

Gold Mining, Indigenous Land Claims and Conflict in Guyana's Hinterland

Gavin Hilson^{*A} and Timothy Laing^B

^A *Surrey Business School, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Surrey
Guildford, GU2 7XH, United Kingdom*

^B *Brighton Business School, University of Brighton, Brighton, BN2 4AT, United Kingdom*

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* Corresponding author Email: g.m.hilson@surrey.ac.uk

Abstract

In recent decades, Guyana's gold-rich interior has been the location of numerous, mostly low-latent, conflicts. In each case, groups of Afro and Indo-Guyanese originating from the country's coastal cities and towns – popularly referred to as 'Coast Landers' – have clashed with indigenous Amerindians over control of remote parcels of land containing gold deposits. Each appears to have a valid argument in support of its position: the former contend that they are legally entitled to work these lands, having obtained the requisite permits from the central government to mine for gold, whilst the latter maintain that such decisions constitute a breach of their human rights, and draw attention to key legislation in support of their case. This article broadens understanding of the dynamics of these conflicts by reflecting more critically on the arguments presented by both parties. Drawing heavily on research conducted in Mahdia-Campbelltown, one location where frictions between Coast Lander mining groups and Amerindians are particularly serious, it is argued that these disputes are not about control of gold riches as is popularly believed but rather a product of deeply-rooted ethnic tensions between these parties.

Keywords: Guyana; mining; gold; Amerindians; conflict

1. Introduction

On 25 January 2013, residents of the village of Isseneru, a remote indigenous Akawaio Amerindian settlement of 260 people in Region Seven (Cuyuni/Mazaruni) of Guyana, took to the streets of Georgetown, the country's capital.¹ The 80 protesters scattered along Vlissengen Road outside of the Office of the President were voicing disapproval over a court decision made by Judge Diana Insanally to allow Joan Chang, a mine concession holder, to extract gold on lands within Isseneru. In the eyes of the Akawaio and their supporters, the ruling was unjust because according to Guyana's *Amerindian Act 2006*, any miner who wishes to enter and operate on Amerindian lands must first obtain the 'permission' of the relevant Village Council,² comply with all legislation, and provide compensation to locals (Canterbury, 2014). But Judge Insanally decided that this *only* applies to individuals in possession of mine permits obtained *after* implementation of the act. Ms Chang, therefore, was deemed exemptible because she had secured her claim in 1992.

The Isseneru dispute is one of several high-profile conflicts that have surfaced in gold-rich sections of Guyana's hinterland in recent years (Bulkan, 2014). In each case, groups of Afro and Indo-Guyanese originating from the country's coastal cities and towns – hereafter referred to as 'Coast Landers' – have clashed with Amerindians over land. With the state being the ultimate holder of sub-surface rights,³ court battles over remote, largely-unmonitored, sections of Guyana's interior where settlements such as Isseneru are found, areas which Coast Landers are interested in mining but from their distant Georgetown bases and where indigenous titling histories are not particularly well-documented, are bound to continue surfacing. Both parties appear to have valid arguments: Coast Landers contend that they are legally entitled to work these lands, having obtained the requisite permits from the government to mine for gold, whilst Amerindians maintain that such decisions constitute a breach of their human rights, and draw attention to sections of the *Amerindian Act 2006* and complementary legislation in support of their case.⁴ Further analysis of both positions, however, reveals that these disputes are far more complex than they first appear.

The purpose of this article is to refocus the debate on conflict in Guyana's gold-rich hinterland by reflecting more critically on the arguments presented by both Coast Landers and Amerindians. Dialogue on the subject has taken an intriguing turn of late in response to the growing influence of the latter in policymaking. It is no secret that, since the colonial period, Guyana's Amerindians have struggled mightily to have their voices heard in national development debates. But the recently-implemented *Amerindian Act 2006* has provided a platform – however fragile it may seem – for Amerindian groups to influence decisions which may affect the development of the country's resource-rich interior. Their increased visibility in national-level negotiations has been evident in the discussions that have emerged over access to, and development and deforestation of, the hinterland since implementation of the country's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS)⁵ in 2009. With a

¹ 'Isseneru villagers picket OP over court ruling', www.stabroeknews.com/2013/news/stories/01/26/isseneru-villagers-picket-op-over-court-ruling/ (Accessed 4 November 2015).

² The Amerindian Act establishes that a Village Council be installed to administer Amerindian villages, comprising a *Toshao* (chief) and councillors. The Council is tasked with, *inter alia*, representing the Village, providing advice and strategic direction to the Village, and managing and regulating the use and occupation of Village lands.

³ As stated in Section 6 of the Mining Act 1989.

⁴ In addition, many Amerindian leaders have argued that the *Amerindian Act 2006* is inconsistent with international commitments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

⁵ The LCDS is built on a vision of developing a low-carbon development path for Guyana, financed in part by a Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) agreement with Norway. It outlines key strategic areas for development of the country, including two that affect Amerindian communities.

major emphasis of UN REDD+ programming⁶ being the welfare of indigenous, forest-dependent peoples, Amerindians now have, for perhaps the first time, a fairly visible 'space' in which to engage in national-level and international dialogue, the most recent wave of debates dominated by their strained relationships with Coast Lander groups involved in gold mining, currently Guyana's most important industry. As the discussion that follows clarifies, however, these rifts are not over access to gold *per se*, as is widely believed. Rather, and as will be explained, similar to other conflicts which have surfaced in other resource-rich developing countries (Solando, 2016; Corde, 2017), the disputes that have intensified in many gold-rich sections of Guyana's interior in recent years are the product of deep ethnic divisions, specifically a Coast Lander-Amerindian divide that has shaped the development of the country for decades.

The paper begins with a brief review of the literature on conflict and ethnicity in resource-rich developing countries, analysis which helps to 'situate' the case study of Guyana examined here. Section 3 focuses on the Guyana case, tracing the origins of the innumerable disputes which today plague the country's gold-mineralized terrain. Section 4 presents a case study of Mahdia-Campbelltown, twin townships where tensions between Amerindians and Coast Lander mining groups have escalated over the past decade, to illustrate more clearly the dynamics of these conflicts. Concluding remarks are then provided.

2. Understanding the Ethnic Dimension of Conflict in Resource-Rich Developing Countries

Today, many resource-rich developing countries have become 'hot spots' of civil violence. The major shortcoming with some of the more popular analysis which attempts to explain why, however, is its lack of nuance: there is often the presumption, or at times, outright declaration, that the *presence* of natural resources is responsible for such conflict. Significant criticism (e.g. Nathan, 2005; Bensted, 2011; Cuvelier et al., 2014) has been directed at the work of Paul Collier in particular (e.g. Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Collier et al., 2009) over his reductionist approach to analyzing what is clearly a very complex issue. It has become almost routine to highlight the limitations of Collier's work but given how influential it has become, the criticisms and cautions seem justified.

Collier's 'greed versus grievance' typology appeals to donors because of its accessibility and simplicity. But as Bensted (2011) explains, the conclusions reached by Collier, who he himself concedes has deliberately omitted criteria that are difficult to measure, such as opportunities for corruption, the influence of leaders over rebelling factions and suppliers of arms, are based on narrowly-defined quantitative indicators. Whilst perhaps intended as a basic starting point for analysis of natural resource-based conflict, Collier's work seems to have had the opposite effect: providing inspiration to a host of scholars who have proceeded to assemble equally-ambiguous datasets and models (Welsch, 2008; Fjelde and De Soysa, 2009; Bennour, 2009; Torvik, 2009; Bjorvatn and Farzanegan, 2015), and to overzealous donors keen on 'doing something' to mitigate violence and as a result, publishing ungrounded critiques (UN-HABITAT, 2012; Barma et al., 2012). The problem with this body of analysis is, as indicated, that it misleadingly implies that it is the natural resources themselves – specifically, the view that various groups believe they can gain access to them – that is triggering civil violence in developing countries. Proponents of this position, imply Lujala et al. (2005), have inadvertently truncated the traditional 'three-factor model of rebellion'

⁶ Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) is a United Nations-led initiative which attempts to create financial value for the carbon contained in forests. REDD+ seeks to go beyond deforestation and degradation. See 'UN-REDD Programme', www.un-redd.org/aboutredd (Accessed 13 December 2015).

inspired by Gurr (1970) of *motivation* (or *frustration*), *opportunity* and *identity*, to mostly *opportunity*, in many cases cavalierly concluding that it ‘provides considerably more explanatory power than grievance’ (p. 540).

Whilst an abundance of natural resources undoubtedly influences all three of these factors, arguing that a desire to accumulate wealth for personal gain is chiefly responsible for inciting civil violence in developing countries runs the risk of side-lining what may be ‘legitimate grievances that many people have felt due to social injustices, corruption and other concerns, during different time periods’ (Bensted, 2011, p. 89). Believing that conflicts in resource-rich settings are owed to belligerents’ greed and/or broader macro-level elements, explain Cuvelier et al. (2014), ‘tends to yield rather unsophisticated analyses, which downplay the importance of various complex political and social processes at the grassroots level’. The authors draw on opinions shared by Winslow and Woost (2004) for emphasis:

Culture, ideology and power struggles disappear to be replaced by simple financial feasibility. Rebel leaders are reduced to a perverse form of that old staple of neoclassical economics, the rationally calculating generic man who, given enough funding and the right advertising, can manipulate almost anyone to follow any cause. [p. 16]

Several scholars have sought to build on the simplistic greed versus grievance typology, valuable work which has yielded a more dynamic critique. A detailed survey of this literature is beyond the scope of the present paper but several different lines of analysis have emerged that have contributed to the nuance of the current debate on natural resource wealth and conflict in developing countries. Various issues explored include the value of particular commodities, their accessibility and a host country’s geographical characteristics (see e.g. Ross, 2004, 2006; Humphreys, 2005; Le Billon, 2008, 2009).

One of the more complex issues investigated, which is particularly relevant to understanding why innumerable low-latent conflicts have surfaced in Guyana’s gold-rich hinterland in recent decades, is ethnic divisions. Several scholars (e.g. Sorens, 2011; Neudorfer and Theierkauf, 2014; Morelli and Rohner, 2015) offer valuable insights on how ethnic composition and divisions shape conflict in resource-rich settings. Revisiting Gurr (1970), these tensions or differences are commonly seen as a major source of underlying *motivation* or *frustration*, and when taken into account in a number of cases to which the greed versus grievance typology has been applied, reveal the limitations and shortcomings of a feasibility hypothesis and rational choice theories as explanations for civil violence in natural resource-rich developing countries (after Cuvelier et al., 2014). In many settings where ethnic divisions are pronounced, therefore, natural resource wealth has simply magnified *existing* disputes, further galvanizing divisions between groups and retracing battle lines. This is perhaps best illustrated by the most extreme of cases, three of which will be briefly examined here.

