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# Cartographic Expressions in the Guiana Region

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# Cartographic Expressions in the Guiana Region

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## Abstract

From the mid-twentieth century, there was a proliferation of studies in various fields of knowledge regarding the Guiana region. However, until today there still remains a large gap in updating thematic cartographies that explain *the geographies* of the region. The aim of this text, therefore, is to outline some reflections on the construction of 5 maps that have been created in order to highlight aspects of the territorial ordering of this region and, as a result, to clarify relevant questions concerning the past and present of the Guianas. In order to compose both the maps and our arguments, a literature review has been undertaken, together with the collection and tabulation of primary data (statistics) and fieldwork as methodological guidelines.

**Keywords:** Regional Geography. The Guiana Region. Fieldwork. Cartography.

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## Expressões cartográficas da região das Guianas

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### Resumo

A partir da metade do século XX, proliferaram estudos em diversos campos de conhecimento sobre a região das Guianas. Mesmo assim, até hoje há uma grande lacuna na atualização de cartografias temáticas que expliquem *suas geografias*. O objetivo deste texto é tecer reflexões sobre a construção de cinco mapas que elaboramos para evidenciar aspectos do ordenamento territorial da região e, com isso, elucidar questões relevantes de seu passado e presente. Para compor os mapas e nossa argumentação, recorreremos à revisão de literatura, à coleta e tabulação de dados primários (estatísticas) e ao trabalho de campo como balizas metodológicas.

**Palavras-chave:** Geografia Regional. Região das Guianas. Trabalho de campo. Cartografia.

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# Expressions cartographiques de la région des Guyanes

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## Résumé

Il y a eu depuis la moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle une prolifération d'études sur divers champs de la connaissance de la région des Guyanes. Cependant, il persiste aujourd'hui une grande lacune dans l'actualisation de la cartographie thématique qui explique *ses géographies*. Notre objectif est de lancer des réflexions sur l'élaboration de 5 cartes destinées à mettre en évidence les aspects de l'aménagement du territoire de cette région, et, ainsi, de traiter des questions importantes relatives au passé et au présent des Guyanes. Pour composer les cartes et nos arguments nous avons recouru à des lectures, à la collecte et la quantification de données primaires (statistiques) et à des études de terrain comme bases méthodologiques.

**Mots-clés:** Géographie Régionale. Région des Guyanes. Études de terrain. Cartographie.

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## Introduction

The Guianas, a relatively unknown and rarely studied region in the international area of the Amazon, has undergone numerous territorial transformations since its first inhabitants, the indigenous peoples, populated it more than 10,000 years ago (Eriksen, 2011). With the arrival of the European explorers from the end of the fifteenth century, i.e., just half a millennium ago, followed by enslaved Africans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and by Asians and people from the American continent itself during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there has been a long process of occupation, circulation and construction of territorialities in the Guianas. This has given rise to a complex region with regard to different social, economic, political and geopolitical aspects. Moreover, it is a relevant fact that there is still a significant lack of thematic cartographies, which support an explanation for the past and present regional geography. The contribution of this text is to overcome this gap by means of five maps representing the regional context, in addition to an introductory map, which is the first to be presented, in which we indicate the location and the administrative units of the region.

## The regional cross-section

The focus of this paper is on the Guiana region, a vast area between the Orinoco and Amazon Rivers, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean (Map 1). The works of two authors have been the pillars for this regionalization: the books by Lézy (2000) and Hammond (2005). The British explorer, Walter Raleigh, is credited with the first accounts of some of the wealth of nature found in the Guianas in *The Discovery of Guiana* (Raleigh, 1596), written a year after his first expedition to the Amazon. Three centuries later, in 1895, Elisée Reclus analyzed the Guiana

region for its natural aspects (size, shape and location) in his famous book *Universal Geography*. A little later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Vidal de La Blache also undertook a study of the region, although from its historical and cartographic aspects. On analyzing ancient maps of South America, he observed that there was a vast harmonic landscape in the macro-region, the borders of which are the Orinoco and Amazon Rivers (Lézy, 2000). Nonetheless, it is possible to state that it was from the 1950s onwards that numerous texts on the Guiana region were published in different fields of knowledge (Hammond, 2005), prompting - in the new century - the emergence of groups of researchers with the intention of assessing historical, geographic and anthropological aspects of the region featured herein.

