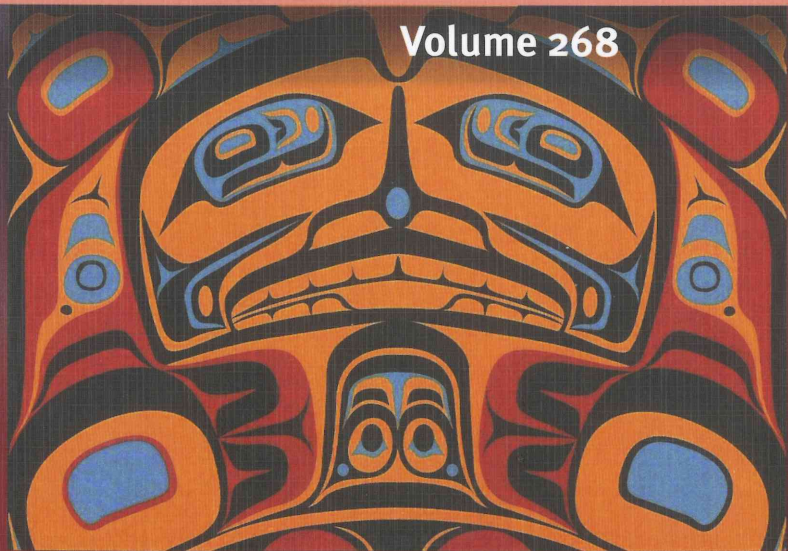


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The New Wild West? Gold Rush in the Rainforest of Guyana and Suriname

1. Introduction

The South American countries of Guyana and Suriname are two of the most tropical rainforest rich countries in the world. Approximately 85% of the land in Guyana and around 90% in Suriname are covered by primary forest. The rainforest in both countries is populated by various groups of indigenous peoples, and Suriname is also home to several Maroon groups, the descendants of slaves who escaped into the forest from the plantations and settled there between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The indigenous and Maroon peoples rely on the forest's natural resources, such as plants, animals, particularly fish, and water from the rivers. Primarily non-indigenous Guyanese and Surinamese citizens and foreigners (especially Brazilians) profit from the use of other resources found in the rainforest, such as wood, bauxite, gold, and diamonds. The ecological and social consequences from the use of these resources, particularly gold mining, are far-reaching for the communities living in the forest.

The governments of Guyana and Suriname are now faced with the task of regulating gold mining and controlling its ecological and social consequences. While gold mining laws exist from the British colonial period and the government passed laws protecting the rights of its indigenous peoples in 2006, there are no current gold mining laws or special rights for the indigenous and Maroon peoples in Suriname (as of 2015).

Cultural and geographical studies focus on researching the interaction of humans and the environment, individual life worlds, and social realities as well as the question of how and with what impacts

areas can be constructed through (for example, culturally determined) associations of meanings. Empirical on-site studies can open up new perspectives for Indigenous Studies as an interdisciplinary field of research, such as deconstructing mediumistic images of indigenous peoples.

From a cultural as well as a geographical perspective, this paper will analyze the actions of the indigenous and Maroon peoples as well as those of other relevant actors in the gold mining industry in the context of their physical environment, cultural rules, and country-specific laws. The comparative analysis will focus on the question of how much the different laws of both countries impact the use of the gold resources for the indigenous and Maroon peoples and to which extrajudicial measures the gold mining industry is subject.¹

2. Theoretical Considerations about the Institutions and Actors of the Gold Mining Industry

The theoretical approach of actor-centered institutionalism as developed by MAYNTZ & SCHARPF (1995), combined with action theory and institutionalist approaches are particularly well-suited for studying the empirical phenomenon of gold mining in Guyana and Suriname. The theory focuses, on the one hand, on the actions of the actors and, on the other hand, on the formal and informal institutions that shape the actors' behavior.

Actors can be individual actors or groups of actors. The actions of both actor types are characterized by the motivations and resources behind the actions. The motivations are the driving forces that are decisive for the actors' behavior. Some of the resources behind actions can be, for example, specialized knowledge, social relationships,

¹ If no bibliographical sources are cited, the following findings were generated with the help of qualitative interviews as well as systematic and free observations. The data were collected during several stays in Guyana and Suriname between 2008-2011 as part of a dissertation project (see RIEMPP 2012).

financial capital or power. The actors that will play a role in the discussion below are public authorities that are responsible for the drafting and adoption of laws for gold mining and indigenous peoples. Other central actors include the indigenous and Maroon peoples who are significantly affected by the laws (or the lack thereof) and in whose territories the mining takes place. Institutions influence and control the actions and interactions of the actors or actor groups. Institutions are understood here to be regulatory systems that give structure to the actions of the actors (MAYNTZ & SCHARPF 1995: 45), although a distinction is made between formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions are control systems that are set out in writing (such as laws or legally valid contracts) and are legally enforceable. Informal institutions are understood as rules that have developed through history (such as customs, codes of conduct, moral values or traditions) that have not been recorded in written documents. If these informal institutions are disregarded, such disregard has no consequence other than social disapproval (NORTH 1991: 4).

