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## 1. Introduction

- 1 The twentieth century history of Suriname, a small republic and former Dutch colony on South America's northern shore, is closely tied to the extraction of bauxite and its transformation into aluminium. Ever since the element was identified in 1898 in the 'red soil' that is abundant in the country's interior, it has fuelled hopes of economic growth, political independence, and employment—in short, hopes of 'development'. Having become the world's main exporter of bauxite in the 1940s, Suriname was, by the 1970s, one of the first countries in the global South to have built an entire infrastructure to transform bauxite into aluminium, including the hydroelectric dam that would power that infrastructure.
- 2 Today, the aluminium factories of Suriname are closed. Investors retreated from the country 20 years earlier than the date they had agreed upon, leaving behind a landscape rationalised for bauxite extraction but inhabited by the same Maroon communities that already lived there a century earlier. Amidst industrial structures, in company towns, and on the shores of the artificial lake created by the flooding of their ancestral lands, these Afro-descendent populations are faced with the challenge of

finding new livelihoods and sources of income, now that large tracts of their land have changed beyond recognition.

- 3 The Surinamese aluminium industry and its impacts on Maroon communities share many commonalities with other neo-extractivist ‘resource booms’ that we can observe around the world. The discovery of a valuable resource is often perceived as a promise of human and social development, but cases abound in which the expansion of extractive activities has not matched such expectations, and rather has exacerbated inequality, insecurity, corruption and environmental degradation (as described, for example, by Acosta (2013), Kirsch (2014) and several of the contributions in this thematic volume). Moreover, extractive activities play an important role in the expropriation, marginalisation and deculturation of indigenous and tribal communities living in resource-rich areas.
- 4 At the end of the Second World War, Suriname embarked on a pathway to independence, adopting industrialisation as its main strategy for progress, echoing similar strategies that at the time were being implemented in other, much larger South American countries. A major source of inspiration for these strategies was dependency theorists like the Argentinian economist Raúl Prebisch, who encouraged Latin American countries to industrialise in order to break with the role that the international division of labour had ‘bestowed’ on them as providers of food and raw materials for industrial centres (Prebisch, 1950). These post-war industrialisation policies may have increased employment, economic growth and levels of specialisation in certain countries, but as this chapter shows they often failed to generate improved living conditions for the broader population. Whether an industry-based pathway can generate a development pathway that can be inclusive of a country’s entire population in the long run, or even one that includes that country’s population at all, depends on a range of factors.
- 5 The Surinamese bauxite and aluminium industry provides a unique opportunity to evaluate a resource development cycle already completed, from discovery to resource fever, and from industrial development to eventual decay and closure. I aim to show how the development of this mineral-based industry in the global South contained a promise of development, but already created winners and losers in the short term, and ended up benefiting almost no one in the long term. I identify the factors that were responsible for the failure of the aluminium industry in Suriname, offering reflections not only on the heyday of a mineral and industrial bonanza, but especially on the period that followed it. Such lessons could be valuable for other countries who find themselves in an earlier stage of an extractivist or neo-extractivist resource boom (as in the examples described by Gudynas, 2009; Acosta, 2013; and Svampa, 2015), and ironically also for Suriname itself, which discovered large offshore oil reserves in 2020. Amid new hopes of a resource-fuelled windfall, we may actually be looking at a repetition of history.
- 6 The history of Suriname’s bauxite and aluminium sector has been described by economic historians such as Westermann (1971), Lamur (1983) and especially Pollack (2016). Several authors have highlighted a number of perspectives on Maroon history in the context of an expanding mining sector (Thoden van Velzen and Van Wetering, 1988; Scholtens, 1994; De Theije and Heemskerk, 2009; Price, 2011; De Koning, 2011a; 2011b; Gomes da Cunha, 2018). The present contribution aims to combine these two strands of scholarship, showing how the chemical and industrial processes used to

produce aluminium have shaped physical, social, cultural and environmental landscapes in Suriname, and how Surinamese Maroons have been involuntary players in a narrative of industrialisation and development. Thus, it discusses the supply chains of bauxite and aluminium, the emergence and downfall of Suriname's bauxite and aluminium industries, the changes set in motion by these developments, and the impacts they had on the livelihoods and ways of living of the traditional populations of the area.

- 7 The chapter uses a mix of methods. It relies on the available literature on the history of aluminium and bauxite extraction as well as on Maroon history, complemented with original research in the national archives of Suriname and the Netherlands. It also relies on interviews and observations from a field trip I undertook early in 2020—a trip unfortunately cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2. Suriname and the 'Invention' of Aluminium

- 8 Suriname is located on the Guiana Shield, a geologically old area that contains, besides its bauxite cover, significant amounts of gold and gemstones. A Dutch colony since 1667, Suriname's coast was developed into a slavery-based plantation economy exporting several tropical commodities. But this 'plantation of Suriname' (Van Lier, 1949) was only a tiny piece of the colony's territory. The remainder of the country, the interior, only accessible by travelling up one of the mighty rivers with their swirling *soela's* (rapids), was covered by dense forests (still today, forests cover over 80 per cent of Suriname, making it the most forested country in the world (FAO, 2015)) that formed an ideal refuge and hideout for those fleeing slavery on the coast. Over time, these fugitives—referred to as Maroons or, in the colonial terminology, Bush Negroes—created several communities with more or less fixed territories in Suriname's interior: the Ndyuka, Saamaka, Matawai, Paamaka, Aluku and Kwinti.
- 9 Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Dutch waged several wars against the 'rebellious Negroes' (Stedman, 1796), but the disease-infested, mosquito-ridden forest environment, as well as the guerrilla tactics employed by the Maroons, caused most of the colony's military expeditions to fail miserably. In the meantime, the 'enemy' never ceased to attack or burn down plantations to obtain food items, tools, and new recruits, especially women. For this reason, the colonial government changed its strategy, and started 'pacifying' the Maroon communities through peace treaties. These treaties recognised Maroon autonomy in the lands controlled by them and even entitled the Maroons to receive yearly packages of tools and foodstuffs from the government. After gold was discovered in Suriname's interior in the 1880s, Maroons played an important role in the lucrative business of rowing and guiding miners to the sites where the metal was found—which were mostly located in areas controlled by them, in an environment where any outsider would get easily lost or would not be able to survive.
- 10 Omnipresent at the surface in many localities in Suriname, including in those of many Maroon communities, was a reddish material called '*ston*', which was used to pave roads. Only after a similar material present in the French village of Les Baux was, in 1821, shown to be composed of aluminium and iron oxides did the mineral become known, internationally as in Suriname, as 'bauxite'. Even though methods for

chemically extracting aluminium from bauxite existed, these processes were so costly that any large-scale exploitation of aluminium was impossible.

- 11 Two inventions, both from the 1880s, revolutionised aluminium production. The first process was developed by Carl Joseph Bayer, the second simultaneously by Charles Martin Hall and Paul Héroult. The Bayer process involves the treatment of raw bauxite with caustic soda and other substances at high temperatures to ‘clean’ it. It produces a white powder known as alumina or aluminium oxide, as well as leftover materials: the infamous, toxic ‘red mud’. The purified alumina is then ready for the next step, the Hall–Héroult process, which is based on electrolysis. With the help of very significant amounts of electricity, this process deoxidises the alumina to produce aluminium<sup>1</sup> (and CO<sub>2</sub>).
- 12 After Hall had patented the Hall–Héroult process in the United States, he sought and found investors to create the Pittsburgh Reduction Company, which in 1907 would be renamed Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa). The industrial production of aluminium was limited by two factors: the availability of bauxite and the ability to generate enough electricity to perform electrolysis at a commercial scale, for which hydroelectricity was the cheapest, most stable, and therefore preferred option. The perfect location for aluminium production is thus one that combines bauxite reserves with watercourses with sufficient potential (water run-off and drop) to power a hydroelectric plant. Such locations were to be found in North America as well as in Europe. The early supply chains of the aluminium industries often involved several countries from these two regions.

