

# Friction between Reticence and Narrative in Local and Global Interconnections along the Ethical Canadian Diamond Supply Chain

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*This research analyses, through ethnographic research, the cultural interpretations of the global storytelling of Canadian ethical diamonds given by different subjects, belonging to diverse sociocultural and economic contexts, including staff of mining companies, indigenous communities, jewellers, and consumers. The study took place at the two ends of the diamond supply chain, in the Canadian Northwest Territories, where the mines and mining companies are located, and in two jewellery stores in Milan and Bologna, that sell Canadian diamonds. Introducing the concept of the Process of Argumentative Aphasia I highlight how the discourses of the participants in the research on Canadian ethical diamonds were becoming increasingly metaphorically unpronounceable and, therefore, misaligned with the official storytelling as I approached the mining context; whereas moving towards the sales contexts, the argumentative contents of the jewellers' and consumers' speeches were more aligned with the contents of the global advertising narratives on diamonds mined in Canada.*

*Keywords: Canadian ethical diamonds, Process of Argumentative Aphasia, Italian jewellery stores, Friction.*

## INTRODUCTION

During the past three decades the mining industry has been overwhelmed by concerns related to soil and water pollution, the unethical management of work organization and human rights in general (Le Billon 2006). From this disquietude a global narratology surrounding mining exploitation focuses on certain sensitive issues concerning environmental impacts, the destabilisation of indigenous communities living near mines, and the consequent reassurance of the existence of decent work practices within highly fragmented value chains (Armano 2023). Specifically, in the mining sector, diamonds have been the target of heated controversy by investigative journalism, activists, filmmakers, and researchers who have exposed harassment, especially in the African mining context (D'Angelo 2019). In light of these considerations, in 1999 five European organizations (Global Witness; Medico International; International Peace Information Service; Netherlands Organization for International Assistance; Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa) launched the Fatal Transactions campaign. Through it, terms such as “blood diamonds” and “conflict diamonds” were introduced to expose the problem of the financing of civil wars in Sierra Leone and Angola through the illegal sale of precious stones, and “terrorist diamonds” to talk about the financing of Al Qaeda and international terrorism in general. Thus, the Fatal Transactions campaign began to

convey the message that buying diamonds was tantamount to killing civilians from disadvantaged socio-economic groups. Restricting the trade in African diamonds was not the only aim of the Fatal Transactions campaign. The message to be conveyed also aimed at blaming a production system that was complicit in these illegal trades and the responsibility of consumers to boycott such products (Armano, Joy 2022a) in order not to be classified as people who indirectly contributed to supporting the perpetuation of violence against civilians living near mining areas in countries that are poor but have potentially emerging economies through the exploitation of non-renewable resources (Armano, Joy 2021).

### **The Ethical Certification of Canadian Diamonds and Contexts of Research**

Faced with the threat of massive financial losses due to global boycotts, multinational diamond companies, to improve their reputation, adhere to forms of certification such as the Kimberley Process (KP). It was created in 2003 to ensure that the sale of rough stones exported from signatory partners did not financially support civil wars or acts of international terrorism (Schlosser 2013a). However, this certification does not ensure that fraud in the illicit sale of diamonds is slowed down as it traces rough diamonds to the cleaning process, but not to the final clients (Armano 2023). Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, while the African blood diamonds scandal informed public opinion (D'Angelo 2019), Canada became actively involved in the KP. In January 2004, Canada assumed the chairmanship of the KP, and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) began labelling stones mined in the Northwest Territories (NWT) as ethical diamonds. Indeed, Canada has been internationally recognised, since the early 2000s, as the exporter of diamonds mined in absolute legality, as it is a nation free of civil wars (Armano, Joy 2022b). Specifically, diamonds mined in the NWT have a certification of ethicality, a laser engraving with a maple leaf, the symbol of Canada, and an alphanumeric code that traces the diamond's journey from the place of extraction to the place of sale by entering the alphanumeric code in a special database. Traceability is based on blockchain technology. In particular, the traceability and ethical certification of Canadian diamonds are part of a plan called the GNWT Diamond Certification Program through which the Government of NWT (GNWT) guarantees that all diamonds mined in the NWT are also cut and polished within the region. In addition, through this programme, the regional government allows various stakeholders along the supply chain, from polishers and carvers in the region to jewellers around the world, to use specific brands, the best known of which are Polar Bear Diamonds. The certification of Canadian diamonds and the possibility of tracing the stone, support a growing ideology of expanding new mining frontiers that engage in ethical business practices in the jewellery and electronics sectors (Schlosser 2013a). The tracking system and certification of diamonds are, moreover, supported by the narrative based on a binary ontological configuration that pits Canadian ethical diamonds against African blood diamonds (Armano, Joy 2021) which

elevates, by invoking transparent mining governance through the use of digital tracking technologies and ethical certification, Canadian mines as “model mines” (Calvão et al. 2021).

