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“Attracting all Indians under the Pretext of Religion”: Dutch-Indigenous Relations and the Moravian Mission in Berbice (1738-1763)

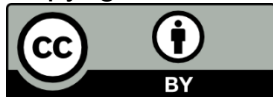
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**“Attracting all Indians
under the Pretext
of Religion”: Dutch-
Indigenous Relations and
the Moravian Mission in
Berbice (1738–1763)**

by

MARIE KEULEN

ABSTRACT

In the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the Dutch colony Berbice on the northern coast of South America formed the stage of the short but successful mission of the Moravian Church among the Indigenous people of the region. Whereas from the perspective of the Moravians this religious mission was part of their numerous missionary activities in the Atlantic world from the 1730s onwards, for the governor, council, planters, and various Amerindian groups living in Berbice the arrival of the missionaries was something new. This article brings together the historiographical fields of Moravian missions in the Atlantic world on the one hand and Dutch-Indigenous relations on the other hand. Examining the reaction of the local and metropolitan colonial authorities to the Moravian community and the missionaries' interaction with different Indigenous population groups inhabiting the region, this article argues that the history of the Moravian community in Berbice opens a window through which Dutch-Indigenous relations can be investigated. From the perspective of the Dutch colonial authorities, the alliances with the Amerindian peoples were of vital importance for oppressing the majority enslaved population, and the interactions between their much needed-allies and the Moravian missionaries were seen as a threat. Using colonial archival material on the conflicts and confrontations between missionaries and authorities, this article shows that their relationship was primarily defined by the (desired) interactions of both parties with the Amerindian populations. It shows the colonial perspective on the interactions between European missionaries and Indigenous groups while revealing the metropolitan and local authority's priorities, limits, and fears.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marie Keulen is a Research MA student in *Colonial and Global History* at Leiden University. Her research interests include the interplay of global, regional, and local dynamics within colonial societies. She is particularly interested in the interactions, confrontations, and connections between the different social and cultural groups inhabiting the Atlantic and Caribbean region.

INTRODUCTION

In the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the Dutch colony Berbice on the northern coast of South America formed the stage of the short but successful mission of the Moravian Church among the Indigenous people of the region.¹ From 1738 until the slave revolt in 1763, the Moravians established a small Christian settlement in Berbice from where they maintained contact with various Amerindian groups, of whom several people were baptized and lived among the Moravian missionaries. This was a striking event, given the fact that in Dutch Atlantic historiography the absence of missionary work has often been mentioned as characteristic of Dutch colonialism in the region, and as characteristic of Dutch-Indigenous relations in particular.² From the perspective of the Moravian Church, the mission in Berbice was part of their numerous missionary activities from the 1730s onwards in the Atlantic world, including the Danish West Indies, Suriname, Jamaica, and

several places in North America. In both German and English, these Moravian missions have been discussed extensively, with a particular focus on the lives and beliefs of the missionaries as well as their interactions with the enslaved and Indigenous populations.³ With their missions, the Moravians established a global community with a shared Christian identity.⁴ Within the Moravian religious community, which was founded by Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf in 1722, missionary activities were considered fundamental for their unconditional commitment to the expansion of the kingdom of God. The missionaries, seen as the chosen warriors for the Saviour's service, had a special place within the Moravian congregation and were in close contact with the home front. Whereas the activities and attitudes of the missionaries within the colonies of the Atlantic world have been widely examined, however, the reaction and attitude towards the missionaries from the perspective of the colonial society

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- 1 I would like to thank Michiel van Groesen for his insightful comments. I also wish to thank the editors of *Global Histories: A Student Journal* for their comments and suggestions.
 - 2 Recently, Danny Noorlander has challenged this view of missionary work in the Dutch Atlantic: see Danny L. Noorlander, *Heaven's Wrath: The Protestant Reformation and the Dutch West India Company in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2019).

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- 3 Hartmut Beck, *Brüder in Vielen Völkern: 250 Jahre Mission Der Brüdergemeine* (Erlangen: Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 1981); Gisela Mettele, *Weltbürgertum Oder Gottesreich: Die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine Als Globale Gemeinschaft 1727-1857* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009); Michele Gillespie and Robert Beachy, eds., *Pious Pursuits: German Moravians in the Atlantic World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).
 - 4 Mettele, *Weltbürgertum Oder Gottesreich*.

have been less widely investigated.