Both Lézy (2000) and Hammond (2005) have highlighted several cartographies in the Guianas, but even so, the maps presented herein have made further advancements in terms of both refinement and updating (Maps 2 and 3), as well as in innovation, presenting complex maps in terms of production and the acquisition of data valid for all the Guiana countries in a comparative perspective (Maps 4 to 6).

### Map 1 – The administrative area of the Guiana region



### The data used

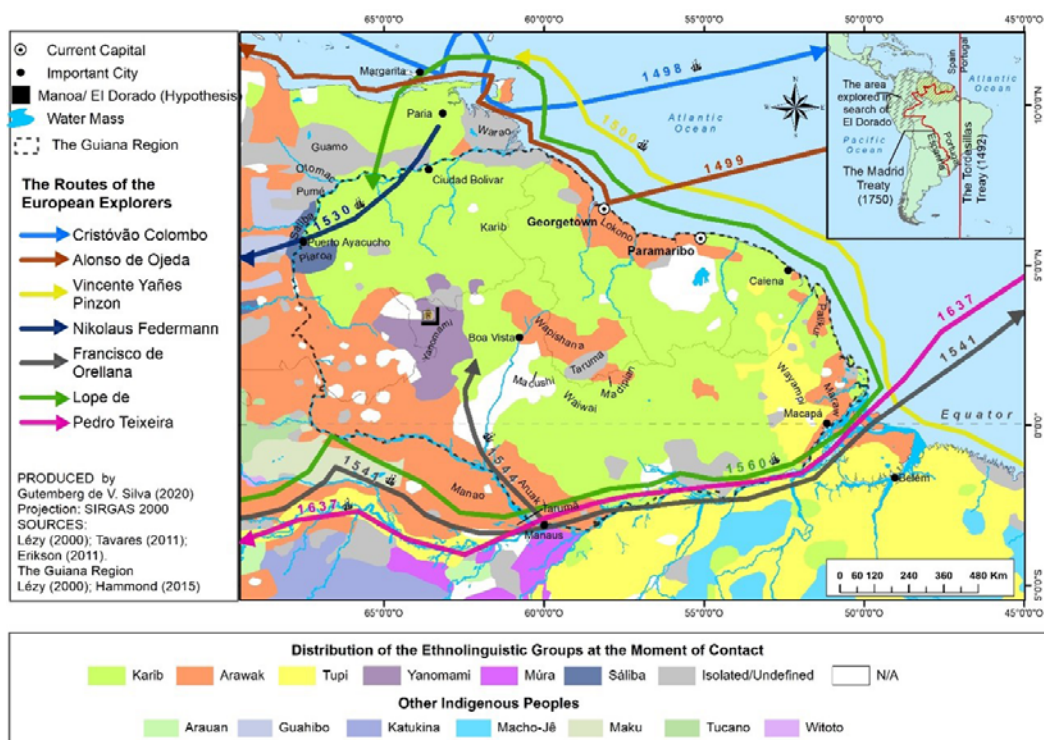
The following five maps have been assembled using primary data (the most recent census from each country); international space stations encompassing the entire study area; a review of the literature; and fieldwork, the latter being conducted between January and February 2020<sup>1</sup>. For the cartographic representation, ArcGis 10.1 was used. On some of the maps, photographs taken during the fieldwork have also been added so as to provide illustrations of the cartographic representations.

<sup>1</sup> Over a period of 20 days, the author traveled overland via the entire TransGuianian Highway (except between Santa Elena and Ciudad Guayana, in Venezuela) and then the Manaus-Santana river route along the Amazon River (Map 4).