### 3. Moengo: An American Company Town on Maroon Lands

- 13 The First World War caused significant disruptions in the supply chains of the aluminium industry. In Europe, commercial ties were cut due to opposing alliances, causing countries such as Britain to turn to the United States for supplies. At the same time, the war industry, and especially its new use of warplanes, made aluminium an indispensable material. It was in this context that Alcoa started looking for bauxite reserves in the Caribbean and South America, particularly turning to British Guiana and Suriname, lending these former colonial backwaters strategic importance (Baptiste, 1988).
- 14 Alcoa’s acquisition of bauxite reserves in Suriname was particularly enabled by the then Dutch Governor of Suriname, Willem Baron van Asbeck (in post 1911–16). Convinced that a completely open market would lead to development and ultimately benefit the colony, he set aside the existing regulation that prohibited the ‘concessioning’ of land to non-residents of Suriname, first by actively facilitating the settlement of Alcoa agents on Surinamese soil, and second by changing the regulation altogether. In *The American Take-Over* (1983), historian Carlo Lamur concludes that this proved possible due to general institutional weakness and cumbersome communication between the Dutch government and the colonial government in Suriname, as well as naivety regarding the value and importance of the new mineral. The favourable conditions that the colonial authorities in Suriname granted to Alcoa, including a near exemption from taxes, were also the result of an international deal between the

Netherlands and the United States, in exchange for US Standard Oil's departure from Sumatra in the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia), which benefitted Royal Dutch Shell (Buddingh', 1995). While this may have been a positive outcome for the Kingdom of the Netherlands as a whole, it deprived Suriname of the potential benefits of its bauxite endowments, even after its independence. Alcoa's revenues from Surinamese bauxite quickly outstripped the Surinamese government budget, but little of the former ended up with the local population.

- 15 Alcoa chose Moengo, an abandoned Ndyuka village on the banks of the Cottica River, as the centre of its mining activities. Between 1916 and 1920, Moengo was transformed into a model company town, an 'enclave', with a hospital (Figure 1), sports facilities and hygienic conditions (drinking water, sewage disposal, anti-malaria measures) far superior to those in Paramaribo, the capital of the colony. Its seemingly democratic grid of rectangular housing blocks obscured, however, a built-in inequality between different ethnic groups. Moengo had separate neighbourhoods for the American and Dutch expatriates (Figure 2), for skilled Surinamese workers, for unskilled Surinamese workers, and for the contract labourers from the Dutch East Indies, who were referred to as 'Javanese'.
- 16 As Moengo was surrounded by Maroon villages, the town's economy has, since its construction, relied on Maroon labour for different kinds of services. Alcoa's subsidiary the Surinaamsche Bauxiet Maatschappij (SBM), however, did not formally recruit any Maroon workers until the 1950s. Still, Maroon men were preferred as informal labourers for felling trees and clearing forested land, while Maroon women frequently came to Moengo to sell agricultural produce or wash clothes. They were required to leave Moengo and go 'down the river' before five o'clock every day (De Koning, 2011a), but eventually started building informal housing just outside the town.
- 17 During the early years, Moengo could only be reached by ship after a ten-hour journey on the Cottica River. Then, in 1929 the town was connected by road to Albina, at the French Guiana border, and finally, in 1965, to Suriname's capital Paramaribo (Pollack, 2016).

Figure 1 Moengo's hospital, currently in a state of disrepair and used as an art exhibition space



Source: Author, February 2020.

Figure 2.1 The Casa Blanca, Moengo's guesthouse, pictured in 1930 by Augusta Curiel



Source: Collection Stichting Surinaams Museum.

Figure 2.2 The Casa Blanca, Moengo's guesthouse, pictured in 2020 in a state of disrepair



Source: Author, 2020.

## 4. Building an Aluminium Industry

- 18 As a rule of thumb, one could state that at the time of Suriname's bauxite boom alumina had a value five times that of bauxite, while aluminium was eight times as valuable as alumina (Kruijer, 1973; World Bank, 1981). There was thus an enormous potential for countries with bauxite reserves to increase their profits if they were able to vertically integrate their industries and instead of exporting bauxite produce aluminium themselves. Ideas of building facilities for the Bayer or even the Hall-Héroult process in Suriname were being floated even in the early days of bauxite mining in the country. In 1925, Alcoa proposed building a dam on the Maroni River at the Surinamese–French Guianese border to generate the necessary hydroelectricity. In return for this investment, the corporation would receive the exploitation rights to all bauxite reserves, identified and unidentified, in Suriname. The Dutch authorities took this option into consideration as they thought that the prospect of producing aluminium in Suriname itself could be beneficial to the colony's economy. They even reached an agreement with the French government regarding a possible dam across the border river, but Alcoa eventually pulled out, building extra Hall-Héroult capacity in North America instead (Pollack, 2016). It is telling, however, that Alcoa expected to be compensated with bauxite concessions for the costs of building the dam. Apparently, the company regarded the construction of an aluminium industry in Suriname not as an investment in its own productive capacity, but as a favour to the colony, for which it could ask for something in return.
- 19 Demand for aluminium kept rising over the course of the 1930s. Tensions in Europe that would eventually lead to the Second World War were a reason for the United



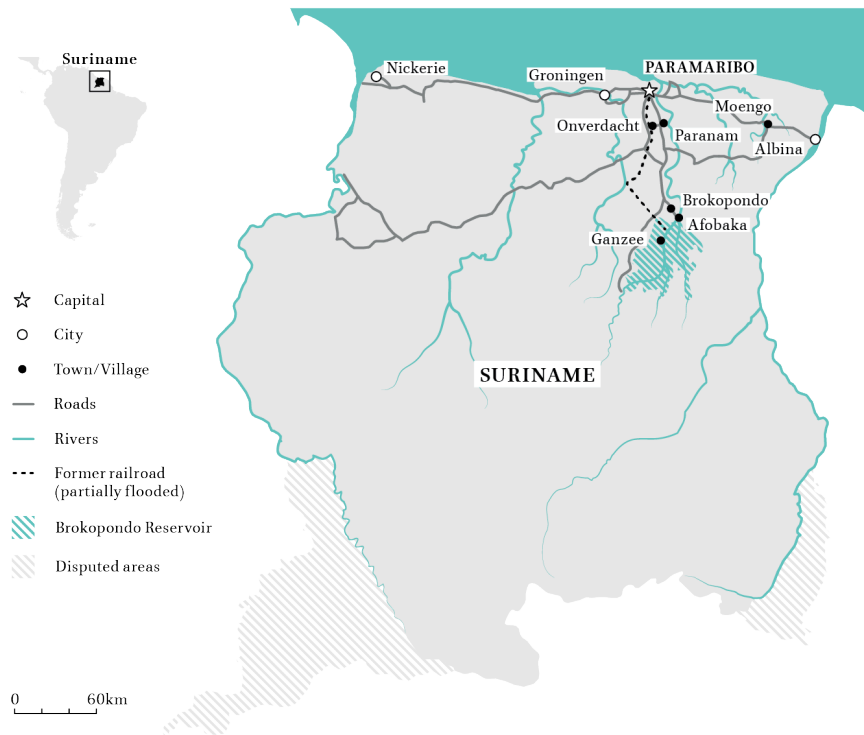
States to expand its stock of military equipment, especially warplanes, for which it sought reliable bauxite supplies. Suriname was unlikely to be directly affected by the war, but still the reliance on Moengo as the only centre of production could be problematic, due both to its single means of access—via the narrow Cottica River—and to the risk of labour unrest in the town. For this reason, Alcoa opened a second bauxite mine in Suriname, at the location where, in 1938, the company town of Paranam would spring up, not far from the capital, Paramaribo. In order to balance American dominance in the sector, the colonial authorities granted a mining concession not only to Alcoa but also to the Dutch company Billiton,<sup>2</sup> which now started operations in Onverdacht, a few kilometres distant from Paranam.

