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# Scenarios in anthropology: reflections on possible futures of the Suriname Maroons

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## Abstract

Traditional concern with social change requires anthropologists to analyze linkages between past, present, and possible future events. Anthropological methods can contribute to speculation about the future because they incorporate what most extrapolations and forecasts lack: (1) uncertainty and surprise, (2) people's own mental models of the future, and (3) a detailed understanding of specific cultures and the diversity within these cultures. The author argues that *Scenario Planning* is a useful method that allows ethnographic data to be used for thinking about the future. Scenarios are stories about possible, alternative futures that incorporate human diversity and uncertainty. How Scenario Planning works as an analytical and policy tool is explained and then demonstrated with the example of forest peoples in Suriname, called Maroons. Qualitative data from anthropological fieldwork is used to reveal Maroon perspectives on the future; identify driving forces that might influence their future; and speculate about the different directions these forces may go. Two scenarios are presented and their implications discussed. The article concludes with reflections on the advantages and disadvantages of Scenario Planning as a method in anthropology, and on the contribution that anthropology can make to development policy that envisions and plans for alternative, surprising futures.

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## 1. Introduction

“Nothing is less likely than a plausible future” (Lowenthal, 1995) [11].

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### 1.1. *Thinking the unthinkable*

Designing policy that promotes more equitable and sustainable development requires foreseeing the consequences of policy interventions. Anthropologists with long-standing research experience in local communities can contribute much to the design of development policy, and have traditionally done so. Anthropological interpretations of past and present events have guided reflections on the future of communities across the world, and on ways in which policy might steer these futures in desirable directions.<sup>1</sup> However, despite frequent reminders that life has unthinkable events in store, our speculations typically remain within the narrow boundaries of what we know and consider likely. Extreme events, such as the 9–11 terrorist attacks, the rise of AIDS, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, shock the world because they are not considered likely. For policy makers to more adaptively respond to unknown and unannounced events requires thinking beyond likely futures.

Business consultants, scientists, and policy makers are increasingly turning to *Scenario Planning* to help envision more imaginative, alternative futures.<sup>2</sup> Scenarios are stories of the future. They should be possible but surprising narratives that incorporate the unanticipated and undesired alternatives that are often left unacknowledged. The purpose of scenarios is not prediction but rather evaluation of the past, discussion of the future, and thought about actions that might help avoid or reach certain event outcomes. Herman Kahn, one of the founders of Scenario Planning, argues that scenarios help ‘thinking the unthinkable’ [8].

The purposes of this paper are to present Scenario Planning as a method for anthropological reflection on the future, and to combine traditional anthropological methods with scenarios to speculate about the future of forest peoples in Suriname, South America. The premise of my argument is that anthropology and scenario planning will benefit from cross-fertilization. By encouraging thinking that breaks away from the current situation, scenarios can help anthropologists to more systematically evaluate the possible outcomes of socio-cultural change. Vice versa, anthropological data can help scenario writers explore a richer variety of possible futures.

### 1.2. *Ethnographic data and future thinking:*

Compared to many other disciplines, anthropology has designed relatively few methods to analyze or speculate about the future [11]. One explanation for this phenomenon may be that it appears difficult to extrapolate from the type of data that anthropologists typically collect. Econometric analyses, business forecasts, ecological projections, and other quantitative models seem easier to extend in time than ethnographic data, which provide the core of many anthropological studies.

Notwithstanding valuable applications of quantitative models, there are good

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on how anthropologists have dealt with the future, see: V. Razak (Ed.), Editor’s introduction. *Essays in anticipatory anthropology*. *Futures*, 32 (2000); 32 (special issue): 717–727.

<sup>2</sup> Whole Earth. 1999; 96 (Spring): 77–95. K. Van Der Heijden, *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. 1996.

reasons to be skeptical of statistical predictions. Multivariate analyses, for example, assume that all variables that matter are known and measured adequately, and that causal relationships are linear and constant over time. Heterogeneity within populations, outliers, nonlinearity, and other divergences from normality are often ignored. Even though scientists who use statistical models recognize these limitations, their predictions are sometimes attributed more certainty than is appropriate. For example, confidence intervals are used to estimate the boundaries of variable values. However, we often forget that these boundaries depend more upon our selection of, and proficiency in, analytical methods than on reality.

I am not arguing for a replacement of statistical models but rather for the use of ethnographic data to enrich thinking about the future.<sup>3</sup> The most noteworthy contributions of qualitative observations and interviews may be their (1) potential to account for uncertainty, non-linear trends, and surprise; (2) respect for people's own mental models of the future; and (3) detail and inclusiveness. First, narratives allow for the inclusion of improbable events that, as history shows, are more plausible than linear extrapolations of current trends. Anticipating surprise is difficult yet important because it can help people take measures that facilitate coping and adaptation when crises do occur.<sup>4</sup>

Second, anthropologists typically aim to present an emic or insider's perspective. That is, they try to understand the past, present, and future from the perspective of local people who vary in age, sex, class, and other characteristics. Interviews can reveal people's life-goals and sense of power to choose and change their destinies. Consideration of local concerns may improve the success of policies aimed at improving the lives of local people [18]. Third, the in-depth study of the history and culture of a specific group of people provides anthropologists with a broad vision on the driving forces within a culture and how they may evolve. Detailed understanding of what motivates human behavior helps understand how, when, and why people change the way they act. In contrast to quantitative analyses, ethnographic data integrate cultural specifics and diversity within populations, and provide a more holistic perspective of a society.