In Berbice, a small and sparsely populated Dutch colony centred around the Berbice River on the Caribbean coast of South America, the presence of the Moravian missionaries led to tensions between them and the local and metropolitan colonial authorities. The colony was owned by the Society of Berbice, a company that operated under the sovereignty of the Dutch Republic. The company directors were based in Amsterdam and the local colonial administration consisted of an appointed governor who had to protect the interests of the company. Conflicts and confrontations about the oath of allegiance, participation in the civil militia, and payment of capitation taxes eventually led to a hostile situation in which the directors and the Society of Berbice's governor decided not to allow more Moravians to settle in their colony. This differs from the attitude of the local colonial authorities in Suriname, where the Moravian missionaries were seen as less of a threat. In her article, Jessica Cronshagen shows that in the second half of the eighteenth century, the governor of Suriname was satisfied with the Moravian missionaries forming a "European frontier" between the plantations and Maroon communities.⁵ This different

reaction to the same religious community makes the hostile attitude of the Society of Berbice even more interesting. Although the Moravian community in Berbice is the central subject of this article, the main interest lies not in the community itself, but in how their environment – in particular the colonial authorities – reacted to their presence. This way, the story of the Moravian missionaries could tell us more about the colony of Berbice.

A central and recurring concern of the directors and the governor of Berbice was the large number of Amerindian people living with and, according to them, influenced by the Moravian missionaries. In the entire Guianas, an area stretching from the Orinoco river to the Amazone river, a large, multi-ethnic Indigenous population inhabited the region. These various Indigenous peoples – in the Dutch Guianas the Arawaks (Lonoko), the Caribs (Kari'na), the Waraos, and the Akawaios – lived in their own settlements outside the colonial society. In Berbice, the Arawaks and Waraos lived closest to the plantations, whereas the Caribs and Akawaios lived more inland, away from the colonial society.⁶ The

1 (2019): 9, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jmorahist.19.1.0001>.

5 Jessica Cronshagen, "A Loyal Heart to God and the Governor": Missions and Colonial Policy in the Surinamese Saramaccan Mission (c. 1750–1813)," *Journal of Moravian History* 19, no.

6 Marjoleine Kars, "Cleansing the Land": Dutch-Amerindian Cooperation in the Suppression of the 1763 Slave Rebellion in Dutch Guiana," in *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Warfare in the Early Modern World*, ed. Wayne E.

constant focus on the Amerindian populations by the colonial authorities was no coincidence, given the dependency of the latter on the various Indigenous groups living in and around the colony of Berbice. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Dutch-Indigenous encounters and relationships played an important role on the northern coast of South America, in particular in the Dutch Guianas.⁷ At the beginning of the seventeenth century, those Dutch-Indigenous relations were primarily defined by trade. Over time, as the Dutch colonies developed into plantation colonies with an enslaved African majority, the military role in suppressing slave revolts and capturing runaway slaves became more important.

Lee (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 253, 262; Lodewijk Hulsman, "Nederlands Amazonia. Handel met Indianen tussen 1580 en 1680" (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2009), 1–2.

- 7 For the seventeenth century see Hulsman, "Nederlands Amazonia"; Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade: Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595-1674* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); for the eighteenth century see Neil Lancelot Whitehead, "Carib Ethnic Soldiering in Venezuela, the Guianas, and the Antilles, 1492-1820," *Ethnohistory* 37, no. 4 (1990): 357–385, <https://doi.org/10.2307/482860>; Bram Hoonhout, *Borderless Empire: Dutch Guiana in the Atlantic World, 1750-1800* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2020).

Although an important characteristic of the colonial society of Berbice, this topic of Dutch-Indigenous cooperation has not yet been the subject of a focused historical study.⁸ This article argues that the existence of the Moravian community in Berbice during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, and more importantly, the reaction of the colonial authorities to their interaction with the valuable allies of the Society of Berbice, forms an interesting window through which this topic could be investigated. In answering the question of how the Moravian missionaries and the local and metropolitan colonial authorities interacted with each other during the existence of the Moravian community in Berbice (1738-1763), I hope to get a better understanding of social and political relations between the four different groups involved – the Amerindians, the Moravian missionaries, and the metropolitan and local authorities of Berbice – with special attention to the position of the Indigenous peoples in the colony. This brings together the two historiographical fields of Moravian missions on the one hand and Dutch-Indigenous relations on the other.