- 20 The capacity to carry out the Hall-Héroult process remained unattainable, but Suriname did embark on efforts to carry out the Bayer process, which would enable it to export alumina instead of bauxite. For this purpose, in 1938 Alcoa started planning the construction of an alumina plant in Paranam, serving both the Alcoa and the Billiton concessions. The outbreak of the Second World War spurred Surinamese exports of bauxite as well as the country's economic reliance on this single industry. Suriname was now responsible for 60 per cent of US imports of bauxite, and soon enough the US government stationed military personnel in Suriname to secure the mines and their access routes. In order to satisfy the quickly rising demand, working hours were increased, and mining operations in Moengo were now running seven days a week. This, in combination with the fact that the economic downturn of the 1930s and 1940s had caused the cost of living to rise in Suriname while wages had stagnated, led to the outbreak of a series of strikes in Moengo and Paranam in 1941 and 1942. In a radio address aired on 18 January 1942, the district commissioner of Marowijne, J. Postma, called the strikers 'traitor[s] to our cause; fifth columnist[s]' (De Koning, 2011b). Clearly he recognised what the Moengo strikers knew all too well: that they had unique bargaining power due to the geopolitical game that they had become a part of.
- 21 But the US would not be reliant on Suriname for long. Suriname's share of international bauxite exports already started falling as of 1943, as known bauxite stockpiles and domestic production capacity in the US had grown, and the ships used for the trade were now needed to transport troops and military supplies to the front lines in Europe (Pollack, 2016).
- 22 Nonetheless, Suriname's '15 minutes of fame' during the Second World War, during which its 'mother country', the Netherlands, was subdued by Nazi Germany, led to a new self-confidence and a wave of nationalism in the colony. In 1942, the Dutch Queen, Wilhelmina, broadcast a radio address from exile in London, mentioning the need for a 'restructured Kingdom' after the war, in which the colonies would gain more autonomy. This statement was primarily directed at audiences in the Dutch East Indies under Japanese occupation, but was received with enthusiasm in Suriname (Buddingh', 1995). Shortly after the end of the Second World War, a process began that would, in 1954, make Suriname an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.
- 23 In 1951, the Stichting Planbureau Suriname (Planning Office Suriname) was founded to accompany this shift from colony to country. The Planbureau presented the first draft of its *Ten-Year Plan for the Development of Suriname* in 1952. Its authors argued that:
- [Since] the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century an uncontrollable process of decay has turned Suriname into an indigent community, but currently there are indications that forces in the country are active that – as long as they are directed and supported

from outside – can constitute a more prosperous society in Suriname. (Stichting Planbureau Suriname, 1952, 15)

- 24 The authors considered Suriname an ‘indigent community’ due to the decline of the agricultural sector that Suriname had once relied upon, while the forces they suggested could lead to prosperity were associated with Suriname’s bauxite reserves. While putting all its hope in the mining sector, the Planbureau also observed that the rising wages in the sector, unmatched by increases in other sectors, were leading to growing inequality. The decline in agriculture also augmented the gap in income levels between city and countryside, fuelling a movement of rural flight.
- 25 In order to reinvest bauxite revenues in other sectors, the Ten-Year Plan contained a series of policies for the agricultural, forestry and industrial sectors. The highlight of the Plan, however, was a project in which several of Suriname’s identified needs would come together: the Brokopondo Plan. The construction of a hydroelectric dam, this time across the Suriname River close to the Saamaka village of Brokopondo (Figure 3), would lead to the generation of 1 billion kilowatt hours of electricity per year, 90 per cent of which was intended to power the Hall–Héroult process in an aluminium smelter that would also be built under the Plan. According to the authors, there would also be many helpful side benefits: *en passant*, Suriname’s electricity problem would be solved, while a new road and train line<sup>3</sup> from Paramaribo to Brokopondo would allow for the exploitation of forest and mineral resources alongside it, and the regularisation of the river’s water stream in all seasons would end siltation problems during the dry season, which would allegedly be beneficial for agriculture. The many Maroon communities upstream of Brokopondo were only mentioned once in the Plan: the authors stressed that the lake would create opportunities for fish farming, which could form an additional source of income for the 10,000 ‘Bush Negroes’ in the area (Stichting Planbureau Suriname, 1952, 113).

Figure 3 Map of Suriname, showing the capital Paramaribo and the mining towns Moengo and Paranam, as well as the artificial lake created by the Brokopondo Dam, and the (currently inactive and partially flooded) train line. All roads shown are those in existence today.



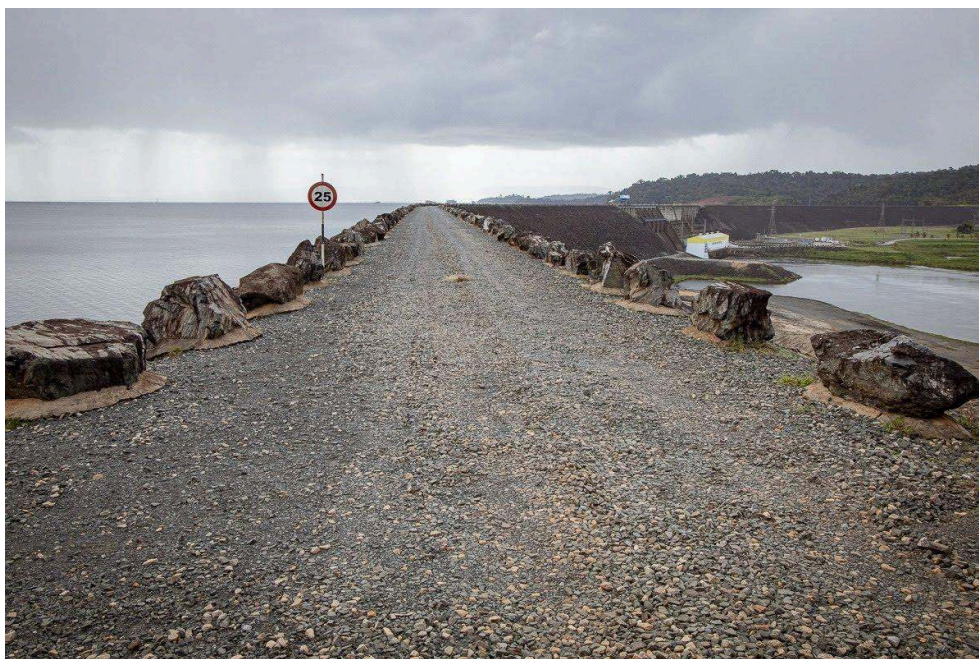
Source: Author.

