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Hoefte, Rosemarijn; Bishop, Matthew; Clegg, Peter  
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## STILL LONELY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS? CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT IN THE 'THREE GUIANAS'

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*Rosemarijn Hoefte*

*Matthew Bishop*

*Peter Clegg*

### ABSTRACT

Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana have traditionally been seen as isolated: from each other; from the Caribbean with which they are socially and culturally contiguous; and also from the South American continent in which they are geographically situated. Moreover, divided by language and relationships of varying intensity with their former colonisers, very little research exists which analyzes their development predicament collectively. This article seeks to overcome some of these deficiencies. It shows how similar processes of change internally, regionally and globally are provoking new patterns of development and engagement with the world in all three Guianas. The central conclusion of the paper points towards the need for a new research agenda which focuses on these unique territories as distinctive prisms through which to view various dimensions of contemporary globalisation. These include emerging Brazilian hegemony in South America, the ecological devastation wrought by extractive industries, the accompanying clandestine trade in humans and narcotics which flourishes in regions with fuzzy borders, limited state reach, and, in some cases, compromised—and potentially even partially criminalized—state institutions themselves, and the precarious position of indigenous Amerindian and Maroon communities.

**Keywords:** Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, Caribbean, Latin America, regionalization

### RESUMEN

Guyana, Surinam y la Guyana Francesa tradicionalmente se han considerado como aisladas entre sí, del Caribe, con el cual están relacionadas social y culturalmente; y también del continente suramericano donde se encuentran localizadas geográficamente. Aún más, divididas por el lenguaje y las relaciones de variada intensidad con sus antiguos colonizadores, existen pocas investigaciones que analicen su situación de desarrollo en conjunto. Este artículo tiene como propósito el superar algunas de estas deficiencias. Se demuestra cómo los procesos similares

de cambios internos, regionales y globales están provocando nuevos patrones de desarrollo y compromiso con el mundo en las tres Guayanas. La principal conclusión del artículo señala la necesidad de una nueva agenda de investigación que enfoque estos territorios únicos como distintos prismas a través del cual se puedan ver las distintas dimensiones de la globalización contemporánea.

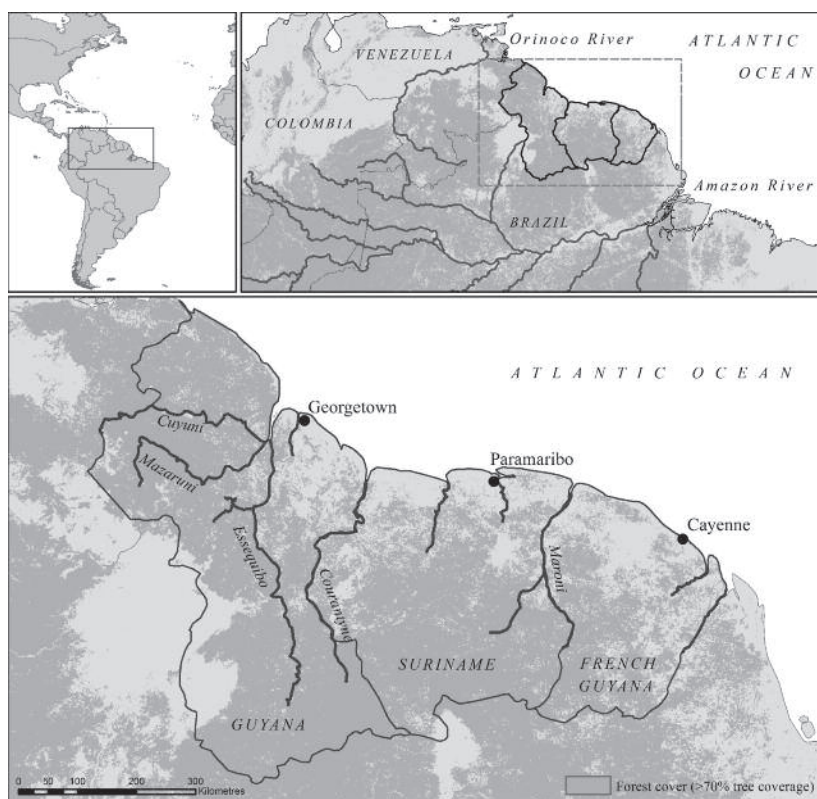
**Palabras clave:** Guyana, Surinam, Guayana Francesa, Caribe, América Latina, regionalización

#### RÉSUMÉ

Le Guyana, le Suriname et la Guyane française ont été traditionnellement considérés comme isolés l'un de l'autre; des Caraïbes avec lesquels ils sont socialement et culturellement contigus; et aussi du continent latino-américain dans lequel ils sont situés géographiquement. En outre, divisés par la langue et les relations d'intensité variable avec leurs anciens colonisateurs, il existe très peu de recherches qui analysent leur situation de développement collectivement. Cet article cherche à surmonter certaines de ces lacunes. Il montre comment les processus similaires de changement interne, régional et mondial sont en train de provoquer de nouveaux modèles de développement et d'engagement avec le monde dans les trois Guyanes. La conclusion centrale de cet article pointe vers la nécessité d'un nouveau programme de recherche qui se concentre sur ces territoires uniques comme prismes distinctifs pour voir les différentes dimensions de la mondialisation contemporaine.

**Mots-clés :** le Guyana, le Suriname, la Guyane française, la Caraïbe, l'Amérique latine, régionalisation

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NB: This map represents the internationally accepted borders of the Guianas; it does not show those which are contested by Guyana, Suriname and Venezuela.

## Introduction

The territories of Guyana (formerly British Guiana), Suriname (formerly also known in English as Dutch Guiana) and French Guiana represent a uniquely challenging and interesting comparative case study of development. Situated on the north-eastern coast of the South American mainland, the ‘Three Guianas’ occupy a distinctive position in the region, the hemisphere and the broader global political economy. They are similar in many ways: from their physical geography, to the complex social, economic and ecological challenges that they face. However, there exists little comparative literature which addresses their politics, society or economics collectively, and the work which is available tends to treat one or the other in isolation. Indeed, isolation is the common theme; as noted in a recent *New York Times* article (Jacobs 2012), it is ‘loneliness’ which has traditionally distinguished the

Guianas' limited engagement with the world.

Such loneliness plays out in a number of ways. First, they are alienated geographically from a wider Caribbean with which they are historically and socio-economically contiguous. Their similar history of sugar slavery and the colonial plantation, along with a demographic and social structure which—although more complex and kaleidoscopic—resembles that of the island Caribbean to the north, together render them fundamentally West Indian societies. Yet they are, because of their size, low population densities, distinctive ecology and unique challenges, also Caribbean countries apart. Second, they are also estranged from the wider South American continent. The Guianas' experience of colonialism was not a Spanish or Portuguese one, and the Amazon rainforest, which forms an enormous band across their respective interiors, has long cut them off from the South American countries with which they share the same land mass. Third, they are also alienated from each other. Contrasting patterns of British, French and Dutch colonialism have left them with distinct social and political legacies; these manifest themselves with a range of unique and often exclusionary pathologies.