The first is Chad, where, report May and Massey (2000), the 1996 ‘post-election milieu resembled successive episodes of a soap-opera set amongst the oil wells around Doba in Logone-Orientale, complete with accusations of corruption, embezzlement, assassination and massacre’ (p. 125). The country’s oil project, the authors further explain, ‘offers [President] Deby’ – who ascended to power via a *coup d’etat* – ‘not only the possibility of personal wealth, but also the, hitherto absent, largesse needed to construct a viable clientalistic state’ (p. 126). But whilst Deby’s behaviour and stranglehold over the country (see Hansen, 2013) has undoubtedly been shaped by the new-found wealth provided by the Doba oilfields, what is often forgotten is that since Chad gained its

independence from France in 1965, its 'socio-political narrative had been coloured by unceasing civil strife, interspersed with cyclical intervention' (May and Massey, 2002, p. 73). With immense ethnic diversity within its borders, specifically, 127 different languages and intra-group relations highly-prone to segmentation (May and Massey, 2000), the country was destined to continue being a 'hot spot' of civil violence, with or without Doba.

The second case is Aceh, Indonesia, the location of a well-documented secessionist conflict which became extremely visible in 1976, when a group of individuals formed the Free Aceh Movement (FAM) after Jakarta excluded them from a contract to develop the territory's natural gas (Scott and Tebay, 2005; Drexler, 2006; McCarthy, 2007). Three decades of conflict between Acehnese and the Indonesian army followed, ending only after a peace negotiation was brokered in 2005. The conflict, however, long predated the discovery of natural gas. This natural resource wealth simply fomented existing tensions between the Indonesian Government, which seemed adamant about not allowing Aceh to govern itself after the country gained independence. Close to 80 percent of the territory's inhabitants describe themselves as 'Acehnese', an identity shaped by a century of violence, initially through frictions with the colonial Dutch rulers and subsequently, the Indonesian Government. There was a sense of collective ethnic identity, therefore, firmly entrenched in the territory by the 1980s, when grievances over the lack of local benefits from resident natural gas extraction began to surface. The ethnic dimension of the protracted civil violence in Aceh, which is often described as a 'resource conflict', soon became very visible (Aspinall, 2007; Barter, 2015).

The third, and final, case is oil-rich Equatorial Guinea, where, as Williams Jr (2011) puts it, 'recent history – replete with coup attempts, heavy handed threats against diplomats and journalists, high-level intrigue, and an heir-apparent with a taste for expensive cars and female rap stars – reads like a political thriller that invokes a few too many clichés of the genre' (p. 622). Equatorial Guinea's new-found oil has, as many scholars have correctly suggested (Frynas, 2004; Wood, 2004; Appel, 2012; Campos-Serrano, 2013), helped to solidify the position of its corrupt authoritarian regime, ultimately spawning such extravagant behaviour. McSherry (2006) offers a timely reminder about how 'the country has a long history of ethnic conflict between the Bubi and Fang' (p. 35), the latter comprising 'various close knit clans', one of which – a group originating from a locality called Mongomo – has ruled the country since independence in 1968 (Cusack, 1999, p. 209). Initially, territorial *Fanguization*, specifically, the mass migration of Fang to the country capital of Malabo, was encouraged. This was followed by administrative *Fanguization*: how, during the country's two successive dictatorships, the most significant political and military posts have been filled chiefly by members of the Mongomo clan, and how even middle ranking offices (for example, civil governors, other government officials and army commanders) have been taken by Fang, the majority of whom were/are close to the dictators' family circles (Aixela, 2013). Ethnic tensions have, not surprisingly, been pronounced since independence and long recognized as the main instigator of violence even before the discovery of oil. The vicious cycle of violence became very visible in the 1980s, beginning with the attempted overthrow of President Obiang by junior army officers on 11 May 1983, described at the time as a 'coup [that] had followed a conflict within the country's ruling faction and [which] was indicative of a tribal struggle for power' (Fegley, 1989, p. 216). The country's oil, therefore, has simply nourished ethnic divisions that have persisted for decades.

What these three cases underscore is how, across the developing world, natural resource wealth perpetuates *existing* tensions, many of which have been shaped heavily by ethnic friction and fractionalization. Much of the same applies to low-latent conflicts, such as the tensions that have surfaced in many gold-mineralized sections of Guyana in recent decades. Few cases have exposed

the underlying ethnic cleavages of a society more so than the tensions that abound in Guyana's gold mining territories. The remainder of this paper explores the origins and dynamics of these disputes.

3. Critical Reflections on Guyana's 'Coast Lander-Amerindian Divide'

As indicated at the outset, across Guyana's hinterland, indigenous Amerindian groups are battling inhabitants of the coast ('Coast Landers') over control of gold-mineralized lands. It is an unsurprising development, however, when the country's unique cultural history is taken into account. These conflicts have surfaced in a landscape which, over the past 150 years, has been shaped heavily by ethnic tensions. During this time, Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese, the country's two dominant ethnic groups, have themselves struggled to co-exist, often using the political parties they have aligned themselves with along racial grounds to systematically marginalize one another. Several scholars (e.g. Abraham, 2005; Mars, 2009; Wilson et al., 2010) have reflected critically on the country's ongoing racial tensions and its unintegrated population but it is perhaps Lall (2013, p. 5) whose words resonate most powerfully here. The author describes life in Guyana today as 'Sitting on a Racial Volcano' and asks whether 'there is truly any hope for us [Guyanese] to survive intact as one nation?'

The rapidly growing population of Amerindians, who today account for around 10 percent of Guyana's population (Guyana Bureau of Statistics 2015), have been profoundly affected by these ethnic tensions, although they face an entirely different challenge: namely, a lack of 'voice'. As Hennessy (2013) explains, 'Amerindians occupy the lowest position in Guyana's hierarchy of race relations' (p. 1243), which, for them, has made gaining control of the lands they inhabit and deriving more benefit from the natural resource wealth they contain very difficult. Guyana is, in the traditional sense, a 'staples economy'. Between 2012 and 2014, five industries – gold mining, sugar production, rice cultivation, timber harvesting and bauxite mining – accounted for 85 percent of the country's exports (Guyana Bureau of Statistics 2014). But as will be explained in this section of the paper, these activities are mostly controlled by Coast Landers (or foreign investors) and have deeply-rooted ethnic foundations, the dynamics of which a disparate and politically-impotent Amerindian community has struggled to influence.

3.1 Staples and the Galvanization of Ethnic Divisions of Guyana's Coastland

In Guyana, the developments that have taken place in recent decades in the gold mining sector reinforce points made by Harold Innis nearly a century ago about 'staples'. Of particular significance here is the observation that economic growth and development, as well as increased political power, in the heartland or core is contingent upon the accumulation of 'staples' – and, if necessary, the marginalization of people – located in the hinterland or periphery. This is precisely what critics imply is taking place in Guyana's gold mining regions today: how the 'Coast Lander [i.e. the core's] approach to the interior lands in which Amerindians [i.e. the periphery] form the majority population remains extractivist, exploitative, and rent seeking in orientation' (Bulkan, 2013, p. 68). As gold, has become *the* staple in Guyana, it is further argued, Amerindians have been increasingly subjugated by Coast Landers and the government to facilitate access to sections of the county's vast interior where mineral deposits occur. But claims made that, in the process of developing their gold mining claims, incoming Coast Landers have damaged the pristine environments and cultural resources on which inhabitants of the hinterland depend for their livelihoods, have been somewhat tempered by accounts of Amerindians' participation in the industry.

The reality is, however, that most Amerindians, despite often being the first to locate gold deposits, struggle to secure mining claims because they cannot afford heavy machinery, have insufficient knowledge of Guyana's (mine) licensing process and lack political connections. The casual and often unskilled work in which most of the Amerindians employed at mine sites find themselves today is very much a microcosm of their daily struggle: a battle to secure gainful employment and unable to challenge the country's ruling Coast Lander elites and government authorities. A brief review of Guyana's history, in particular, the galvanization of its ethnic underpinnings, helps to contextualize Amerindian exclusion and struggles. It also helps to explain why so many Amerindian groups have been resolute in their efforts to gain greater control, through what they believe to be legitimate means, of territory in the hinterland which happens to contain gold deposits.

During the 1800s and first half of the twentieth century, Amerindians were – or so it seemed – 'forgotten about' or perhaps simply ignored, initially by the British and subsequently, by the masses of Afro and Indo-Guyanese who had settled in coastal townships such as Georgetown. During the colonial period, Guyana was primarily a sugar-producing hub for the British Empire. Up until 1838, its plantations were dependent on African slave labour and from this point onward, on *coolies* (indentured East Indian workers) who arrived in the colony in waves in the 19th century (Farage, 2003). The 'divide and rule' tactics deployed by the British during the colonial period to maintain social control would fuel racial hostilities and establish divisions between these two 'settled' groups (Mars, 2009). By the time Guyana had gained its independence in 1966, two race-based parties had galvanized, the bedrock of what, as Lowe (2013) puts it, is today 'a winner-takes-all political system between Indo-Guyanese (East Indians) and Afro-Guyanese (Africans/Blacks)' (p. 362). As will be explained, the fate of Amerindians has long been inextricably linked to the change and actions brought about by the clashes between these Coast Lander groups.

Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham are credited with expediting Guyana's independence. The two banded together to establish the People's Progressive Party (PPP) for the sole purpose of exerting pressure on the British. But by 1955, the power-sharing arrangement between the two had broken down, and by 1957 the party had split into two factions: the 'Burnham-ites' and the 'Jagan-ites'. The latter triumphed and the former established the People's National Congress (PNC). Race riots erupted up until the 1968 general election, which the PNC won. Burnham's authoritarian regime would rule Guyana for the next two decades, controlling the private sector and community development. It crippled the opposition by banning the imports of staples integral to the Indo-Guyanese diet, including split peas, flour and potatoes. When the PPP regained power in 1992, Indo-Guyanese would exact their revenge, depriving their African/Black counterparts access to social and financial services (Mars, 2001, 2009; Hossein, 2014).