- 26 Even though the original idea for the Brokopondo Plan may have come from civil engineer Willem Eysvoegel (Pollack, 2016), it would be developed in full detail by hydraulic engineer Willem Johan van Blommestein (1905–85). In 1948, working for the Dutch East Indies' water management department, van Blommestein had published his *Federal Welfare Plan for Western Java* (Van Blommestein, 1949), based on the experience of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the US regarding the integration of irrigation and hydroelectric planning. Soon thereafter, the independence of Indonesia prompted van Blommestein to move to the Netherlands, where he was asked by the Planbureau Suriname to help develop a water management plan (Stichting Planbureau Suriname, 1952). Even though he had never visited Suriname, van Blommestein promptly proposed the much costlier Brokopondo Plan of his own accord (Ravesteijn, 2002).
- 27 In 1951, van Blommestein was asked to travel to Suriname to defend his ideas before the Surinamese government, which only two years earlier had become accountable for the first time to a democratically elected parliament: the 'States of Suriname', which had replaced the earlier 'Colonial States'. The engineer apparently convinced the dignitaries, and the Brokopondo Plan was included in the draft Ten-Year Plan. The dam would, however, not fall under the budget that was available for the Planbureau to invest, so external sources of funding would be needed.
- 28 First, Suriname turned to Alcoa for the necessary funds, but Alcoa responded in the negative. It considered the enterprise risky, at the margin of making a loss, and it had enough aluminium smelting capacity in the US (Loeff, 1960). A World Bank mission, visiting Suriname on the invitation of the Dutch government in 1952, came to the

conclusion that the project was feasible, but stressed that more data on both the physical environment and sales markets would be necessary. Billiton launched its own research, and warned that the geological conditions had not been sufficiently investigated, and moreover that carrying out the Hall-Hérault process in Suriname would—given the cost at which the Brokopondo Plan envisaged generating electricity—cause Surinamese aluminium to be too expensive for international markets (Pollack, 2016). Nonetheless, Suriname asked the French company Société Anonyme de Grands Travaux de Marseille to deliver a technical report leading to a detailed plan for the building of the dam. This report was, in turn, submitted to Dutch consultancy firm Nedeco, which concluded that 1) the potential electricity output of the dam was too optimistic, 2) the geological conditions had not been adequately researched, and 3) there was a lack of articulation between the technical report and the business case. The Dutch government showed itself to be increasingly annoyed with the Surinamese government, not having been consulted during the entire process, and made clear that it would not be providing any financial guarantees were Suriname prove able to secure a loan for the project—which was exactly what Suriname was planning to ask for (Pollack, 2016).

- 29 In 1957, a deal suddenly emerged nonetheless. Alcoa had identified a loophole in US law. Under the Western Hemisphere Trade Corporation, a company's US taxes could be greatly reduced if it obtained at least 95 per cent of its income from activities elsewhere in the Americas. To comply with this condition, Alcoa set up a secondary company: the Suriname Aluminum Company (Suralco), which would undertake all of Alcoa's activities in Suriname, but which was legally and fiscally based in Delaware. As this option reduced the investment required, the project had become more commercially attractive in Alcoa's eyes—or so it said. Alcoa showed itself willing to fund the aluminium smelter and, in 1958, also the dam's construction and that of the road leading to it—but in return it demanded ownership of these structures for 75 years and an additional concession of 20,000 square kilometres for bauxite exploration in Suriname, of which 200 square kilometres could be used as actual mining areas once reserves had been found. When Prime Minister Johan Ferrier defended the deal in Parliament, some parliamentarians expressed the suspicion that these concessions were the true reason for Alcoa's sudden enthusiasm (cited in Pollack (2016)).
- 30 The Brokopondo Agreement was signed on 27 January 1958, and construction of the dam started the same year. On 1 February 1964, the dam was finished and the 'Prof.dr.ir. W.J. van Blommestein Lake', commonly referred to as 'Brokopondo Lake', started filling up. Seeing that the plan was going ahead in spite of its initial warnings, Billiton now also joined the project, allowing for an expansion of the aluminium smelter. Queen Juliana opened the smelter in 1965, and by the early 1970s Brokopondo Lake had reached its current water level (Pollack, 2016) (Figure 4).

Figure 4 The Brokopondo Dam



Source: Author, 2020.

## 5. But... What about the Population?

- 31 Let us now return to the Maroons, whom we had almost forgotten amidst the festivities. On 16 August 1958, an advisor reminded Prime Minister Ferrier that under the Brokopondo Agreement Suriname was responsible for the ‘removal of the population, the buildings and other property from the area of the artificial lake’.<sup>4</sup> Upstream of the location of the dam, but below the intended water level, lived approximately 6,000 Maroons, mostly Saamaka along the Suriname River, but also some Ndyuka along Sara Creek. In 1956, a representative of the government in the area had been asked not to discuss the Brokopondo plans with the population. Only in 1959, over a year after the Brokopondo Agreement was signed, was *gaamá* (Chief) Agbagó Abóikóni (in post 1951–89) of the Saamaka officially informed of the project—even though he stated he had been hearing rumours about the plans for ten years already. Agbagó demanded that the Maroons be included in plans for the development of the area, simultaneously deploring that any promises made to the Maroons were never fulfilled anyway in this new ‘economic slavery’ (cited in Scholtens (1994)).
- 32 The construction of the dam itself required around 2,100 workers, of which 1,800 would be recruited from local communities.<sup>5</sup> A common observation is that many of the Maroons who were helping to build the dam never themselves believed that it would actually cause their lands to flood. District Commissioner Jan Michels, the public authority in the area, stated during an interview with anthropologist Richard Price, ‘They were too much like children’. Saamaka author Carlo Hoop said the same, from a slightly different perspective: ‘The government treated the forest dwellers ... as primitive and childlike’. *Gaamá* Agbagó referred, in an interview with Price, to the peace treaties struck between the Dutch colony and the Saamaka people from the eighteenth century: ‘From Mawási to Adjámina and on up on the headwaters of this

river, that's for us Saramakas'. If they wanted the land back, he said, they would have to pay for it. But the 'Americans' simply arrived, with all their heavy equipment. 'They'd simply taken it away from us – our own land!' (all cited in Price, 2011).

**Figure 5** School children of the Saamaka Maroon community jumping rope in Ganzee, a village that later disappeared to make place for the Brokopondo Reservoir powering the aluminium smelter in Paramaribo



Source: Willem van de Pol (1948). Photo collection Van de Pol, Dutch National Archives, 2.24.14.02, 252-5769

- 33 In January 2020, I interviewed the retired schoolteacher Berry Vrede, born in 1943 in the now flooded Saamaka village of Ganzee, and currently residing in the outskirts of Paramaribo. Before the construction of the Brokopondo Dam, Ganzee used to be the largest Saamaka village, with 1,500 inhabitants (Figure 5). Given the long history of the missionary activities of the Moravian Church (Evangelische Broedergemeente (EBG)), the village had the most developed school system in the whole 'land of Saamaka'. Boys from Ganzee, like Berry Vrede, were trained as schoolteachers to work in the other villages. However, as they were required to teach in Dutch rather than *Saamaka Tongu*, Berry Vrede stated that 'the level of development was not such that we could talk about [the consequences of building a dam]. People thought: What God has built, how can they dam it? A river that we couldn't even swim across!'
- 34 The immediate impact of the construction activities was, according to Berry Vrede, a different one. 'Young people earned money building the dam; you could see the clothing change; you could hear other types of music; they could buy new items. Now they were Suralco employees, they obtained a diploma to operate a bulldozer! They could even find employment in Paramaribo.' The new wealth of the young people, while 'village elders earned a mere trifle in comparison', started eroding the authority of the traditional leadership. In the old times, Berry Vrede says, conflicts occurred mostly within relationships, marriages, families—there was hardly any crime, and all problems were solved by the village elders. 'Today, you need the police.'