### 1.3. Outline

The scenarios in this paper envision how life might evolve over the next ten years among forest peoples in Suriname, called Maroons. Maroons are descendants of escaped African slaves who built independent communities in the rainforest. As an

<sup>3</sup> For supporting arguments, see also Razak 2000, and V. Razak, S. Cole (Eds.) Editors introduction: Anthropological perspectives on the future of culture and society. *Futures*, 4 (1995) 27.

<sup>4</sup> This argument also underlies the adaptive management approach to policy implementation. For example: C.S. Holling, What barriers, what bridges. In: L.H. Gunderson, C.S. Holling, S.S. Light (Eds.), *Barriers and Bridges to the Renewal of Ecosystems and Institutions*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. C.S. Holling, G. Meffe. Command and control and the pathology of natural resource management. *Conservation Biology*, 10(2) (1996) 328–337. K.N. Lee. *Compass and Gyroscope. Integrating Science and Politics for the Environment*. Washington DC: Island Press. 1993.

anthropologist, I observed and participated in everyday activities in Maroon communities, and talked with Maroon women and men about their present lives and dreams for the future. From scenario planners, I borrowed analytical techniques and a model for thinking about alternative futures.<sup>5</sup>

In the sections that follow I describe Suriname and the present status of the Maroon population in this small country on the northern shore of South America. Next I will turn to Scenario Planning and analyze two interlinked, driving forces that are likely to influence the Maroon's destiny: the attitude of the government vis-à-vis forest peoples and multinational resource extraction on Maroon territories. Two example scenarios will serve as tools for thought. The paper concludes with reflections on the value of Scenario Planning for anthropology, and on the contribution that anthropology can make to the development of policy that envisions alternative futures.

## 2. Background: Suriname and the Maroons

Suriname, previously called Dutch Guiana, is located on the South American continent, north of Brazil between Guyana and French Guiana. The country is small in size with a total land area of 163,820 km<sup>2</sup> [1]. Suriname's 425,000 people live almost entirely in and near the capital city of Paramaribo. The national language of Suriname is Dutch but many other languages are spoken, including Sranan (the national creole), several Amerindian and Maroon languages, and languages specific to other ethnic groups. Suriname compares favorably to other Latin American and Caribbean countries in infant mortality (29/1000) and life expectancy rates (women: 73, men: 68) [16]. This position might be changing though, as an estimated 66% of the urban population is now living below the poverty line [2]. Among forest peoples this percentage is probably higher, but no census data exist for this group.

Tropical rainforest covers more than 80% of Suriname. The forest or interior region of Suriname houses and provides sustenance to Amerindians (est. 10,000 people) and Maroons (est. 50,000 people), who live in small settlements along major rivers. Six culturally distinct Maroon groups claim different territories (Map 1<sup>6</sup>). The different Maroon groups operate largely independently from the nation state in political, legal, religious, and socio-cultural matters [7]. A legacy of slavery and suppression, preserved in oral histories, has resulted in a strong aversion to excessive government interference in Maroon affairs. Notwithstanding their independent spirit,

<sup>5</sup> A. Kahane. How to change the world. Lessons for entrepreneurs from activists. Global Business Network, 2000. A. Kleiner. Consequential heresies: how "thinking the unthinkable" changed royal Dutch Shell. Originally written for Doubleday as a prototype for Currency magazine, 1989. Available online from the Global Business Network web site, which features several examples of scenario planning in practice, URL: <http://www.gbn.com>; A special issue of Whole Earth 1999; 96(Spring): 77–95, features articles by and interviews with prominent scenario writers, including Art Kleiner, Adam Kahane, Kees van der Heijden, and Pierre Wack (1992). URL: [www.wholeearthmag.com/ArticleBin/222.html](http://www.wholeearthmag.com/ArticleBin/222.html).

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from R. Price, S. Price, Maroon arts. Cultural vitality in the African diaspora, Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1999: 18.

the Maroons have closed numerous treaties with colonial and national rulers since the 1760s. These documents oblige Suriname to recognize and respect Maroon rights to, among others,

“land, territory, and resources based upon historical occupations use; [...] the right to participate in and consent to all matters that may affect [them]; the right to bilingual and bicultural education and access to education of at least the same quality as that enjoyed by coastal Surinamese; the right to a healthy and productive environment...” [7, p. 182].

To this date, however, the Suriname government has not acknowledged Maroon rights to land, resources, adequate education, and health care.