This new approach to the subject matter of the Moravian missions in early modern Atlantic colonies also calls for a new focus

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- 8 The exception is an article by Marjoleine Kars on the Dutch-Indigenous military cooperation during the slave revolt of Berbice in 1763: Kars, "'Cleansing the Land'".

concerning source material. Until now, the extensive and very well-preserved correspondence network of the Moravian missionaries has been the main source for historians working on Moravian missions. Keeping contact with both the religious communities in Europe and North America, letters were frequently sent back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean.⁹ Nowadays, the traces of this exchange can be found in several archives.¹⁰ The mission in Berbice, most recently discussed by the historian H. Weiss in 1921, has only been investigated based on those Moravian sources.¹¹ The

same is true for the more extensively researched missions in Suriname.¹² Even the article by Cronshagen, in which she discusses the position and the role of Moravian missionaries in the colonial politics of Suriname, only uses Moravian sources.¹³ Although occasionally using those Moravian letters and reports, this article primarily focuses on a different type of source material: the colonial archival material of the Society of Berbice preserved in the Dutch National Archives in The Hague.¹⁴ This consists of both documentation written by the directors of the Society of Berbice in Amsterdam and documentation written for the directors by the colonial officials in Berbice. The governor of the colony was supposed to inform the directors as accurately as possible on his actions, which resulted in letters, minutes of the council, and financial books being sent to the Dutch Republic. This article draws on documents from both the directors and the colonial officials identified

9 From 1747 onwards the administration of the Moravian Church was divided between a European and an American front. The American and Caribbean missions, including the mission in Berbice, were under the administration of Bethlehem. However, after 1747 still, many letters were also sent from and to Europe.

10 The Unity Archives in Herrnhut, the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem Pennsylvania, and the correspondence of the Zeist Mission Society held in the Utrecht Archives. For the missions in Suriname and Berbice specifically, many of the personal letters and official reports are available through the source publication of Friedrich Staehelin: see Friedrich Staehelin, *Die Mission Der Brüdergemeine in Suriname Und Berbice Im Achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Eine Missionsgeschichte Hauptsächlich in Auszügen Aus Briefen Und Originalberichten* (Herrnhut: Missionsbuchhandlung, 1914).

11 H. Weiss, "De Zending Der Herrnhutters Onder de Indianen in

Berbice En Suriname 1738-1816," *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 2, no. 1 (1921): 36–44, 109–12, 113–21, 181–97, 249–64, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134360-90001820>.

12 Weiss, "De Zending Der Herrnhutters"; Maria Lenders, *Strijders Voor Het Lam: Leven En Werk van Herrnhutter Broeders En -Zusters in Suriname, 1735-1900* (Leiden: KITLV, 1996).

13 Cronshagen, "A Loyal Heart to God and the Governor".

14 National Archives, The Hague (NL-HaNA), Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05.

by searching the Handwritten Text Recognition data of the Dutch National Archives.¹⁵

The first section examines the emergence and growth of the Moravian community in Berbice. Arriving in the colony in 1738, the Moravian community consisted of

¹⁵ Liesbeth Keijser, "6000 Ground Truth of VOC and Notarial Deeds 3.000.000 HTR of VOC, WIC and Notarial Deeds" (Zenodo, 21 January 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.4159268>. The HTR-data of the archive of the Society of Berbice was obtained by the Dutch National Archives in the context of their project 'De IJsberg' using the Transkribus HTR platform. They used both documents from the Dutch East-Asia Company (VOC) and the Noord-Hollands Archief to create a trained Transkribus HTR+ model called 'IJsberg'. This model was used for the HTR-data of the archive of the Society of Berbice. Because the HTR-data of the Society of Berbice has a relatively high fault rate, I used several spelling possibilities when searching the keywords 'moravische' and 'herrnhutters' in Voyant Tools (mora*, morav*, herr*, hern*, herrn*) <<https://voyant-tools.org/>>. Searching all inventory numbers of the archive of the Society of Berbice between 1738 and 1763 (with the exception of the payment books), I found 400 pages on which one of those terms was used. The limitations of this approach, in particular the limited quality of the HTR-data, mean that the set of documents is unlikely to be complete. Yet, the use of text-mining tools does enable historians to identify documents in large corpora relatively quickly and is, therefore, a valuable way of exploring the available source material.

two missionaries living and working at several plantations. In those early years, the cooperative relationship between the governor, council, and missionaries made it possible for the Moravians to peacefully establish a growing religious community. This, however, changed with the arrival of the new Governor Jan Frederik Colier in 1749. The conflicts and confrontations that arose during his term form the subject of the second section. Several times, Moravian missionaries had to appear at a meeting of the council where the civil status of the Moravians was questioned. Both the governor and the directors of the Society of Berbice expressed their concerns regarding the missionaries' contact with the Amerindians. This attitude of the colonial authorities – and the central role of the Amerindians in their worries – is explicitly examined in the third and last section of this article. Comparing this to the situation in Suriname, it becomes clear that the reaction of the metropolitan and local colonial authorities of Berbice to the Moravian missionaries in their colony had everything to do with their strong dependency on the Amerindian populations.