For both Coast Lander groups, however, Amerindians only became relevant once interests shifted to the country's natural resource-rich hinterland, popularly referred to locally (and hereafter) as 'the interior'. Their main preoccupation was marginalizing one another whilst simultaneously supporting 'their own' economic activities – a deliberate division of labour, the origins of which long predate independence. Visible stratification began in the country's sugar industry shortly after the arrival of Indian indentured labourers in the 1830s: as migrants arrived to work in the sugarcane fields, Africans who had been labouring in these very fields moved into the more skilled factory operations, an ethnic division which would persist for more than 100 years (Thomas, 1984). Toward the end of the 19th century, the colony's 'staple' economy, *hitherto* based almost exclusively on sugar cultivation, experienced its first pronounced changes, each of which also had ethnic undertones (Richardson, 1977). East Indians responded to reductions in wages and demand for

labour following the crash of sugar prices in 1884 by branching out into rice cultivation (Potter, 1998). For individuals of African ancestry, explains Josiah (2011), mining became the destination of choice, a combination of the chance of earning higher wages in gold and diamond fields and the horrendous plantation conditions being the main ‘pull’ and ‘push’ factors, respectively, behind their decision. A census conducted in 1891 identified only 18 East Indian gold-diggers compared to many thousands of African-descended counterparts. The original European prospectors made their preference for black labour known. One entrepreneur, George Garnett, went on record saying that ‘East Indians were unsuitable for mining’ because they ‘are not quite strong enough’ (p. 28). By the 1890s, the number of Afro-Guyanese prospectors had increased dramatically, working alongside European prospectors. But most were scattered and of the ‘pork-knocking’⁷ variety – a far cry from the estimated 100,000 people engaged in the sector today, many of whom are armed with heavy machinery and countless dredges (Hennessy, 2015). Although texts do not state so explicitly, the footprint of the small but growing masses of Afro-Guyanese who had moved to the interior in the late-1800s and early-1900s in search of gold and diamonds seemed to have had very little impact on Amerindian groups at the time. Up until this point, Amerindians, who were dispersed in the interior, were largely spectators, minimally affected by the ethnic tensions brewing in coastland areas.

3.2 Galvanization of the ‘Coast Lander-Amerindian’ Dichotomy

The fortunes of Guyanese Amerindians began to change in the 1950s. Broaching similar arguments to those voiced elsewhere about indigenous groups, sympathizers argue that Amerindians, as the *original* inhabitants of what is now Guyana, had not been recognized as such under law: that without adequate protection from the state, they had been forced to forfeit the lands they had inhabited for centuries. The evidence in support of this position is, indeed, compelling, and goes a long way toward explaining why so many Amerindian groups are today feuding with coastland-based gold miners.

Central to the ongoing conflicts in Guyana’s gold mining communities, much like everything else in the country, is what is referred to here as the ‘Coast Lander-Amerindian Dichotomy’: namely, the perpetual division, both geographically and ideologically, between the people of the core and those of the periphery. It is unclear as to when this division actually galvanized. Reinforcing points raised by Menezes (1979), Bulkan (2013) suggests that it began to take shape prior to the abolition of African slavery in 1833 and the subsequent arrival of Indian indentured labour to Guyana circa-1838. Archival records, explains the author, indicate that colonial sugar planters used Amerindian militias to capture escaped slaves and to help suppress slave revolts, such as the Demerara Rebellion of 1823 (Mars, 2009). It is unclear, however, how, exactly, these isolated events fuelled the ethnic tensions that began to intensify between Coast Landers and Amerindians in the latter half of the twentieth century, if at all. What *is* clear is that the contemporary geographical and ideological division divide between Coast Landers and Amerindians was, as Bulkan (2013) rightly points out, ‘cemented’ when the latter ‘withdrew into the hinterland’ when it emerged that the planter-dominated colonial parliament and London-appointed Governors began to disagree ‘on the need to maintain the traditions of providing presents [to them]’ (p. 369). This withdrawal was further entrenched by the physical geographical differences between the reclaimed agricultural lands of the Coast Landers (buttressed by canals and water conservancies) and the dense forests and savannahs

⁷ ‘Pork-knockers’ is the Guyanese term for small-scale freelance miners who have traditionally made up the majority of Guyana’s gold mining industry (Dalgety, 2010).

of the interior. The lack of an expanding agricultural frontier reduced interactions between the groups to sporadic encounters in the interior.

Whilst the position of Coast Landers towards Amerindians up until independence is often projected as apathetic, as indicated, this was likely due to the former having very little interest *hitherto* in developing the country's interior. There certainly *was* an opinion of Amerindians – and not a particularly positive one. This included that of the British, who were clearly determined to prevent Amerindians 'from civilizing'. As Riley (2003) explains, 'Amerindian groups were to remain on their traditional lands, the assimilation of Amerindians into the larger Guyanese society was discouraged, and non-Amerindian (especially white) contact with the Amerindians was restricted' (p. 147). In fact, it was very clear that 'For a long time', some groups, such as 'Amerindians living in Rupununi [South Guyana], particularly the southern Wapishana...were considered by the colonial administration to be wild Indians untouched by civilization' (Farage, 2003, p. 110). This projection would prove problematic for Amerindians during the build-up to country independence.

Specifically, neither Jagan nor Burnham and their respective followers, who again, were preoccupied mainly with Coast Lander politics at the time, considered the 'voice' of the interior to be particularly relevant in debates on Guyana's development, independence and future. In fact, had it not been for the initiative of Stephen Campbell, an indigenous Arawak Indian who travelled to London to present to the Independence Commission a petition signed by 26 Amerindian chiefs, 'Guyanese Amerindians might well lack secure land tenure, as is the case for indigenous peoples in the other circum-Caribbean territories of Belize and Suriname' (Bulkan, 2013, p. 371). As Colchester et al. (2002) explain, Campbell moved quickly to protect the land rights of Amerindians in a country on the brink of independence and experiencing rapid ethnic fractionalization, the effects of which, it was assumed (and correctly predicted), could spill over to the interior at any point. He sought counsel from, and the support of, the departing British, for whom, it was widely-known, the view that 'Amerindians should actually be recognised as owners of their lands began to gain currency among colonial administrators in the last years of the colony, in line with advances in perceptions about indigenous peoples globally' (p. 15). Although it would prove to be more cosmetic than substance, the Amerindian Lands Commission (ALC) was established in 1966. Two years later, it produced a report, recommending that 128 Amerindian communities receive title to 24,000 square miles of land, exactly 50 percent of the total land requested by the chiefs who had signed Campbell's petition (and almost double today's titled Amerindian lands). It was the series of moves that followed and consequent rapid changes in the interior which have sparked the conflicts between Coast Landers and Amerindians in countless gold-producing areas of Guyana in recent years.

Bulkan (2013) argues that two events, also described in depth by Farage (2003), Hennessy (2013) and others, were instrumental in bringing the 'Coast Lander-Amerindian Dichotomy' to fruition, incidents which 'fed the coastlanders' negative stereotyping of Amerindians, then cast as traitors and anti-national' (p. 373). The first was a secret convention held in the Kabakaburi Amerindian Reservation, attended by 36 Amerindians, in April 1967. The convention was quickly quashed by the government, and all of its financiers, including a Venezuelan diplomat, were expatriated. The second was the Rupununi Uprising, an attempted secession, spearheaded by white settler ranchers with the backing of a small group of Amerindians, of the Rupununi, in January of 1969. As a result, Bulkan (2013) contests, 'Amerindians were seen as traitors, and at the First Conference of Amerindian Leaders held two months later, Amerindian leaders were asked to sign a six-point pledge of allegiance to the country' (p. 372). But whilst these events certainly contributed to the deterioration of relations between Coast Landers and Amerindians even further, the former's plans for development of the interior were already cast in stone: despite the growing rift between

Afro and Indo-Guyanese, both Burnham and Jagan supported socialist ideas, including the view that the natural resource-rich interior should be exploited (Hennessy, 2013).

Under Burnham, actions taken to achieve this were swift and decisive, and generally did not take into account the 'voices' of Amerindians. The resulting tensions were so severe that by the 1980s, it had become clear that the dichotomy between Coast Landers and Amerindians had become as sizable an ethnic division as that between Afro and Indo-Guyanese in the 'racial volcano'.

3.3 Antecedents of Conflict in Guyana's Gold Mining Communities

Guyana has, over the past two decades, experienced an unprecedented rise in gold production, propelled by an increase in Coast Lander-financed small and medium-scale mining activity. Between 1995 and 2015, declared gold production increased almost 500 percent, rising from 91,451 ounces to 451,490 ounces.⁷ Today, export revenues from gold mining exceed US\$500 million annually (Figure 1).⁸

What impact has this gold mining boom had on Amerindian culture and society? The Coast Lander mining community is quick to point out how Amerindians are benefitting from the industry because it provides them with jobs. Those critical of the gold mining industry do not deny this but – and revisiting a point made earlier – argue that most Amerindians employed in the sector are temporary workers or work menial jobs, and question whether, given the adverse impact their involvement in the industry has had on the dynamics of households and the damages caused by operations, the decision to pursue such work is worthwhile. Colchester et al. (2002) provide a detailed but bleak account of Amerindian involvement in mining and its impact:

Indeed Amerindians have engaged in small-scale mining in Guyana for a very long time...[but] The social impacts of mining, reported by Amerindians through interviews and through the community consultations, are diverse and severe...Community and family dependency on mining is...reported to have a demoralizing impact on Amerindian livelihoods. Traditional activities like farming, fishing, hunting and gathering are neglected making Amerindians even more dependent on mining. Wherever there are mines, the mining 'way of life' follows. As in other parts of the world, mines in Guyana are associated with loud and garish displays of wealth and lax morality. Bars, discos and rum shops have proliferated in all the mining towns and villages. Amerindians with cash or gold in their pockets are drawn into the same lifestyle. [p. 35, 37-38, 40]

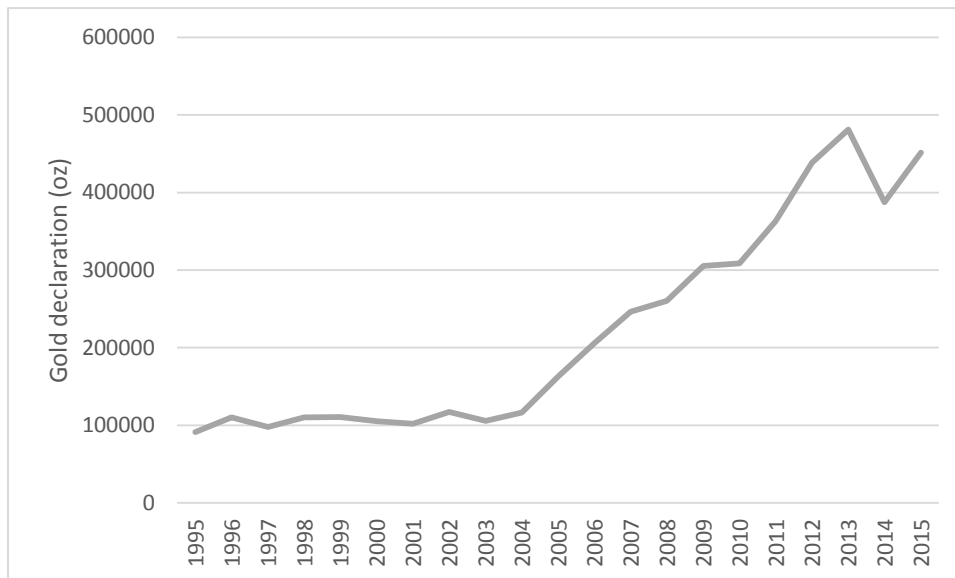
Hennessy (2013) echoes these sentiments, reporting that in the villages in the Upper Mazaruni, following the arrival of Coast Landers in pursuit of gold mining interests, the 'ability [of Amerindians] to continue traditional farming practices was reduced by time spent mining' and the 'cultural practices of the mining industry changed the nature of interpersonal relationships among families and villages' (p. 1255). According to documented Amerindian accounts (Forte and Melville, 1989), these impacts were felt almost immediately following the 'opening up' of the interior in the 1970s. For example, 'Lemel Benson Thomas', who was born in the village of Waramadong in the Upper Mazaruni, recalled how after 'The Government gave dredges to the Amerindians in the Upper Mazaruni in 1978/79', within two-three months, 'a lot of young men were attracted to the dredges because they could see that the divers were earning thousands of dollars'. He claimed, however,

⁷ Data extracted from GGMC (2010) and Ministry of the Presidency (2015).