3. Guyana, Suriname, and the Search for Gold

The history of the country of Guyana has been associated with the search for gold from the very beginning, at least viewed from a European perspective, when explorers left the Old World to search for the rich gold deposits of El Dorado. Since gold is rarely found in the form of nuggets in Guyana, but instead is usually found as coarse grains embedded in rock, the searches for the precious metal between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries did not prove to be successful (HOEFTE 2001: 1, RALEIGH 1988: 7). Techniques developed in subsequent centuries first made it possible to extract gold with the help of mercury or cyanide. The most common form of gold mining today is medium-scale mining and small-scale mining in which the gold is extracted from the topsoil with the help of mercury. While only a few years ago, gold was extracted from sediment from the rivers using pans, today techniques such as sluice boxes and dredges are used, which Brazilian migrants imported into Guyana in the late 1990s.

Gold is currently Guyana's most important export product along with agricultural products such as sugar and rice (Bureau for Statistics

2012a), while in Suriname resources such as bauxite, gold, and oil are exported (Algemeen Bureau voor de Statistiek 2011: 53). A majority of the mining that takes place in the two countries takes place illegally. Illegal small-scale mining is an important source of income for the people of Guyana and Suriname, but the governments benefit only marginally from the practice, since no taxes are being paid on the profits. The two countries are also subject to fierce criticism (some of it international) due to the ecological and social consequences of such practices.

The Ecological and Social Consequences of Gold Mining

To create mines forests must first be cleared, then the ground is turned into mud with water being added through high-pressure pumps. The gold-bearing sludge is fed through pipes into a sluice box in which the gold is separated from other soil components. This method has two problematic aspects: On the one hand, highly toxic mercury is used to bind the gold together. The mixture is then heated in order to separate gold from mercury. Mercury is released into the air and enters the gold prospector's respiratory system, while the majority of it enters the atmosphere, where it condenses and settles on the ground. A portion of the mercury is also released directly into the environment through the water used in the mines. Both Guyana and Suriname have released recommendations concerning the use of mercury, but no rules and regulations. Significantly elevated concentrations have been found in the hair of gold prospectors and the indigenous and Maroon peoples that have come in direct contact with the metal or have consumed fish from contaminated rivers (see PELOW & AUGUSTINE 2012, Republic of Suriname & European Community 2008). The sluicing of the ground also releases a large amount of sediment, which enters the rivers through the water diverted from the mining pits. The drastic increase in sediment throws off the ecological balance of the rivers, since it increases the acidity of the water, which kills the indigenous animal and plant species (HAMMOND 2005a: 432). The indigenous peoples also use the river water as drinking water, for personal hygiene, and to wash clothes. The resulting environmental damage has had a significant impact on the indigenous and Maroon peoples, who live from subsistence farming and

are dependent on the quality of the river water and soil. Finally, the construction of mines, even when they are locally limited, results in deforestation. Once the mines are depleted, they are abandoned with no attempts made to restore the landscape. The pits, which are filled with water, are ideal breeding grounds for insects that carry malaria, Dengue fever, and typhoid, which results in a growing number of people affected by these diseases (International Human Rights Clinic 2007: 16). Since the gold prospectors who emigrated from Brazil also consume the rainforest's fish and wildlife, there are economic and social conflicts between the miners and the forest inhabitants. The Maroons in Suriname have already reported a decrease in wildlife, which is an important staple in their diet, due to overhunting. The social impact on the indigenous peoples is also significant since Guyanese and Surinamese from the cities as well as the Brazilian gold prospectors and their living habits intrude into the indigenous peoples' traditional way of life. Settlements and infrastructure for prospectors' logistics are built around the mines. The settlements contain housing as well as supply centers in which the prospectors can purchase food, products that are essential to everyday life, and fuel for the generators. There are also places for entertainment such as bars and bordellos. Prostitution and drugs are part of everyday life, and infections with HIV and hepatitis are common (HAMMOND 2005b: 505). There is no prostitution in indigenous cultures. There have already been reported cases in Guyana in which women were kidnapped from indigenous villages and forced into prostitution (International Human Right Clinic 2007: 17). Moreover, prospectors and indigenous peoples have different and incompatible standards for dealing with the resources of the rainforest. The forest is not just the home and provider of food for the Maroon and indigenous peoples, but also the home of their spirits and ancestors. Protecting the rainforest is the same as protecting their livelihood and is in crass contrast with mining practices.