THE EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF THE MORAVIAN COMMUNITY IN BERBICE

The beginning of the Moravian mission in Berbice can be traced back to Amsterdam in 1736 when the founder of the

Moravian Church, Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, was asked by Jan Nicolaas van Eys to send some missionaries to his plantation to teach his slaves the Evangelical religion.¹⁶ Zinzendorf agreed, and in the spring of 1738, he found Johannes Güttner and Ludwig Christoph Dehne, two men willing to go to Berbice. It was from that moment onwards that the Moravian community shifted their attention from Suriname to Berbice. Already between 1735 and 1738, several attempts had been made to establish a missionary community in Suriname without success. In total, eleven Moravian 'brothers' and 'sisters' were sent to Suriname, but they all either died, came back to Europe, or joined their fellow brothers and sisters in Berbice.¹⁷ Only more than ten years later, in the 1750s, were the missionary activities in Suriname successfully continued. From the perspective of the Moravian community, the missions in Suriname and Berbice could be seen as part of the same story, often with the same actors. Several missionaries spent time in both colonies and regularly travelled between the two. From

the perspective of the Amerindians, planters, governor, and council in Berbice, on the other hand, the arrival of the two Moravian missionaries was something new.

In the first two years of the mission in Berbice, Güttner and Dehne were the only Moravians in the colony. For one year they lived at one of the plantations of Van Eys, from where they would work at several plantations in the region to earn enough money for their livelihood.¹⁸ In November 1739, both Güttner and Dehne wrote several letters to the Moravian community in Herrnhutt, in which they wrote that they had moved to another plantation called Johanna at the invitation of its owner Erhard Arthing.¹⁹ Already several months earlier, Güttner wrote about their plans of leaving Groot-Poelgeest because of the "wicked lifestyle" at the dining table of the plantation's director and, more importantly, the remote location of the plantation, with the consequence that "not many Indians come here".²⁰ Although the Moravians had initially come to Berbice to convert plantation slaves, they had soon shifted their focus to the Amerindian populations of the region, more specifically the groups of Arawak people they encountered during their first year in Berbice.

16 Staehelin, *Die Mission Der Brüdergemeine*, Teil II. Erster Abschnitt: Anfang der Mission in Berbice 1738-1748, 3–5; Weiss, "De Zending Der Herrnhutters," 41.

17 Cronshagen, "'A Loyal Heart to God and the Governor,'" 6; H. Weiss, "Het Zendingwerk Der Herrnhutters in de Oerwouden van de Boven-Suriname," *De West-Indische Gids* 1 (1919): 102–3, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134360-90001942>.

18 Staehelin, *Die Mission Der Brüdergemeine*, Teil II. Erster Abschnitt, 3, 7–25; Weiss, "De Zending Der Herrnhutters," 41.

19 Staehelin, 25–27.

20 Staehelin, 23.

Having had good contact with the "wild heathens", Güttner writes, the missionaries had more hope to spread their Christian messages among the Indigenous peoples than among the enslaved African people.²¹ This became even more apparent in July 1740, when Güttner and Dehne were accompanied by Heinrich Beutel and his wife Elisabeth Beutel, who brought with them a letter by Zinzendorf, which ordered Güttner and Dehne to live among the Amerindians and to learn their language.²²

Regarding these early years of the mission in Berbice, there seem to be no (preserved) records from the Society of Berbice that mention the Moravian presence. It is only from the documentation of the missionaries themselves that we know that there was contact between the Moravians and the colonial authorities in the first two years. In his journal on their voyage to Berbice, Dehne described an encounter between him and Güttner and the council of governance during the first days of their presence in the colony. As head of the council, Governor Bernhardt Waterham explained to the missionaries the laws of the colony, including the obligation to take the civil oath of allegiance. The missionaries, however, refused to do so, stating that it would be against their belief to take a secular oath. Although the governor and the council were not happy about