⁸ Data extracted from Ministry of the Presidency (2015).

'that the majority of young people – teachers and other trained persons included – left their farms and their families and became drivers and dredge hands', and that 'with mixing with the coastlanders, earning a lot of money which they could spend in the discos and other shops, and being exposed to coastlander culture, all of these things led to a break down in family relationships and in the whole way of life in the Upper Mazaruni' (p. 137).

Figure 1: Declared gold production in Guyana, 1995-2015



For Amerindians, however, the issue of contention is that they had no say whatsoever when Burnham opened the interior for – in particular, mine-related – development. The proposed awarding of 24,000 square miles as Amerindian reservation land, and not the 43,000 square miles requested by Stephen Campbell and supporters, was deliberate. Coupled with the very slow rate at which Amerindian villages were titled, the process divided Amerindians into ‘titled’ and ‘untitled’ groups by breaking up ‘once contiguous indigenous lands into islands intersected by areas of state lands, facilitating the entrance of environmentally destructive and socially-disruptive mining and logging operations into the heart of traditional Amerindian lands’, in the process, ‘generating much conflict and resentment’ (Colchester, 2002, p. 16). Under Burnham and in the current political environment of neoliberal resource extraction, the patches of land excluded from titles granted in 1976 – the spaces between these ‘islands’ – were put aside for mining, and have since been developed even further. To facilitate this, Burnham used the freshly-minted *Amerindian Act 1976* to keep minerals in the trust of the state and make all airstrips, planned and existing, government property. These airstrips became conduits for Coast Landers to establish businesses in the interior to service the mining sector (Hennessy, 2013). Key among the omissions was the territory encompassing the communities of the Upper Mazaruni, which, as in many other areas of the country, without the protection of a title, ‘ushered new mining activity to the region’ (Hennessy, 2015, p. 136).

One significant impact of the *Amerindian Act 1976* (and its successor Act of 2006) has been its ‘homogenization’ of Amerindians. As Hennessy (2013) explains, ‘The language of the law situates the overall population as “racially and geographically distinct” from coastal peoples yet homogenizes them as an undifferentiated group in need of government protection’, which has purposively ‘served both to racialize and to spatialize the government’s vision of a homogenous, diffuse people, while legitimizing state intervention to correct their underdevelopment’ as well as rationalizing ‘the appropriation of remaining land for the state’ (p. 1252). Thus, despite all but two of Guyana’s nine Amerindian peoples populating Guyana occupying spatially-distinct lands, the government (and Coast Landers) treats them, in both legislation and in practice, as one collective group. This extends to the gold mining communities in remote sections of the interior, as Roopnaraine (1995) illustrates using the case of Monkey Mountain, a settlement in the Pakaraima Mountains. Although Monkey

Mountain is a tribal frontier, for the Coast Landers who control its gold mining activities, 'Amerindians are just Amerindians, not Makusi or Patamona' – that the 'distinction between Makusi and Patamona dissolves in the presence of coastlanders and [partnering] Brazilians' (p. 40). It has been reported that the divisions between the groups are so pronounced that in the mining communities, 'coastlanders work in separate areas' and 'in some instances are not allowed to work alongside the Amerindians' (Forte and Melville, 1989, p. 145).

Where, then, do Amerindians go from here? It was Cheddi Jagan who, during the early days of independence, believed that Amerindians were destined to be co-opted by others 'as long as they did not constitute a class, and for this reason, they did not have revolutionary potential' (Farage, 2003, p. 113). Perhaps bundling nine very different groups of peoples as 'Amerindians' was a deliberate move made by Coast Landers to prevent such a class from forming: specifically, to keep the peoples of the interior destabilized in order to continue appropriating natural resource wealth. On the one hand, the broad consensus among Guyana's Amerindians today is that they continue to be underrepresented by a government which 'supports the position of most coastal Guyanese' (Hennessy, 2015, p. 135). The 1951 *Amerindian Ordinance* established – at least on paper – some governance at the village level, mandating that villages elect a Captain (*Toshaos*) and Village Council every two-three years. The *Amerindian Act 2006* outlines the governance structure, functions and power of these councils, and the responsibilities of the captain or *Toshaos* as the representative of the village, and established the National Toshaos Council (NTC), a representative body consisting of all the *Toshaos* in the country (Colchester et al., 2002; Grüning and Shuford, 2012; Bulkan, 2013). But with a central administration dominated by Coast Lander ideologies, the effectiveness of these moves is open to debate. The lack of focus on empowering all types of local communities in Guyana is evidenced by the fact that no local government elections were held in over 20 years (between 1994 and the revived elections of early 2016). The only initiatives taken by local government that were vaguely democratic were the elections for *Toshaos* and Village Councillors in Amerindian titled communities.

On the other hand, however unreliable and unrepresentative the newly-minted and existing policy machinery might be, there is little disputing that the 'homogenization' of Amerindians, as projected in policy and often manifested in the development 'outcomes' of the interior, has provided Guyana's nine indigenous groups with a much-needed 'space' to manoeuvre politically and economically. Referring to the Monkey Mountain example, despite their differences, 'Symmetry is observable here insofar as Coastlanders and Brazilians are, for the Patamona and Makusi, non-Amerindian more than they are Guyanese or Brazilian', therefore 'uniting categorically in the opposition to Coastlanders and Brazilians' whose presence, 'even on non-reservation land, is [viewed as] an encroachment on their territorial sovereignty' (Roopnaraine, 1995, p. 40-41). Most importantly, through such 'unification', Amerindians potentially put themselves in a position to influence the development of gold mining in remote settlements such as Monkey Mountain in ways they have never been able to before. This is largely a result of growing awareness of their plight. Specifically, as Riley (2003) explains, 'the increase in international attention to Guyana as a "cash poor but biodiversity-rich" country has, so to speak, placed Amerindians more on the global stage than ever and has given them a listening audience, this providing further incentive toward developing historicities that reinforce indigenous rights claims to the present' (p. 157).

This has particularly been the case since the launch of the LCDS in June 2009, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Norway to 'foster partnership between Guyana and Norway on issues of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable low carbon development', and 'the establishment of a framework for results-based Norwegian financial support

to Guyana's REDD-plus efforts'.⁹ The MoU essentially constituted a payment-on-results program for up to US\$250 million over five years in financial support to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in the country. The LCDS was built on eight key strategic areas, two of which were exclusively focused on Amerindian communities: one focusing specifically on Amerindian development (including establishing an Amerindian Development Fund and providing solar panels to localities), and one prioritizing the titling and demarcating of Amerindian communities. A crucial innovation of the LCDS was the creation of a Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC) that include representatives from the private sector, government and NGO community. All four of the national-level Amerindian NGOs were invited to participate, although the largest and most vocal, the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA) decided not to attend.¹⁰ The other three NGOs were represented at the vast majority of these meetings, with the NTC, the North Rupununi District Development Board (a regional body representing Amerindian villages) and a prominent Amerindian lawyer also serving on the committee (Laing, 2015).

It is no secret that the number of applications for extensions to Amerindian titled lands has increased since the launch of the LCDS thanks in part to its focus on land titling. If fully successful, this, claim officials at the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GDMA),¹¹ would result in Amerindians controlling 44 percent of Guyana's surface rights. What appears to be a sudden interest in land extensions has aroused suspicions amongst Coast Landers, who believe that Amerindians are simply looking to gain control of lucrative gold mining spaces. This, however, is an extremely short-sighted view of tensions. As the case study of Mahdia-Campbelltown that follows illustrates, conflicts between Coast Landers and Amerindians in Guyana's gold-rich territories are in large part racially-motivated, and the move made by the latter to apply for extensions seems more about what they feel is justice-seeking rather than a calculated decision to secure potential gold mining territories for their own purposes. Tensions and divisions such as those found in Mahdia-Campbelltown can therefore be viewed as the latest 'expressions' of Guyana's 'Coast Lander-Amerindian Dichotomy'.

4. Gold Mining and Conflict in Mahdia-Campbelltown: Guyana's 'Coast Lander-Amerindian Dichotomy' in Practice

The case of the twin-townships of Mahdia and Campbelltown, located in Region 8 of the country, was selected to develop a more nuanced understanding of how the 'Coast Lander-Amerindian Dichotomy' is fuelling conflict in gold mining sections of Guyana. Whilst 'connected' and with free movement of people throughout, these towns are very divided: Mahdia hosts a number of gold miners as well as local government offices, and Campbelltown is an Amerindian settlement, home to the Patamona tribe, and which was granted its official title by the government in 2006. The former, the administrative capital of Region 8, has a population of just over 4000 people and a history of mining which dates back to the late-1800s. The latter, established in 1957 in recognition of the aforementioned Stephen Campbell, is home to approximately 220 Amerindians, is run by one *Toshao*, and is attached to another village called Princeville which is run by one *Toshao* and two councillors.

⁹ See The Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana (Guyana) and the Government of the Kingdom of Norway (Norway), (2009) p. 2.

¹⁰ This was due to the lack of a clear terms of reference for the committee and the short timescale required for a decision to undertake membership.

¹¹ The GDMA is the representative industry body for Guyana's small-scale gold and diamond miners.