4. Selected Actors and Formal Institutions of Mining in Guyana

The central actor for coordinating the mining sector is the Guyana Geology & Mines Commission (GGMC), and the most important formal institution is the Mining Act.

Guyana Geology & Mines Commission (GGMC) and the Mining Act

The GGMC is responsible for developing laws, research, and the collection of taxes that accrue from the use of resources, monitoring compliance with the laws and regulations that are anchored in the Mining Act (see GGMC 1989) and issuing licenses and concessions for medium-scale and small-scale mines (GGMC 2009: n. pag., ROOPUNARINE 2002: 83).

The number of gold mines that are currently operating in Guyana is not documented. According to CLIFFORD (2002: 358), in 2002 it was estimated that around 20,000 people were working directly in the gold mining industry. The number has most likely increased significantly in the past few years. The numerous mines that are located in the almost impenetrable rainforest are supposed to be inspected by the GGMC's 230 employees, of whom approximately twenty are inspectors. The inspectors have no technical equipment such as planes, infrared cameras, etc. to help monitor the rainforest.

The mining sector's most important formal institution is the Mining Act. The objective of the Mining Acts is "... to make provisions with respect to prospecting for and mining of metals, minerals and precious matters connected therewith" (GGMC 1989: 19). The Mining Act gives the government the unlimited right to distribute and use the resources. For instance, the Mining Act states that all land rights that were granted after 1903 only apply to use above the Earth's surface (GGMC 1989: 12, 17). All sub-surface resources in the ground, in riverbeds, and under the ocean are excluded from use (GGMC 1989: 12). The rights of the miners with regard to resource use have priority over those of the land owners. Theoretically, the government can therefore grant mining rights for land that is privately owned or owned by the indigenous community, provided the land was signed over after 1903.

Inaccurate location data and incomplete cartography make the inspectors' work difficult and can lead to overlap when granting rights of use. Inspecting the gigantic rainforest region is almost impossible due to the lack of financial resources and therefore also human and material resources, as one interviewee explains:

The Venezuelans, the Brazilians . . . Every day you read about people dying in the gold fields. This is a frontier. It's a lawless place, the police [are] even afraid to go there. Or the army prevents people from going unless they go in numbers. And so the agencies can't go because they don't want to die. From all reports it's a lawless frontier state. And there is very little control.

Although there are numerous mining laws, they are outdated and unenforceable due to corruption and the lack of staff.

The non-existent or insufficient inspections on site are not the only problems, the lack of consequences for violations is also problematic. The few inspectors who have been hired earn a meager salary of around 270 US dollars a month. The temptation to supplement the low wages is great, especially since the value of an ounce of gold is several times the monthly salary. The number of inspectors is not only much too low in light of the gigantic land areas and numerous mines, but they are also frequently unqualified and ill-equipped to do the job.

Guyana's Indigenous People and the 2006 Amerindian Act

The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, which is also the direct contact for the indigenous communities, is responsible for drafting and monitoring compliance with the Amerindian Act. Including settlements and villages, there are 169 indigenous communities in Guyana. Around 90 of these communities possess land titles that permit them to use the land within the marked territory for their purposes (see Map 1). In order to receive a land title the communities must prove that they have used the land during the last twenty-five years. The community must also have at least 150 members (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012: 12, Republic of Guyana 2006: 19).

Since 1992, around 14% of Guyana's land area has been owned by indigenous communities. Before the Amerindian Act of 1951 was revised in 2006, especially the government's authority to seize any land or limit the surface area was criticized. In addition, in some cases the borderlines which were being drawn did not consider the needs of the communities, since, for example, villages were located outside the legally guaranteed borders or the areas granted to indigenous groups were outside the traditional tribal territory. The unauthorized encroachments of third parties have been problematic, as is the fact that the granting of 'titled land' is not synonymous with the implementation of and compliance with a clear legal framework. The demarcation of the boundaries is still frequently unclear, since mapping and marking the land in the field has not yet been completed. In the event of disputes with outsiders, without clearly defined borders the communities have no legal argument (Ministry of Amerindian Affairs 2009: n. pag.).



Map 1: Titled Amerindian land in Guyana in 2005.

The revision of the 1992 Amerindian Act in 2006 involved two major changes. First, it established the formal procedures for the application and awarding of land rights. Secondly, it decreased the government’s political influence by shifting the decision-making rights (also with regard to the question of how a community would like to develop) from

the government to the village elders. Protection of the territory was increased, because the authorities were prohibited from withdrawing or reducing land ownership. The land is awarded to a community through a document signed by the president of Guyana for an unlimited period of time, or at least for as long as the community exists.