If this is the conventional story of the Three Guianas, our goal in this article is to subject it to critical scrutiny. Specifically, we offer something of a corrective by showing how, in the contemporary era, their domestic and international relations—along with the development that this implies—are transforming rapidly. The analysis consequently unfolds in the following way. We begin by explaining the unique history of these territories, and outlining the conventional story described above in a little more detail. Then, in the substantive parts of the paper, we uncover the transformations which are taking place. We organize this empirical analysis around three concentric circles which move steadily outwards: firstly, from the coast, where most of the population and much economic and political activity has been traditionally located, to the interior, where much development has lately taken place, and the opening up of which is particularly pronounced; secondly, the regional and continental context, which incorporates relations with Brazil, South America as a whole, and the wider Caribbean; and, thirdly, their location within the broader hemispheric and global context which brings into view relations with North America, Europe, and newer players such as China. The analysis here addresses a range of issues: not only the changing landscape of formal politics, but also relations with other social forces, all of which are coming to bear on transformative processes of migration, mineral extraction, agriculture, industrialization, drug and human trafficking, and so on. Finally, we conclude the paper by reflecting on the implications of the foregoing analysis, before speculating about how the processes we have identified are likely to continue to unfold.

## Historical Background

All three territories have undergone a similar process of European imperialism with comparable implications for their longer term development. Early in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, it was the Dutch who settled the whole of what was then called 'The Wild Coast', which essentially means the coastal region between the Orinoco and Amazon rivers. At one time, therefore, it may actually have been proper to speak of Five Guianas, but both Portuguese and Spanish Guiana have experienced different destinies: the former is today the state of Amapá in Brazil, and the latter now comprises a large swathe of contemporary Venezuela. Yet despite their similar initial experience of colonialism, the three remaining Guianas were eventually settled by different colonial powers.

It is the shared history of sugar and slavery which has marked these continental territories as contiguous with the island Caribbean as part of 'Plantation America' (Wagley 1957). However, this history also played out in distinctive ways between the three. All of them had to tackle several ecological problems, including forest clearing and constructing polders, in order to cultivate sugar and other tropical consumer products, and they utilized West African and Brazilian slaves to do so. However, this was more pronounced in British Guiana and Suriname; further south, lands were poorer, and the turmoil of the French and Haitian revolutions meant that French Guiana was never developed as a colony to quite the same extent (Aldrich and Connell 2006). Maintaining sugar production proved difficult, particularly immediately before and after the abolition of slavery, which took place in British Guiana in 1832, in French Guiana in 1848, and in Suriname in 1863. In all three, significant numbers of indentured labourers were brought in from India and to a lesser extent China, and in Suriname also from the Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia) in order to keep the plantations running as many freed slaves sought livelihoods elsewhere. As the 19<sup>th</sup> Century wore on, all three territories witnessed a gold rush. At the same time, and uniquely, French Guiana also became institutionalized as a penal colony. Into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, agriculture no longer remained the most important motor of development. In both British Guiana and Suriname the mining of bauxite, a key ingredient in aluminium, became the mainstay of the economy in the 1940s. In French Guiana, industrial development was less pronounced. In fact, the territory's role as primarily a penal colony—and little else—continued until well into the 1950s.

In tandem with economic change and impending decolonization, distinctive domestic political, economic and social arrangements began to emerge. Decolonization actually came first in French Guiana, in 1946. In the French Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, local

elites actively sought decolonization by integration into the French state. After World War II France moved quickly to turn these two islands along with French Guiana and Réunion in the Indian Ocean, into Overseas Departments, with essentially the same status as those on the mainland. Huge transfers of finance from Paris resulted in the rapid creation of essentially 'first world' levels of infrastructure. These exist, often uneasily, with an economy which provides for a very high material standard of living for many, but which is largely dependent on metropolitan transfers in order to sustain it. Politics in French Guiana have developed in a similarly idiosyncratic fashion. On the one hand, the territory regularly undergoes the usual panoply of French and European elections. On the other, it is the local General and Regional Councils where 'domestic' politics, such as it is, plays out. It is generally social democratic parties which dominate, although there is a very influential autochthonous party, Walwari, which is also leftist in orientation.

In British Guiana, strong labour unions emerged during the 1950s, the most important being the British Guiana Labour Union. An associated political party was later established, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) led by Cheddi Jagan (of Indian descent) and Forbes Burnham (of African descent). In 1953, a new constitution was enacted and elections were held which the PPP won. However, soon after, the British government, with support of the United States (US), suspended the constitution claiming that the PPP's reform programme could lead to communist dictatorship. This then precipitated a period of political and ethnic unrest. The PPP split and a new party was established in 1957—the People's National Congress (PNC)—under the leadership of Burnham. As Premdas (1995:115) argued, 'a new pattern was set: a divided African and Indian leadership, each at the helm of a separate party, elicited and exploited sectional fears and prejudices in order to obtain votes'. British Guiana (as Guyana) achieved independence in 1966 and the divisions became institutionalised in favour of the Afro-Guyanese under the leadership of Burnham. His position was consolidated through electoral fraud and the introduction of 'Cooperative Socialism'. This period witnessed significant outward migration, particularly of the educated classes, and the atrophying of the economy, such that Guyana is today the second poorest country in the hemisphere, after Haiti. In 1985, Burnham died and left his successor Desmond Hoyte to liberalize the economy and introduce free and fair elections. These were held in 1992 and saw the return of the PPP. From then until 2011 the PPP dominated electoral politics but did little to bridge the ethnic divide. As a result, the country was hamstrung by political disputes and ethnic violence.

Suriname celebrated its independence in 1975, after obtaining autonomy from the Netherlands in 1954. The years immediately

preceding and following independence witnessed mass emigration of all ethnic groups and all social classes. Politically more far-reaching was a military coup in 1980. Under the command of Sergeant Desiré ('Desi') Bouterse, the military took over the government, but following major human rights violations, including the execution of 15 members of the opposition, and economic mismanagement, the regime quickly lost support. The hesitant re-democratization process (1984-1988) was complicated by the Interior War (1986-1992) which pitted the national army against disgruntled groups of Maroons (descendants of runaway slaves). With the exception of the military period, ethnic parties have dominated the political arena. A plethora of new and established parties based on ethnicity or religion rather than ideology make Surinamese politics hard to decipher; parties have to form coalitions as no party has ever held a majority, and there exists a wider range of major ethnic groups with political purchase than, for example, in Guyana. Clientelism is the driving force in Surinamese politics, while the parties suffer from personalism, fragmentation, secrecy, and bully-boy tactics. The election of Bouterse as president in 2010 displayed these characteristics in full.

**Table 1 – The Three Guianas**

	<b>Guyana</b>	<b>Suriname</b>	<b>French Guiana</b>
<b>Population (2012)</b>	795,369	534,541	239,500
<b>Land Mass</b>	196,850 km <sup>2</sup>	156,000 km <sup>2</sup>	83,846 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Of which is forested (%)</b>	77.2%	94.6%	96%
<b>Population Density (people per km<sup>2</sup>)</b>	4	3.4	2.9
<b>GDP (current USD in 2012)</b>	\$2.85 billion	\$4.74 billion	\$4.76 billion
<b>GDP Per Capita (current USD in 2012)</b>	\$3,584	\$8,864	\$20,226

Sources: UN World Development Indicators, INSEE, iEDOM.