21 Staehelin, 24.

22 Staehelin, 31–33.

this, Dehne writes that they were dismissed once they declared to be loyal citizens.²³ In the years after their arrival, Dehne and Güttner described their contact with the local authorities as cooperative. Plantation owner Arthing, with whom the Moravians worked and lived for one year, was a member of the council, and helped the missionaries to get a small estate to build their own house called 'Pilgerhut'.²⁴ The successor of Waterham, Governor Jan Andries Lossner, was also favourably disposed towards the missionaries. It was under his rule that the decision was made in autumn 1740 to grant the Moravians a ten-acre plot of land along the creek Wieronje. In a later report about the mission in Berbice, written by missionaries in 1753, Governor Lossner was praised for this decision, stating that during his "Government of 9 years the Brothers had an opportunity of establishing themselves in stillness & our savior begun to gather the rewards of his Pain & Labour from among the Heathen here".²⁵

It was half a year after the settlement of the Moravian missionaries in Pilgerhut that the first preserved mention of the missionaries in the documentation of the Society of Berbice was written.

23 Staehelin, 10–11.

24 Staehelin, 33–36.

25 Moravian Archives, Bethlehem Pennsylvania (MA), MissSur Suriname Papers, inventory number 2, 'Report of the mission at Berbice, Suriname, 1738-1752', p. 29.

In April 1741, pastor Johann Christian Frauendorff wrote an alarming letter on behalf of the Church Council of the Protestant Church in Berbice about the Moravian missionaries to the governor and the council.²⁶ Given the fact that the Moravian Church was not a privileged religion, the Protestant Church Council felt obligated to report the baptism of the child of Heinrich and Elisabeth Beutel, a religious act they regarded as illegitimate. In his letter, pastor Frauendorff made a clear distinction between the civil and religious status of the Moravians. While he saw the latter as problematic and illegitimate, Frauendorff, on the other hand, characterized the missionaries as "free citizens" who were allowed to live in the colony of Berbice,

[W]hich could not be denied to them, as they subject themselves to the laws of the country as obedient subjects to their rulers, neither has one received the slightest complaints about them, while in silence and peace they earn their bread, and are a burden to no one.²⁷

26 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 80, p. 178–189.

27 Idem. Citation in Dutch: "konde haar sulxs niet gewijgert worden als deselve sig de wetten van het land, als gehoorsaame onderdaanen aan hunne overheden onderwerpen, men heeft ook tot hiertoe niet de minste klagte over deselve tevoezen, terwijl in stilheijd ende vrede haar brood winnen, ende niemand tot last zijn".

The problem pastor Frauendorff reported to the local authorities was thus not the presence of the Moravian missionaries as such, but the religious act of baptism he regarded as illegitimate. The solution, he wrote to the governor and the council, was a redoing of the baptism by the Protestant Church.

Not knowing how to handle the matter, the governor decided to forward the issue to the directors of the Society of Berbice in Amsterdam. In a brief letter, the directors responded by stating that they did not have any knowledge of the presence of the so-called "herrenhutters" in the colony. Concerning the issue of baptism, the directors did not think that the Moravian missionaries would agree to the pastor performing their sacraments.²⁸ Eventually, at the end of that same year, the council of Berbice decided in line with the Church Council that the baptism performed by Moravians was illegitimate. However, the council did not insist on a redoing of the religious act, as suggested by Frauendorff. Instead, they let the Moravians continue their practice, with the only consequence being the acknowledgement that the sacraments performed by them were regarded as illegitimate. The directors approved of this decision made by the council and explicitly emphasised that this religious issue was not a matter of the "High

28 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 14, p. 278.

Government".²⁹ Thus, although the baptism of Heinrich and Elisabeth Beutel's child by their fellow Moravian missionary Güttner led to several letters back and forth between the Church Council, pastor Frauendorff, the governor, the council, and the directors, the matter had no major consequences for the Moravian community in Berbice and their relationship with the local colonial authorities.³⁰ This can also be seen from how the Moravian missionaries themselves described this issue. In a letter to the Moravian community in Herrnhut, Güttner briefly mentioned that he had to appear for the council to answer questions on the baptism of Beutel's child. According to Güttner the council "was very friendly" and afterwards "[he] felt good in [his] heart and was happy and went back to [his] Brothers".³¹

In the years after this religious matter, relations between the missionaries and Governor Lossner

continued on the same cooperative footing. In addition to the plot of land that was given to the missionaries in the year 1740, Lossner granted them some additional land in 1745.³² In the meantime, the Pilgerhut community expanded during the 1740s. Firstly, several Moravians from Europe, North America, and Suriname came to Berbice. In the year 1745, the community grew from four to ten missionaries, and in subsequent years, several more people joined the Pilgerhut community.³³ The most significant change in the 1740s, however, was the growing number of Amerindian people that settled in or next to Pilgerhut. According to the reports written by the missionaries, by the year 1748, around 60 Amerindians lived with the Moravians, of which 41 people were baptised.³⁴ The Amerindian people living closest to the colonial settlements, including the Moravian community, were the Arawaks, whom the Moravians explicitly and repeatedly mentioned in their reports. Occasionally, the missionaries also mentioned the presence of Carib people, who lived

29 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 15, p. 8–13.