This paper provides an analysis, based on ethnographic research, of cultural interpretations of the global storytelling of Canadian ethical diamonds, given by different subjects, belonging to diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts, including staff of mining companies, indigenous communities, jewellers, and consumers. My field research took place at the two, opposite ends of the diamond supply chain, in the Canadian Northwest Territories (NWT) where the mines and mining companies are located and in two jewellery stores in Italy, one in Milan and one in Bologna, that sell Canadian ethical diamonds. Through incrementing multi-sited and multi-scale ethnographic research, I progressively became aware that “friction” (Tsing 2005) typified my research field. Specifically, once I arrived in Yellowknife, the capital of the NWT, I found that some local actors - mine workers, many indigenous people, and multinational staff - did not want to talk about mining for diamonds, presumably for fear of exposing themselves on issues they considered sensitive and contestable. This reticence to speak about these topics made me reflect on the fact that mining companies only communicate certain information to global consumers, geographically and culturally distant from the mining context in which it emerged, through brochures and advertising content that promotes trust in ethical and sustainable mining practices. In the meantime, at the other end of the supply chain, I found that Italian consumers and jewellers acculturate a niche luxury product using the narrative of ethical diamonds. They apply the familiar frame of organic food produced in Italy, which is associated with careful, respectful, and high-quality processing to Canadian diamonds. Thus, in this study, the lens of “friction” highlights the discrepancies within global storytelling around Canadian diamonds, particularly between the diamonds' certification and local interpretations of it along the supply chain. The concept of “friction” has, therefore, guided the speculative considerations of this research which emerged in the space “between the traps of the universal and the culturally specific” (Tsing 2005, p. 1) in which it was possible to configure how pieces of the world unconsciously but simultaneously interact with each other through friction. Within this framework, I theorized a conceptual construct that I called the “Process of Argumentative Aphasia” by highlighting the controversial alternations between advertising narratives accompanying Canadian diamonds along the supply chain, the more or less explicit reticences to talk about mining diamonds of the interlocutors in the extractive context, and the hopes of the Italian consumers that the storytelling on the ethical practices for extracting diamonds corresponded to the truth. Specifically, the Process of Argumentative Aphasia provided me with a conceptual tool to explain how the discourses of the participants in the research on Canadian ethical diamonds were becoming increasingly metaphorically unpronounceable (Stoler 2011) and, therefore, misaligned with the official storytelling as I approached the mining context; whereas

moving towards the sales contexts, the argumentative contents of the jewellers' and consumers' speeches were more aligned with the contents of the global advertising narratives on diamonds mined in Canada.

Thus, this research highlights on the material effects that global narratives about ethical and sustainable diamond mining practices in Canada create, at the local level, in the production and sales contexts. The study follows the path of the advertising narrative on Canadian ethical diamonds from the NWT to the two Italian jewellery companies and shows how the narrative about the ethical practices of the diamond mining industry functions in direct proportion to the distance from the extractive sites.

### **The Two Extremities of the Supply Chain**

In 2019, I stayed in the NWT for my ethnographic research. Within the borders of this region, and especially in Yellowknife, I collected various data sets through archival research and through informal interviews with geologists and native people who worked and lived in the NWT. In general, it was extremely complex, if not, in some cases, impossible, to build conversations centred on the topic of ethical diamonds and, in general, on the mining industry with people in the Canadian region. Especially, managers of multinational corporations, trustees of public departments that financed geological exploration in the region, and miners openly avoided talking about these topics. However, from conversations with some geologists, I was able to understand the physical characteristics of the region. Indeed, they shared with me some information from their research and showed me documents, videos, and samples of rocks rich in kimberlite deposits from which diamonds are extracted. Geologists often underlined the importance of following safety protocols to enter the mine and confirm that these rules always apply in extractive contexts such as the Canadian ones compared to artisanal mining realities such as the African ones. They explained how the typical working day in the mines was punctuated by “highly ritualised risk-avoidance practices” (Appel 2012: 700). Workers are obliged to wear protective clothing (helmets, safety shoes, etc.), must not be present in the tunnels when the machinery to extract the rock is in action, and it is forbidden to drink alcohol during work shifts. Although I was not allowed to visit the mines, and thus see if these rules were respected, the geologists assured me that the workers carefully followed these rules. During the conversations, they also introduced the distinction between African blood diamonds and Canadian ethical diamonds by re-proposing the contents of the advertising narratives that accompany Canadian diamonds in global markets.