35 As the Saamaka did not believe the dam would actually flood the area, they were not planning to leave. As Michels told Price: ‘Village elders would tell me they weren’t going anywhere—this was their land’. The longer the situation lasted, the more concerned the government officials responsible for the ‘transmigration’ became, as it was increasingly unlikely that the evacuation would occur in an orderly fashion. Eventually, the Saamaka only got ready to leave after the water started flooding the villages, and by then it was too late to take all their belongings with them. Saamaka author Dorus Vrede (1949–2020, not a close relative of Berry Vrede) remembered, in his short story *I won’t leave until the water touches my feet*:

The storm blew the water into the huts, of which the doors had been torn out by the inhabitants, as they had left the village in a great hurry. [...] An event like this had seldom been witnessed by the Bush Negroes and their ancestors. The water had never come this high, and never had it threatened them in this way. But it wasn’t a surprise. [...] They had been warned years ago already of the big dam that would be built in the river, and of what would happen if the water would be trapped behind it. But how could someone believe in water that would come till your doorstep? As long as the *obyas* [forest spirits] were alive, how could such a thing be possible? But the *obyas* didn’t perform any miracles, although they had not abandoned their people. Their power was not without limits. [...] That’s why the Bush Negroes rushed to leave the place where they had sworn they would stay even if the ocean invaded it. (Vrede, 1986)

36 In his story, Dorus Vrede had an explanation for the *obyas* not coming to the rescue—but Price (2011, 37) cites an informant according to whom

the forced relocation led to a crisis of the beliefs of the Maroon society. The gods and the ancestors, who are expected to protect the community, were unable to prevent the disasters. Traditional leaders who had assured their people that the water would not swallow their villages were proven wrong.

37 But what had the government in mind for the 6,000 displaced people? The Planbureau had created a separate entity to answer this question: the Brokopondo Bureau. A 1958 brochure from this office, entitled *Light and Power from the Jungles of Suriname*,<sup>6</sup> boasted about the improvements for the local population that would result from the project: ‘A piece of wilderness will be taken away from them and their needless isolation will come to an end. [...] Also for them, the Brokopondo Project is therefore of great value’. It was promised that new, better houses would be built, new employment generated, and that the displaced population would receive compensation for lost lands and fruit trees, free distribution of food during one year, and a coop with chickens per family. Twenty-five new villages sprang up: 12 smaller ones south of the lake, deeper into the country’s interior—where the newcomers would have to compete for scarce resources with the existing Saamaka villages of the Upper Suriname River basin—and 13 north and north-east of the lake, including Brownsweeg, the largest conglomerate of villages of all, which gathered together the populations of six to eight flooded villages, all of which came with their traditional leaders, leading to new conflicts.

38 Berry Vrede remembers that the ‘huts’, with their palm-thatched roofs in the original villages, were, in the so-called transmigration villages, replaced by ‘real houses: so we should be very happy’. The size of each house was based on the size of the original hut that each family had owned. But, Berry Vrede states, in the original villages there had been much more space. Apart from the ‘big house’ (*gaan wosu*), where the family would sleep, they used to have another, ‘small house’ (*pikin wosu*), where they could store their provisions, and sometimes some family members would also sleep there. Then

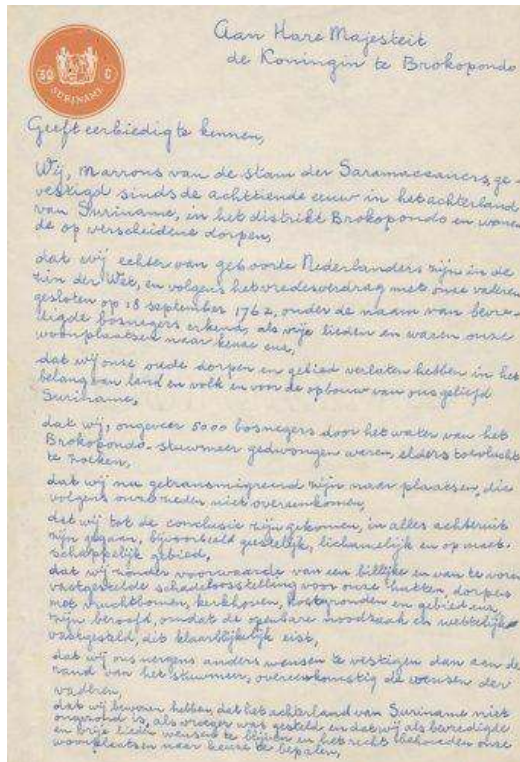
there was the *gangasá*, the cooking hut, with a palm-thatched roof on stilts and without walls—here, you could cook, eat, talk and more. Sometimes, families would even have a second *gangasá* for the preparation of foodstuffs. But most importantly, all these structures and the trees offered plenty of shade. Now, in the transmigration villages, only the size of the *gaan wosu* was taken into account, and your neighbour was living two metres away from you, and as soon as you stepped out of the house, you left all shade behind you.

- 39 The process of determining each family's compensation suffered from similar issues. For what was the value of a hut that was now under water? Monetary compensation offered to families finally equalled roughly 10 Surinamese guilders,<sup>7</sup> according to Berry Vrede, or 3 US dollars, according to Richard Price (2011). It was known that families had also owned fruit trees, scattered all over the forest, but how many? Families were asked to give an estimate, but, as Berry Vrede remarked, it could not be too high, 'otherwise they thought you were gambling'.
- 40 Maroons usually lived off their own land, with each family cultivating roughly 1.5 hectares for a year or two—then, the soil exhausted, they moved on to cut a new piece of forest. Maroon agriculture traditionally took place without tilling the soil, so that the tree roots stayed intact and the forest was allowed to grow back. In their new locations, they did not proceed differently: they cut a piece of forest and started cultivating crops. Berry Vrede remembers that this occurred 'around Brownsweg, along the Atjoni Road—but these areas had already been given in concession, and then someone would show up and say: Nice to see that you've planted; you can harvest your rice and your cassava, but you shouldn't plant again'. The displaced population was not compensated for the land it had lost, nor was it provided with new lands to cultivate as its property structures functioned in ways that the Surinamese authorities could not understand—in the same way that the colonial authorities before them had not grasped or registered them. Within the communities, everyone knew which forest areas belonged to which family or *lö* (subtribe), but now the government was claiming that the flooded lands had no known owner. Only a Guyanese man who had lived in Ganzee—a *balata* banker (who provided loans to local rubber tappers and would buy up their harvest)—received full compensation, as he owned a fenced garden containing fruit trees, which was easy to recognise and measure. And, according to Berry Vrede, 'because the responsible inspectors were staying in his house'.
- 41 Particularly painful was the fact that the Maroons had been removed from their villages in order to generate electricity, but that the transmigration villages themselves had not been connected to the grid. Thus, the Maroons lacked both electricity and clean water in their new homes.<sup>8</sup>
- 42 It was clear that the transmigration created a lot of anger among the Maroons. The Dutch Army realised this: a series of helicopters was put on standby during the operation, to be used if there were protests. In an internal note, the responsible commander informed the Governor of Suriname (the highest Dutch representative) that irregularities could occur, as the population 'on mere personal and religious grounds' resented their resettlement.<sup>9</sup>
- 43 In the end, active resistance to the transmigration was limited, not least because the rising water left no time for collective action. Maroons did, however, express their discontent after the event, including in a letter to Queen Juliana indicating the deterioration of their situation due to their displacement (Figure 6). They requested



fair compensation for what they had lost, referring to their rights under the 1762 peace treaties.