30 I found four letters from the directors and five incoming letters from the colony to the directors related to this matter. Respectively: NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 14, p. 278; inv. no. 15, p. 8–13; inv. no. 15, p. 21–28; inv. no. 15, p. 39–44; inv. no. 80, p. 178–189; inv. no. 83, p. 117–121; inv. no. 83, p. 123; inv. no. 83, p. 126–128; inv. no. 83, p. 212–217.

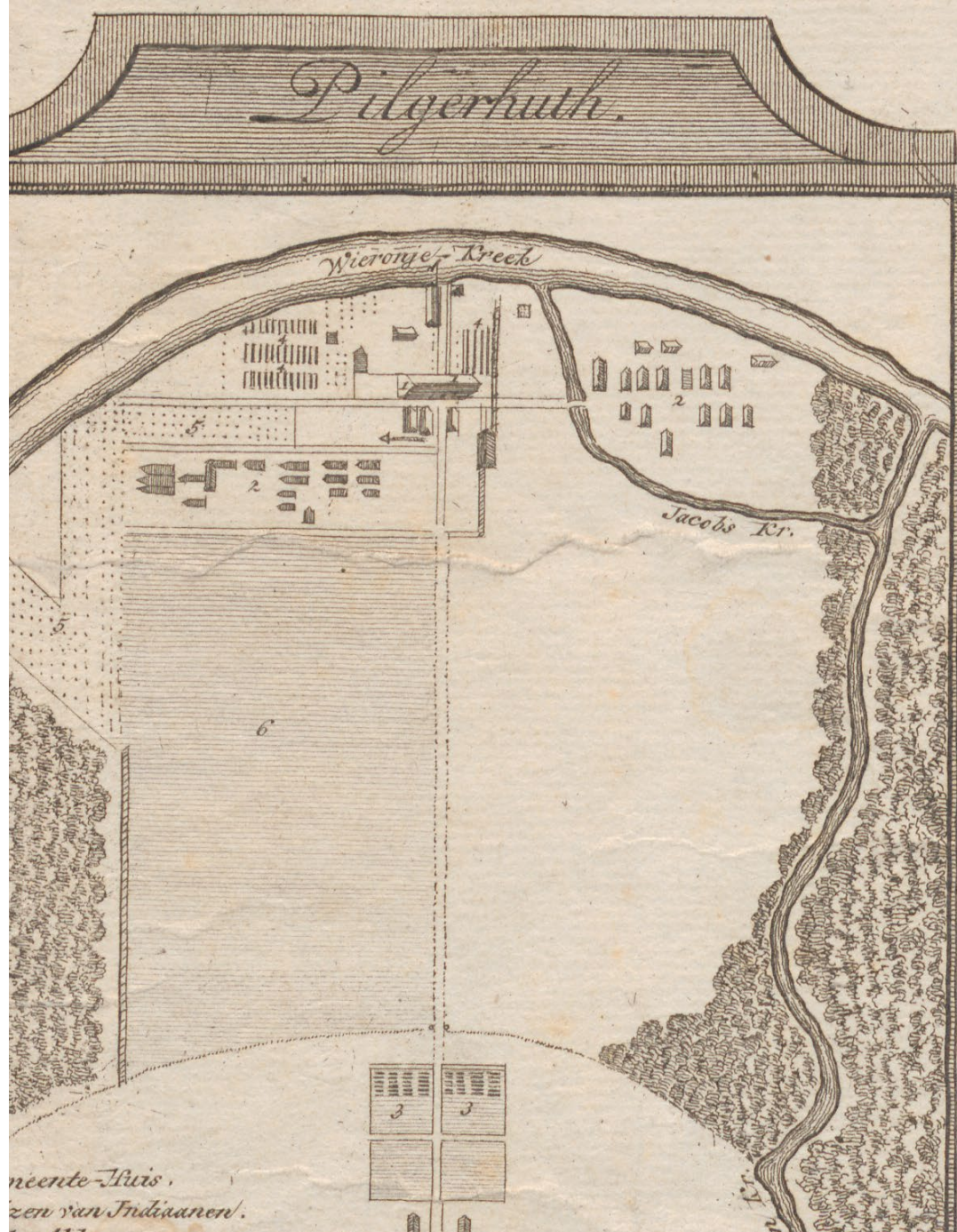
31 Staehelin, 39–40. Citation in German: "Sie haben mich im Rath weiter um nichts gefragt und waren sehr freundlich und hieszen mich wieder gehen. Es war mir wohl in meinem Herzen und ward vergnügt und ging wieder zu meinen Brüdern."