Thanks to people belonging to the native communities of the Tłı̨chǫ and Dene, including some elders and a former miner, I was able to understand various interpretations that the natives give to the diamond industry in the region. Nonetheless, these people generally preferred to avoid talking about mining multinationals and ethical diamonds. Instead, they chose to focus primarily on the

symbolic interaction that native populations weave with the land. For native communities, the land involves an active vision that includes caring for both the well-being of the community and the well-being of the places where indigenous live and carry out their subsistence activities. The bond between indigenous people and their land is still commemorated today through “land payment” practices that consist of offering tobacco, or other medicinal herbs, to a specific site. Specifically, the elders explained how this practice reaffirms the values of respect between humans, animals, and the land, and the importance of passing down this mutual solidarity from generation to generation along with legends, songs, and stories. From their words, I could understand how some members of native communities, such as the elders, might view the extractive industry. The mining activity, they explained, has caused environmental degradation, increased levels of soil and lake water pollution, and has also altered the migrations of certain animal species, such as caribou, on which indigenous people base their diet (Hall 2015). In this sense, some indigenous people consider mining as a kind of theft of their land. Although the link between territory and indigenous culture still represents a system in which mental, cultural, and environmental states are interconnected, some indigenous argued that currently with the absorption of many indigenous people into diamond mining, this profound knowledge is crumbling. In their view, extractive industry destabilizes the subsistence economy as well as the dialogical relationship that the natives have with the environment (Hall 2002).

Nevertheless, not all indigenous people in the NWT share the same vision of the mining industry. The former miner affirmed that the mining industry has offered greater employment opportunities for the native communities in the region; however, he pointed out that the percentage of non-indigenous miners who advance in their careers is higher than native miners. He also stated that it is easier for single indigenous people to be a miner as working in the mine forces workers to be away from home for several consecutive days a month.

In Yellowknife, I therefore met people reluctant to talk about mining or ethical diamonds in different ways. Managers of multinational corporations and miners explicitly avoided broaching these topics with me. Geologists repeated the global publicity narratives about Canadian ethical diamonds but did not provide details about the work in the mines (i.e. how recruitment took place, what the relationships were among workers and between workers and multinationals, etc.). In contrast, indigenous people’s testimonies showed heterogeneous views of the mining industry, which is interpreted both as a threat to the environment and the maintenance of native culture and as an economic opportunity for young people.

In Yellowknife, I also conducted archival research at The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Center. The sources I analyzed included company reports, geological reports and reports prepared by indigenous teams that assisted mining multinationals in analyzing environmental impacts caused by the extractive industry. Additional information was obtained from local newspaper articles from the mid-

1990s to the present day describing the increased diamond mining in the region. I also collected documents that recounted the development of mining industrialization in the NWT and the founding of Yellowknife as an extractive city. Thanks to these sources, I could reconstruct the history of the town, understanding that it was founded in 1934 following the opening of gold mines. However, the diamond rush in the NWT began much later. It was not until 1998, following intensive geological exploration, that Ekati, the region's first diamond mine, was opened in the centre of Lac de Gras. Not far from Ekati, Diavik, Gahcho Kué Diamond Mine, and Snap Lake Mine were also opened in 2003. Like Ekati, these mines are located about 300 km from Yellowknife. Specifically, diamond mines have been opened in the territory inhabited by the Dene and Tłı̨chǫ indigenous communities with whom multinational mining companies enter into contracts called “Impact and Benefit Agreements” (Hall 2015). In particular, these agreements provide for hiring quotas for young native miners, access to training courses for the acquisition of labour skills, joint ventures between multinationals and indigenous companies for cleaning and carving diamonds, and financial compensation for opening mines in the territories of the two communities. Through these contracts, the industry also finances environmental monitoring operations to assess the polluting impacts of mining on water, soil, and air. The peculiarity of Impact and Benefit Agreements is their confidentiality. The content of these contracts is only accessible to the signatories, which include executives of multinational mining companies and political representatives of indigenous communities. Although the employment of indigenous personnel in the mining industry has improved the economic conditions of the region's native groups, there are countless disputes between multinational companies and indigenous people regarding the exploitation and management of the land where the Dene and Tłı̨chǫ continue to carry out their traditional subsistence activities (Armano 2022). GNWT values mining companies and indigenous groups as stakeholders. This means that, legally, natives and corporations have the same right to the use of land. However, this resulted in land expropriation for mining exploitation at the expense of the indigenous people who, invoking the Aboriginal right included in the Constitution, pursue, often with little success, legal attempts to claim their land management rights (Schlosser 2013a). Therefore, as I perceived during my ethnographic research in the NWT, strategies for building relationships between multinationals and indigenous communities in the region may be challenging. This aspect poses the difficulty of providing an unambiguous definition of “responsible mining” that can meet the needs of different sociocultural groups living near the mines (Calvão et al. 2021).