Of large concern to forest peoples is that the Suriname government has granted approximately 90 gold concessions and 88 timber concessions in the rainforest. Many concessions are in the hands of Suriname citizens who then lease the exploitation rights to foreign logging and mining companies.<sup>7</sup> A visit to the country’s Geological Mining Service revealed that a large number of Maroon communities now lie within mining concession areas, usually without their knowledge, let alone consent (Map 2<sup>8</sup>).

Since the 1960s many Maroons have moved to the capital city of Paramaribo, primarily for economic reasons. Today, Maroons make up about 7% of the population of Paramaribo [3]. Many others have moved to the Netherlands, where several thousand Maroons now reside.

### 2.1. *Current situation of the Suriname Maroons*

Like indigenous peoples in many parts of the world, Maroons are economically, socially, and politically disadvantaged in Suriname. Recent political and economic instability have aggravated this position [5]. In 1986, a civil war erupted between the contemporary military government and a group of Maroons. Even though many Maroons did not or only weakly supported the conflict, the military government aimed its reprisals at the entire ethnic group. Military activity destroyed much of the social, educational, and economic infrastructure in Eastern Suriname, where most Maroons live [15]. The conflict ended in 1992 with the signing of a Peace Accord.

Economic recession, increased inequality, and degradation of the educational and health-care systems have lowered the standard of living, particularly among the poorest Surinamers, many of whom are ethnic Maroons [2,3]. National census data show that Maroon households are disproportionately represented among the lowest income classes. Compared to other ethnic groups in Suriname, Maroons spend the largest

<sup>7</sup> R. Van der Kooye. Environmental journalist, Personal communication, August 2001.

<sup>8</sup> I constructed the map using data from the Geological Mining Service (GMD) in Paramaribo, Suriname, in 1998 and 1999. For reasons of clarity I simplified fanciful concession borders. It is possible that concession areas were slightly misplaced in copying GMD maps. Nevertheless, the map presents a good approximation of gold concession areas. Logging concessions are not drawn.

share of their household budget on food; almost 50% [3]. My field data confirm the marginal position of Maroons suggested by the national statistics. Compared to the national population, the average Maroon individual in my research was less likely to have a high-school diploma, be literate, and speak the national language [6]. In addition, Maroons fill few high positions in the government and private business. In Suriname, like much of the Caribbean and Latin America, such a lack of personal connections at higher levels precludes upward mobility.

A long history of mistrust and antipathy between Maroons and urban Creoles perpetuates marginal status of Maroons [17]. I frequently heard city residents refer to Maroons as “primitive”, “hot-tempered”, and “unreliable”. Discrimination combined with a lack of political connections and low educational rates undermine Maroon competitiveness in the national job market.<sup>9</sup> Given these conditions, it is not surprising to find many Maroons in the informal economy, in particular artisanal gold mining. Artisanal miners use rudimentary methods to prospect and extract gold. In Suriname, most artisanal miners work informally and quasi-legally.

Artisanal gold mining is attractive for its low entry barriers in terms of money and education, and because it offers relative independence from urban power structures. Yet mining also harms Maroon families in nearby communities by degrading the forest ecosystem services that they ultimately depend upon [5]. Miners’ release of mercury into the environment has contaminated fish, a primary source of protein in Suriname’s interior [4,12]. Further, the gold rush has caused river sedimentation and deforestation, has promoted the spread of malaria due to standing water, and has increased indigenous peoples’ exposure to sexually transmitted diseases [14,5]. The in-migration of Brazilian gold miners, who make up an estimated three quarters of the Suriname mining population, has accelerated the negative consequences of local mining [19].

### 3. Methods

Numerous methods exist to develop scenarios. Usually though, scenarios are the product of structured, loosely facilitated, and improvised group conversations designed for that purpose. Art Kleiner, a well-respected analyst and facilitator of Scenario Planning sessions, believes that workshops should cover at least five or six full days, spread out over several months [8].

Such a workshop did not take place in Suriname. Instead, the ideas and data presented in this paper rely on anthropological fieldwork among one of Suriname’s Maroon groups, the Ndjuka, in addition to formal and informal conversations with people from diverse layers of Suriname society during repetitive visits to Suriname

<sup>9</sup> H.E. Lamur. *De levensomstandigheden van de in Paramaribo werkende Aukaner arbeiders*. New West Indien Guide 1965; 44: 121–132. And, Price 1995 [17].

between 1996 and 2001.<sup>10</sup> Because fieldwork was not conducted with the purpose of scenario writing, the present narratives are less interactive than would ideally be the case and serve primarily as a demonstration. I anticipate eliciting reactions on the scenarios from Maroons and other people in Suriname during follow up research in the summer of 2002.

Through semi-structured interviews, I collected different types of projections about the future. First, I asked Ndjuka ( $N_{total} = 219$ ) about their desires for their own personal futures. Questions included: “For how long do you plan to continue the job you are doing now?”, “What would you like to do if you were to quit this job?”, and “What do you want your children to do when they grow up?” Answers to these questions provided ideal futures of individuals and their families.