Subterranean mineral resources are always the property of the State. Unlike all the other segments of the population the indigenous peoples have the right to decide whether or not they will permit mining by third parties within their awarded land (Republic of Guyana 2006: 25). The right to decide whether or not mining will be permitted in their territory applies to all small-scale and medium-scale mines, but does not apply in the case of a major project that will benefit the public. The Minister of Amerindian Affairs and the Minister responsible for natural resources and the environment decide whether the project is of major interest (Republic of Guyana 2006: 21).

Even if the latest Amerindian Act appears to regulate the most important points, indigenous communities feel that a few central points were excluded or not clearly defined. As stated above, this concerns, above all, the lack of clearly defined borders for already existing land titles. In the opinion of the indigenous representatives, the fact that mineral resources and water remains property of the State, even if they are located within the territories granted to them, is problematic. The fact that bodies of water and the shoreline are not part of their territory is especially problematic because gold mining generally takes place in or on the shore of rivers (WEITZNER 2001: 8). From a state perspective, the fact that these rules do not apply is quite understandable, since the majority of Guyana's gross domestic product comes from mining industry.

There is doubt as to whether the Amerindian Act of 2006 has actually come into force. In September 2010 the daily newspaper 'Stabroek News' reported that the law had been adopted and was starting to be 'put into practice,' but it had not yet gone into effect by September 2010 and the Amerindian Act of 1951 was still legally valid (RAM 2010: n. pag.). This could have grave consequences for the indigenous peoples when it comes to the approval of major projects.

Guyana is currently experiencing a kind of gold rush due to the high price of gold which has been increasing since 2008. Not just thousands of individual actors operate mines, but foreign investors like the

Canadian companies 'Reunion Manganese' and 'IAM Gold' are also planning major projects and are already officially performing surveys.

5. Selected Gold Mining Actors and Institutions in Suriname

The Ministry of Natural Resources is the central actor with regard to the organization and monitoring of the mining sector and is also responsible for the further development of the Mining Decree. Informal institutions play a special role in Suriname.

Ministry of Natural Resources and Mining Decree

The Ministry of Natural Resources is responsible for organizing the mining sector (gold and bauxite) as well as for energy, the petrochemical industry, and the water supply. Due to internal discrepancies, it is hard to say how many Ministry employees work in the mining sector.

The legal situation for mining in Suriname is clear. The ownership of resources is anchored in Suriname's constitution and is similar to that of Guyana. There is also a Mining Decree. However, it was adopted in 1986 and has not been adapted to the technological advances and social dynamics of the past few years. There is no information about environmental protection and labor laws. The only section that discusses the Maroon and indigenous peoples merely states that the government has the inalienable right to have access to the natural resources. The settlements and fields of the Maroon and indigenous peoples are supposed to be respected, provided that this does not go against the public interest (Republiek Suriname 1986: 5). As in Guyana, the use of resources above the ground is tolerated. The law assumes it is small-scale mining that is performed with pans and small washing troughs. However, in Suriname the question arises of whether the term 'small-scale mining' still applies to many mines. For example, bulldozers and earthmovers are transported into the forest in dugout canoes that can flatten large areas of rainforest in a few hours.

According to a legal expert in charge at the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Mining Decree is being revised and has been under

revision for several years. As long as there is no updated version of the Decree, individual paragraphs are applied in a flexible manner.

Similar to Guyana, inspections are difficult due to the lack of personnel available for the inspections; as one Ministry employee explains: “The six people you have in the field do not intend to control on your (*the state's*) behalf . . . If the gold miner finds 10 kilogram, it's like ‘hey, listen . . . you report three, you give me one, and the remaining six you can keep’.”

The difficulties in the enforcement of formal institutions are also comparable to the situation in Guyana. Lack of staff and low income (compared to the possible additional income from gold mining) make it likely that regulatory measures will not have much success.

In the absence of a formal regulation concerning the indigenous population (as in the Amerindian Act in Guyana), there is no additional specification for the indigenous and Maroon peoples on a formal level. Instead, the dominance of informal institutions that have developed for decades is characteristic for the organizational structure of the Suriname gold sector. Due to the implementation of the existing law, access to resources is granted or denied through a vote among the local groups, and formally existing mining concessions are ignored. The government and its formal institutions are barely represented on the ground. This gives the actors room to maneuver and a certain amount of autonomy that they would not have if there were special laws (like the Amerindian Act), as is the case in Guyana.