## The methodology/creation of each map plus a brief discussion

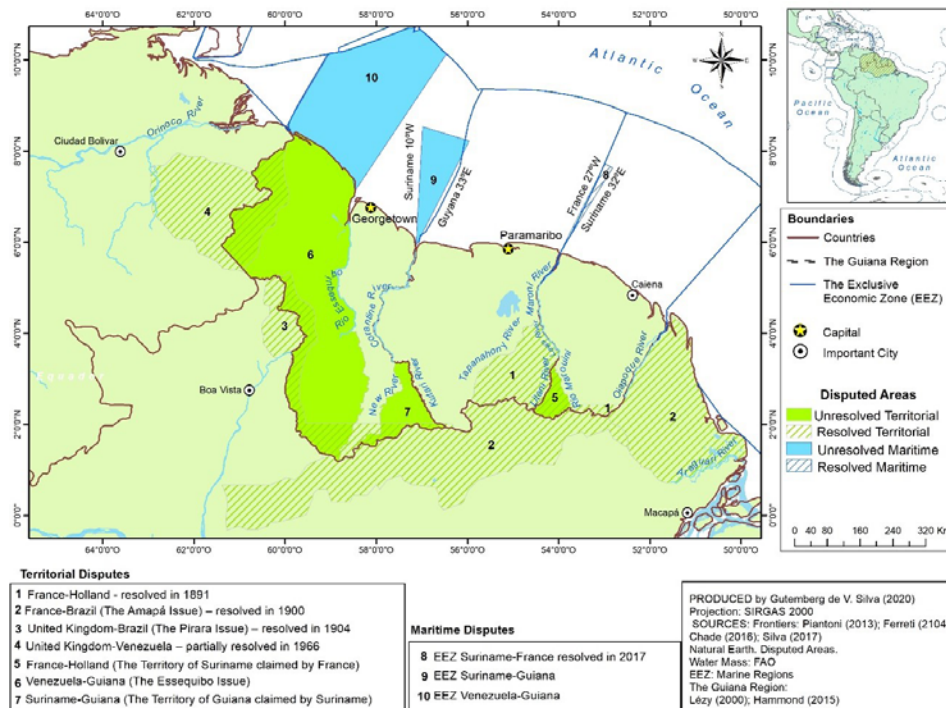
Map 2 was essentially created by cross-referencing information from Lézy (2000), Tavares (2011) and Eriksen (2011). It presents two cartographies: the larger one presents three fundamental pieces of information: (i) the distribution of indigenous peoples in the Guiana region at the moment of contact with the Europeans, (ii) the hypothetical location of El Dorado, a mythical city obsessively sought after during the colonial period in the Amazon, and (iii) the route of European explorers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is also a smaller cartography, which presents the territory explored by the Europeans in the international area of the Amazon and the two main devices of territorial division with a great impact on the territorial formation of the Guianas, i.e., the Treaties of Tordesillas (1492) and Madrid (1750). With rare exceptions, explorations along the borders of the region brought about a strong impact on the regional order, because, until today, the entire process of demographic occupation and the assembly of the central bases of the region's engineering system has essentially occurred along the borders of the Guianas (Maps 5 and 6), exactly where the main cities are located.