The conflict in the twin-township has been brewing for a number of decades. Throughout this period, Coast Lander groups have been mining gold but have contributed little locally. The *Amerindian Act 2006* and the LCDS has changed this, in the process, magnifying a concern that is at the root of local Coast Lander-Amerindian tensions in the twin-township: the presence of mining claims in Campbelltown (see Figure 2). Three separate periods of fieldwork (August-September 2011, March-May 2013, and July-August 2013) were undertaken, with the aim of broadening understanding of the conflict in Mahdia-Campbelltown and the country's gold mining regions more generally. A basic stakeholder map of the gold mining sector and for Amerindian affairs was constructed prior to beginning the first episode of fieldwork (Figure 3). Using the map as guidance, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted, over the three phases of the research, with key stakeholders: 15 government officials (10 in Georgetown and five in Mahdia-Campbelltown), 12 small-scale miners (10 claimholders and two GGDMA officers in Georgetown), 30 dredge owners in Mahdia-Campbelltown (25 Coast Landers and five Amerindians), 10 NGO officials based in Georgetown, and the entire Amerindian Village Council in Campbelltown. This section of the paper reflects on the findings from this research, with a view to assembling a more complete picture of the low-latent conflict brewing in Mahdia-Campbelltown.

Figure 2: Map showing Mahdia and Campbelltown

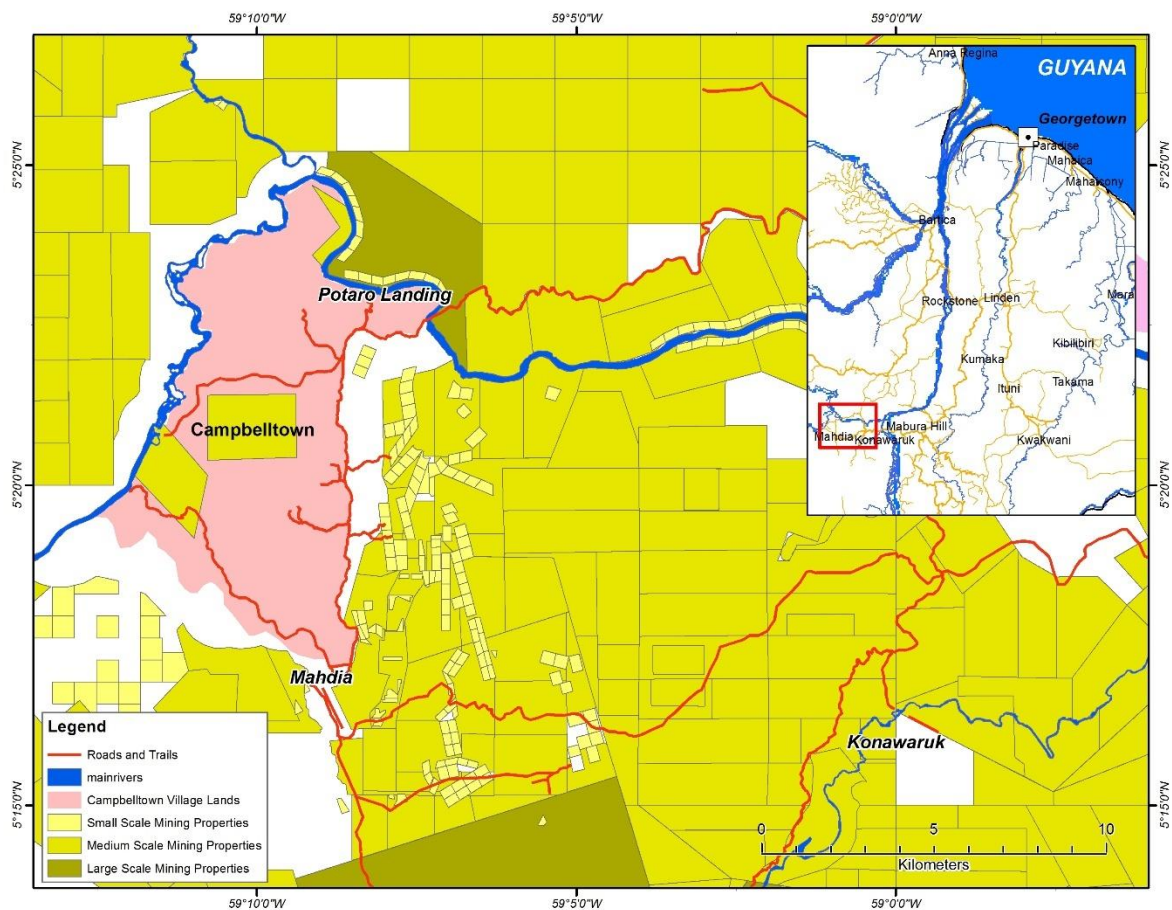
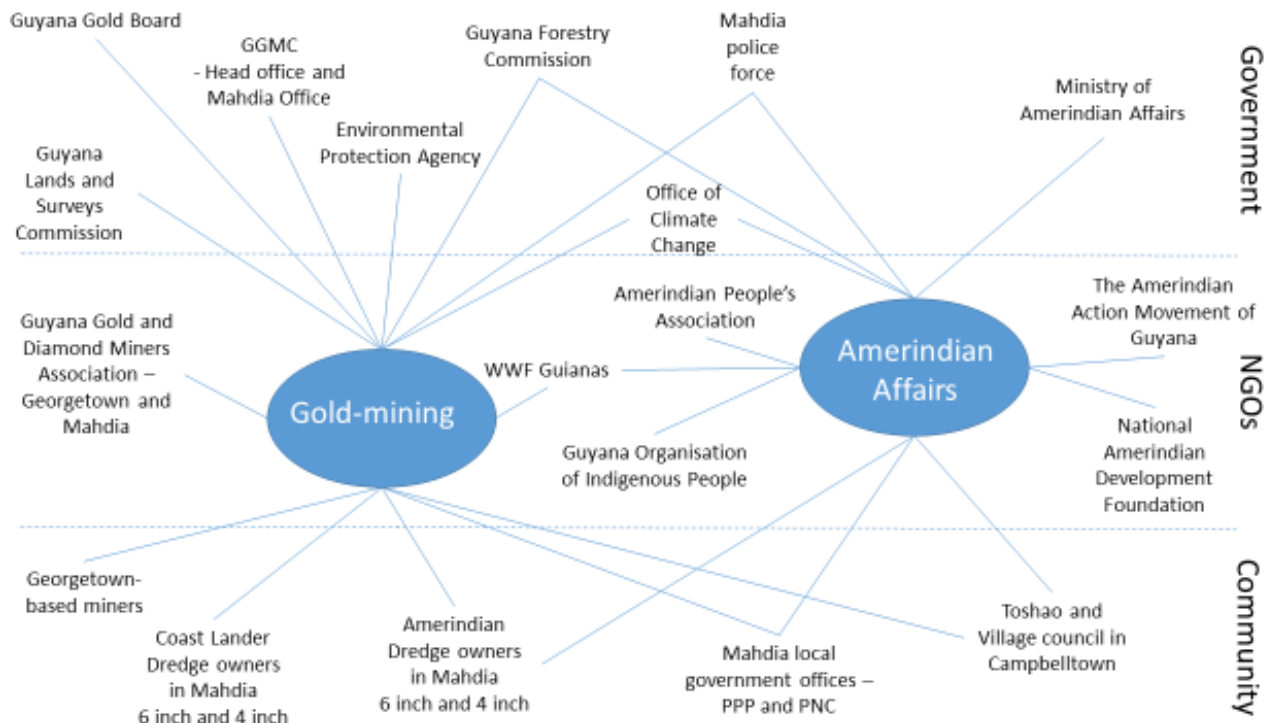


Figure 3: Basic stakeholder map of Guyana’s gold mining sector and Amerindian affairs



4.1 Retracing the Battle Lines

The view among miners and dredge owners working in Mahdia is that local Amerindians are using both the *Amerindian Act 2006* and the LCDS to apply for extensions to the existing Campbelltown land claim for the sole purpose of gaining greater control of local gold mining interests. A number of Mahdia-based government officials echoed these sentiments during interviews:

If you were to look at most of the extensions Amerindians have asked for [around here], it’s for lands with gold and diamond. They [Amerindians] are not asking for extensions where there aren’t minerals.¹²

Amerindians are fighting for land because of the mining sector. Before mining, there was nothing about but their forefathers. But because of the high price of gold, they want a piece of the action...this is how we see it. So there’s conflict between them and miners...¹³

Their perceived behaviour, one sympathetic dredge owner suggested, should come as no surprise because the ‘bottom line [is that] everyone is making money...[and] Amerindians are rising up to get mining areas, so if that’s what they gotta do, that’s what they have to do’.¹⁴

¹² Interview, government official, Mahdia, 2 April 2013.

¹³ Interview, government official, Mahdia, 2 April 2013.

Mahdia-based mining groups and their supporters blame Amerindians for impeding the development of Guyana. One government official summed up the collective opinion in an interview, explaining that 'We are a developing country, and we need development, [which is why] I don't know why you [Amerindians] are sitting on the resource'.¹⁵ To clarify, and as observed in Mahdia-Campbelltown during the course of fieldwork, mining *is* undoubtedly engaging a number of local people and providing them with much-needed income. Since Brazilian miners introduced dredging technology to Mahdia in 1991, there has been a sharp increase in demand for labour and support services in the community in response to the increased capacity to produce gold. As one dredge owner explained in an interview, 'If you take away mining what can the government offer these people here?...I know people with qualifications, with university qualifications here, they can't get a job'.¹⁶

But aside from creating avenues for low-level employment, gold mining is contributing very little, developmentally, to rural Guyanese communities. Even the very government officials and operators interviewed who were highly-critical of Amerindians were equally-condemning of Georgetown-based politicians for neglecting the development needs of the country's mining communities. In Campbelltown, water supply and electricity are inadequate, and the Village Council is scrambling to equip swelling pockets of idle youth with vocational skills training. The continued impoverished state of the town and neighbouring Mahdia, explained one Amerindian dredge owner in an interview, is due to 'whatever attracted them [Coast Landers] here is going out, which is why the road, building is not being developed, [as] all the gold and diamond being taken out'.¹⁷ A government official elaborated on this point, explaining that 'officials in Georgetown collected over 80,000 oz of gold from Mining District 2 [the district in which Mahdia falls] in Sub-region 2, in 2012',¹⁸ the implication being that none of it is being reinvested in the locality. Many local actors interviewed voiced similar opinions:

The government should pay a little more attention to Mahdia...A lot of things people need here. Look at the schools, the hospital...rich people survive but small people stay where they are...¹⁹

As the same government official mused, 'if you could build a [Guyanese] 60 million dollar Mahdia Hotel, you can build a technical institute, for example, to empower the people'.