Finally, as illustrated by the data in Table 1, and from our previous discussions, the Three Guianas exhibit a range of socio-economic differences. Guyana is 25 percent larger than Suriname, which itself is around double the size of French Guiana. All three are sparsely populated, and have some of the lowest population densities in the world, although there are discernible differences in population size: French Guiana has



barely a quarter of a million inhabitants, something which is reflective of the broader historical lack of productive development to which we have alluded; Suriname has around double this; and Guyana another quarter of a million more. It is also interesting to note that Suriname has been able to generate levels of GDP per capita which are more than double that of Guyana; the latter's weaker economic performance is in large measure a result of the cumulative impact of the lost years under Burnham. By contrast, Suriname was decolonized later, has retained more profitable financial links to the Netherlands, and has, over time, developed a broader range of commodity export industries. Contemporary French Guiana is even more developed in pure income terms, although as we see later this comes as the *quid pro quo* of a very peculiar economy.

### From Coast to Interior

The Three Guianas exhibit analogous—yet, in many ways, subtly different—patterns of settlement and development. All three are highly urbanized; the vast majority of people—up to 90 percent of the population—live close to the coast, and principally around and within the capital cities of Georgetown and Cayenne. These cities, and the coastal regions around them, represent the traditional centres of political and economic activity. Conversely, the sparsely populated interiors have always lacked strict government control, and are something of a 'free zone' where both local populations and foreign fortune seekers have been able to exploit natural resources without much official oversight. It is also a 'forgotten area' where the state often fails to provide adequate educational and health facilities and utilities. Since the turn of the millennium, however, there has been increasing levels of development in the interior, particularly in Guyana and Suriname. Also, the further inside the territories one ventures, not only are the challenges faced replete with similarities, but the boundaries between the three become infinitely fuzzier.

Agriculture and fishing are traditionally located in the flat coastal area. Accurate figures are hard to come by because of variations between different institutions in methods of calculation and dissemination, but Guyana's primary sector is by far the largest, accounting for around a quarter of output. In Suriname, the figure is closer to 10 percent, and in French Guiana it is far less (4 percent). In Guyana, sugarcane and rice are still produced in large volumes, whereas the former has disappeared completely in Suriname and rice is cultivated mainly in the district bordering Guyana. Higher value-added industrial production is considerably more important in Suriname (at around 40 percent of GDP), while in Guyana such activity accounts for around 25 percent of

output. A relatively new activity in the offshore coastal and marine area that Guyana and Suriname share is the oil industry with companies from Canada, Spain and elsewhere undertaking drilling. It is claimed that the Guyana Basin could hold up to 15 billion barrels of oil and 1.2 trillion cubic meters of natural gas (Sanders 2012b). In French Guiana, there have been attempts at exploration, but so far no oil has been found.

The public sector, sustained by transfers provided by Paris and Brussels, renders the economy of French Guiana quite different to those of its neighbours. Of course, the territory is not strictly a state in itself, something which makes governance structures—buttressed as they are by the central French state—generally more robust and developed. French Guiana also has a much more extensively developed internal infrastructure than Guyana and Suriname. Enormous amounts of metropolitan finance sustain a bloated public sector, something which, as both Réno (2001) and Daniel (2001; 2009) have argued, derives from a conscious strategy on the part of local elites to extract ever larger amounts of capital from the centre. In recent years, this has also been supplemented by significant amounts of European Union (EU) finance, approximately US\$850 million between 2006 and 2013, for both capital investment and subsidies for often uncompetitive economic activities, such as banana or sugar production (Bishop 2011). However, probably the most striking example of metropolitan investment is the *Centre Spatial Guyanais* (CSG) or the Guyanese Space Centre at Kourou, north-west of Cayenne. In 2012, the European Space Agency spent over €4 billion to cover the running costs of the CSG, €770 million of which came from the French space agency, the *Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales*. Further, with three separate launch pads, Kourou was, along with Cape Canaveral, the second most prolific launcher of spacecraft in 2012, with ten different launches, the budget for which was in the region of €1.3 billion (iEDOM 2013:133). By providing some investment, France is able to leverage significant external funds for French Guiana, and retain both a strategic outpost in South America and a space programme which it would not be able to support alone.

Coming now to the interior, mining is a huge concern in all three territories, and has grown rapidly in recent years. The two main products that are exploited are bauxite and gold. Bauxite remains of importance, even though its relative contribution to GDP has declined in recent years. The exploitation of gold resumed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century when world market prices increased. There are two separate developments in this sector: mainly North American companies exploit large mines, while Brazilian *garimpeiros* and local people dominate small surface-level operations. The Brazilians bring advanced hydraulic mining techniques and small-scale mining management, while the local inhabitants supply

geographical knowledge. In Guyana, mining contributed 19 percent of GDP in 2011, and strong rates of growth have been seen. In 2013 the highest ever level of gold production was recorded (*Caribbean Insight* 2013, 5). This in turn has led to a growing national economy: Guyana has consistently grown at between 4 and 6 percent every year between 2010 and 2014, assisted by debt relief granted in 2007 under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Suriname has also enjoyed significant resource-driven growth: in the period 2007-2012, the economy showed an annual growth rate of almost 5 percent. Bauxite, gold, and oil accounted for 85 percent of export revenues in 2012, with gold accounting for two-thirds of exports (Central Bank of Suriname 2013). In French Guiana, likewise, gold mining is increasingly lucrative once more: between 2011 and 2012 exports of gold increased from 1,300kg to 1,700kg, but this is well short of that which is mined in Guyana and Suriname (iEDOM 2013:85). In all three countries, the value of other resources such as diamonds, copper, uranium, and iron ore is unknown, and would require substantial infrastructural upgrades to exploit.

Mining is, therefore, of great importance to all three economies, but there are several problems associated with the sector. One is a distinct lack of transparency, the attendant corruption, and poor revenue collection. Indeed, as much as 80 percent of gold revenues escape Guyana without being taxed due to operators under-reporting their income (International Human Rights Clinic 2007). Even when parts of the industry are properly regulated, contracts are extremely favourable to the companies. Many pay little or no tax. As in Guyana, the outflow of gold from Suriname is largely beyond the government's control. The irony is that this in part stems from a degree of state capture by government actors. Trommelen (2013) provided an 'educated guess' of the main players in the gold sector, and the top-three consisted of influential politicians. In 2011, the state received only 12 percent of total revenues from the gold sector, and the largest company—Canadian Iamgold—contributed more than 90 percent of state revenues from the sector even though its production was less than 40 percent of the national total. In French Guiana, the state, operating out of Paris, theoretically enjoys greater regulatory power over its relatively small mining sector. In 2009, attempts were made to re-regulate the industry, but illegal mining remains a significant problem.

A second problem afflicting the interior, which is strongly linked to mining networks, is human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking and forced labour, including child labour (a phenomenon which is also reproduced within the forestry, agricultural, and informal sectors). As the US State Department has observed, both Suriname and Guyana are considered source and destination countries for women, men, and

children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour, as well as intermediary transit points. Even in French Guiana, it was noted that both Brazilian women and children 'were subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking'. This all takes place within interior mining communities where borders are fuzzy and state control is patchy. This is not helped by the fact that neither the Surinamese nor Guyanese governments 'fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking' (US Department of State 2013a:186; 347).