### Map 2 – Indigenous peoples and the first explorations into the Guiana region



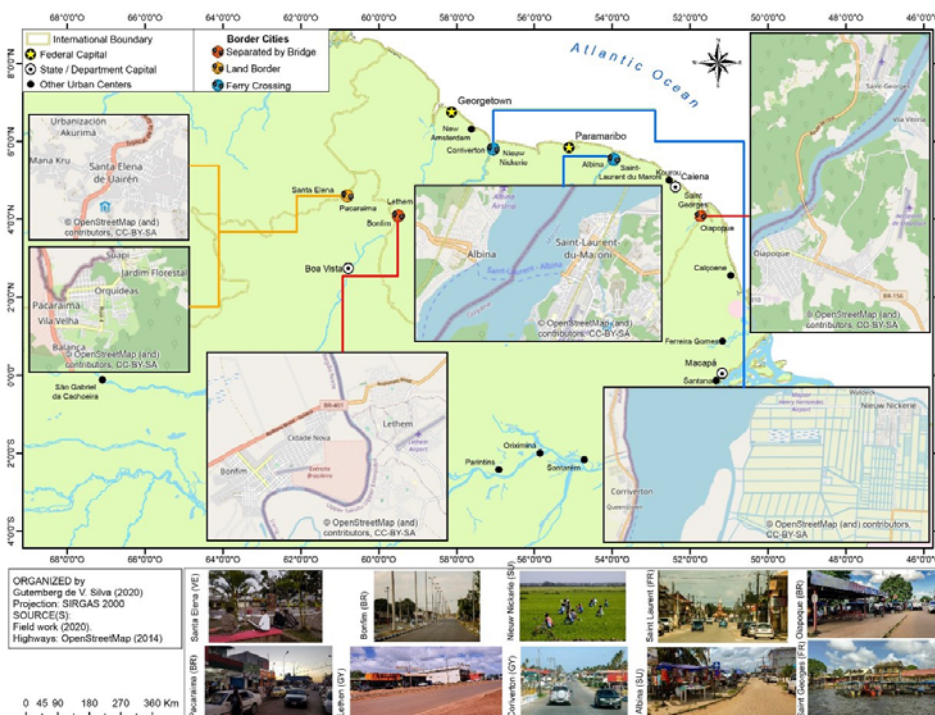
Map 3 was created from a vast literature review synthesized mainly by Silva (2017), but also based on other references mentioned in the map. Here, resolved disputes are presented together with those that may still cause diplomatic embarrassment and even result in possible armed conflicts. Although several factors are always specified for fresh clashes and the need for diplomatic intervention, the mineral wealth – gold and diamond on the continent and oil in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), have always determined the geopolitics of the region's borders (Silva, 2017, 2020), which makes this map relevant for an overall analysis of the existing disputes.