The difficulty of multinationals in building relationships with Indigenous communities in the NWT (due, for example, to the environmental impacts witnessed by natives since the opening of the mines) and the increase in layoffs of many miners (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) due to mining debts in recent years is not reflected in the ethical narratives that accompany Canadian diamonds as they make their way

along the supply chain to international outlets. This was particularly evident in the two Italian jewellery shops, called Belloni and Righi stores, where owners Francesco and Simone, as well as their customers, were very confident in the ethical and sustainable extractive practices of the multinationals in Canada, which, according to all those interviewed in the shops, are committed to supporting indigenous communities economically and protecting workers and the fragile environment of the north.

I began ethnographic research in the Italian shops when I returned from Canada in July 2020 until June 2021. As the store proprietor Francesco Belloni explained to me, Belloni Jewellers is a historic shop in the heart of Milan, Italy. It was opened in 1948 by the grandfather of the current owner. Until the 1970s, the jeweller's business consisted mainly of repairing watches. In 2005, Francesco decided, to donate part of his income from jewellery sales to cancer associations. At the time, the jeweller was buying African diamonds. In 2006, Francesco wanted to donate to Survival International (a human rights organisation founded in London in 1969), but Survival rejected the offer because the proceeds came from the sale of diamonds. At the time, the organization was boycotting Diamond Trading Company and De Beers' mining operations in Botswana, as the mining companies had expropriated Bushmen from their land where diamond deposits had been found. Survival International suggested to Francesco the alternative of ethical Canadian diamonds from the NWT. As a result, since 2006, the jeweller has been selling not only African diamonds but mainly diamonds mined in Canada, which he continues to source from a supplier in Toronto. A large part of his clientele immediately recognized Canadian diamonds as stones free from illicit sales channels and immediately began to appreciate the certification of ethicality and the ability to trace the stones through the supply chain (Armano, Joy 2021). Francesco noted that the Canadian origin of diamonds continues to be one of the key traits for consumers he calls "ethical customers" who are distinguished from other customers who frequent his shop and are less sensitive to the ethical and sustainable issues of mining practices. Belloni Jewellers sells Canadian diamonds under the "Ethical Diamonds" brand created by Francesco Belloni, who, over the past decade, has, in turn, become a supplier of diamonds mined in Canada to other Italian and European jewellers. Simone Righi, the owner of Righi Jewellery Store in Bologna, was Belloni's first customer who creates the jewellery that he then sells. Simone Righi opened his jewellery shop in Bologna in the second half of the 1980s. In 2010 he got in touch with Francesco Belloni as Simone was also eager to offer his customers luxury brands that were more in line with his sustainable lifestyle. Simone now sources ethical Fairmined certified gold extracted in South America and ethical Canadian diamonds with which he makes his jewellery collections. He introduced these new luxury brands not only to those who want to buy ethical diamonds and gold but also to those interested in a unique handmade piece of jewellery. Francesco Belloni and Simone Righi, from the first conversations, always maintained a strong distinction

between their ethical clients and their other customers, who were interested in contributing, thanks to their virtuous purchases, to save the planet and defend people, including children, employed in mining activities in other parts of the world (Armano 2023).

Thanks to jewellers and their customers' extreme helpfulness, I was able to create a network of twenty-three clients, mainly men who purchased a piece of jewellery for their fiancées or wives. All of them were extremely willing to share with me their views on how they imagined Canadian mines and how they interpreted the global storytelling of ethical diamonds.

### **THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATIVE APHASIA IN THE FRICTIONAL NARRATIVE BETWEEN THE TWO EXTREMITIES OF THE ETHICAL DIAMOND SUPPLY CHAIN**

Although some authors (Sterman, Sweeney 2007) argue that people's silence and reticence indicate a gap in their understanding of certain social or political facts, this research shows that potential interlocutors encountered in the NWT avoided talking about mining practices and ethical diamonds because they seemed to be aware of something that I, as a foreign researcher, was unaware of. Eviatar Zerubavel describes this phenomenon with the concept of a "conspiracy of silence" (2006). Highlighting the difference between knowing and acknowledging, the author underlines the fundamental but under-theorised tension between personal awareness and public discourse. Whether generated by fear, shame, embarrassment, pain, etc., the conspiracy of silence revolves around what the sociologist calls "open secrets" which are known to all members of a group, but represent uncomfortable truths that may, in some cases, emerge despite the attempt to conceal them. Zerubavel argues that silence, co-denial, or reticence to talk about something implies a collective and collaborative effort on the part of both the generator and the receiver of the information who acts as a facilitator to keep something unrevealed. Silence and reluctance are undoubtedly objects of study that require the creation of ever-new methods and theoretical constructs capable of highlighting elements of social, political, and identity conflict. In this study, to analyse the reluctance of interlocutors to talk about mining practices and ethical diamonds in the mining context and the willingness instead to talk about them in the two jewellery shops, I constructed the concept of the Process of Argumentative Aphasia.