Figure 6 First page of the letter from the Saamaka community to Queen Juliana, 1965



Source: 'Stukken betreffende de transmigratie van Bosnegers', pp. 37–38

- 44 When Queen Juliana visited the area once more for the opening of the aluminium smelter, she was handed a pamphlet authored by a certain Toelingha Martin, who claimed to represent 'Saamaka popular committees' in which 5,000 Saamaka were united. It stated that 'the Saamaka are currently living in disgraceful conditions in their new places of residence, which are concentration camps'. Martin's note announced that any representative of the Surinamese government was henceforward forbidden from entering Saamaka land. To ensure compliance with this unilaterally established rule, and recalling the eighteenth-century treaties, Martin requested support from the Dutch Army. The Dutch Army formally answered that it could not offer support, and advised Martin to send his request to the Surinamese authorities instead.<sup>10</sup> The Surinamese authorities, however, told the elders of the different villages to dissolve the popular committees. The elders refused. Gaamá Agbagó declared his solidarity with the committees. The complainants in Brownswey referred to a 'revolution' that had just begun, and said that any representative of the Surinamese government would be welcomed with gunfire, as plenty of weapons had been delivered to them by Brazilian smugglers. They threatened to burn down the police station, because 'the Bushland Creoles desire complete separation, for which they, if necessary, can rely upon support from outside'.<sup>11</sup> A long struggle lay ahead of them, in which ultimately there would be no winners.

## 6. Independence, War, and the Closure of the Mines and Factories

- 45 Flash forward. In the year 2022, looking back at the history of bauxite and alumina and aluminium production in Suriname, we can see that the government's expectations regarding modernisation through bauxite-based industrialisation have remained a vision unfulfilled. Yes, Suriname managed to perform all the steps of the value chain from bauxite to aluminium on national soil, but it paid a high price.
- 46 After the country became independent in 1975, it raised its own armed forces—a faction of which, only five years after independence, committed a coup d'état and installed a military government under Sergeant Dési Bouterse. Under his regime, the conflict with the Maroons reached boiling point in the so-called War of the Interior ('*Binnenlandse Oorlog*'), which lasted from 1986 to 1992 and greatly impacted the Maroon communities. The conflict caused one out of three inhabitants of the interior to flee their villages—25,000 people in total. Today, 83,000 Maroons reside in and around Paramaribo, while the French-Guianese town of Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, just across the Maroni River, which forms the border with Suriname, has a Maroon population of 31,000, mostly Surinamese refugees and their descendants (Price, 2018). Contrasting this with the 57,000 Maroons who still reside in Suriname's interior (the '*binnenland*'), including semi-urban areas like Moengo and Brownsweg, we can safely conclude that Maroons in their majority have shifted from a rural to an urban setting in only a few decades.
- 47 The War of the Interior also established the position of the guerrilla fighter turned politician Ronnie Brunswijk. A Ndyuka Maroon born in 1961 in a village close to Moengo, Brunswijk, with his 'Jungle Commando', unleashed the Maroon guerrillas against Bouterse in spite of express objections from the traditional Maroon leadership, including the Saamaka *gaamá* Agbagó and his Ndyuka counterpart *gaanman* Gazon Matodya (in post 1965–2011). Thus, Brunswijk effectively sidelined these leadership structures, replacing them with a new authority based on military might. Brunswijk's Jungle Commando came to control large parts of Maroon lands, and extracted surplus resources from them, requesting a share of the proceeds of the illegal activities that were increasingly undertaken in the interior by smugglers, Brazilian goldminers (*garimpeiros*), and the prostitutes catering to them (Hoogbergen and Kruijt, 2005). The war ended when Brunswijk and Bouterse announced their reconciliation, and the two men have since collaborated on numerous occasions. Brunswijk is currently the vice president of Suriname, heading the Party for General Liberation and Development (ABOP), which is especially popular among Maroons.
- 48 The various events that have uprooted the Maroon communities have caused them to suffer from an overall erosion of authority. Berry Vrede describes how in the old times people refrained from violent crime out of fear of the *kunu*, the revenge spirit. The War of the Interior changed this, as young men joined the guerrilla movement and saw that nothing happened after they had killed government soldiers. As such, the traditional norms of the Maroons started to change, and their armed youth became more powerful than their village elders.
- 49 During a trip I undertook in the first months of 2020 to certain mining sites, I was able to observe (and confirm with interviewees) that former company towns like Moengo and Paranam are today inhabited by a Maroon majority. Many Maroons settled in these

towns when the War of the Interior made it increasingly unsafe for them to remain in their villages of origin, while at the same time the employees of the bauxite and aluminium industries started to abandon the towns. The Maroons have mostly settled in the neighbourhoods where Surinamese workers used to live. The former expatriate dwellings, the ‘staff villages’ with their nice bungalows and swimming pools, are in a state of decay and surrounded by ‘No entry’ signs. No industrial activity is to be found. How can this demise of the sector be explained?