A third problem is the marginalization and undermining of local communities whose land is being exploited and, so far, they have had limited success in challenging the mining concessions awarded by the government. As Bulkan (2013:368) argues for Guyana, '[t]he coastlander approach to the interior lands in which Amerindians form the majority population remains extractivist, exploitative, and rent seeking in orientation'. This is true in Suriname as well, where the tribal and territorial rights of Amerindians and Maroons are consistently ignored by the government, despite a ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) from 2008 in which it was stated that, in the case of large-scale developments or investment projects, the state should obtain the 'free, prior, and informed consent' of these communities and that their right to property can only be restricted 'under very specific, exceptional circumstances' (Price 2011:215-216). In the case of French Guiana, in early 2013 officials in Paris controversially permitted the French mining company, Rexma, to begin extracting gold in the territory's only national park, just three kilometers from the isolated town of Saül, in an area along the Limonade River, which is ecologically highly sensitive.

This brings us to the fourth problem, which is environmental: gold mining creates severe ecological damage. Erosion, deforestation, and pollution threaten both land and the waterways. Mining negatively affects biodiversity, while the water in many of the rivers in all three territories, which is variously crucial to Amerindians, Maroons, and wildlife living in the interior, is contaminated by mercury (Price 2011; Wongsowikromo 2011). In July 2012, the Guyanese government temporarily suspended the granting of new permits to mine for gold and diamonds in rivers because of concerns over pollution (*Caribbean Insight* 2012a:6). In French Guiana there is the river dam at Petit Saut in the interior: on the one hand, it produces around half of the country's electricity renewably; yet on the other, it has been indirectly responsible for environmental degradation by opening up unexploited and previously inaccessible areas to gold diggers.

Fifth, and finally, there is the broader migratory impact; in all three Guianas, increasingly organized groups of Brazilian *garimpeiros* are gradually coming to dominate large parts of the industry. At times, this

is perfectly legal. However, many of these groups are migrating clandestinely, and with often disruptive social effects (Granger 2008). No official statistics exist on the number of Brazilians involved in mining, but it is estimated that there are 20,000 Brazilians in Suriname (De Theije and Heemskerk 2009:8) and 3,000 in Guyana (Sanders 2009). In French Guiana there could be as many as 15,000 *garimpeiros*. Successive quasi-military programmes have all sought to crack down on *garimpeiro* activity and seize illegally mined gold, in turn leading to sporadic outbursts of violent conflict. Moreover, since January 2012, mining has been banned by ministerial edict on approximately 45 percent of French Guiana's territory (iEDOM 2013:84). This is partly a response to the environmental fallout, but also an attempt to reassert a degree of control over the industry and its clandestine dimensions. However, this has not been entirely successful; illegally mined gold is often sold over the border in Suriname, further adding to the production figures there.

The forestry industry, meanwhile, is also very important, given the huge levels of Amazonian tropical rainforest coverage that the three territories share. In French Guiana, forestry activity is essentially the main private sector endeavour; it employs around 900 people and was responsible for €2.78 billion (approximately USD\$3.7 billion) in exports in 2012 (iEDOM 2013:78-79). In Guyana, although less important in absolute terms, forestry has increased significantly over the last 20 years with the granting of concessions to several Asian companies, and it contributed 3 percent of GDP in 2011 (Wilson 2012:1). In Suriname, granting of concessions to multinational companies from Indonesia, Malaysia, China and elsewhere, is a lucrative business. In early 1993, some 3 to 5 million hectares of logging concessions were granted to Asian companies, equivalent to between 25 and 40 percent of Suriname's land area, and timber production has continued to increase: from 247,377 m<sup>3</sup> to 366,000 m<sup>3</sup> between 2010 and 2011 alone, and monitoring is haphazard at best (Hoefte 2014:191). Corruption and illegal logging are consequently also serious problems. For example, in Guyana, the Korean/Malaysian-owned Barama Company was believed at one point to be generating US\$3-5 million per month in illegal income through the mis-declaration of log exports (Chêne 2010). Attempts have been made to better conserve the rainforest, for example, via an agreement with Norway signed in 2009. Under the terms of the agreement Guyana agrees to strengthen its efforts to limit forest-based greenhouse gas emissions and protect its rainforest as an asset for the world in exchange for financial aid from Norway. However, little progress has been made with few funds disbursed.

The opportunities, but also problems, associated with the mining and forestry sectors are clearly indicative of the wider challenges facing

these economies as a whole. All three countries have significant potential, including in new sectors such as oil, manganese, and zinc. However, concerns over corruption and good governance are omnipresent in both Guyana and Suriname, and, even in French Guiana. The rentier nature of the state itself, whether in terms of acute dependence on commodity exports, the enrichment of the political elite in Guyana and Suriname, or, indeed, the way in which French Guiana extracts resources from Paris and Brussels, only serves to reinforce these phenomena. This is captured perhaps most tellingly in the role the Guianas play as cocaine trafficking hubs to the US and Europe. A number of factors account for this, including compromised customs, police and judiciaries, the implication of powerful government actors in the industry, and natural characteristics like 'remote airstrips, intricate river networks [and] porous land borders' (US Department of State 2013b). Consequently, trafficking is able to flourish. The most striking example of this, of course, is the fact that both President Bouterse—who ruled the country brutally under the military regime—and influential MP Ronnie Brunswijk both have convictions for cocaine trafficking, having been convicted in absentia in separate court cases in the Netherlands.

## **Regional and Continental Change**

All three Guianas are undergoing similar—yet distinct—processes of regional and continental reconfiguration. We discuss here four dimensions of this change: we begin with relations between the Guianas themselves, then with Brazil, the wider Caribbean, and finally South America as a whole.

### ***Relations between the Three Guianas***

French Guiana is by far the most isolated of the territories. It is more tightly oriented towards the metropolis, it has fewer disputes or interests requiring engagement with its immediate neighbours, and it is the French state which undertakes diplomatic activity rather than local actors themselves. Even infrastructural links between French Guiana and Suriname are poor (Van Dijck 2013). Contemporary bilateral relations between Guyana and Suriname, by contrast, are more extensively developed, but at times remain quite tense, and are characterized by 'a culture of cold courtesy' (*Stabroek News* 2010a). Nonetheless, they are also less complicated than they have been in the past now that the various territorial and maritime disputes which have traditionally contaminated their mutual engagements are, to some extent, less acute (although still not fully resolved). Since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, there have been challenges

regarding the eastern and western borders of Suriname, which sits in the centre of the three, and, as we discuss shortly, both Guyana's border with Venezuela, and French Guiana's with Brazil, have at times been contested.

In the case of Suriname and Guyana, the so-called Tigri or New River Triangle—a mineral rich area covering 15,600 km<sup>2</sup> in western Suriname, close to the border with Brazil—has remained an area of tension. Despite the creation of National Border Commissions in 1989, little progress has been made in terms of fully resolving the issue. The maritime boundary has also been long disputed, and in 2000 Surinamese gunboats evicted a Guyanese-licensed petroleum exploration platform from an area claimed by both countries. In an effort to solve the dispute it was referred to the United Nations' International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. In 2007 the tribunal granted 65 percent of the disputed area to Guyana and 35 percent to Suriname. However, tensions remain. Suriname and France also have a river/border dispute involving the resource-rich Marowijne river; the key question being whether the Marowini or the Litani is the source of the river, which in turn carries implications for its ultimate ownership and consequently control of downstream resources. Still, relations between the two southerly Guianas have stabilized in recent years; in 2011, Suriname opened an embassy in Paris. Moreover a number of initiatives, ranging from combating malaria along the Marowijne to judicial and police cooperation, have also got underway.