From a theoretical point of view, the analytical framework of the Process of Argumentative Aphasia is built by interconnecting the concepts of aphasia in linguistics, namely the inability to express one's thoughts and feelings (Jakobson 1971); Stoler's (2011) concept of "colonial aphasia" explains, within post-colonial debates, the misrecognition of accounts of marginalised social groups in relation to dominant rhetorics of power; and friction (Tsing 2005), understood as "global encounters across differences" (p.3).

Conceptually, the Process of Argumentative Aphasia indicates discursive alignments or misalignments, by subjects in a cultural context, concerning official rhetorics. Argumentative processes of aphasia thus form in the frictional meeting zone between dominant global narratives, often supported and accepted by elites (Stoler 2011), and local interpretations of them. Such forms of acculturation may therefore take the form of total adherence to the contents of such narratives or criticism or various forms of inhibition in discussing the main arguments of the official storytelling.

In this research, by using the Process of Argumentative Aphasia I was able to analyse how global advertising discourses about ethical Canadian diamonds are reorganised within the mining and sales contexts into local sub-discourses that give rise to misalignments or argumentative alignments of interlocutors concerning the official storytelling about diamonds mined in Canada. Specifically, in this study, the narrative about the ethics of Canadian mining practices that accompany diamonds in the global market gives rise to argumentative misalignments with the official marketing storytelling that becomes more marked as one approaches the mining context. Whereas the closer one gets to the retail context, the argumentations on Canadian diamonds of jewellers and their customers are more aligned with the global narrative. This reflection raises the crucial question of the division between knowledge and real context, the distance between which seems to be bridged by the trust of consumers in narratives of ethical mining practices to extract Canadian diamonds in which the traceability and certification of stones assume a central role. Moreover, in the mining context, managers of multinationals, indigenous people and miners are more reticent to talk about mining and ethical diamonds than geologists, who are instead explicitly aligned with official diamond narratives.

### **Misalignments and Argumentative Alignments as Compared to the Global Advertising Narrative on Canadian Ethical Diamonds in a Mining Context**

In this study, my interlocutors who avoided talking about mining practices and ethical diamonds in the extractive context prompted me to analyse the social uses of this reluctance or silence. I then attempted to formulate some hypotheses about the silence of managers of companies, and reticence to talk about mining topics on the part of those who were not bound to the multinationals through an employment relationship such as indigenous people. I then began to reflect on the relationship between the codes of conduct that the companies impose on their employees, trying to understand how this relationship might be influenced by their cultural backgrounds, subjective experiences, job specialization and how social uses of silence or reticence can arise from these relationships.

Managers of multinationals explicitly avoided talking about mining and diamonds. Scholars (Harlos 2016) argue that it is important for companies to select the information they want to communicate publicly in order to build a good reputation and, conversely, not to disseminate information that could undermine

their image. In this research, therefore, by not letting information out of company boundaries, managers seemed to assume the role of gatekeepers within multinational corporations. Thanks to conversations I had with indigenous elders, I could, in general, understand that native people use forms of silence for different reasons. Social uses of silence in Canadian indigenous communities can be, for example, considered an important component in preparing for an encounter. Elders are silent for a few minutes before telling a story to create a kind of empathic space with their listeners. It is also used by the natives as a protective practice toward researchers or external consultants whom they consider potentially harmful to the integrity and social well-being of the community (Hall 2015). Dene and Tłı̨chǫ would often recount their experience in the 1970s when two anthropologists, June Helm and Beryl Gillespie, conducted their field research in communities published in a book called “Subarctic” (1981). Here, the anthropologists claimed that the Dene became extinct during a flu epidemic in 1928. This misinterpretation was promptly contested by the Dene. Nevertheless, this information spread among academics, causing reactions of discomfort from native populations when interacting with foreign researchers. However, when I asked the elders to talk to me about the evolution of the mining industry in the region, they preferred avoiding that topic and focusing on their personal history or the traditional teachings passed on by the elders.