(Lack of) Formal Institutions for the Maroon and Indigenous People in Suriname

Compared to Guyana, where formal institutions govern the situation of the land rights of the indigenous peoples in the form of the Amerindian Act, as has already been stated there are no special laws for the Maroon and indigenous communities in Suriname. As WEITZNER (2011: 12) explains, “. . . Suriname stands out among all the countries for being the only one in the Western hemisphere with no recognition of ethnic rights at all.” For decades associations of indigenous peoples and local as well as international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been trying to develop rules that are recognized by the government. Up to

now, there have only been countless recommendations on how the government should behave towards the Maroon and indigenous peoples and how they can approach the question of land use rights (see, for example, MARTIN *et al.* 2001, KAMBEL 2006). A U.S. report on human rights from 2011 also criticized the legal situation of the Maroon and indigenous people by saying,

Because Amerindian and Maroon lands were not effectively demarcated or policed, populations continued to face problems with illegal and uncontrolled logging and mining . . . Many Maroon and Amerindian groups also complained about the government granting land within their traditional territories to third parties, who sometimes prevented the villages from engaging in their traditional activities on those lands. (U.S. Department of State 2011: 14)

Up to now the Maroon and indigenous peoples who primarily live in the country's interior (see Map 2, next page) have acted based on (informal) common rights. For example, the borders of the different tribes were negotiated by their leaders as 'gentlemen agreements,' and the areas were used as hunting grounds. Wood is felled when needed and even mining activities are performed after internal negotiations by the group itself or approval is granted to third parties.

In the eyes of the Maroon and indigenous people, the fact that they do not have the right to have a voice with regard to land use by outside parties is problematic. For example, if the government grants concessions to multinational companies, the groups living there have no legal, formalized option to prevent it. This happened, for example, in the 1990s when the U.S.-based company ALCOA opened a bauxite mine along the Cottica River near the jungle village of Moengo. The Maroon people living there were forcibly relocated and have not received any compensation to date (KAMBEL & MACKAY 1999: 105). The problem is also evident in the example of the Arawak and Carib villages of Apoera and Washabo on the border to Guyana. The construction of a dam near Kabalebo to generate power for the mining of the bauxite deposits there has been discussed for more than 30 years now (BAKKER *et al.* 1998: 17). The reservoir that it would create would be in the middle of a traditional tribal territory, and its inhabitants have been living for decades in uncertainty of whether or not they will soon be relocated.



Map 2: Maroon and indigenous settlements in Suriname

Informal Institutions in Guyana and Suriname

Two informal institutions have emerged in the empirical research process that have a major impact on the actors in Guyana and Suriname and are closely linked in both countries: ethnicity and patronage. They permeate all sectors of society and influence to a great extent the access to and association with practical resources, such as the access to organizations and institutions, political, and economic networks, or the (non-)existence of qualified expertise.

Patronage and Corruption

A large number of legislative measures before the country achieved its independence are no longer applicable to the current economic and political situation. Due to this fact, the stability of the formal institutions that are still in force depends on the amount of flexibility with which they are being handled. The results of this are that individuals and interest groups have some room in which to maneuver. The patronage system is well-entrenched in both Guyana and Suriname (see Bradford 2008, MARTIN *et al.* 2001). Patronage is understood to be “. . . the power of disposition over public resources that a patron can distribute to his/her supporters” (ZIEMER 2010: 725). One problem resulting from this system is that, especially in public authority offices, employees are not chosen based on their qualifications but rather personal networks play a considerable role, which has a negative effect on the skills and therefore grave effects on the efficiency of public authorities. The guiding principle frequently appears to be to maintain room for maneuvering by keeping critics away as well as expanding institutional margins for maneuvering in order to assert personal interests or the interests of the family or ethnic group. Because of the mutual benefit, neither people in leadership positions nor their subordinates have an interest in changing the situation. The patronage system is therefore self-stabilizing.

Ethnicity

Politics and trust in the government are closely linked to the aspect of ethnicity in Guyana and Suriname. Politics cannot be considered in either country without an ethnic dimension. In this article, ethnicity is understood to be a quality characterized by three aspects. First of all, the members of a group perceive themselves as different from others. Secondly, the group is also perceived as being different by other people, and thirdly, the members of the group participate in common activities that are related to their common background or culture. This relationship can be real or contrived (Bös 2008: 55).

Approximately 750,000 people live in Guyana, including Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese, who represent the two largest ethnic groups. Indigenous people (approx. ten percent of the total population), mixed ethnicities, and a few minorities such as Chinese and Brazilians also live in Guyana (Bureau of Statistics 2012b: 29). The indigenous people are statistically recorded as one group even though they are composed of many different groups.

Suriname's population (a total of around 530.000 people) is composed of Hindustani and Creole, Javanese, six different Maroon groups, five indigenous groups as well as Chinese, Lebanese, mixed ethnicities, descendants of European settlers, and a growing number of Brazilians and Guyanese (Stichting Algemeen Bureau voor de Statistiek 2011).