32 MA, MissSur, inv. no. 43, 'Land patent for land in Berbice, Suriname, November 18, 1745'; NL-HaNA, Digital duplicates of the 'Dutch Series' of the National Archives of Guyana, 1.05.21, inv. no. AZ.1.7, p. 120–121.

33 Staehelin, 3–4; Staehelin, *Die Mission Der Brüdergemeine*, Teil II. Zweiter Abschnitt: Blütezeit der Indianermission in Berbice 1748-1755, 3–4.

34 MA, MissSur, inv. no. 2, 'Report of the mission at Berbice, Suriname, 1738-1752', p. 32.

FIGURE 1. Printed inset map of the Pilgerhut community at the Wieronje Creek. This inset map is portrayed on (Figure 2): Leiden University Special Collections (LUSC), Bodel Nijenhuis Collection (COLLBN) Port 63 N 52, 'Berbice en Suriname Gelegen in Zuid-America 6 Gr. benoorden de Aequinoctiaal linie'.



farther away from the colonial society. This seems to suggest that the Moravian missionaries were able to differentiate between different groups of Indigenous peoples. However, it is unclear to what extent they were able to do so correctly.

The portrayal of a significant Amerindian community in Pilgerhut can also be found on a printed inset

map of Pilgerhut, made during or after the existence of the Moravian community in Berbice (Figure 1). On this map, more than forty houses are categorised as “Huizen van Indiaanen” (houses of Indians), of which the majority are located around the central “Gemeente-Huis” (community home). To what extent this is a trustworthy representation

of the actual Pilgerhut is difficult to say. Strikingly, when the missionaries wrote about the number of Amerindian people living at Pilgerhut, they also briefly mentioned the fact that Governor Lossner was very happy with the converts. In the archive of the Society of Berbice, however, I did not find any notice of this. It is plausible that if Lossner was indeed pleased with the Amerindian community at Pilgerhut, he did not communicate this to the directors in Amsterdam.

Yet this growth of the Moravian community did not go unnoticed. When a ship with passengers would arrive in the colony of Berbice, it was customary for the governor to report this in the minutes of the council meeting, which would be sent to the directors in Amsterdam. This way, the latter was notified that on the 24th of October 1748, several passengers, of which some were Moravian missionaries, had arrived in the colony. The minutes of the council say that the passengers had sworn the oath of allegiance. However, regarding the newly-arrived Moravian passengers, the council wrote that they were exempt from swearing the oath: "according to custom, no oath of allegiance is required, but their word that they will behave as a faithful citizen and inhabitant here".³⁵ Reacting to the minutes of

³⁵ NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 99, p. 20. Dutch citation: "van dewelke volgens het gebruyk geen Eed van getrouwigheid word gevergd, maer

the council, on the 13th of May 1749, the directors wrote that they did not understand why the oath was not demanded from the Moravian missionaries; everyone except the Mennonites (whose exceptional position dated from the early years of the Dutch Revolt), they stressed, should take the oath.³⁶ Clearly, the directors were not aware of, and not happy with, the position that the Moravians had gained in their colony and the arrangements Governor Lossner had made. The cooperative relationship between the governor, council, and missionaries made it possible for the latter to obtain their own plot of land and to peacefully establish a growing religious community. This, however, was about to change with the arrival of a new governor.

ARISING CONFLICTS AND CONFRONTATIONS

Several days before the directors wrote their critical message on the actions of the council, they had fired the incumbent Governor Lossner due to his repeated disagreements with the superintendent general of the Company's plantations, appointing

op hun lieder woord van sich als getrouwe burger ende inwoonders alhier te sullen gedraagen".

³⁶ NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 1, p. 15–20; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 16, p. 26–31; NL-HaNA, 1.05.21, inv. no. AG.1.1, p. 157.