Like the multinational managers, miners were also reluctant to talk about ethical diamonds or mining-related topics. In the NWT, it is essential to consider two employment patterns, that of temporary employment for most indigenous employees, and that of permanent employment for other workers from various parts of Canada and the United States. However, in relation to both categories of workers, I have been able to notice several more or less reluctant behaviours in explaining whether the mining multinationals really acted ethically towards the workers. Important was the only testimony I was able to gather from an indigenous former miner who, contrary to what appears in some existing studies, did not provide an exclusively victim-oriented interpretation of indigenous workers employed in diamond mines (Hall 2022). As this former miner explained, mining work must always be considered in relation to the experiences of individual workers:

“Multinationals are ethical with workers, but the ethicality must be adapted to the individual life situations of miners. I am neither married nor do I have children. I can easily work in the mine and work overtime. My married friends had to quit their jobs in the mines because they could no longer see their children grow up and their wives were always alone. The mine can give you a lot but also take a lot away from you. The miners employed in the mines have to be away from home two consecutive weeks a month” (Peter, name invented to protect the privacy of the informant working in the mines in the NWT, Tłı̨chǫ Community)

The diamond mines in the NWT are in the middle of the Lac the Gras and they are only accessible by air from Yellowknife or Edmonton, or by ice road during the coldest months of the year. As the interviewee reported, being away from home can be difficult for a married indigenous miner with children, who have to balance work, family, and community life.

Apart from this valuable testimony, other indigenous workers or non-indigenous miners refused to talk about diamonds, their experiences in the mine, and their relationship with the multinationals. However, some geologists assumed different attitudes and, in addition to sharing some data from their research concerning the geological characteristics of the region, when they spoke of Canadian ethical diamonds, they re-proposed the global advertising narrative that opposed them to African blood diamonds.

How could, thus, the Process of Argumentative Aphasia explain the creation of argumentative alignments or misalignments between global storytelling on ethical diamonds and local sub-discussions in the Canadian region? On the basis of data collected in the Canadian mining context, four main attitudes can be identified with reference to managers, indigenous people not employed in the mine, miners (indigenous and non-indigenous) and geologists. In relation to the first group, one can interpret the silence of managers by linking it to the importance of controlling information from leaking out of the company. If external actors (stakeholders, NGOs, journalists, researchers) capture information that the corporation avoids disseminating and that is outside the official marketing narratives, the public reputation of the company could be threatened. Regarding the second group, it could be hypothesised that indigenous avoided talking about mining practices and diamonds because of a general mistrust of foreign researchers, especially anthropologists, who might spread information disapproved by the natives. The miners, on the other hand, were allegedly reticent for fear of creating conflict with the multinationals. Mining companies in the NWT organise job training to impart rules of conduct to be assumed in the work context for all miners in front of superiors (Caron et al. 2019). Despite the impossibility of access to this information by those who are excluded from the mining environment, it could be assumed that rules of conduct also condition the relationships between workers and people outside the mining working environment. Rules of conduct, which concern all those who are hired by multinationals, can also be present in the employment contract. This would consequently favour an airtight working environment which prevents the leakage of information and therefore the establishment of social uses of reluctance to talk about specific topics.

Furthermore, for both miners and geologists, we could categorize their misalignment or argumentative alignment with the ethical diamond advertising narrative through “defensive reticence” practices which may take different forms. One could put forward the hypothesis that what equates all workers in the extractive context is a concern to expose themselves. If miners could use “fearful reticence”

that pushes them to be reluctant to speak for fear of possible negative consequences in the workplace, geologists could use “reticence masked by the publicity narrative” to convince the external researcher of the positive socio-economic effects introduced by multinationals. In general, the geologists’ attitude could be related to their willingness to be the spokespersons for a corporate social responsibility that promotes the ethical commitments of multinationals towards local workers. The Process of Argumentative Aphasia thus shows that geologists, by re-proposing the content of marketing storytelling, were explicitly aligned with it; while other actors created misalignments that formed in the frictional encounter between global narratives about ethical Canadian diamonds and their reluctance and silence in talking about the stones.

Another interesting aspect was to discover, during the research in the archives in Yellowknife, no direct reference to the ethical dimensions of Canadian diamonds in the local newspapers, company reports, and indigenous suppliers’ reports. The documents analysed spoke mainly of the productive mining performance within the region. Furthermore, in some documents, it was written “clean diamonds” instead of “ethical diamonds”. The substitution of some words allows for interesting interpretative considerations on the use of local terms to describe diamonds. Various terminologies used to talk about the stones could be used to address different types of audiences. While the term “ethical diamond” seems to be used to address global consumers and to talk about corporate responsibility towards local mining workers and communities, the term “clean diamond” could be used to address NWT residents to talk about greater attention to the environmental impacts that the extractive industry can cause locally. Therefore, if “ethical” seems to refer mostly to issues related to human rights, the term “clean” instead seems to have the purpose of reassuring residents about the effects caused by soil and water pollution due to mining.