The pronounced stratification of colonial society along ethnic lines has not been overcome in Guyana and Suriname to this day. Ethnicity plays a role with regard to the structure of the labor force and settlement structure as well as the political organization of society. MARS (2002: 96) sees the origin of potential conflict between the ethnic groups in the culturally different informal institutions:

. . . [D]efining culture as the observance of distinct and unique institutional practices, posits that the source of conflict between these groups lie in their cultural specificity; the incompatibility of their institutional practices and customs; and the loyalties of each of these groups to the countries of their origin rather than to their new home.

At first glance, the different ethnic groups in Guyana and Suriname appear to live together harmoniously; however, clear signs of

segregation become apparent at second glance. The groups have their own schools, churches, markets, radio stations, and TV stations. There are also recognizable differences with regard to their places of residence, education, vocational choices, voting behavior, or concept of what constitutes a family. The indigenous peoples in both Guyana and Suriname—save for a few exceptions—live in rural areas in the rainforest and practice subsistence farming. They have next to no presence in the political arena.

The Maroon and indigenous groups that live in Suriname's interior play a special role, since their culturally specific informal rules significantly influence the use of the rainforest.

Maroons in Suriname

During the seventeenth century around ten percent of all slaves fled from the plantations in the rainforest into the country's interior and established their own villages and communities along the rivers. A majority of the escaped slaves were born and raised in Africa. Since not all of the slaves came from the same region in Africa and brought their own cultural practices into the community, new Maroon cultures and languages developed. Around 75,000 Maroons (approximately fourteen percent of the total population) live in Suriname today (KAMBEL 2006: 10).

The six Maroon groups differ with regard to culture and language to this day. There are huge differences with regard to family structure and employment that differentiate the Maroons from other ethnic groups that live on the coast and—at least in Paramaribo—maintain a primarily urban lifestyle. For example, the families are organized along matrilineal lines; after they get married the women usually live with their large families in the village. Polygamy is a common practice in all Maroon tribes when a man can afford to take care of several wives. The division of labor between men and women is very traditional. The women are responsible for raising the children, tending the fields, and cooking. The men hunt and fish and are responsible for creating new fields through slashing and burning, building boats, and performing ceremonies. In recent years men are increasingly going into towns to earn money for goods such as radios, sewing machines, or outboard

motors for the interior's most important means of transportation, the dugout canoe. Additional sources of income include working in the forestry sector or small-scale gold mining.

Back in the 1980s, the Maroons were at war with the military government that was in power then. The reasons for the war (Jungle Commando of the Maroons against the National Army) remain unexplained to this day. It has been presumed that political and personal differences between the former military dictator and today's president Desi Bouterse and the leader of the Jungle commando Ronny Brunswijk caused the fights. The violent conflicts took place primarily in central and eastern Suriname and led to the almost complete destruction of the infrastructure and social facilities in the villages and the border town of Albina. Because of the violent strategies they used against the national army during the war, the Maroons were subjected to massive prejudice from then on and no longer had access to political organizations due to their lack of political representation. Politics, economics, and society came to a standstill throughout Suriname, which led to further isolation of the Maroon peoples, who were blamed for the country's misery (CHIN *et al.* 1987: 173). This isolation led to an expansion of the gold mining that had been performed by the Maroon peoples, which had financed the rebels, in the eastern territories of Suriname where the country's largest gold deposits are located.

Additional reasons for prejudices and social exclusion, which is still occurring to this day, are the clans' strong cohesion and the common religious cults. It should be noted, however, that the younger Surinamese in particular, who did not experience the conflict themselves, find it less difficult to associate with Maroons. The fact that Maroon territories and villages are main destinations for tourists also seems to create a more positive image. More and more young Maroon people are working in the tourist industry in the cities and are fluent in Dutch and often English, which promotes exchange between the ethnic groups and significantly counters the image of 'violent, criminal forest dwellers' often expressed by older Surinamese citizens. Nevertheless, especially the Maroon people in the eastern part of the country have the reputation of being hostile and 'extremely tough' towards other Surinamese, which earns them a mixture of mistrust and respect. In any case, large segments of the Surinamese people have very little knowledge of Maroon cultures, their lifestyle, and their way of thinking.