The more holistic scenarios are based on Maroon and non-Maroon perspectives on the future of the Suriname interior as a whole. To probe discussions about the future, I asked Maroons for their reactions on several hypothetical questions. An example of such a question is: “If the government were to sell of Maroon land to a logging company, what would you do? How do you think people around you would react?” In addition I asked a range of people in Suriname about their projections, including government ministers, journalists, urban citizens, and associates of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations. Presenting both personal and macro-scale visions on the future reveals the tension between Maroon dreams for their own lives, and possible directions in which their society might develop. In doing so, visions of preferred futures provide material to evaluate the desirability of different scenarios.

#### 4. Personal visions on the future

Oscar Lewis, a famous anthropologist, found in the 1960s that poor people tended to have a low level of expressed orientation towards the future [9,10]. This notion was confirmed in my fieldwork. Most Ndjuka I interviewed were uncomfortable speculating about their destinies. Some felt that statements about something they could not know or had not experienced were lies. Others voiced the opinion that: “...you can only decide about your options once you have money.” About two-fifths of the people in my research sample shared visions about where they would like to be in approximately one decade from the time of the interview. These people lived either in the forest or in the capital city of Paramaribo.

One immediate observation was that personal desires for the future were extremely

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<sup>10</sup> I conducted research among the Ndyuka in 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2001. The present data were collected during a year of doctoral dissertation research in 1998–1999. The Ndyuka, their society and culture, and the methods used to collect data are described in greater detail in the dissertation: Heemskerk M. Driving forces of small-scale gold mining among the Ndjuka Maroons: a cross-scale socioeconomic analysis of participation in gold mining in Suriname. PhD dissertation. University of Florida, Gainesville FL: Department of Anthropology, 2000.

practical. Table 1 summarizes the responses of 81 Ndjuka men and women, from the most to the least frequently mentioned. A majority of interviewees (59%) wanted to work independently, often in the informal economy. Of those wanting to become entrepreneurs, almost half (48%) wanted to enter commerce, 17% wanted to commercially hunt or fish, and 15% wanted to drive a taxicab. Less common ideas included being a musician, a tourist guide, and the owner of a karate and boxing school. Others preferred formal labor in the city for the stability and social services it offered, as well as the conveniences of urban life. Most men in this group wanted to be construction workers. Others mentioned diverse professions such as civil servant, police agent, border guard, doctor, consultant for development organizations, and human rights lawyer.

Almost a fifth of people said they wanted to migrate, all but one to the Netherlands. The former colonial power is a prime migration destination because Suriname shares its national language, Dutch, and practically all Maroons have relatives in the Netherlands. Few people wanted to work or continue working in the small-scale gold mining industry. Only one fifth of the miners I interviewed wanted to mine for a lifetime. Most others preferred to quit as soon as possible, in a few more years, or as soon as they found another job. Two mining women who were single mothers said they would stay home and take care of their children once they found a man to financially provide for the household.

Education is seen as a vehicle for Maroon children to escape poverty. Many Ndjuka emphasized that their children should finish school and obtain what is called ‘work in society’, meaning the non-Ndjuka, urbanized segment of Suriname. One person explained: “In the city you find newspapers, development. In terms of personal development, you can only go backwards [in the forest/the mining area].” Practically the only capital good mentioned was a well-constructed house that would

Table 1

Most frequent answers on the open question about future perspectives: What would you like to do, be, or have a decade from now<sup>a</sup>

| Answer  | #  | %    |
|---|----|------|
| An independent job, mostly in the informal economy          | 48 | 59.3 |
| Commerce; open a shop, store, or restaurant                 | 23 | 28.4 |
| Live in the city, obtaining formal or informal work in town | 18 | 22.2 |
| Migration, all but one to the Netherlands                   | 12 | 18.8 |
| Lighter or no work outside the home                         | 9  | 11.1 |
| Buy a house, or construct one from better materials         | 8  | 9.3  |
| Agriculture, Hunting for bush-meat, or Fishery              | 8  | 9.3  |
| Drive a taxi-cab; and buy a car or mini-bus to do so        | 7  | 8.6  |
| Other specified wage labor                                  | 7  | 8.6  |
| Construction  | 5  | 6.1  |

<sup>a</sup> The table only lists the answers given by at least five people ( $N_{total} = 81$ ). The total number of responses does not add up to 81 because several people gave more than one answer



accommodate one's children. In this context, a house meant socioeconomic security and stability.

Maroon narratives tell of plausible futures that presuppose that Suriname society ten years from now will look like Suriname today. It is possible, however, that unexpected changes in society will alter the options and constraints of individual Maroons, as well as those of Maroon society as a whole. Scenario Planning offers a conceptual lens to zoom in on unexpected possibilities. This exercise shifts the question from 'what do we think will happen' to 'can we adapt to a radically different future?'

## 5. Scenario planning

### 5.1. Applications and approaches

Over the past few decades, corporate and military decision-makers have refined Scenario Planning as an alternative to deceptively precise predictions. Confronted with failing predictions and the limited capacity of organizations to deal with consequent surprise, planners wanted visions of the future to incorporate uncertainty. Acknowledging that the future is complex, dynamic, and unpredictable, scenarios explore diverse alternative futures that might happen rather than a narrow range of likely futures.