Nonetheless, despite these developments, French Guiana still remains the most fraternally estranged of the three territories. One reason for this is that, because of the distinctive development patterns it exhibits—characterised by far higher GDP per capita, a smaller and relatively wealthier population, a consumption society sustained by metropolitan investment and, especially, the space station—French Guiana is considerably more tightly integrated, in a formal sense, with the metropole than either of its neighbours, and consequently also further away from them (iEDOM, AFD and INSÉE 2008). Another part of the explanation stems from the fact that French Guiana is simultaneously a French and European territory, and its border with Suriname is therefore a border of the EU. Although this remains difficult to police effectively, there remains a strong incentive to remain somewhat removed, to whatever extent, from Suriname and Guyana.

Yet given the similar nature of the challenges faced, all three territories have little choice but to work together to some degree, however unevenly this may play out in practice. Several initiatives have been instigated, such as the EU-funded Guyana-Suriname ferry at South-Drain-Moleson Creek which was launched in 1997. But even here the issue of sovereignty is paramount. The fact that the service is managed



by the Surinamese government, that the ferry flies the national flag of Suriname, and if an offense is committed on board, the offender will be tried in a Surinamese court, causes a fair degree of resentment in Guyana (*Stabroek News* 2010b). Nonetheless, compared to the 1970s, there has been a discernible thaw in relations of late, in part because of the international isolation of Suriname's current President, Desi Bouterse, and in part because of the high level of informal economic and criminal activity that takes place across their borders. In September 2010, Bouterse travelled to Guyana for talks with then President Bharrat Jagdeo, and they agreed to deepen cooperation in areas such as trade and security. In later talks, plans were made to build a bridge across the Corentyne River, and a Bi-National Commission for Collaboration on Health was created to better meet the health care needs of migrants in both countries.

Beyond formal diplomacy, it is actually the deepening of economic relations and the development of informal ties which are in many ways more significant. Economic exchange between Guyana and Suriname has grown dramatically in recent years. In 2013 Guyana imported US\$142 million of goods from Suriname, or 7.7 per cent of total imports; although Guyana exported far less to Suriname (Guyana Statistical Office). Moreover, a large amount of smuggling takes place across the border, too. This so-called 'back-track' or informal trade includes a wide-range of goods, including gold, tobacco, firearms, household articles, food stuffs, illicit drugs and even people. In 2002 Guyana and Suriname signed an agreement in an attempt to prevent cross-frontier smuggling—and the attendant crimes and violence which often come with it—but the initiative was never properly taken forward, largely because of Guyanese, rather than Surinamese, reticence (*Stabroek News* 2010b). This is attributed, at least in part, to the ability of more poorly regulated and taxed Guyanese goods to undersell Surinamese ones when bypassing official trade channels, along with the political implications of important electoral constituencies residing on the Corentyne coast, where much smuggling takes place.

### ***Brazil***

Besides their own evolving fraternal relations, all three Guianas are simultaneously grappling with the increased influence of the behemoth to the south and west. The Amazon rainforest that they share with Brazil has long represented both a barrier and a permeable border between them. On the one hand, the scale of the rainforest, the difficulty of building infrastructure through it, and the sheer distance between the capitals and population centres of the Guianas and Brasilia (and even



major Amazonian cities like Manaus) have historically restricted the development of official political and trade relations, as well as more malign cross-border phenomena. Yet on the other hand, for those communities within the Amazon—such as the Waiwai Indians who live in both southern Guyana at the headwaters of the Essequibo River and across the Acarai Mountains in northern Brazil—the fuzzy frontiers of the state are far less significant. Moreover, today, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana are all seeking to deepen relations with Brazil, both diplomatically and also through the establishment of better infrastructure. This is, however, something of a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it undeniably facilitates greater potential for commerce and economic activity; yet on the other, Brazilian migration—both legitimate and otherwise—into the Three Guianas has grown dramatically. They are also becoming locked into a competitive race with each other for Brazilian investment, and it is plausible that something of a silent colonization of the territories is likely to ensue as these phenomena become more pronounced in tandem with increasingly irresistible Brazilian hegemony throughout South America.

French Guiana was the first of the Guianas to announce the construction of a land border crossing to Brazil in 1997, although, after many delays, it was only finished in 2011 (and commissioned in 2013). As Jacobs (2012) notes, the connection between Saint-Georges-de-l'Oyapock and Oiapoque on the two sides of the river represents not only 'the first road link between France and Brazil' but also 'the first overland connection between the European Union and the Americas' (although at the time of writing, it still had not been opened to vehicular traffic due to delays in paving the road to Amapá on the Brazilian side). More broadly, relations between French Guiana and Brazil are to some extent overlaid by the 'high politics' of diplomacy between Paris and Brasília. The two countries, in fact, have a formal strategic alliance and France has been a vocal advocate of Brazil's attempt to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. One source of tension, though, remains the borders of the Amazon rainforest.

In terms of Guyana, several initiatives have been taken. For example, in 2003 a partial abolition of visas was agreed; in 2009 a new border-crossing was established when a bridge was built over the Takutu River with US\$5 million of Brazilian finance; also in 2009, the Guyana/Brazil Frontier Committee was created to enhance relations of the frontier regions; and in February 2013 a joint Working Infrastructure Group met for the first time to discuss a series of projects to aid economic integration. However, there are a number of problems and ambiguities in these emerging relationships. A critical one is the lack of an all-weather road from the Takutu Bridge to Guyana's coast in the east, which serves to

inhibit the upgrading of Guyana's port facilities and the country becoming a key export centre for Brazilian goods. Nevertheless, a deepening of links is undeniably taking place. As Sanders (2012a) notes, the volume of trade in commodities has increased, and with it 'the flow of Brazilians into Guyana especially into the gold and diamond mining industries, and increasingly into the establishment of nightclubs and restaurants in Guyana's capital city'. In total, approximately 70,000 Brazilians live in Guyana—about 9 percent of the population (Lloyd 2010). A similar process is underway in Suriname, and, allied to the problems in the interior where *garimpeiros* are working, along with the generally one-sided trade relationship, observers in both Georgetown and Paramaribo are to some extent fearful of the longer-term implications of Brazilian influence.

### *The Wider Caribbean*

All three territories are considered to be contiguous with the wider Caribbean, because of their similar social structures which derive from the shared history of sugar slavery. However, French Guiana is furthest from the Caribbean imagination; it is impossible to fly directly from the territory to any of the independent islands, and although the links between Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana are relatively strong—lots of people circulate between the three, with complex family, commercial and employment relationships—the latter is still, to some extent, isolated. Only Air France flies between the islands and Cayenne, with Air Caraïbes having ended its services other than those between French Guiana and Paris. By contrast, Guyana is by far the most deeply entrenched within the wider region, and has long been a key player in West Indian politics and diplomacy. Suriname occupies a more ambiguous position: it only became an observer of the key institution of regional governance, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), in 1982 and a full member in 1995.