Why has the Campbelltown Village Council applied for extensions to titled lands? With only 20 – all being the smaller four-inch – dredge owners residing in the town at the time of writing, and therefore possessing limited capacity and expertise to mine, the accusations being levelled by Coast Landers seem way off base. As are the views of that of the *Tashao*, who, despite arriving to the interview aboard an ATV and residing in a home fully equipped with modern technology, hinted – unconvincingly – that the move was made strictly to regain lands so that Amerindians could resume their 'traditional' ways of life:

The forest is a supermarket for us. We fish, farm, use animals, get fuel. Amerindians have a way of using forest for a lot of the sick they have.²⁰

¹⁴ Interview, miner, Mahdia, 4 April 2013.

¹⁵ Interview, government official, Georgetown, 26 April 2013.

¹⁶ Interview, miner, Mahdia, 6 April 2013.

¹⁷ Interview, miner, Campbelltown, 6 April 2013.

¹⁸ Interview, government official, Mahdia, 2 April 2013.

¹⁹ Interview, miner, Mahdia, 7 April 2013.

²⁰ Interview, *Tashao*, Campbelltown, 2 April 2013.

At this point, the most plausible explanation is, and reinforcing the main thesis of this paper, *hitherto* irreconcilable ethnic tensions. Members of Campbelltown's Village Council made their distaste for Coast Landers known during interviews. A major reason why is that despite Campbelltown's recent titling, what Coast Landers operating in Mahdia fail to recognize is that the move to do so was initiated formally in the early-1990s. One councillor expressed considerable frustration in an interview over the lengthy waiting time, furthermore reflecting on the countless visits made to Georgetown, a view which seems to resonate in the town. The councillor explained that 'Here in Campbelltown, year after year, minister after minister, president after president, trying to get our title'.²¹ Their battle and ultimately, frustration, continues, however: despite having finally been granted a title, the initially-requested 25 square miles was reduced to 23.4 miles in order to accommodate the – at the time of this research – town's eight existing mine claims, all of which are controlled by Coast Landers. In response to accusations that Campbelltown has applied for extensions to gain control of gold-rich lands, the *Toshao* explained in an interview that 'In terms of extensions, we are surrounded by mining blocks, forest blocks, the next village Micabe, Chinapao...You can't go right, you can't go left, so where are you requesting for extensions, and a lot of these areas you want to extend your land to, when...you can't go because it's occupied by forest blocks, mining claims'.²²

Frustrations truly began to escalate in Campbelltown following meetings with the eight – whom the councillor referred to as – 'Coast Lander block owners' to discuss a royalty payment on their gold, which, according to the law, Amerindians are now entitled to receive from miners working on titled lands.²³ Adamant on extracting a 10 percent royalty on all declared gold production, the members of the council approached these miners for a meeting. From the feedback received from Campbelltown councillors during interviews, the move seemed like a genuine attempt to broker a deal to coexist with a group of people whom, in the words of the *Toshao*, 'used to work without consent', and with whom there has long been considerable ethnic friction. The move, it was further explained, proved to be 'a struggle', because 'no one wants to pay royalty to Amerindians' and therefore the 'majority have given up land to Amerindians but not in writing yet'.²⁴ Privately, many miners and local government officials explained that whilst the owners of these eight claims, each of whom is highly-influential and resides in Georgetown, have vacated their plots, none has any intention of releasing them to the Campbelltown executive, regardless of what the intended uses for them are. This is why, few outside of the Georgetown pro-mining lobby, support the view that small-scale gold mining should take precedence over Amerindian affairs on the grounds of development: again, there is little evidence that it is having a positive transformative impact on local communities, particularly Amerindian settlements. They point to this argument simply being a skilful means of justifying the furthering of Coast Landers' personal interests. As one NGO official explained, the GDMA is 'rejecting land being applied for because they are saying Amerindians are getting more land but not developing the country, so they are smartly getting land back from the Amerindians'.²⁵

²¹ Interview, Amerindian councillor, Campbelltown, 6 April 2013.

²² Interview, *Toshao*, Campbelltown, 2 April 2013.

²³ The Amerindian Act Section 48(f) highlights that before miners can carry out mining activities on Village lands, they must reach agreement on the tribute to be paid. This is subject to the provisions of Section 51 that place the tribute at a minimum of 7 percent of the value of any minerals obtained. In addition, at least in theory, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission should transfer 20 percent of the royalties into a fund for the benefit of Amerindian villages.

²⁴ Interview, *Toshao*, Campbelltown, 2 April 2013.

²⁵ Interview, NGO official, Georgetown, 25 April 2013.

Miners' refusal to relinquish their claims has exposed further the ethnic divisions omnipresent in Mahdia-Campbelltown. In fact, it seems to have had the effect of revealing many truths about its Coast Lander and Amerindian populations. Most notably, the former has no intention of integrating with the latter for the purpose of facilitating development of the twin-township. Similarly, the Campbelltown Village Council now refuses to work with Coast Lander mining groups altogether, the main justification given for the recent push to seize the idle eight mining claims being because, as one councillor put it in an interview, 'we were the first here in Guyana'.²⁶ Can the differences between Coast Landers and Amerindians in Mahdia-Campbelltown be reconciled before they spiral out of control? When asked this very question in an interview, the *Toshao* explained that 'I don't think it's the Block Owners who need to do something...it is the government [in Georgetown]'²⁷ that needs to act promptly. But as the next section of the paper explains, this is where the source of the problem lies.

4.2 The Georgetown 'Bubble'

Tensions between Amerindians and Coast Lander mining groups in localities such as Madhia-Campbelltown have been shaped heavily by the prejudices in, and political dynamics of, Georgetown. Interviews conducted with a host of stakeholders in the country capital captured this.

It is in Georgetown where the most powerful players in Guyana's gold mining industry reside. These operators and their associates, who possess mine claims in Mahdia-Campbelltown and other areas in the country, such as Matthew's Ridge, Chinese Landing, Arakaka and the aforementioned Isseneru, comprise a small but influential and tightly-knit group. This was confirmed during interviews: *inter alia*, how a small group of Georgetown-based export dealers control the gold trade, and to whom most major miners sell their winnings;²⁸ how, as one NGO official put it, these miners seem to have 'politicians in their pockets', as evidenced by their having 'closed down Bartica' over disagreements with changes being proposed under the LCDS;²⁹ and, the overall strength of the country's mining lobby, which another NGO official highlighted by drawing attention to operators' response to the sudden drop in the gold price 2013, explaining that 'you heard, five days ago, the price of gold plummeting, they [miners] already had an audience with government, [and] given [tax] breaks'.³⁰ The sudden emergence of the Amerindian voice in national affairs seems to have caught these miners off guard. Most of those interviewed were visibly agitated over the possibility of having to engage in more bureaucracy, brought about by greater recognition of the Amerindian 'voice', in order to mine. The concerns expressed by Amerindians for decades, which are now being heard because of the platform created by the *Amerindian Act 2006* and the LCDS, will undoubtedly stifle the mobility Coast Landers have long enjoyed in the country's interior.

What quickly became clear was that the opinions expressed by miners interviewed in Mahdia were virtually extensions of those of the Georgetown pro-mining lobby. The collective opinion among those interviewed was that the mining community feels somewhat slighted by a government which it believes to be siding with Amerindians. Key representatives of the pro-mining lobby interviewed provided near-identical, albeit more elaborate, 'Collier-esque' explanations to those

²⁶ Interview, Amerindian councillor, Campbelltown, 6 April 2013.

²⁷ Interview, *Toshao*, Campbelltown, 2 April 2013.

²⁸ One miner claimed in an interview to have used the same buyer for over 25 years.

²⁹ Interview, NGO officer, Georgetown, 29 July 2013; 'Gov't scrambles to quell Bartica Protest' www.stabroeknews.com/2010/archives/01/30/gov%E2%80%99t-scrambles-to-quell-bartica-protest/ (Accessed 13 February 2016).

³⁰ Interview, NGO officer, Georgetown, 25 April 2013.

provided by miners consulted in Mahdia, for why Amerindians are applying for extensions to their lands:

They [the government] are not renewing licenses that overlap the Amerindian land, who are now claiming the land because they stand to benefit financially from LCDS. A lot of reverse discrimination. Community wants this land he [the miner] has pumped millions into, and now Amerindians want it.³¹

I bought property but it was Amerindian land but I did not know...They don't even have 30 people there and 40 people are drunkards...[They] Heard about 500,000 oz of gold but it is GGMC [Guyana Geology and Mines Commission] gives the license, Amerindians have surface rights and are only entitled to a tribute. GGMC put 'ceasework order' on operations because of pressure from Amerindians...³²

[They are] claiming peoples' lands where there are mines, and don't have a legal claim. Need 150 Amerindians for 25 years in a place [to qualify for an application for an extension], and they are clever. They hear about an inspection and move there.³³

[They] Move into an area, a section of them, and claiming that it is their land. Bottom line, not a fair way of doing things on behalf of the miner.³⁴

Interestingly, certain government officials echoed, almost verbatim, the very points raised by the miners quoted above, believing that the motivation behind Amerindians' moves to apply for extensions to titled lands is purely economic. Referring to the criteria needed in order to apply for an extension,³⁵ one explained in an interview that 'Someone told Amerindians to create villages around mineral-rich areas, villages being 150 people' and how '14 percent of land in Guyana is Amerindian, and could go up to 17 percent with extensions being applied for'.³⁶ Another was even more critical:

We are one of few countries to give titles to their [Amerindians'] land, which give them surface rights, meaning before a miner can mine on a small or medium scale, they must get permission...But this poses a problem to miners because the law enables Amerindians to apply for an extension. Why? Because they see the gold miner making money. Amerindians own 23 percent of Guyana, which is Amerindian titled land. With the extensions, 44 percent of land will be in the hands of 20,000 people.³⁷

The collective view of Guyana's mining government bodies on what is increasingly being portrayed as a flood of applications for extensions to Amerindian titled lands was summed up effectively by one official in an interview, who argued that 'because of the high price of gold, they [Amerindians] want piece of the action'.³⁸

³¹ Interview, GMDA official, 29 April 2011.

³² Interview, miner, Georgetown, 28 August 2011.

³³ Interview, miner, Georgetown, 01 September 2011.

³⁴ Interview, Georgetown, 01 September 2011.

³⁵ The Amerindian Act Section 60 states that in order to apply for a grant of State lands the community must have been in existence for at least 25 years, and have, at the time of application and for the preceding five years, a population of at least 150 persons.

³⁶ Interview, government official, 29 April 2011.

³⁷ Interview, government official, Georgetown, 30 April 2011.

³⁸ Interview, government official, Mahdia, 2 April 2013.