Today scenarios are being written by a diverse public including policy makers, development workers, resource managers, and academic scientists [20]. In countries including Colombia, Guatemala, and South Africa, scenario workshops have stimulated discussion among heterogeneous groups of people, ranging from members of guerilla groups and the clergy to government and corporate representatives.<sup>5,11</sup> These workshops initiated debate about more and less desirable futures among people who otherwise did not communicate.

In corporate circles, Scenario Planning has helped businesses anticipate and prepare for unexpected crises. A classic example is Royal Dutch Shell, where a small group of planners considered the possibility of an energy crisis two years before it happened in 1973. When the unthinkable turned out to be true, Shell prospered because it was the only oil corporation that had prepared for dramatic changes in oil prices.<sup>5</sup> More recently, concern and uncertainty about the impacts of land-use/land-cover change has inspired ecologists to write scenarios. Global scenarios have exposed policy makers and the general public to possible social and ecological consequences of climate change [13]. On a regional scale, scenarios have sketched possible ways in which human populations and ecosystems might co-develop with

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<sup>11</sup> A. Kahane. *Destino Colombia*. A scenario planning process for the new millennium. GBN. *Deeper News* 1998; 9(1): 1-30. URL: <http://www.gbn.org>. A. Kahane. *Changing the winds*. Scenarios for people who want to change the world. *Whole Earth* 96 (Spring): 82-

the purpose of inspiring more robust human responses to change in their local environment.<sup>12</sup>

Recognizing the limitations of externally developed scenarios, the stories in this paper are meant as an example and a first step towards more systematic thinking about the future of forest peoples in Suriname. The narratives sketch alternative futures of the Maroons with the aim of inspiring debate about the desirability or undesirability of paths towards these future worlds.

## 5.2. *Steering factors*

Innumerable factors can influence the future, but some matter more than others. Scenario Planning evolves around the factors that are least predictable and most likely to make a difference. Two steering factors are central to the Maroon scenarios: the national government and multinational resource extraction activity. I selected the first factor because colonial and national governments have historically shaped the fate of the Maroons. Especially indigenous (land) rights are a long-standing source of friction between forest peoples and governing parties. The future government can choose to either support or ignore the Maroons, depending on international pressure, national politics, economic potential, and local events.

I focus on extractive multinational companies because they are a source of worry for Maroons, international observers, and Suriname citizens today.<sup>13</sup> If and when these companies will execute exploitative activities on indigenous territories will depend upon commodity prices, national economic and political developments, and the international investment climate, among other factors. Some government officials emphasize the social and economic benefits to forest communities once multinationals establish themselves. They point to the creation of new jobs and investments in local infrastructure, electricity, schools, and health care. Moreover, expected revenues are indispensable to the struggling national economy. Conservationists and human rights activists, on the other hand, fear violations of environmental regulations and indigenous rights as the government has few resources to monitor multinational companies.<sup>13</sup>

Table 2 summarizes some of the possible outcomes following opposite government and multinational actions. I used this table as a basis to develop the Maroon scenarios. Box IV in the table represents the status quo: a national government that practically ignores the Maroons and relatively benign activities executed by mining and logging companies. This box cannot inspire a provocative scenario because it depicts no or little change. Conversely, the developments in Box I may be practically impossible and hence less suitable for a scenario. Promoting indigenous rights is

<sup>12</sup> In press. Garry Peterson, Maple paper.

<sup>13</sup> E.R. Kambel, MacKay, 1999, see [7]. R. Van der Kooye. *Porknockerij in de media. berichtgeving en effecten van dagbladberichtgeving over kleinschalige goudwinning in Suriname, 1994–1995*. MA Thesis. Paramaribo, Suriname: School of Journalism, 1997. National concern with large-scale resource extraction is also shown by its frequent discussion in the national newspapers *De West* and *De Ware Tijd*, between 1994–2001.

Table 2  
Possible outcomes due to changes in the steering factors

| Multinational gold and timber extraction companies |              | Active exploitation  | Passive or Leaving  |
|--|--------------|--|---|
| Government policy vis-à-vis the Maroons            | Support      | I (Least likely combination)<br>Pressure on multinationals to invest in local health care, electricity, physical infrastructure, education, and to provide jobs for local people.<br>Concessions do not overlap with Maroon villages without their informed consent.   | II (Exposed teeth ...)<br>Legal recognition of indigenous rights to land and natural resource.<br>Investment in local health care (malaria eradication) and education, possibly with assistance of international aid agencies.  |
|  | Indifference | III (The snake and the worm)<br>Widespread malaria and other diseases, poor quality of forest education, poverty.<br>Allowing timber and gold concessions to overlap with Maroon villages; loss of access to natural resource base & environmental degradation.<br>Conflict over resources and environmental impacts between multinationals and Maroon communities.<br>International alarm from human rights and conservation activists. | IV (Status quo)<br>Maroon communities have poor access to health care, education, and other public services.<br>Low gold prices make large-scale gold exploitation unattractive.<br>Large-scale logging companies operate in some regions, sometimes quasi-legally.<br>Limited international attention. |

hard to reconcile with large-scale exploitation of the resources that indigenous people depend upon. The two scenarios considered in this paper will focus on the contrasting developments sketched in Boxes II and III.

