some stones carried the blood of innocent victims, killed or mutilated by rebel groups in Africa who used the profits of diamond sales to continue their campaigns of brutality and inhumanity.

Like almost everyone else who buys diamond rings or necklaces, I didn't realise that the small stones' invaluable reputation was nothing more than a 100-year-old parlor trick<sup>5</sup> born of the greed of one company, De Beers Group, the largest diamond mining company in the world, which has completely manufactured both the worth of diamonds and the demand for them. I had no idea that De Beers's monopolistic policies put in place more than a century ago enabled a band of ruthless killers to wrest<sup>6</sup> diamonds from the heart of an untamed jungle and sell them to willing buyers with connections to respectable diamond centers from London to Antwerp to Bombay.

I didn't know that the proceeds from diamond sales funded not only the RUF's<sup>7</sup> war against its government, but also Hezbollah terrorism against Israel and Al Qaeda attacks against the United States. Nor could I have imagined that I would discover such a complicated and far-reaching network of smugglers, gunrunners, terrorists, corporate manipulators and corrupt governments that made such sales possible.

Greg Campbell, *Blood Diamonds*, Basic Books, 2004

1. **murky trail:** dubious path.
2. **beguiling allure:** unexplainable attraction.
3. **torn apart:** destroyed.
4. **bandied about:** mentioned.
5. **parlor trick:** illusion.
6. **wrest:** take.
7. **The RUF's:** The Revolutionary United Front, formed in 1991.

### ► Understanding the text

#### 1 Answer these questions.

1. How many times did the author visit Sierra Leone?
2. What were his aims?
3. How many soldiers has the UN sent to Sierra Leone? What does this tell us about the scale of the problem there?
4. How does the author define 'conflict diamonds'?
5. Which company is the largest miner of diamonds in the world? From its name, where do you imagine it is from?
6. Where are the three diamond centers mentioned in the extract?

7. What does the sale of conflict diamonds pay for?
8. What is the network that the author discovers composed of?

## ▶ **Beyond the text**

- 2 Using the Internet, find some more information about the De Beers Group, mentioned in the extract. How did they 'manufacture both the worth of diamonds and the demand for them'?
- 3 What is the effect of the author writing in the first person? What effect does this have when he says 'like almost everyone else who buys diamond rings or necklaces'?