### Map 3 – Territorial ordering/border disputes in the Guianas



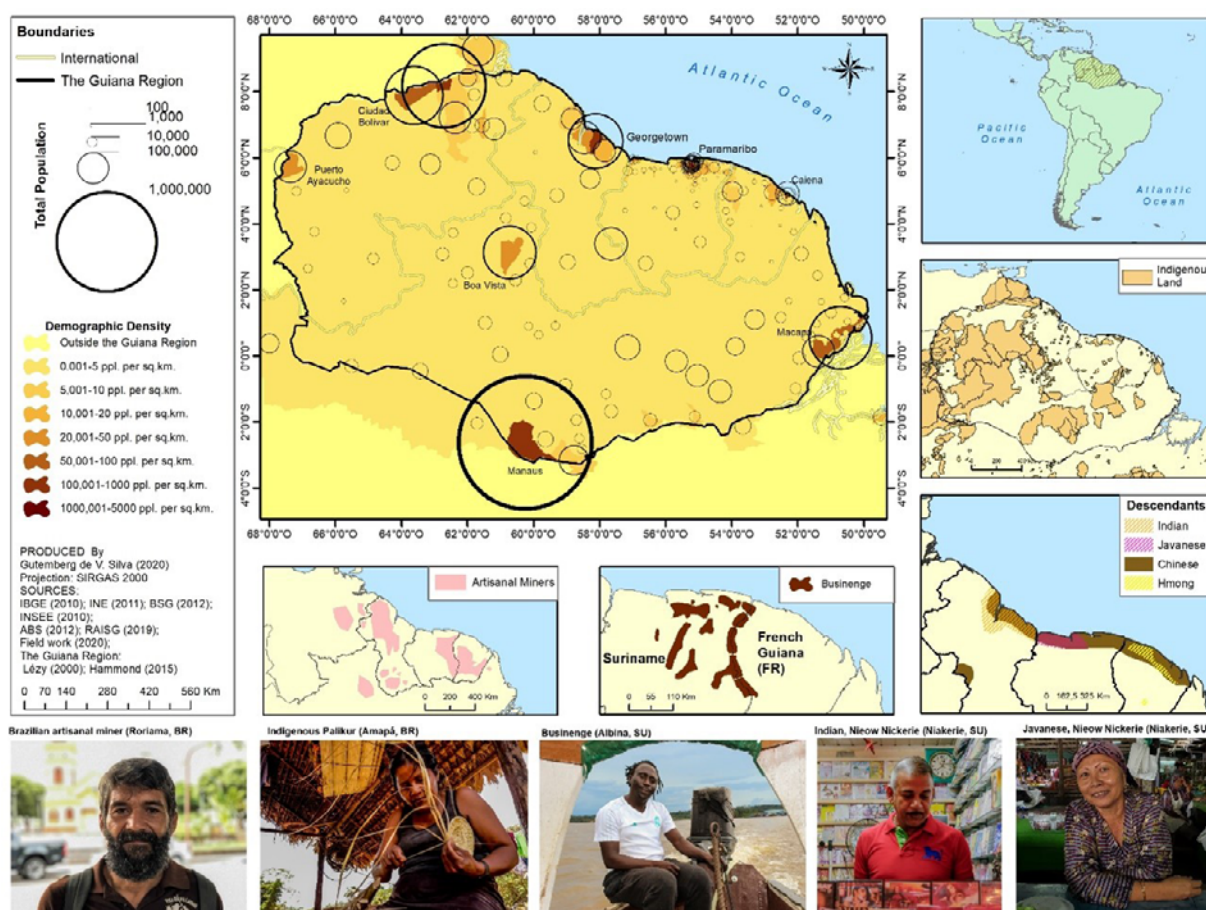
Map 4 was produced on the basis of fieldwork and support from the Open Street Map (2021) in order to indicate the patterns of border-city pairs in Guiana region. It was not possible to standardize the scale for cities due to their size and the distance between them. Altogether, there are 5 pairs, of which four are natural boundaries and one is a land boundary. Of the first, three stand at the mouth of the river where they are located, giving them a relevant strategic position for entering and exiting the region.