## 6. Likely trends and wild cards

As difficult as selecting items to include is deciding what factors to leave out. Least interesting in terms of Scenario Planning are fairly predictable factors such as, in this case, population growth. Current Maroons birth rates and migratory patterns suggest that the absolute number of Maroons will increase and that many will seek their fortunes in either Paramaribo or abroad. Neither do I pay much attention to the artisanal gold mining industry, even though its growth or contraction will influence the Maroons' quality-of-life. Artisanal mining is likely to fluctuate in response to government policies, multinational activity, and alternative economic opportunities in the forest.

The opposites of fairly predictable factors are wild cards: unanticipated yet dramatic events [8]. It is useful to consider dramatic events because it can help us envision and prepare for worst-case scenarios. I have heard people in Suriname speculate about civil warfare, an HIV/AIDS epidemic, road construction into the interior, the discovery of valuable gold and diamond deposits, and the Brazilian annexation of Suriname. Recent developments in Suriname and neighboring countries suggest that, except for the latter, the listed events are not unlikely. In the following section, I will compile the steering factors and wild cards to sketch two alternative futures for the Maroons in Suriname. An *odo*, or Suriname proverb, inspires each story.

## 7. Two stories

### 7.1. *The snake and the worm: Learning from bad experiences*

*Efu sneki beti mi, mi e lon efu mi e si wan woron*

(Litt: If a snake has bitten me, I'll run when I see a worm)

This is a story of government indifference and inaction leading to a series of disastrous events, which motivates all parties to search for a solution (Table 2, Box III). Ten years from now, a Maroon person looking back could remember the years of violence and reconciliation as follows:

Discontent with the government was not new, but taking on unprecedented proportions. Malaria was taking its toll without public efforts to eradicate the disease. Schools did not receive qualified teachers or teaching materials, and we felt that our children were denied access to a better future. Government officials only feigned interest in our needs during election times. Meanwhile we witnessed tremendous public spending on luxuries for the president and cabinet ministers.

And yet, we grumpily accepted the status quo until large logging and mining companies knocked on our doors. We had heard about concessions overlapping our territories but had no means of verifying this information. We passively looked on

until foreigners moved in and began working on our lands without prior warning, let alone our consent. We were told that we would be moved to an area closer to the city with better access to health care and education. Each family was offered a lump-sum cash payment for moving. Yet we had lived here for more than 400 years; what about our ancestors, our shrines, our gardens and animals?

At first our lack of enthusiasm was received with pleas and more attractive offers, then with irritation and threats. The village elders recounted stories of the days of slavery and suppression by the *bakáas* (Maroon word for ‘outsiders’ or ‘white people’), reminding us that our fate was in our own hands. We called several meetings. When the military moved in to remove us, we were determined to stay. What followed brought back memories of the interior war (1986–1992), another dark period in our history of struggle and rebellion. Violence displaced people, destroyed villages, and caused teachers and health workers to leave. Artisanal gold mining revenues became indispensable to the indigenous guerilla movement. Many people fled to the Netherlands and French Guiana.

After several years of conflict and international pressure, a peace treaty was signed between the parties. In many ways we lost. Families are fragmented due to killing and out-migration. The educational and socioeconomic infrastructures are destroyed. In one way we won: the multinationals moved out when it became too risky to invest in an area with political violence. In addition, war memories and peace negotiations catapulted developments in a new direction. The war acted as the proverbial snake; only once we had experienced the pain of its strike, we took measures to avoid it. After the war, both Maroon negotiators and government delegates were equally motivated to avoid another period of violence, and international mediators were drawn to the scene. For the first time in the history of Suriname, the government, under pressure from international donors, has taken serious steps towards recognizing our land rights. Yet the sacrifice has been high. Much time and strength are needed to heal the bite of a poisonous snake.

## 7.2. *Exposed teeth ...: Appearances are deceptive:*

*Ala piritifi a no lafu*

(Litt: Exposed teeth do not make a laugh)

This narrative tells about unexpected developments following the provision of indigenous rights that benefited some but disappointed others (Table 2, Box II). If Maroons who had been conscious participants in this process would have to explain to their children what went right and what went wrong, they might do so in the following words:

Euphoria following the ratification of land-rights was soon replaced with practical concerns. Funding agencies and diverse national interest groups had pressured the government to grant territorial rights to its forest peoples, but had not resolved details such as territorial boundaries and resource rights. The first conflict broke out when

a team of foreign geographers, with much technical but little cultural understanding, attempted to map the borders between a Maroon and an Amerindian group in Eastern Suriname. Members of these groups had hunted and collected forest products in overlapping areas ever since human memory recalled. Land demarcation implied that one of the groups risked losing access to these forests.