### **Argumentative Alignments to the Global Advertising Narrative on Canadian Ethical Diamonds by the Sample of Whistleblowers Interviewed in Italian Jewellers**

In the context of retailing, Italian jewellers clarified that consumers were focused mainly on the aspects of ethical certification and diamond traceability, which proved to be important themes that increased customer confidence in a narrative that extolled sustainable practices to extract diamonds and safety protocols towards miners. Thus, Italian clients immediately distinguished the Canadian diamond from other stones whose material characteristics and mine of origin could not be known because they were not traced. During the interviews, the jewellers and their customers stated that they did not appreciate artisanal mining techniques, which they perceived as a form of illegal excavation. In this way they implicitly built a sort of linear and, at the same time opposite, link with underdeveloped African extractive

contexts rich in non-renewable resources, as well as imaginaries of Africa as synonymous with violence and primitivism (D'Angelo 2019).

Although Canadian diamonds are more expensive than other diamonds mined elsewhere because of the warranty given by their ethical certification, the customers interviewed opted for this choice because they felt that they could control, through the possibility of using the traceability, information about the stone along the blockchain. It was also interesting to discover, during the interviews with Italian jewellers and consumers, a particular process of acculturation of stones mined in Canada. Specifically, most consumers, when purchasing a Canadian diamond, superimposed conceptual categories of products known to them, such as Italian organic food, to understand, and thus acculturate a niche product:

“In Italy, many people pay attention to products bearing the Made in Italy label. This aspect is particularly true, not only for products such as clothes or luxury goods, but above all for the choice of food. Many Italians prefer organic foods produced in Italy because they provide a guarantee of product control in terms of quality” (Luca, 49 years old, entrepreneur, Monza).

Such overlapping was used especially when sellers and customers raised the certification and traceability of both the stone and the food, which evoked careful, respectful and high-quality processing (Armano 2023).

In addition to providing a guarantee of corporate responsibility to be respectful towards workers, who, according to Italian customers, received a good salary and were protected by safety protocols in the mine, the ethical certification of Canadian diamonds also allowed consumers to construct imaginaries of Canadian extractive contexts. The concept of “ethics”, in this case, was also used to refer not only to the material qualities of the diamond but also to describe as they imagined a set of geographical characteristics that evoked the almost pristine northern environment (regardless of industrialisation) in which Canadian diamonds are mined.

However, while the clients highlighted solidarity with labour and social groups potentially exploited by the extractive industries, most jewellery customers did not describe themselves as diamond connoisseurs. Some of them also did not even know that the ethical Canadian diamonds they were buying were mined in the NWT and did not verify the stone's information by entering the alphanumeric code into the database. This gap seemed to be filled by the imagination of many customers to whom the jewellers told the “diamond story” in their shop. Asked by a customer how he envisioned Canadian mines, he replied:

“I find it difficult to imagine Canadian mines, but I am very familiar with African mines. Often in films, you see that in Africa even children are employed alongside women and men working in mines in conditions that are very dangerous for their health. I can say that in mines in Canada, the

situation is completely different. Canada is a Western country. It is like in Europe, where you have to respect protocols at work and you cannot exploit workers” (Mattia, 43 years old, entrepreneur, Reggio Emilia).

Some clients constructed a stereotypical representation of the mining environment and work and the information they gathered came mainly from popular sources such as documentaries, websites, activist articles, and films (Armano, Joy 2022b). Although jewellers narrated the main contents of the global advertising storytelling on Canadian diamonds, which contrasted them with African blood diamonds, the stories that jewellers told their customers also seemed to possess characteristics of vagueness. Specifically, the story about Canadian ethical diamonds told by jewellers to their clients in the shops seemed to contain in effect schematic, non-detailed references to the production context, industry practices, and state policies, thus ensuring the functionality of the narrative. As with any kind of story, jewellers, in narrating Canadian diamonds, felt free to include references to their personal experience, only on the condition of a “conventionalization” (Beduschi 1987: 51) with ethical and sustainable values, without breaking the thread of the main content that was to be conveyed to consumers. Perhaps the most interesting, as well as the contradictory, aspect that emerged in the Italian jewellery stores was the fact that customers, despite having the possibility of tracing the stone (thanks to the use of blockchain technology), seemed little interested in knowing the mine where the diamond they were buying had been extracted and its material characteristics. It seemed, in this way, that they were content simply to enjoy the *fabula*.

To explain the construction of imaginaries about ethical and sustainable business practices, in accordance with Hannah Appel (2012), I reflected on the process of *disentanglement* carried out by actors far from the production context who literally “detach” (p. 693), i.e. symbolically separate, industry from the concrete place of production. At this point, considerations arise on the relationship between narratives, constructions of imagery, and situational context. Specifically, a situational context is that set of pragmatic conditions, external to the narrated fact, which guide its production, reception, and interpretation. The situational context thus defines the actual spatiotemporal coordinates within which a narrative is told (Beduschi 1987). Adapting this definition to the present research, we can assume that the ethical narrative that accompanies the Canadian diamond takes on meaning only within the situational context of the point of sale and in relation, as we have seen, to high-level professional categories in the mining context such as for example, geologists. Focusing attention on the context of retailing, at this point, the crucial question is: How is the Process of Argumentative Aphasia useful in explaining argumentative alignments of Italian jewellers and consumers to the official storytelling on Canadian ethical diamonds? In Italian retailing contexts, the themes present in the global narrative on Canadian ethical diamonds regarding the importance of boycotting unethical mining practices in poor countries, adhering to values of responsibility and