Indigenous Peoples in Suriname

Five main groups of indigenous people live in Suriname. The approximately 18,000 indigenous people represent almost four percent of the total population (KAMBEL 2006: 10). While the Arawak and Carib have settled on the coast, the Trio, Wayana, and Akurio tribes live in the country's interior. The Trio, Wayana, and Akurio communities were first 'discovered' only in the twentieth century, with the latter not having been discovered until the late 1960s (BAKKER *et al.* 1998: 11). The Arowaks and Caribs are the two most populous indigenous groups, with around 6,600 and 5,900 members respectively. The groups that live in the interior are significantly smaller. For example, the Trios tribe has around 1,500 members. The few villages are primarily located on the Tapanahoni River and in the Sipaliwini Savanna. The Wayana tribe with its around 500 members is also settled along the Tapanahoni and Lawa rivers (BAKKER *et al.* 1998: 15, HEEMSKERK & DELVOYE 2007: 8, HEEMSKERK *et al.* 2007: 6). The smallest of the groups are the Akurios, who lived as nomads until the 1970s and were forced to abandon their nomadic lifestyle by Catholic missionaries. About half of the almost 100 Akurio people died shortly thereafter due to the change in diet (KLOOS 1977: 20). The surviving Akurios now live with the Trios and Wayanas in the village of Pelelu Tepu, which was built by missionaries in the 1960s. Another 3,300 indigenous people living in Suriname cannot be attributed to any of these groups.

The indigenous communities in the country's interior live from subsistence farming like the Maroons. Their chosen cultivation method is shifting cultivation. Similar to the Maroons, the division of labor between men and women is clearly defined. Access to schools and infirmaries exist in all villages. Just like the Maroons, the indigenous people are also significantly disadvantaged with regard to their educational opportunities. Some of the indigenous teachers do not speak perfect Dutch and the children would have to travel to the capital city of Paramaribo to attend secondary schools, which usually is not possible for financial and logistical reasons since most of the villages can only be accessed by plane or after several days on a boat.

The goal of the infirmaries in the villages that were opened by the missionaries was not just to improve medical care; the missionaries were

also trying to replace the traditional medicine man (pyjai).² He was prohibited from practicing, since he also acted as a medium for non-Christian spirits and gods. Even though the knowledge of medicinal plants and their applications is disappearing, the Pyjai still plays an important role in all of the groups today. All of the indigenous peoples are officially Christians, but their belief in the gods and spirits of the forest and their ancestors also survived the conversion. Like with the Maroons, they are included in decisions that affect the village or the tribe (VAN PUTTEN 1992: 17 *et seq.*).

Specific Informal Institutions of the Indigenous and Maroon Peoples

The social and political organization of the Maroon and indigenous peoples is almost identical, since the political organization was introduced by the Dutch in order to make the groups living in the interior “governable.” Several large families form a clan, and several clans form a tribe. The tribal chief is the granman. Each village has a captain (village chief) and several sub-chiefs (basjas). Conflicts are settled in kroetoes (conferences), which is led by the captain and in which all of the villagers are allowed to participate. The granmans and captains are the representatives of their groups that are recognized by the government in Paramaribo (BAKKER *et al.* 1998: 17, 69 *et seq.*). Even though there is no valid legal basis for the granting and use of land to and by Maroon and indigenous people, today no mining licenses are granted in Suriname without the approval of the granmans. For example, the Maroons in eastern Suriname informally grant ‘licenses’ to Brazilians and demand a share of the profits from them. The tremendous fear and the respect for the spirits and religious cults of the Maroon and indigenous peoples can sometimes be seen as the reason why the Surinamese and foreign gold prospectors accept the self-appointed authorities. The Maroons have a reputation for causing evil through their magic, by contrast to the indigenous cultures that are generally seen as

² For a discussion of traditional medicine in a Native American context, see also Leslie Korn’s essay in this volume.

peaceful. The great importance of spirituality is characteristic for all of the Maroon groups. The common forms of worship to which other segments of the population have no access are perceived by outsiders as frightening (LEWIS 1994: 80). As already mentioned, all of the groups were converted by missionaries as early as the eighteenth century, first by the Moravian church and later by Catholics; however, in addition to Christian beliefs there are also animistic and polytheistic cults that have considerable influence on all of the central decisions and on all levels of society. For example, the Maroons believe in 'wintis'—spirits that can be found everywhere in nature: in trees, rivers, and even in animals. One sacred site for spirits includes kankan trees, which are not cut down or disturbed for spiritual reasons. 'Obias' (amulets) are worn to guard against black magic. Ancestor worship plays another important role. Usually Maroons do not believe in natural death. When a person dies it is always caused by a supernatural power. This can be gods, spirits, or another person who practices black magic. The shaman or medicine man plays an important role in the Maroon and indigenous culture; he is called a Bonuman in the former and Pyjai in the latter community. He is the medium that unites all the spirits and is, at the same time, a healer who possesses knowledge about the mythology and effects of medicinal plants (POLIMÉ 1992: 31-32).