Other tensions occurred because communal rights did not translate to equal access and control over resources within communities. Conservation groups were shocked when the captains of two Maroon villages closed a deal with a logging conglomerate in exchange for electricity and a road that connected their communities to the city. These leaders and their constituency benefited at the expense of others in the community.

Ecotourism development similarly exposed and increased inequality between and within Maroon villages. Tour operators collaborated with community elders in a small number of scenic locations. Regular wages raised the standard of living of villagers who constructed lodges, sanitary facilities and trails, and cooked, cleaned, and performed for tourists. Less acculturated and educated community members, mostly women and the elderly, benefited little. Instead they lost status and power to young men. Tour operators lobbied with the government for cellular phone access and more regular delivery of fuel for public generators. In addition to electric light and restroom facilities, tourists wanted to see healthy, school-going children. Hence more resources were allocated to educational and health services in privileged locations. In villages without economic pressure groups, fuel continued to arrive sporadically, clinics remained understaffed and chronically short of medicine, and schools still functioned poorly.

Outwardly indicators, such as private and government investment, seemed to promise a smiling future. For many people, however, appearances turned out to be deceptive. Socioeconomic benefits never reached their villages and homes. Despite these drawbacks, we have achieved practical goals and seen spin-off benefits. Economic growth, jobs, and better health conditions in some places may spark similar developments in other communities. Indigenous people who have acquired negotiation skills now demand the expansion of their rights, including rights to adequate education and health care. A malaria eradication program is on the verge of being implemented as part of public policy aimed at attracting tourists. In the long run, we envision that better education will open up employment opportunities and decrease the reliance on gold mining as a source of subsistence in the interior.

## 8. Lessons learned

### 8.1. *The Suriname scenarios*

Among Maroons with whom I have spoken, personal dreams for the future typically spanned a narrow range of possibilities. Scenario Planning, by contrast, can encompass a wider array of possibilities in Suriname as a whole, and in Maroon societies in particular. Interviews and development concerns suggest several indi-

cators to evaluate the scenarios. From a Maroon-centered perspective, meaningful indicators include economic and employment opportunities, and the quality of forest education. In terms of regional development, it is useful to focus on sources of success or failure in terms of public health, social stability, and ecological conservation in the two scenarios.

Clearly, the priorities of individual Maroons and advocates of more sustainable development will be jeopardized if Suriname were to follow the first scenario path of violent struggle. In this scenario, economic development stagnates, the educational system falls apart, no new jobs are generated, public health worsens, and society destabilizes. The only positive outcomes from a conservation perspective may be the suspension of large-scale forest exploitation and the initiation of communication among stakeholders. Government recognition of indigenous rights, an active indigenous movement, non-governmental support for the Maroons, and international pressure on the Suriname government to ratify the international treaties it has signed,<sup>14</sup> might lessen the likelihood that this scenario occurs.

The second story contains more room for the realization of people's personal goals. It illustrates that the gains and losses of economic development may not be distributed equally. We are forewarned that a narrow focus on land rights can blindfold us to potential negative outcomes once these rights are granted. Some communities and powerful people within them are more likely than others to benefit from industrial and tourism development. Economic growth, new jobs, improved educational facilities, and adequate public health care will reach some people earlier than others, and may not reach some at all. Policy makers can change this trajectory by promoting inter- and intra-community equity. This is important because inequity promotes social instability and ecological degradation. A scenario workshop that integrates policy makers and Maroons could be a first step towards a socially, economically, and ecologically healthier Suriname interior.

## 8.2. *Promises and pitfalls*

Applied anthropologists have traditionally demonstrated a genuine concern with social change in the communities they study, and have consulted policy makers to positively steer these changes. Their efforts would benefit from a more systematic reflection on the possible long-term outcomes of policies and actions. In this context, Scenario Planning can be a useful tool. Vice versa, Scenario Planning can benefit from anthropological theory and methods. Whereas quantitative models tend to generalize, ethnographic data emphasize detail and departures from general patterns that

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<sup>14</sup> In 1992, the Suriname government signed the Manaus agreement, by which it agrees, among others, "to respect the rights of indigenous populations in relation to their lands ...". In the same year at the Rio Summit, Suriname signed Agenda 21. This document states that: "Indigenous peoples need to be integrated in processes of national decision-making, law development, natural resource management ... especially where it concerns their own living and subsistence environment." Translated from Vernooij J. *Recht voor één, recht voor allen: grondrechten in Suriname*. Paramaribo, Suriname: Stichting Wetenschappelijke Informatie, 1995: 10. Kambel and MacKay 1999, see [7], also present several examples.