### Map 4 – Border cities in the Guiana region



Map 5 was essentially produced with the most recent census data from each country together with the fieldwork. For data aggregation, in Venezuela and Brazil, the municipal divisions were used. In the Republic of Guyana, the administrative regions were used and in French Guiana the communes, and in Suriname the districts. After this lengthy step, it was possible to demonstrate the population distribution in the larger cartography of the map in question, demonstrating the large demographic concentration in cities along the borders of the region. There are also five other smaller cartographic representations: one is of location and the others are of some of the main ethnic groups represented in the Guiana region: the indigenous people, represented by their areas, either demarcated or not (RAISG, 2019); the artisanal miners, who are generally Brazilian, the Businenge (meaning *people of the forest*), a very peculiar group of African descendants that has spread across the Guyanese-Surinamese border; the Indians, Chinese and Javanese who began to arrive in the mid-nineteenth century to make up for work shortages; and, finally, the Hmongs, an ethnic group that arrived in French Guiana in the 1970s with the crisis in Indochina.

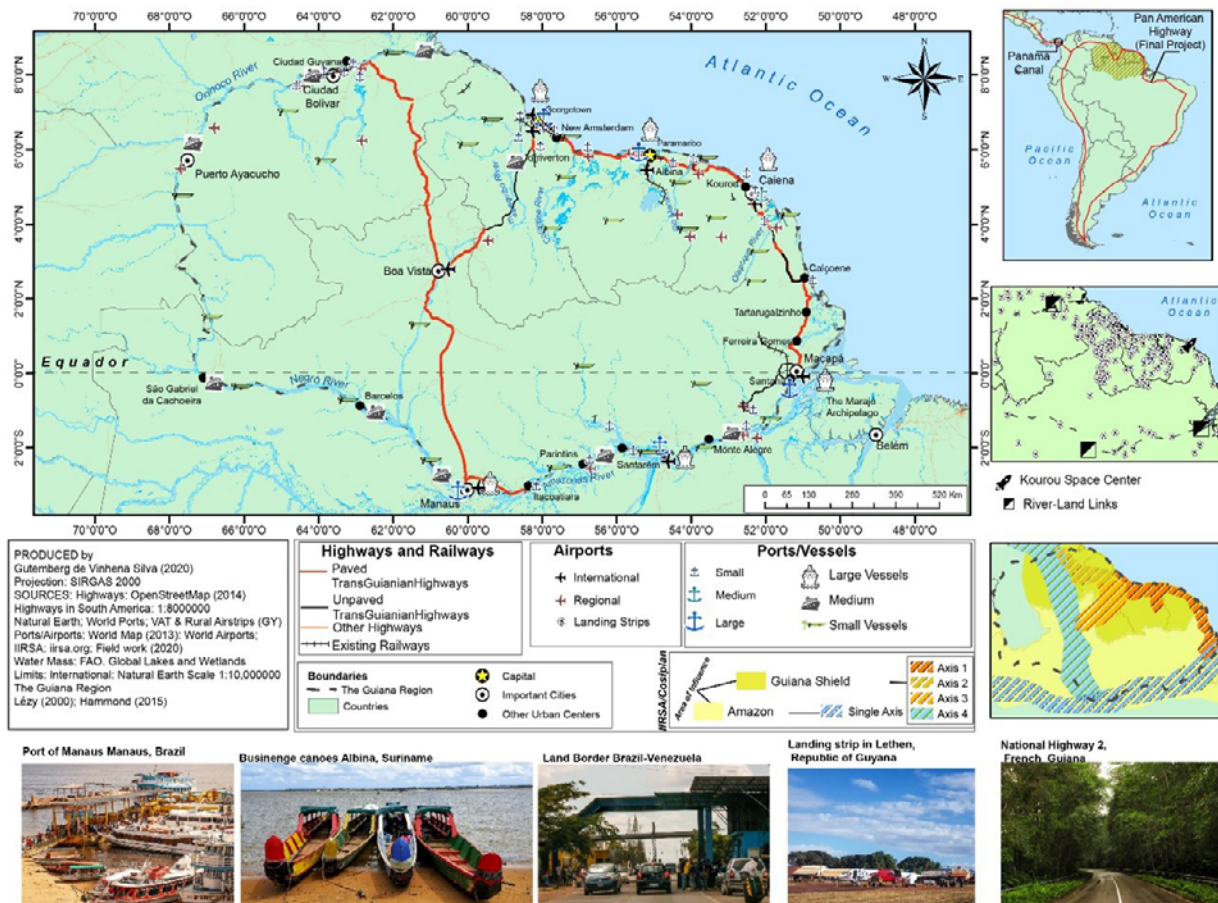
## Map 5 – The demographics in the Guiana region



Map 6 illustrates the transportation system set up in the Guiana region. The cartography was constructed after an extensive consultation was undertaken into information on ports, airports, railways, waterways, a review of the literature and the fieldwork. This representation highlights the selected circulation and connection patterns within the regional as a whole. Today,

the multimodal network in the Guiana region is formed by a variety of river connections, a few highway routes, some regular intra- and inter-regional flights and an almost non-existent railway system. The logistical structure may be divided into three main axes: (i) along the Atlantic coastal strip, the highways predominate, (ii) in the great arc between the Orinoco and Amazon Rivers - and penetrating the forest in all directions, there are waterways, and (iii) in the great regional interior, airplanes, generally small, and canoes, either with or without outboard motors, almost always steered by the local traditional populations.

## Map 6 – The logistic structure in the Guiana region



## Conclusion

These maps, all original in construction and mostly innovative in design, have enabled us to increase our understanding of the territorial ordering of the Guiana region, which has resulted from a rich, complex historical process of occupation and demarcation of territories, from the available options for assembling the region's transportation system and from the ongoing restive disputes over borders, which are reflected in the interactions between neighboring cities. The cartography also reflects a population concentrated along the borders, but a coastline, although weak in density, rich in traditional communities.



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