Certainly, there appears to be some substance to these claims. Referring back to the Isseneru case described at beginning of the paper and which has received a considerable amount of press both nationally and internationally, at least one individual interviewed in the NGO community believes the motivation behind why the *Toshao* forced claimholder Ms Joan Chang to use the courts was purely economic. The official – ironically, an Amerindian – explained that there are ‘six councillors at Isseneru involved in dredging and the village itself is a mining project’, and further reported that the *Toshao* was ‘also blocking another miner from entering the mine along a public corridor in Cocoa Village’, on the grounds that it ‘was [being developed] on ancestral lands’, even though the claim is not on titled lands and allegedly 10 kilometres from the village. But from the evidence gathered, it appears that Isseneru is more the exception, rather than the rule.

Specifically, the data suggest that there are two reasons why a desire to control access to profitable gold deposits – or what Gurr (1970) would interpret as *opportunity* – falls short in explaining why Amerindians are applying for extensions to titled lands. The first is finance: few, apart from perhaps some *Toshaos*, had, at the time of this research, the money to develop gold mines productively. In addition to having to complete all of the paperwork at the GGMC and make all of the required payments to secure a license, Amerindians would need to purchase costly equipment, including a six-inch dredge, which fetched a price of US\$25,000, a truck at US\$25,000-30,000, and an ATV at US\$13,000. Few, if any, of the Amerindian miners interviewed in Campbelltown could commit to such an enormous financial outlay, as evidenced by the following two cases:

I am originally from the mountains, a place called Wips. I have been in Campbelltown for 40 years. I [now] have a four-inch dredge, bought last year. Before that, I was “pork knocking” and a little farming, pork knocking for ages. Had a job with a company and after they left, decided to do pork knocking.³⁹

I have no claims. I work in Amerindian titled lands. Before this, I worked in Mazuruni all over before getting my own dredge. I got my own dredge four years ago, a four-inch registered with GGMC. I work on and off the reservation now, and give 10 percent of whatever I produce to the council, whenever I produce it.⁴⁰

For these miners, whose finances are limited, the priority seems to be securing a less costly and productive four-inch dredge and little more.

The second reason is Amerindians’ lack of expertise, and their general inability to develop gold deposits on their own. This was certainly the impression conveyed by Amerindians interviewed in Campbelltown. Most seemed content working as labourers on the claims of Coast Landers in and around Mahdia, in all likelihood because, as one explained, using a dredge, ‘it’s like playing the lottery because you may invest and get nothing’, which is why ‘sometimes, I think the employees are benefitting the most because no matter what, they’re getting paid’.⁴¹ Ironically, many key players consulted from the Georgetown-based pro-mining lobby would unknowingly reinforce this point during interviews. One miner explained that ‘Lots of mining operations are employing the Amerindians...95 percent of my workforce is Amerindian’.⁴² Another, reflecting on his own experience in having to get a court injunction against local Amerindians, explained ‘Amerindian people can do nothing with the property because a sluice box can only recover seven percent, so

³⁹ Interview, Amerindian dredge owner, Campbelltown, 6 April 2013.

⁴⁰ Interview, Amerindian dredge owner, Campbelltown, 6 April 2013.

⁴¹ Interview, Amerindian dredge owner, Campbelltown, 6 April 2013.

⁴² Interview, miner Georgetown, 1 September 2011.

why apply [for extensions]?’⁴³ This is precisely the argument being made here: that, based on the interview data and field observations, most Amerindians are *not* applying for extensions to titled lands because of gold, as is widely portrayed by the Georgetown pro-mining lobby.

The reason provided by many Amerindian sympathizers interviewed, however, was even less convincing. On the one hand, Amerindians and their supporters are correct in their claims that the application for extensions to titled lands is by no means a recent phenomenon or a scramble induced by a desire to secure gold deposits. One NGO official provided some clarity on this during an interview:

If the government kept the records of applications, then it predates the LCDS...For hunting, fishing, traditional uses...It is not an LCDS phenomenon. The *Amerindian Act* was implemented in 2006 but this was work done in the 1990s. We have records of this. This is not an overnight question...In 1969, shown by government the areas they [Amerindians] believed was their land...The PPP Government campaigned saying ‘We will title your land but nothing done yet. The recognized it was an issue then.’⁴⁴

But on the other hand, the counterargument to what one NGO official described as the ‘cruel mining lobby that says Amerindians are mining’,⁴⁵ is that, mirroring the opinions of the Campbelltown *Toshao*, these extensions are being sought solely so that Amerindians can continue leading traditional ways of life seems equally unlikely:

I would not say that that Amerindians are applying for extensions because gold is there. They are applying for extensions because they need more land for farming and hunting so they can continue their way of life.⁴⁶

One NGO official went as far as to claim that Amerindians would not engage in mining at all if Coast Landers were not doing so, arguing that ‘*Our* people have traditionally avoided getting into small and medium mining’ and ‘Coast Landers...if you take [these] miners out of it, and the average Guyanese out of it [mining], then no one [Amerindian] cares’.⁴⁷

Suggestions that Amerindians are being forced or coerced into mining, however, are far-fetched, and whilst there is little disputing the centrality of the forest to their livelihoods, the descriptions provided by certain interviewees conjured highly-unrepresentative images of the ‘noble savage’. In Campbelltown, few residents lead such a lifestyle:⁴⁸ the majority have transitioned to the ‘wage economy’, the most visible evidence of this being the countless numbers of local Amerindians who can be seen working in the host of bars, shops and restaurants scattered across neighbouring Mahdia. Further, during interviews, it was revealed that a sizable group of people born and raised in Campbelltown have fled to Georgetown to pursue a university education, to acquire skills training or in search of better employment opportunities. One Amerindian councillor lamented over the exodus in an interview, remarking that ‘all of the young people...everyone is

⁴³ Interview, miner, Georgetown, 29 August 2011.

⁴⁴ Interview, NGO official, Georgetown, 8 April 2013.

⁴⁵ Interview, NGO official, Georgetown, 29 July 2013.

⁴⁶ Interview NGO official, Georgetown, 26 July 2013.

⁴⁷ Interview, NGO official, Georgetown, 8 April 2013

⁴⁸ One NGO official in particular made a point of stressing, throughout the interview, that Amerindians are purely subsistence people and prefer a forest-based life. The official stated, *inter alia*, that ‘[Amerindians] harvest timber on a very small scale, hardly using anything more than a chainsaw, and the quantities they do, it may not even be sufficient to survive’, as well as ‘Even though Amerindians know what it is to be rich, I wouldn’t say they aspire to be rich’. Interview, NGO official, Georgetown, 29 August 2013.

gone'.⁴⁹ Even the *Toshao*, who, in an interview, explained that because of Coast Landers' growing presence, 'residents of Campbelltown [were] forced to go into mining because see these outsiders developing lands, taking money out and not investing in the community', conceded that 'Mining is helping Campbelltown developing...[the] mining sector is the main source of employment here, some own dredges and they employ others to work in the sites as cooks, etc.'⁵⁰ During the course of the research, portrayals of Amerindians being exclusively forest dwelling subsistence hunters and gatherers were, ironically, made by mostly Georgetown-based Amerindians – namely, individuals leading modern lifestyles.

From the data collected, it is clear that both Amerindians and Coast Landers are looking to increase their manoeuvrability in an ethnically-fragmented Guyana, despite the obvious challenges with doing so, and openly admitted their willingness to do so at one another's expense. Each interviewee, from miners, through to NGO officials to even government officers, supplied answers and shared ideas – at times, it seemed, unconsciously – laced with ethnic undertones, in the process casting light on the sizeable rift between Amerindians and Coast Landers. For those consulted who sympathize with the former's plight and favour using the *Amerindian Act 2006* and LCDS skilfully to enhance the Amerindian 'voice', discussions broaching the future of Guyana and what was best for the country, developmentally, moving forward, always led to the same question: 'Whose Guyana?'

Referring once again to the contentious applications for extensions to titled lands, the opinion of one Mahdia-based government official in particular has resonance. The official argued that 'They [Amerindians] are applying because they *can* apply'.⁵¹ As indicated throughout this paper, many Georgetown-based miners and government officials consulted seemed convinced that these applications are being made in an attempt to secure gold-bearing terrain. Interviewees with those 'siding' with Amerindians on the extensions issue confirmed that this was not the case: that these moves were *not* principally about gold. Rather, the impression from these interviews was – and reinforcing the point raised by the government official – that the move was being made to avenge generations of Amerindian plight. As illustrated by the following excerpts, conversations about what is best for Guyana, developmentally, were quickly reduced to discussions about what 'belongs' to Amerindians, the use of words such as 'our' and 'we' connoting the dividedness of the country:

Our feeling about reluctance of the government to deal with the issue and discuss it will expose the brothers, sisters, cousins, sisters in law who cull concessions for government ministers...it may not be in their name...*Our* people have traditionally avoided going into small and medium scale mining...*Our* people are confused about what to do...no clear explanation on how to⁵²

We are contributing to this country in small ways, we are doing...not mining but in other ways...What belongs to Amerindians should remain Amerindian...⁵³

The Amerindian view was perhaps best summed up by a councillor in Campbelltown, who explained in an interview that 'Most of the Amerindian villages ask for extensions but they are not doing it for

⁴⁹ Interview, Amerindian executive, Campbelltown, 4 April 2013.

⁵⁰ Interview, *Toshao*, Campbelltown, 2 April 2013.

⁵¹ Interview, government official, Mahdia, 26 April 2013.

⁵² Interview, NGO official, Georgetown, 8 April 2013.

⁵³ Interview, NGO official, Georgetown, 25 April 2013.

mining...Why do we have to ask for land to work minerals? It is *they* [Coast Landers] who should be asking *us*...⁵⁴

Coast Landers are, of course, fuelling frictions by failing to recognize what many Amerindians and supporters see as 'justice-seeking'. Oblivious to the struggles faced by Guyana's indigenous groups to have their voices heard, Coast Landers see the sudden emergence of Amerindians in national debates as a threat to their livelihoods. Discussions with most also rapidly reduced to conversations about ethnicity:

With the government and the foreign governments looking at Amerindian, Amerindian. Just Amerindian, they are looking at themes indigenous, not Afro and Indo-Guyanese, so we don't know what position they have in the country. No one representing Coast Landers on land and gold...⁵⁵

Indo Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese can't do anything but Amerindians can just go in the village and do whatever...Indo and Afro-Guyanese are always an objection...We say give them an excavator, a percentage and more money but they don't want it.⁵⁶

Here, however, is where the disconnection lies. 'Justice-seeking', in the eyes of Amerindians and their supporters, extends well beyond 'an excavator, a percentage and more money' in a sector – gold mining – which they seem to have very little ability and potentially, interest, in developing on their own. What Coast Landers see as an Amerindian uprising has coincided with, as opposed to occurring in response to, the rise in the gold price and a progressive opening of new mining terrain in Guyana over the past two decades. Specifically, the evidence points to the *presence* of Coast Landers, and less so the activities they are engaged in, sparking tensions in localities such as Mahdia-Campbelltown – disputes that have hastily been associated with an appetite for gold.