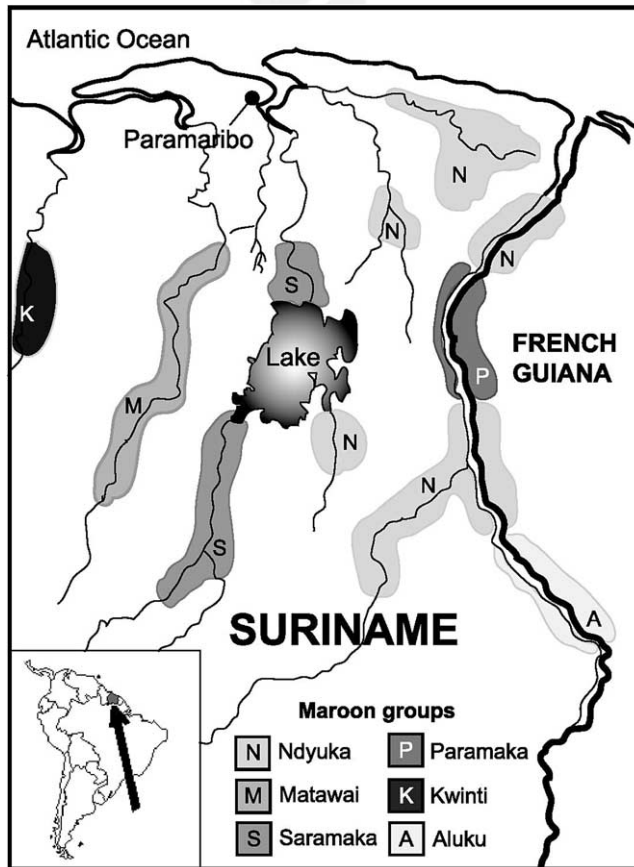


Fig. 1. Eastern Suriname with residency and resource use territories of the country's six Maroon groups. Source: <sup>15</sup>

typify human society. By offering a holistic perspective, providing in-depth analyses of specific groups, and identifying possible sources of surprise, anthropologists have much to contribute to development policy that envisions alternative futures.

Scenarios will not satisfy everyone's needs. Policy makers may prefer numeric analyses and straightforward predictions of the type: 'for each dollar invested in education we can expect illiteracy to drop by x%'. Scenarios cannot provide such rigorous forecasts, nor are they meant to do so. Rather, scenarios can illuminate the diversity of possible future outcomes, and the diverse of paths towards those outcomes. Furthermore, scenario workshops ideally bring together diverse stakeholders. Such meetings require money, time, the dedication of workshop participants, and

<sup>15</sup> Adapted from R. Price, S. Price, *Maroon arts. Cultural vitality in the African diaspora*, Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1999: 18.



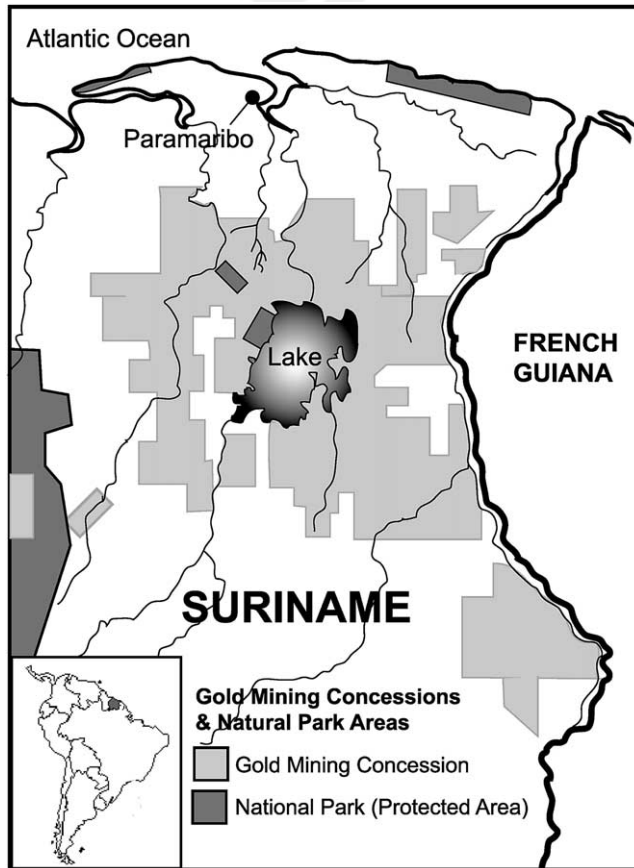


Fig. 2. Approximate location of mining concessions in the Suriname interior (1998–1999). A comparison with Fig. 1 reveals that mining concessions overlap with Maroon territories and villages. Information on the location of logging concessions was not available. Source: .<sup>8</sup>

experienced workshop facilitators, which may be difficult to solicit. Analyzing secondary statistical data will generate faster results that are easier to interpret.

In this context, ethnographic data can serve a dual purpose. First, qualitative data can help plan and manage a Scenario workshop by suggesting who to invite and what to discuss. Second, where financial and human resources for a workshop are not available, researchers can use ethnographic data to develop preliminary scenarios. Externally developed scenarios can be presented to different interest groups as an alternative tool for discussion about the future.

Scenario Planning alone will not provide clear answers or guidelines for policy intervention. Yet expanding our analytical toolkit with Scenario Planning will contribute to a multi-method approach to policy analysis that is necessary in an increas-

ingly complex world. Anticipating unthinkable events can help individuals, societies, and policy makers more adaptively cope with surprising futures.

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