In Suriname, reactions to its admission to CARICOM were mixed: the business community was generally fearful of greater economic liberalization and competition; others felt that such integration was critical to further the decolonization process, reduce dependence on The Netherlands, improve competitiveness, and access international donor financing (Banks 2011). To some extent this has happened: according to the IDB (2011), Suriname's macroeconomic environment has stabilized, but a significant number of barriers, in trade, labour markets, financial services, and so on, remain. Moreover, the fact that Suriname is not part of the Commonwealth continues to set it apart from the Caribbean at large. From the perspective of Paramaribo, the main importance of CARICOM is not its market—but rather membership itself which

represents a major step onto the regional stage, as well as a stable conduit to the EU. This has been especially important as Brussels has, in recent years, reconfigured its development cooperation with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries which represent the former colonies of a number of its most influential members.

By contrast, the role of Guyana within the Caribbean region has been significant. Although it was not a member of the aborted West Indies Federation, it has since been a driving force behind regional integration. In 1968 Guyana helped to establish the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) and in 1973 it joined CARICOM with the Secretariat being located in Georgetown. Further, Guyana was in the first group of signatories for the implementation of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) in 2006, and is only one of three states that are part of the appellate jurisdiction of the Caribbean Court of Justice. Overall, however, progress towards deeper integration has been disappointing. In early 2011 CARICOM Heads of Government decided to 'pause' the CSME process—in essence kicking the process into the long grass. Further, the contribution of intra-Caribbean trade for Guyana is relatively small. In 2012, 15 percent of its total exports and 19 percent of its total imports took place within the region and most of that trade was undertaken with Trinidad and Tobago (CARICOM Secretariat). So despite Guyana's President Donald Ramotar talking about the need for deeper integration and the potential benefits that could accrue (*Stabroek News* 2013), the importance of CARICOM to Guyana is not as great as it once was, or indeed as it could be if there was genuine political commitment to the integration process.

Another reason for the relative decline in CARICOM's importance is the fact that Guyana and Suriname have significant interests in several other regional organizations that incorporate South America including MERCOSUR (as an associate member), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). The last two groups and particularly UNASUR have perhaps the greatest potential in offering alternative poles of cooperation. UNASUR, which from within the Caribbean only includes Guyana and Suriname, was created in 2008 and has a mandate to bring the countries of the region closer together via infrastructural development. Other initiatives include plans for a single market by 2019 and the promotion of regional security. Due to its clear policy agenda, a deepening institutional structure, and substantial funds supporting it, it is quite plausible that UNASUR will become increasingly important to both Guyana and Suriname, potentially even superseding CARICOM.

In the very recent past, the French Overseas Departments have sought to integrate themselves further within a broader region from

which, to some extent, they have historically been alienated. This is something which has been permitted by a greater degree of constitutional innovation on the part of the French state which affords local actors greater leeway to engage in diplomacy with regional states and institutions (Mrgudovic 2012; Bishop 2013). However, this process has been limited for French Guiana, compared to Martinique and Guadeloupe. This is generally perceived to be the result of a number of factors: differences in the nature and desires of the local political class in Cayenne versus Fort-de-France and Basse-Terre; relative differences of importance in the roles played by the Overseas Departments within France's own strategic global assessment; and, relatedly, the fact that French Guiana borders Brazil, an infinitely more critical diplomatic partner, from the vantage point of Paris, than CARICOM or the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

### *South America*

In terms of South American relations more broadly, Venezuela is by far the most significant player. Although, again, this is an area from which French Guiana is also largely isolated: most of its border is with Brazil; the remainder with Suriname. Relations between Guyana and Venezuela are relatively calm at the present time, but there exists an enduring territorial dispute. Venezuela claims five-eighths of Guyana, comprising all lands west of the Essequibo River, which are rich in natural resources. The land area under contention was awarded to Guyana in 1899, but Venezuela renewed its claim in the build-up to Guyana attaining independence. In 1983, both countries referred the dispute to the United Nations, and in 1999 the High Level Binational Commission was established to expedite resolution of the dispute. So far none has been found and from time-to-time the issue re-ignites.

What is more important at the present time is the economic relationship, particularly in regard to the Venezuelan Petrocaribe initiative. Petrocaribe was launched in 2005 and provides budgetary and development support to a number of countries in South America and the Caribbean, along with cheap oil for which only a percentage has to be paid up front, with the remainder transferred into a soft loan. The full cost of the oil can then be deferred for a period of 25 years at a concessionary interest rate of approximately 1 percent (Bryan 2013). Guyana was one of the initial signatories of the deal and has received approximately 5,000 barrels of oil a day since then—equivalent to about 50 percent of its daily consumption. Related benefits have included Venezuela cancelling US\$12.5 million of Guyana's debt in 2007 and a deal in 2011 to ship 50,000 tonnes of paddy and 20,000 of white rice to Venezuela. As a consequence, the

overall volume of trade between Guyana and Venezuela is significant. In 2013, Venezuela provided 11.5 per cent of Guyana's imports, and received 10.2 per cent of Guyana's exports (Guyana Bureau of Statistics). Similarly, Suriname's share in Petrocaribe is the fourth largest in the Caribbean. Corrales and Penfold (2011) estimate that total Venezuelan aid to Suriname in 2006 was somewhere between US\$102.2 and US\$306.6 million. So, today relations with Caracas are undoubtedly critical for both Guyana and Suriname; however there remain serious concerns about sustainability, not least because Petrocaribe was a programme which was associated closely with the late President Hugo Chávez.

### **The world beyond: The broader hemispheric and global context**

All three territories have witnessed sometimes subtle, and sometimes rather dramatic, changes in their relations with global actors and institutions beyond the immediate region. The most abiding of these are in relation to Europe, represented by both the EU itself and the former colonial powers of the UK, France and the Netherlands, as well as with hemispheric centres of power like the US and Canada. But there are also a number of newer links which are being forged, the most important of which are with Asia, and principally China, as the rising powers make their presence felt in South America. Indeed, there is a gradual process of re-balancing taking place on the part of the Three Guianas away from the previously small number of traditional partners towards a more diverse set of international relations. Let us begin with Europe, which has been a key interlocutor.

#### ***Europe***

The EU has spent much of the past decade or so reconfiguring its relationship with the developing world, and especially the ACP group of countries. This reconfiguration has been characterized by the end of the preference regimes on which its postcolonial development assistance was based, a gradual reduction in aid, and an assertive effort to subject poorer and smaller developing countries to the same kind of neoliberal trade and development policymaking redolent of its approach towards more advanced economies (Heron and Siles-Brügge 2012). However, the situation in relation to French Guiana is quite different: as an Overseas Department of France, its experience of EU policy has been considerably more paternalistic, with huge amounts of finance forthcoming, industries subsidized, and even a degree of enduring protectionism of a kind which has been forbidden for its independent neighbours.

Despite a degree of contemporary divergence, the EU has been

among the most important international partners for Guyana and Suriname over the last 40 years. Underpinned by the non-reciprocal trade preferences for sugar, bananas and rum which were granted under the various protocols within the four Lomé Conventions, Europe has traditionally been an important, but now to some extent declining, export market. Today, the EU accounts for around a fifth of Guyanese and Surinamese exports, as opposed to more than a third in the past. Nonetheless, both countries' trade balances with the EU have always shown a sizeable surplus; with the US and China, by contrast, there are significant deficits. The relationship has also traditionally had an important aid dimension: €240 million for Guyana between 1975 and 2000 (Clegg 2008), and over €200 million for Suriname (EU Delegation to Suriname). Aid disbursements have continued since the turn of the millennium, with €55.4 million allocated to Guyana and €19.8 million to Suriname under the most recent 10<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund. Further sources of funding have been provided, in particular up to €169 million to support the reform of Guyana's sugar industry and more than €22 million to help restructure Suriname's banana industry (EU Delegations to Guyana and Suriname). However, these sources of funding have been necessary to help Guyana and Suriname overcome the ending of the agricultural protocols in recent years; indeed, it is unclear whether the historical trade surpluses described above will continue in the post-preference era.