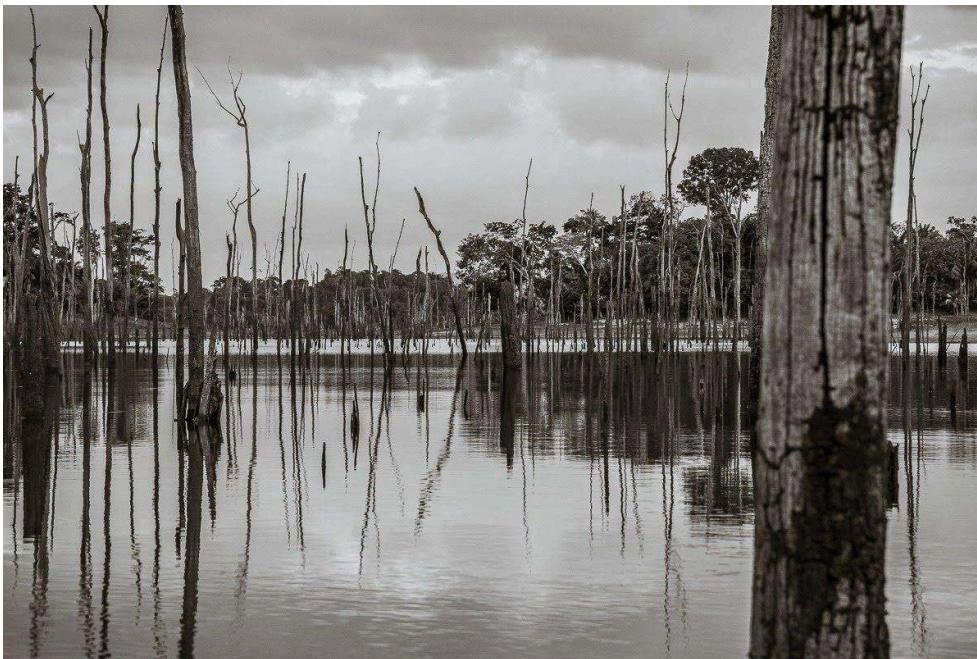
- 50 Immediately after the construction of the Brokopondo Dam, Suriname experienced an episode of considerable economic growth, mainly due to the expansion of aluminium exports. Other sectors did not reflect this growth, causing the Surinamese economy to become increasingly tied to the international aluminium market. Whereas the original Brokopondo Plan had envisaged local development in the area affected by the lake, in the final (and only) offer of financing that Suriname received the regional development component was much less important, and ownership of the dam was transferred to Suralco, hence to Alcoa. Creating jobs, attracting new investments, reinvesting in the Surinamese economy: these were not priorities for Suralco, and most of the revenue from the sector flowed abroad (Pollack, 2016).
- 51 Over the course of the 1970s, new bauxite reserves were identified in other countries, notably Australia, Brazil and Guinea. While Guinea mostly supplied European and North American smelters, Australia and Brazil quickly developed their own aluminium smelters, relying on locally developed hydroelectric potential. Just a few years after the completion of the Brokopondo Dam, Suriname was already struggling to keep up with other aluminium producers, mostly due to economies of scale and the low profit margins of the Paranam smelter. Moreover, as Suriname’s economy was almost exclusively based on aluminium, its imports of all other goods were heavily dependent on the price of aluminium. When the oil price started rising while aluminium prices remained stable, Suriname introduced an aluminium levy to allow it to maintain its level of imports. The country did not consider currency devaluation, and remained unwilling to unpeg its currency from the US dollar. And at the same time the labour unions in Suriname were strong, and effective in preventing any erosion of their members’ salaries (Pollack, 2016). While the price of Surinamese aluminium was thus particularly inflexible, the large aluminium producers (such as Alcoa) lost their price-setting power over the course of the 1970s. The exploding supply of bauxite and aluminium worldwide transferred this price-setting power to aluminium consumers, united in the London Metal Exchange (LME) (Barjot, 2019). Aluminium from Suriname, one of the only ‘developing’ countries to have an aluminium industry, had become simply too expensive for the international market. Moreover, bauxite reserves started to become exhausted, but no investments were made to exploit new resources.
- 52 The War of the Interior did the rest: The mining facilities in the Moengo area became a target for the actions of the Jungle Commando (classified as ‘terrorist attacks’ and ‘sabotage and vandalism’—both classifications cited in Pollack, 2016). Bauxite mining came to a halt, and in order to keep the smelter going, bauxite had to be imported from Brazil. When the power lines linking the Brokopondo Dam to the smelter in Paranam were blown up in 1987, aluminium production was interrupted altogether. Several attempts to restart the sector were undertaken, during and after the war, but to no avail. While significant investments were made to repair the damaged infrastructure, world aluminium prices kept falling. In 1999, Suralco announced the closure of the

smelter (Pollack, 2016), and in 2015 the refinery that used to produce alumina was also closed (Boselovic and Lord, 2018). Ultimately, Suralco had only one asset left: electricity from the Brokopondo Dam, of which only a small portion had been sufficient to power all of Paramaribo. Therefore, before turning off the lights in its facilities, Suralco needed a deal with the government to sell the electricity generated (Pollack, 2016).

- 53 The deal defining the terms under which Suralco would leave Suriname has been the subject of controversy. The company was allegedly willing to make a significant investment in the environmental clean-up of the area where its operations had taken place. According to Hugo Blanker, retired teacher, union leader, journalist and TV personality, this has not materialised: ‘They have only buried the polluted soil under 2 metres of sand: would that be sufficient?’ Blanker was born in 1950 and grew up in the village of Onverdacht, 5 kilometres from the Paranam aluminium smelter, where his father worked. In August 2019, while the ‘Alcoa affair’ was being discussed in parliament, Blanker showed up in the press box with a sizable Surinamese flag, protesting against the plundering of the Surinamese economy. Security escorted him to the exit, but his action attracted some media attention (*Suriname Nieuws*, 2019).
- 54 I spent an enjoyable afternoon with Blanker in a house in the Billiton staff village near Paranam, which he squatted in 2019. After Billiton ceased its operations in Suriname, the ‘expat village’ was supposed to be demolished, but 17 years later the jungle had overtaken it. Now Blanker and his new neighbours are making it inhabitable again. ‘I had hoped the whole nation would work together to negotiate a good deal with Alcoa, but from left to right, I haven’t heard anything from them,’ he says, while hammering on what should become an outdoor bar in his new garden—‘the people have not been heard on this’.
- 55 Since 2015, there have been discussions in the country’s parliament and in the media about a mysterious Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Alcoa and Suriname. The government was said to have signed this agreement, while the parliament rejected it. Whether or not parliament’s approval is necessary, however, is subject to debate among lawyers—as a result of which it remains unclear whether the MoU is valid or not (Essed, 2018). According to energy consultant and lawyer Viren Ajodhia, the signed text of the MoU cannot be found anywhere online. Apart from the environmental clean-up, the deal must, surely, have contained provisions regarding the price that Suriname would pay Suralco for the electricity (tied to the oil price, rather than the much cheaper cost price of hydroelectricity), as well as the date on which the Brokopondo Dam would be transferred to Suriname. According to Ajodhia, Suriname had, under the Brokopondo Agreement with its duration of 75 years, expected to reap benefits from Alcoa’s presence in the country until 2033. Now that the company has left much earlier, with the mines closed, a sizable piece of land flooded, and a lot of environmental damage, Suriname even has to pay for the electricity, whereas ‘Suriname should have told them to pay compensation!’ Ajodhia estimates that the outcome of the negotiations has been very negative for Suriname, and ‘the suspicion, of course, is of corruption’.
- 56 Suriname created the Brokopondo Dam to obtain cheap electricity and to modernise the country through aluminium exports. It currently does not export even bauxite, and is paying oil prices for its electricity. Brokopondo Lake was expected to have numerous side benefits, such as opportunities for fish breeding. However, since the area was not stripped of its forest cover prior to its flooding, dead trees both above and below the

water still obstruct navigation today (Figure 7), and eutrophication severely affects the fish stocks. In several areas of Suriname's interior, gold mining is the only sector offering employment to a population that can no longer rely on its traditional livelihoods. The Rosebel gold mine employs a significant proportion of the population of nearby 'transmigration villages' like Koffiekamp and Brownsweg, but even more Maroons are involved in artisanal gold mining, alongside immigrants from Brazil (De Theije and Heemskerk, 2009). The expanding gold mining activities have led to mercury pollution in the Maroni River and in Brokopondo Lake, for example, leading to health problems related to consuming fish from these waters. The story of Suriname's bauxite boom is definitely over. But the boom's ecological impacts remain.

Figure 7 A branch of Lake Brokopondo with its dead trees



Source: Ted Sun, Ston Island, January 2020

## 7. Conclusion

- 57 The case of the bauxite and aluminium industries of Suriname is illustrative of how dreams of modernity (Sheller, 2014) can go wrong. Countries in the global South have often used industrialisation and import substitution as strategies for development, but only occasionally do these help lift them out of poverty and improve the living conditions of the majority of the population. Often, the process of decolonisation has transferred power to particular groups in society, who take decisions based on the colonial model of the capitalisation of resources, to the detriment of those who in colonial society are generally looked down upon: the 'primitive', the 'untamed', the 'unmodern'.
- 58 In the case of Suriname, the idea of bringing an entire value chain into the country and thus becoming an aluminium producer had been floated a long time before it finally became a reality. The plan for the Brokopondo Dam, originally a one-size-fits-all solution copy-pasted from the Dutch East Indies, did not appeal to international

investors, who considered it commercially unattractive. Several companies had turned down invitations to become involved in the project, but the Surinamese government, fuelled by its Planbureau, insisted—its entire vision of development depended on it. When Alcoa finally stepped aboard, the entire plan was executed with respect to its conditions, which ultimately turned out to be unfavourable for the majority of Suriname’s population. The project did provide benefits for certain groups in society, and may even have helped to speed up the process of independence, but the economic heyday was short-lived as the profit margins were slim and Suriname quickly lost the market to its much bigger competitors.