5. Critical Reflections and Concluding Remarks

This paper began by drawing attention to the case of Isseneru, one of many gold-rich sections of Guyana where Coast Lander mining groups are at odds with indigenous Amerindians. Despite widespread belief that – and reinforcing analysis presented by Paul Collier and supporters which argues that economic opportunity triggers conflict in resource-rich developing countries – Amerindians are applying for extensions to titled lands because of a desire to gain control of lucrative mining activity, as the case of Mahdia-Campbelltown illustrates quite clearly, the disputes that have surfaced in gold-rich sections of Guyana in recent decades are much more nuanced than has been diagnosed. Like most political decisions, events and changes that have occurred in the country over the past century, the move appears to have been shaped heavily by firmly-entrenched ethnic divisions, in this case, what has been dubbed here as a 'Coast Lander-Amerindian Dichotomy'. The paper contributes to an emerging body of analysis on Amerindian struggles and associated natural resource extraction in Guyana (see e.g. Bulkan, 2016; Canterbury, 2016; Grund, 2016; Bellfield et al., 2015; Bulkan and Palmer, 2016). It furthermore transcends the largely-quantitative analysis presented by Paul Collier and supporters, who mostly argue that economic opportunity triggers conflict in resource-rich developing countries. As has been the case in a number of countries, where governments have feuded with local communities over natural resource extraction,

⁵⁴ Interview, Amerindian councillor, Campbelltown, 6 April 2013.

⁵⁵ Interview, miner, Georgetown, 21 April 2013.

⁵⁶ Interview, miner, Georgetown, 19 April 2013.

including Guatemala (van de Sandt, 2009), Melanesia (Allen 2016, 2017), India (McDuie-Ra and Kikon, 2016), Peru (McDonell, 2015), Honduras (Middeldorp et al., 2016) and Ecuador (Avci and Fernandez-Salvador, 2016), the conflicts that have surfaced in Guyana in recent years between 'Coast Landers' and Amerindians over gold-rich territories have a significant ethnic dimension.

Of course, and as hinted earlier, having had no local government elections in over two decades has not helped. A credible local government organ and elections expose ethnic cleavages, facilitate identity formation and, with an ear to the ground, could help to diffuse tensions such as those in Mahdia-Campbelltown. Can these low-latent conflicts be resolved without a credible local government? It would require a champion, specifically, for either Coast Landers or Amerindians to recognize that the fate of Guyana hinges heavily upon a swift dissolution of ethnic differences which its different groups fail to recognize are hindering national development. This, however, is unlikely to happen, as neither group appears ready to put its differences aside. An NGO official offered a particularly enlightening perspective on what Amerindians would need to do to fulfil their side of the bargain:

All Guyana's land belongs to indigenous people but we are a multicultural society. It is important we do not do things as indigenous peoples that violate these people as well. We have to be careful not to violate these people...The UNDRIP [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples] document states that we need to recognize others. And if we as indigenous people keep calling for territorial rights, it is like saying that people should view us as supreme in this country. We need to take into consideration that we do not violate the rights of other ethnicities in Guyana.⁵⁷

For Amerindians to be in a position to even entertain embracing a multicultural Guyana, however, they must overcome their own differences. Despite having representation for Amerindians at the parliamentary level in the form of a dedicated ministry, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs (renamed the Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs in 2015), there is strong concern, explained an NGO official in an interview, that '[it] don't really listen to representation from communities'.⁵⁸ Similar views were expressed by members of the Campbelltown Village Council, one of whom explained that 'We got this title through previous minister who is the new Minister of Foreign Affairs...[who] came around [here] but when it was time to hear about our problems [in Campbelltown], time up, she have to go, etc.'. ⁵⁹

This frustration over a lack of supportive government action for indigenous people is not a new phenomenon in Guyana. In fact, one underlying reason for the conflict between Amerindian groups and Coast Landers, and the mistrust often felt by the former for the latter, is the decisions made by government officials over several decades. Although an Amerindian Land Commission was established at independence, it failed to resolve the land tenure question, with many villages having to wait decades for any sorts of resolution, many of which are still deemed inadequate by many communities and indigenous leaders today. Legislation that allows government officials to override the decision-making of local communities when it comes to the extraction of natural resources, and allows ministerial discretion with regard to mining and land claims, has further fomented this mistrust. A perceived lack of consultation over other development interventions, such as proposed large hydro-power projects and conservation initiatives, such as new protected areas, has further

⁵⁷ Interview, NGO official, Georgetown, 26 July 2013.

⁵⁸ Interview, NGO official, Georgetown, 25 April 2013.

⁵⁹ Interview, Amerindian councillor, Campbelltown, 6 April 2013.

entrenched the divide between many indigenous leaders and communities on the one hand, and Coast Landers Georgetown-based government officials on the other hand.

With a new coalition administration appointed to office in 2015 and the installation of a prominent indigenous leader to both the post of Minister of Indigenous People's Affairs and also Vice-President of the country, this situation could change. Public commitments to undertake reforms, such as a review of the *Amerindian Act 2006*, have already been made. Perhaps most significantly, concerns have been voiced over the behaviour of some of the NGOs purporting to represent Amerindian communities. Specifically, and as hinted at earlier, their largely coastal locations have aroused suspicions that neither really have an interest in interior-inhabiting Amerindians, and, because they have generally been financed by international bodies, that non-Guyanese 'tend to care more about their plight than many Guyanese living in Georgetown' (Riley, 2003, p. 156).

Ironically, it may be Amerindians holding themselves back from having more input into decisions which affect the interior. In addition to the aforementioned problems, there is the point which Hennessy (2013) raised, and touched on earlier, about Amerindians being treated as a homogenous group, despite there being representatives from nine distinct tribes scattered across Guyana's hinterland. Whilst recognizing these tribes, each of which has its own culture and identity, is undoubtedly important, there are merits in a 'strength in numbers' approach when it comes to influencing development policy in the ethnically-fractionalized nation, particularly for Amerindian groups, who have been traditionally marginalized in decision-making processes. Guyana's indigenous community has already captured the attention of influential international bodies such as the United Nations through its commitment to the LCDS and being signatory to key international codes and treaties such as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The case of Monkey Mountain, detailed earlier, is an illustrative example of how Amerindians can influence development at the local level by banding together. By pursuing a similar approach in Georgetown, however, Amerindians could, with the backing of international organizations, facilitate more wholesale policy changes to national legislation and policy – amendments which best serve all of Guyana's people moving forward. The National Toshias' Conference, an annual gathering of Amerindian leaders which, in recent years, has been dominated by discussions about gold mining, extensions to titled lands and development of the interior, is where changes must be proposed and initiated. The *Toshao* of Campbelltown claimed, in an interview, that through the conference, she had 'aired our concerns, and this led to tabling of ideas of writing to the UN'.⁶⁰ However, for the most part, the event mostly exposes the sharp divisions in Amerindian administration and governance, and indeed has been accused of being used by previous governments as a tool for control of the Amerindian population. Whether it can assert its authority and fulfil its mandate in a way that can reconcile differences among communities, which seems to be holding Amerindians back in national development debates, is an important barometer of success in Guyana overcoming ethnic divisions both within and between Amerindian communities.

It would also require Coast Landers to radically change their attitudes toward Amerindian affairs, which is also an unrealistic expectation, at least in the short term. The widely disparate views on the amount of lands that Amerindians currently control, and wish to apply for a title to (documented here as being as low as 14 and as high as 44 percent of the country), show a vast disconnect between how Coast Landers and Amerindian communities view Amerindian land. This situation has not been helped by historic central government policy. Rather than promoting

⁶⁰ Interview, *Toshao*, Campbelltown, 2 April 2013.

integration, Georgetown has generally sought to pacify Amerindians, beginning with the funds the previous administration funnelled, annually, through the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, to each *Toshao*, for development purposes. There was previously little accountability for these funds, and many projects have failed to have significant, if any, developmental impact. The change in national administration in 2015 has come with a commitment to improve this process. Separate policy treatment of Amerindian community development issues from broader community development in Guyana, however runs the risk of dividing ethnic groups even further. There were claims made by several interviewees that this was a preferred strategy of the previous administration because, as one government official explained, 'The Amerindian vote is important, it means a lot, with a growing Amerindian population, it could mean a balance of power'.⁶¹ But this is also preventing an integrated, cohesive Guyana from becoming a reality. For this to happen, a necessary starting point would be prioritizing the improvement of all community and local economic development structures, not just those relating to one particular ethnicity.

This approach has, not surprisingly, shaped mining strategy. Coast Landers have reluctantly agreed to pay Amerindian communities a royalty when operating in titled areas. As indicated, according to the *Amerindian Act 2006*, this royalty cannot be less than 7 percent of the value of the gold obtained from village lands.⁶² A royalty from gold mining, however, is incapable of delivering lasting development to the interior. As was also explained, at present, most Amerindians involved in gold mining work as labourers on concessions controlled by Coast Landers. For affluent Georgetown-based miners, the royalty is an effective way of preserving the *status quo* by pacifying local Amerindian leaders without ceding any control of the sector. For gold mining to have a transformative impact, developmentally in Guyana, therefore, it must be reformed. Specifically, it should be reorganized with a view to encouraging greater participation from Amerindians as 'block owners' and six-inch dredge owners. Coast Landers deserve most of the credit for developing gold mining into the sector it is today but it is not yet in a position where is capable of transforming the fortunes of all Guyanese; it does not 'belong' to the Coast Lander alone.

To summarize, the popular assumption has been that gold has fuelled conflict between Coast Lander groups and Amerindians in Guyana's hinterland in recent decades. It is argued here, however, that this is an extremely short-sighted and superficial diagnosis of a very complex problem. Ethnic tensions which have persisted for generations have clearly shaped these conflicts: gold mining territories are the latest settings where what has been dubbed here the 'Coast Lander-Amerindian Dichotomy' has been exposed. The paper contributes to a growing academic debate which draws attention to the limitations of attributing economic motivation as the main driver of conflict in resource-rich developing countries.

⁶¹ Interview, government official, Mahdia, 5 April 2013.

⁶² Section 48 of the Amerindian Act. See <http://www.stabroeknews.com/2012/news/stories/03/21/amerindian-affairs-ministry-finally-gets-mining-royalties/> (Accessed 13 December 2015).

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