The end of the protocols is indicative of other changes that are making the relationship between the EU, Guyana, and Suriname less distinctive and also less important. For example, a decade ago Lomé was replaced by the Cotonou Convention and the less advantageous Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). Over a period of two decades or so, the EPA will force the full liberalization of Caribbean economies and the creation of a fully reciprocal free trade area between them and the EU. Moreover, the EU has increasingly and purposefully opened up its markets to other countries, so there has been a further erosion of the value of preferences for the Caribbean. Most relevant here is the bringing into the EU's free trade ambit non-ACP competitor countries, such as those in Central America. In addition, the newly agreed Joint Caribbean-EU Partnership Strategy prioritizes security and coordinated action in multilateral institutions, but downplays previously important aspects of the relationship such as development assistance (EU Council 2012). Indeed, plans are being discussed by the European Commission to graduate the Caribbean entirely out of bilateral development assistance from 2014 (Jessop 2013a). Another hit will come with the liberalization of the EU sugar market in 2017. One outcome, with falling prices and higher EU production, could be the end of raw Caribbean sugar exports to the EU market (Jessop 2013b). For Guyana that exports about

four-fifths of its sugar to the EU, the impact of these changes will be very serious. There are several explanations for this downgrading of relations: the relative wealth (as measured by GDP per capita) of Caribbean countries as a whole; the lack of affinity that newer EU member states have with the region; and the EU's attempt to 'entwine' its development and commercial agendas as part of a broader project of global neoliberal restructuring (Heron and Siles-Brügge 2012).

By contrast, French Guiana's relationship with the EU remains strong, not least because the territory is actually part of Europe. French Guiana is consequently the recipient of enormous amounts of EU finance. The space centre at Kourou, as we have seen, is a significant benefactor. Beyond this, French Guiana receives a huge amount of capital investment through EU Structural Funds. In the EU's 2000-2006 budget Cayenne received €389.6 million, and in the next period (2007-2013), a total of €485.8 million (iEDOM, AFD and INSÉE 2008:12). These are significant sums of money; particularly when compared to the much lower levels of development assistance that the EU has provided to Guyana and Suriname to cope with the adjustment necessitated by the end of preferences and the move to the EPA regime. Moreover, French Guiana also receives a range of production subsidies for rum and bananas, and other financing measures under the EU's POSEI scheme, which is aimed specifically at the 'ultra-peripheral' regions of the EU. There are several ironies here: one is the active subsidization of uncompetitive industries, something which Brussels has consistently decried in the independent Caribbean, even going so far, as noted above, to dismantle the preference regime which formerly sustained them; another is the way in which the 'ultra-peripheral' has been constructed to ensure continued European finance for regions of the Union, like the French Overseas Departments, which no longer remain among the poorest as the EU has expanded, on which basis money was traditionally forthcoming (see Bishop 2011).

Beyond the EU, several European states retain—to varying degrees—interests in the Three Guianas. For the UK, its predominant interest lies with Guyana. Although UK engagement has waned over time, links remain. Trade is important—the UK is still Guyana's main export market for sugar cane and other sugar products. Also, recent administrations in London have made efforts to strengthen relations with the Commonwealth Caribbean in general (including Guyana). Suriname's key relationship is with the Netherlands; however, this has also become less important. The underlying bonds remain strong: Dutch is the official language in Suriname and there is a large Surinamese community in the Netherlands (circa 350,000) meaning significant remittances and circular migration between the two countries. However,



in the last decade, relations, at least at the official level, have lessened. This is partly a positive choice, but also the consequence of serious differences over aid policy and spending. Today the Dutch administration does not provide any aid to Suriname. But, cooperation at other levels, for instance involving NGOs, local governments, and the private sector, has intensified. As far as trade is concerned, the Netherlands is a major exporter to Suriname, but it is not a significant buyer of Surinamese goods and services.

Given that French Guiana is a French *département*, then France not only has an interest in the Guianas, it *is* in the Guianas! Following on from the discussion above, it can be argued that Paris plays a clever game of deploying EU power and resources to sustain its own strategic outposts. This is, in many ways, the role that French Guiana plays within the French cadre: the very *raison d'être* of the territory is as a strategic bridgehead for France in both the Americas (especially Brazil) and also as part of broader attempts by Paris to create a more multipolar international system, with a degree of independence, not least in terms of having access to space that is not dependent on the US. Moreover, a similar argument could also be made about what the space station represents more broadly: French Guiana's domestic productive capacity is essentially neutered; it is fundamentally a rentier economy, largely dependent on metropolitan finance, and supporting a far smaller population than either of its two neighbours. Indeed, in many ways French Guiana's contemporary role could be seen as analogous to its role in the past. Where once it sustained a penal colony as an appendage of the French state and supporting a huge group of administrators; today much the same is true of the space centre.

Finally, Suriname also has an important relationship with France, largely because they are technically neighbours. Relations are good, despite the aforementioned border dispute on the Marowijne River. Other issues on this border are illegal migration and trade. As we also noted above, Suriname opened an embassy in Paris in 2011, in part to better deal with these concerns. Another reason is that Paramaribo considers France a stepping stone to increasingly important markets in Europe and North Africa. According to Ambassador Harvey Naarendorp, 'We have more common interests with the French [than with the Dutch]' as France is a 'power centre in the European Union' (RNW 2011). Nevertheless, trade relations between France and Suriname have so far been limited.

### *North America*

Both the US and Canada have important ties with Guyana and Suriname, although they have very little to do with French Guiana,



largely because of the dominant role of France. The US has often had a fractious relationship with both Guyana and Suriname, but today relations are much improved. Trade relations are important for both countries. In 2012 Guyana traded more with the US than with any other country, exporting US\$328.4 million of goods to the US, while importing US\$401.9 million of US goods. In percentage terms, 23.9 per cent of Guyana's exports went to the US and 21.9 per cent of Guyana's imports came from the US (Guyana Bureau of Statistics). For Suriname, in 2012, the US was its most important export market with 25.7 percent of total exports (worth US\$659 million), as well as the most important importer accounting for 26 percent of total imports (US\$468 million) (CIA World Factbook 2013). However, concerns have been raised about certain aspects of US trade policy, particularly in regard to sugar with its high subsidies for domestic producers and restrictive quotas, which inhibit exports from, especially, Guyana, but also Suriname (Maneka 2013). Notwithstanding, economic ties were strengthened in May 2013 when CARICOM signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with the US. Moreover, some US foreign investment is entering Guyana and Suriname, principally in the oil, gas, gold mining, and bauxite sectors, the latter an area where the US has a longstanding interest. Various other forms of cooperation also take place, including combating drug trafficking, fighting HIV/AIDS, disaster preparedness, and strengthening civil society. So despite the view among some Caribbean leaders that US interest in the region is marginal, and to a certain extent this is true, for Guyana and Suriname the US link remains very important.