- 59 Suriname apparently failed to recognise a series of challenges to its aluminium-based industrialisation plan. It disregarded reports that showed how small the profit margin was, and thus how vulnerable the sector would be if aluminium prices were to fall. Second, the country relied exclusively on one commodity, and gave no support to other sectors during the heyday of aluminium exportation. Third, it entrusted its economic future to a single, foreign company, which could easily shift production to other countries. But most importantly, it underestimated how the industry would uproot the local Maroon communities, eventually leading to political disruption at the national level.
- 60 The Maroon population of the sites where bauxite mining and hydroelectricity generation took place was mostly seen as a nuisance by development advocates. When it was no longer possible to keep the Maroons out of the picture of Suriname’s industrial dream, and a solution had to be found for their presence in the area, aspects of their identity that were especially ‘unmodern’ were accentuated: their irrationality, primitivity, religiosity—their otherness. In this way, they could be easily framed as ‘opposed to development’, and therefore not worthy of consideration. The alternative livelihoods offered to them were inadequate, and the process led to significant movements of migration and deculturation. Not only did the bauxite and aluminium sectors flood, pollute and deforest ancestral Maroon lands, they also set in motion a process that would change their traditional lifestyles, which for centuries had kept Suriname’s rainforest landscapes in check. Now, the Maroon population is a young and urban one, looking for new livelihood opportunities, while its traditional leadership has been side-lined by its new political representatives, who are themselves heavily involved in illegal activities. The Maroons are the new urban poor, dwelling in newly emerging slums, or crafting out a living in the artisanal gold mines of the interior. Ultimately, aluminium has not delivered on its promises of development and modernity.

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## NOTES

1. ‘Aluminium’ is the name used in Commonwealth English for the same metal that in North America is referred to as ‘aluminum’. Both terms refer to the pure metal and should not be confused with ‘alumina’, the term used for aluminium oxide (Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>).
2. In 2001, Billiton merged with BHP to form BHP Billiton, which today is once more known simply as BHP.
3. Not to be confused with the previously existing ‘Lawa train line’ from Paramaribo to the gold fields in central Suriname. The Lawa train line was eventually flooded by the Brokopondo Dam, and the new train line proposed in 1952 was never built.
4. ‘Stukken betreffende de bouw van de stuwdam bij Brokopondo, 1957-1961’. Dutch National Archives, The Hague: Gouverneur van Suriname, Kabinet, number 2.10.26, folder 1364, p. 128.
5. Or at least this was originally envisaged. ‘Stukken betreffende de bouw’, p. 128.
6. Brokopondo Bureau, 1958. *Licht en kracht uit de oerwouden van Suriname*. Dutch National Archives, The Hague: Archief van de Vertegenwoordiger van de STICUSA in Suriname 1956-1975, number 3.1, folder 660.
7. Contemporary US dollar value difficult to ascertain.
8. And then there was Operation Gwamba, launched by the International Society for the Protection of Animals and led by 23-year-old American John Walsh, to save the animals trapped by the rising water. District Commissioner Michels, even though he belonged to the government team that was implementing the Brokopondo project, expressed support for the private operation, as he could not ‘passively see the drowning of thousands of animals without taking any action’ (Walsh and Gannon, 1967). But while Walsh took most of the credit for the work, pictures of the operation clearly show that he was aided by a team of Maroons in saving the more than 9,000 animals. Some of these helpers would later bitterly complain that more effort had been made to save the animals than to save the people.
9. ‘Stukken betreffende de transmigratie van Bosnegers uit het gebied van het geplande Brokopondo-stuwmeer en de opvang van deze transmigranten in het kamp Brownsweg.’ Dutch National Archives, The Hague. Digitaal Duplicaat: Gouverneur van Suriname, Kabinet, number 2.10.26, folder 2661, pp. 24–35.
10. Dutch National Archives, The Hague. Digitaal Duplicaat: Gouverneur van Suriname, Kabinet, number 2.10.26, folder 2661, pp. 45–58.
11. Dutch National Archives, The Hague. Digitaal Duplicaat: Gouverneur van Suriname, Kabinet, number 2.10.26, folder 2661, pp. 59–64.

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## ABSTRACTS

Suriname was one of the first countries in the global South to produce aluminium. The establishment of this industry, including the hydroelectric dam that was meant to power it, was the key idea upon which Suriname's entire dream of modernity and independence was constructed. Negotiations with the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) resulted in Suriname accepting a treaty under which hardly any benefits accumulated in the country itself, while the establishment of the industry caused loss of land, environmental damage and the deculturation of the Surinamese Maroon communities. After these revolted against the state, Alcoa left the country, leaving behind an 'aluminium landscape' where aluminium is no longer produced, but where the original population, insofar as its members have not moved to the cities, is still heavily affected by the changes caused by the Surinamese aluminium boom.

Le Suriname a été l'un des premiers pays du Sud à produire de l'aluminium. La création de cette industrie, y compris le barrage hydroélectrique qui devait l'alimenter, a été l'idée maîtresse sur laquelle s'est construit tout le rêve de modernité et d'indépendance du Suriname. Les négociations avec l'Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) ont abouti à l'acceptation par le Suriname d'un traité en vertu duquel pratiquement aucun bénéfice ne soit accumulé dans le pays lui-même alors que l'implantation de l'industrie a entraîné la perte de terres, des dommages environnementaux et la déculturation des communautés marrons du Suriname. Après que ces dernières se soient révoltées contre l'État, Alcoa a quitté le pays, laissant derrière elle un 'paysage d'aluminium' dans lequel on ne produit plus d'aluminium, mais où la population d'origine, dans la mesure où ses membres ne se sont pas déplacés vers les villes, est encore fortement affectée par les changements provoqués par le boom de l'aluminium au Suriname.

Surinam fue uno de los primeros países del Sur global en producir aluminio. El establecimiento de esta industria, incluida la presa hidroeléctrica que debía alimentarla, fue la idea clave sobre la que se construyó todo el sueño de modernidad e independencia de Surinam. Las negociaciones con la Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) dieron como resultado que Surinam aceptara un tratado en virtud del cual prácticamente no se acumulaban beneficios en el propio país, mientras que el establecimiento de la industria provocó la pérdida de tierras, daños medioambientales y la desculturización de las comunidades cimarronas surinamesas. Después de que éstas se rebelaran contra el Estado, Alcoa abandonó el país, dejando tras de sí un "paisaje del aluminio" en el que ya no se produce aluminio, pero en el que la población original, en la medida en que sus miembros no se han trasladado a las ciudades, sigue muy afectada por los cambios provocados por el boom del aluminio surinamés.

## INDEX

**Geographical index:** Suriname

**Keywords:** extractivism, aluminium, bauxite, hydroelectricity, neo-colonialism, independence, industry, livelihood security, history, inequalities

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