compassion that jewellers and consumers had towards economically disadvantaged people exploited in onerous and dangerous jobs in the mines. Jewellers and their clients explicitly expressed their willingness to be both “benefactors”, supporting ethical and sustainable mining practices, and “boycotters” of illegal mining and trading systems (Armano, Joy 2022a). In addition to contrasting Canadian ethical diamonds with African diamonds, my interlocutors also revealed a desire to receive some sort of gratitude in return:

“When I buy jewellery set with Canadian diamonds, despite the fact that they cost more, I feel that I too have contributed, as much as I can, to mitigate difficult situations that many people are forced to endure in mining-rich but economically poor environments. If I buy diamonds that don't finance wars and don't cause people to despair, I feel psychologically better. (...) I can be confident about what I buy because Canadian diamonds are certified and I can even know the mine where they were extracted because I can track them” (Umberto, 52 years old, bank clerk, Milan).

Like Umberto, other customers described their moral choice behind the purchase of Canadian diamonds also as a response to appease a sense of guilt. Customers said they felt guilty when their luxury consumption, which often denotes nonessential and extravagant spending, contradicted their ethical values. This sentiment emerged as the financial means allowed them to own a luxury item obtained from the (often exploited) labour force of other disadvantaged socio-economic groups. In this regard, the advertising narrative on Canadian diamonds played an essential role in reassuring them by offering them an alternative solution thanks to diamonds which, being certified, gave them the perception of the application of safety protocols in mines and environmental protection. Therefore, the advertising narration of ethical diamonds created, in the context of retailing, local sub-discussions that highlight an alignment between global storytelling and the values of the interlocutors which was based, above all, on the possibility of being able to contribute, one's own sustainable luxury purchases, to divert consumption by supporting forms of mining industrialisation that are attentive to human rights and, on the other hand, disallowing illegal mining practices.

Using the theoretical lens of the Process of Argumentative Aphasia, we can therefore say that the alignment with the content of the official advertising narrative about ethical Canadian diamonds that emerged in the discourses of Italian jewellers and consumers allowed them to construct an “ethical imaginary” that contrasted Canadian mines with the unethical African mines. However, we can also argue that although they aligned themselves with the official publicity storytelling, they were unaware, partly due to their geographical distance from the mines in the NWT, of the presence of argumentative misalignments in the Canadian mining context with respect to the global narrative about stones.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this multi-sited, multi-scale ethnographic research that interconnects two different and geographically distant socio-cultural and economic contexts, the concept of the Process of Argumentative Aphasia offers an interpretation of the frictional encounters between the global advertising content of Canadian ethical diamonds and argumentative misalignments and alignments with respect to it. These misalignments and alignments, embedded in local sub-discourses, unfolded along a continuum that ranged from a willingness to discuss ethical Canadian diamonds and sustainable mining, as was the case in the retailing contexts, to more or less explicit reluctance to talk about these issues by people in the mining context. From a theoretical perspective, as I approached the mining context, the argumentative misalignments with official storytelling increased, while as I moved towards the retailing contexts, jewellers and consumers became aligned with global advertising content.

The Argumentative Aphasia Process provides anthropologists with a theoretical tool that is also useful for other research in the area of non-renewable resources. Some studies state that extractive industries often tend to publicly conceal information, or provide generic information, on the environmental impacts and damage caused by extraction to communities living near mines or pipelines (Calvão et al. 2021). On the contrary, companies, seeking to enhance their reputation, would show ethical and sustainable governance practices in their reports that aim to protect the environment and the well-being of residents. At the same time, however, when companies address global consumers, they would use linguistic styles and narrative content that disguise the possible criticalities that exist in the production contexts and local realities in which they operate. The Argumentative Aphasia Process can therefore help to understand, in the frictional encounter between corporate narratives and local interpretations of them, the cultural aspects that facilitate or inhibit the acculturation processes of official storytelling.

In general, the Process of Argumentative Aphasia can be exploited by anthropologists to understand how power dynamics within the corporate world may inhibit employees from exposing themselves on issues that would be deemed uncomfortable by top management and that the latter want to publicly conceal so as not to threaten corporate reputation. In this way, insights can be developed into the implicit rules on what can be said and what is best avoided in working environments. In addition, comparisons can be developed between argumentative alignments and misalignments between how the company presents itself to consumers and how their perceptions may differ from those of the employees.

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