As well as the US, Canada has a prominent role. Canada first had a diplomatic presence in Guyana in 1964, and then with Guyana's independence two years later, full diplomatic relations were established. For Suriname, relations were established in 1975. Good bilateral relations exist based on trade links, development assistance, and immigration. With regard to the trade relationship, Guyana exported US\$74.7 million worth of goods to Canada or 5.4 per cent of Guyana's total exports in 2013. Imports from Canada amounted to US\$38.6 million equivalent to 2.1 per cent of total imports (Guyana Bureau of Statistics). In relation to Suriname, exports to Canada were US\$607 million in 2008, while imports totalled US\$11 million (High Commission of Canada 2009). Neither country benefits from Canadian bilateral development assistance, but support does come via its regional programme. In 2009, as part of Canada's new aid effectiveness agenda, the Caribbean region was selected as a country (sic) of focus for international development. This was supported by a Caribbean Strategy from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) (CIDA 2009). Disbursements totalled C\$97.4 million in 2011-2012. In addition, some private Canadian

investment is entering Guyana and Suriname, most particularly in the oil and gold mining sectors.

Two final but related issues must be considered here—those of migration and remittances. While as we have seen the issues extend beyond North America, the US and Canada are centrally involved and therefore we will deal with migration and remittances here. According to Gupta, Patillo, and Wagh (2007) Guyana is one of the top ten labour exporting countries in the world; a high proportion of whom are educated. Roberts (2009:202-203) suggested that the total number of Guyanese migrants is about 400,000, with 200,000 in the US, 84,000 in Canada, and smaller numbers elsewhere. One outcome is remittances from the migrant population back to their homeland. According to the Inter-American Development Bank (2013:20-22), Guyana received US\$405 million in remittances in 2012 equal to 17 percent of GDP, while Suriname received US\$113 million equal to 3 percent of GDP. The monetary value of remittances has increased steadily over the last decade, though their percentage contribution to GDP has fallen. Nevertheless, as the Bank (2013:22) argues ‘these flows represent an important source of income for the [...] families. Without [them] many ... would fall below the poverty line’.

### *Asia*

Diplomatic relations between the People’s Republic of China and Guyana were founded in 1972 and with Suriname in 1976. Since that time both countries have maintained their support and recognition for China (as opposed to Taiwan/Republic of China). China’s key relationship in the Commonwealth Caribbean is with Jamaica, and relations at the regional level operate via the China-Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum through which significant funds have been disbursed and more promised (US\$1 billion at the third forum in 2011). China also supports the work of the Caribbean Development Bank. Further, during a visit to the Caribbean in June 2013 China’s President Xi Jinping promised up to US\$3 billion in loans. Bi-lateral trade (with CARICOM) is also significant—amounting to US\$3.8 billion in 2012, although this figure is dominated by Chinese exports to the region (Sanders 2013). China is very much interested in deepening relations with the region. However, there is some pressure within the Chinese government to treat the Caribbean and Latin America as one, and if this was to happen it would be ‘... an unwelcome development for the small Caribbean countries whose interests would be subsumed by those of the larger Latin American states’ (Sanders 2013).

In parallel to regional developments, Guyana and Suriname have

developed increasingly important ties with Beijing, particularly in relation to trade. For example, trade between Guyana and China has risen dramatically over the last decade. In 2001 Guyana exported US\$2.4 million worth of goods to China; in 2012 the figure was US\$20.3 million. During the same period Chinese imports to Guyana increased from US\$12.4 million to US\$194.5 million. In 2012, 9.9 percent of Guyana's imports came from China, and 1.5 percent of its exports went to China (Bernal 2010:286; 288; Guyana Bureau of Statistics). Although the growth in bilateral trade is impressive, the widening trade deficit is a concern. Another worry relates to the different kinds of goods being traded. The Caribbean exports raw materials to China, while it receives manufactured goods in return. There are concerns that the nature of the trade relationship with China risks replicating the imbalances seen with traditional trading partners. A similar pattern is emerging with Suriname: exports are negligible but imports from China were approximately US\$174 million in 2012 or 9.9 percent of Suriname's total imports (CIA World Factbook 2013).

Beyond trade, relations have developed in various ways. In Guyana, Chinese foreign investment has increased, particularly in the bauxite sector. In 2009 the total stock of Chinese foreign direct investment was US\$149.6 million (ECLAC 2012:108). In Suriname too there is growing Chinese (as well as Indonesian and Malaysian) investment, particularly in the timber industry. Also, China has given or pledged hundreds of millions of dollars of funding to support a range of projects in the areas of infrastructure, health care, training, and culture. In Suriname for example, the construction or improving of roads in the coastal area and in the interior, and the plan to build a railway and a road linking a deep sea port near Paramaribo to northern Brazil (Santarem or Manaus) are potentially very significant. Further, there are also a substantial number of 'new' Chinese immigrants largely in the retail and construction sectors (the latter are largely employed by Chinese companies). Perhaps 40,000 'old' and 'new' Chinese people live in Suriname and 15,000 in Guyana.

## Conclusion

Are the 'Three Guianas' still as lonely as they once were? There is no doubt that they are becoming increasingly incorporated into the regional and global political economy, but these processes of change are incomplete in many respects, and the patterns of change in the three territories play out distinctively in tandem with global forces. Moreover, complex relationships exist between the local and international context, with the nature of local processes of change in part a reflection of the character of external phenomena and vice versa. So for instance the re-emergence

of Bouterse in Suriname at the head of an ostensibly democratic government is simultaneously a product of that country's history, its peculiar state institutions, its reliance on commodity exports, and the structure of its engagement with the global political economy. Viewed in this way, then, it is not surprising that the key economic elites who dominate the mining industries are often closely tied to both the political and criminal elites. Indeed arguably they are often indistinguishable. Similarly, French Guiana, because of its location as an outpost of both France and the EU, remains the most isolated of the three, and embodies an even more peculiar panoply of governance institutions and economic activities, albeit ones which have generated much higher living standards for (some) sections of the population.

All three territories have distinctly varied political and economic structures; yet the challenges that they face—isolation, infrastructural limitations, the implications of rentier state structures—are similar in a broad sense. However, the spectrum between isolation and engagement is also shifting in subtle ways. For Guyana and Suriname, especially, the pull of South America is becoming stronger, and there exists a genuine long-term threat of alienation from the wider Caribbean, along with continued atrophying of their relations with Europe, broadly conceived. French Guiana, on the other hand, has long been estranged from the wider region, and, indeed, even its French Caribbean cousins. It is also, to some extent prevented from deeper engagement with South America—and, perhaps, thus also protected from the most deleterious implications—by its status as a French and European frontier. Nonetheless, for all three, the reality of specifically Brazilian power is becoming increasingly salient. This manifests itself in myriad ways: from the political and economic hegemony that the country's dramatic recent growth implies for the future development and diplomatic trajectories of Suriname and Guyana; to the more diffuse implications of Brazilian migration, both clandestine and legitimate. These phenomena, of course, are most obvious in the striking expansion of mining and forestry in the interior of the Guianas, industries which, allied with fuzzy borders and unclear patterns of power and accountability, bring with them both a broadening panorama of growth industries, but also severe social and ecological pressures.

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