The Maroon and indigenous peoples do not tolerate any economic activities in their territories without their explicit consent and cooperation. Their political participation through the granmans enables them to influence decisions, such as in the granting of mining concessions. From a legal standpoint, the Maroon as well as the indigenous communities invoke the result of the peace negotiations from the eighteenth century between the Netherlands and escaped slaves in which the Maroons were promised a say in the use of the land (KAMBEL & MACKAY 1999:50f, DONNER 2011: 14). Both Maroons and indigenous groups also invoke their culture, which requires that decisions are made collectively in the village community. Spirits are included in ceremonies in important decision-making processes. Despite the fact that this approach is not necessarily comprehensible to outsiders, this has effects on the authorities' actions.

Superstition is also widespread in other ethnic groups in Suriname. For example, there are also 'wintis' in the Creole and Javanese cultures, which are spirits that can take possession of humans. The beliefs of the

Maroon and indigenous peoples are also accepted by people of other ethnic groups.

Consequently, the informal, culture-specific institutions do not only have effects on the motivation behind the actions of the people living in the rainforest, but also that of the authorities. Decisions that are actually only subject to formal government regulations are often influenced by the fear of powerful spirits, misfortune, or illness. The result is that even formally unjustified claims of a territorial nature are fulfilled. The more a tribe has the reputation of using black magic (like the Ndjukas, for example), the more hesitantly decisions against the community will be made. The widespread ignorance of the Surinamese community living on the coast about the belief in supernatural powers and spiritual ceremonies ensures that the Maroon and indigenous peoples are perceived as sinister and strange. However, the people have a rather favorable opinion of the indigenous groups. They are regarded as peaceful, but definitely capable of using black magic. Since there are no large mineral resource deposits in the territories of the Trios, Wayanas, and Akurios, they play a smaller role in the gold mining industry than the Ndjukas in the eastern part of the country or the Saramaccans along the Suriname River, where a majority of the gold resources are based. The absence of formal legislation in Suriname thus opens up spaces for resistance to the Maroon and indigenous communities.

6. Summary

Guyana and Suriname are former colonies that have a lot of raw material resources. Gold mining already played a prominent role during colonial times. Guyana and Suriname are still economically dependent on the export of gold. Despite the wealth in resources, both countries are developing countries with typical problems such as unemployment, corruption, infrastructural deficits, and a high proportion of people living under the poverty line. Both countries are multi-ethnic countries due to their colonial past. Ethnicity is one of the informal institutions that determines political events and access to and handling of gold. The behavior of the relevant actors in the gold mining industry always occurs in relation to their respective social entity. Their motivations for their actions are frequently characterized by actor-centered interests that

benefit the actor himself, his family or his (ethnic) group. Ethnicity plays a role in the form of patronage when, for instance, filling public service positions. Members of one's own ethnic group are often given priority when hiring for public service positions and not with people who have the relevant practical professional resources, such as skills or work experience. The result is that formal institutions are not developed or are only developed at a slow pace. The inadequate formal institutions and the sometimes lack of or haphazard enforcement of existing laws is compensated for by informal institutions, which sometimes provides the actors with lots of room to maneuver. This is clearly illustrated in the example of gold mining, which differs widely in both countries with regard to the formal institutions. Guyana has the Mining Act and the Amerindian Act, which are supposed to formally regulate ownership and access rights to the mineral resources. Guyana's indigenous population tries to enforce compliance with the laws that apply to them. There are state actors that work specifically for the rights of the indigenous communities (like the Ministry for Amerindian Affairs), but they are not very successful due to the weak social and political position of the indigenous people in the country and the structural deficits described above.

Suriname, on the other hand, also has a law that is supposed to regulate mining; however, it is not or only partially applied. Completely different mechanisms affect Suriname's gold mining sector than is the case in Guyana. These are the informal institutions of the Maroon and indigenous peoples that, completely independent of national legislation, control gold mining. Officially there are no special regulations for Suriname's indigenous population. The informal, unwritten rules are also accepted by the government unofficially. The question of to whom the subterranean resources belong is clarified in the constitution, but distributing the usage rights and capturing the economic value of the gold resources is governed—especially in the eastern part of Suriname—by the informal rules of the Maroon people. The reason these practices are tolerated by the government is, for one, the lack of staff and financial means to control the territories; however, a much more important one is the strong (informal) position of the Maroon community, especially in the Marowijne territory. There is also the fact that the Maroon and indigenous people have the reputation of using spiritual practices that cause their adversaries disease and bad luck. The

Maroon and indigenous communities are statistically the poorest communities in Suriname and have a very limited presence on the official political stage. However, they and their rules are respected and also feared by the State due to their strong social cohesion in their group and the prominent importance of their spiritual practices. In this respect, informal institutions dominate formal institutions to a large extent. In conclusion, it can be said that extrajudicial mechanisms such as the strong position of the Maroon and indigenous peoples in Suriname protect the groups at the informal level from the arbitrary use of state power and unwelcome interference in their territories to an extent that exceeds the power of the formal rules which apply in Guyana.

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