Jan Frederik Colier as his successor. Accompanied with detailed instructions, Governor Colier arrived in Berbice on the 28th of September to inform Lossner of his dismissal. Apparently, the directors, who had been dissatisfied with Lossner's policy, were afraid the former governor would flee from the colony, as they explicitly instructed Colier to ensure Lossner would be held accountable in Holland, "if necessary by placing him under arrest".³⁷ The arrival of Colier in Berbice had significant consequences for the relationship between the local and metropolitan colonial authorities and the Moravian missionaries, with the latter being increasingly confronted with suspicion, hostility, and restrictions. The above-mentioned resolution from the directors, written on the 13th of May 1749, could be seen as a turning point after which local colonial authorities in Berbice spent increasing time and effort on the Moravian community at Pilgerhut. By far most of the preserved documents from the Society of Berbice on the Moravians – both from the directors and the local colonial officials – were written during the years of Colier's term as governor of Berbice.³⁸ Especially in

the first months after his arrival, Colier wrote extensively on the missionaries and his actions against them, while referring several times to the resolution of the directors issued a couple of days after his appointment.

The central issue in the conflict between Governor Colier and the Moravian community was the demand by the local and metropolitan authorities that the latter had to fulfil their civil duties. This meant taking the oath of allegiance, paying capitation for both themselves and the Amerindians living at Pilgerhut, and participating in the civil militia, which included carrying weapons. Whereas under the government of both Waterham and Lossner the local authorities were satisfied with the promise of the Moravians to be loyal citizens, both Governor Colier and the directors in Amsterdam did not allow for the Moravians to be an exception to the rule. Interestingly, such a privilege was granted to the Moravian missionaries in Suriname. In 1740, after negotiating with Moravian representatives, the directors of the Society of Suriname decided that concerning both the oath and the civil militia, the Moravians would be treated in the same manner as the Mennonites – something explicitly turned down by the directors of the

37 Plakaatboek Guyana (PG), 1670-1816, Huygens Institute, <<http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/guyana>>, the 3rd of June 1749, 'Instructie voor Gouverneur Colier.'; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv no. 16, p. 64–86.

38 Of the 400 pages I found containing either a variation of "moravische"

or "hernhutters", at least 226 are to be found in the 'records from the officials in Berbice to the directors in Amsterdam' in the period of Colier's term.

Society of Berbice.³⁹ Whereas the civil status of the Moravian missionaries was undisputed in the first eleven years of their presence in Berbice, it had now become a reason for Colier and his council to repeatedly summon Moravian missionaries to the council meeting and demand their obedience.

The first confrontation between the Moravian community and Governor Colier occurred only a couple of days after the latter arrived in Berbice. In his first letter to the directors, Colier stated that he had "instructed the bailiff to immediately go to all Moravian brothers who are in the colony" and to tell them in the name of the council and the directors "to appear here on the next Tuesday, being the 7th of October, at the ordinary meeting to take the Oath of Allegiance".⁴⁰ It is striking that only two days after his arrival in the colony Colier summoned the Moravian missionaries before the council meeting. This strongly suggests that was he instructed to do so by the directors in Amsterdam, who were unhappy with the agreements made between the missionaries and Colier's predecessors. As instructed, six of the now twelve missionaries living at Pilgerhut appeared at the council meeting, where they

were expected to swear the oath. However, the minutes of the meeting reveal that the missionaries were not willing to do so, referring to the customary practice under Governor Lossner and stressing the fact that they had lived peacefully in the colony for eleven years now.⁴¹ When the council made clear that the order came from the directors in Amsterdam, whose message they read aloud, the missionaries requested "to be considered and treated as the Moravian Brothers who are in Suriname, and regarding the arms trade to be allowed to be considered as the Mennonites".⁴² For the Moravians, this reference to the situation in Suriname was a very logical one, as the missions in both colonies were very much interrelated: several missionaries who came to Pilgerhut in the second half of the 1740s were coming from Suriname. This perspective is also visible on a printed map of the eighteenth-century Moravian missions in Berbice and Suriname (Figure 2). The

39 Staehelin, *Die Mission Der Brüdergemeine*, Teil I.: Erste Missions- und Kolonisationsversuche in Suriname 1735-1745, 108–9.

40 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 102, p. 101–102; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 104, p. 19–22.

41 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 102, p. 102–107; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 104, p. 22–28. The same event is also mentioned in a missionary 'diary from Pilgerhut', which describes a similar course of the event: Staehelin, Teil II. Zweiter Abschnitt, 30–36.

42 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 102, p. 102–107; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 104, p. 22–28. Dutch citation: "versoekende soo aangesien en gehandeld te worden als de Moravische Gebroeders die te Suriname zijn, en aangaande Wapenhandel te moogen werden geconsidereerd als de menoniten".

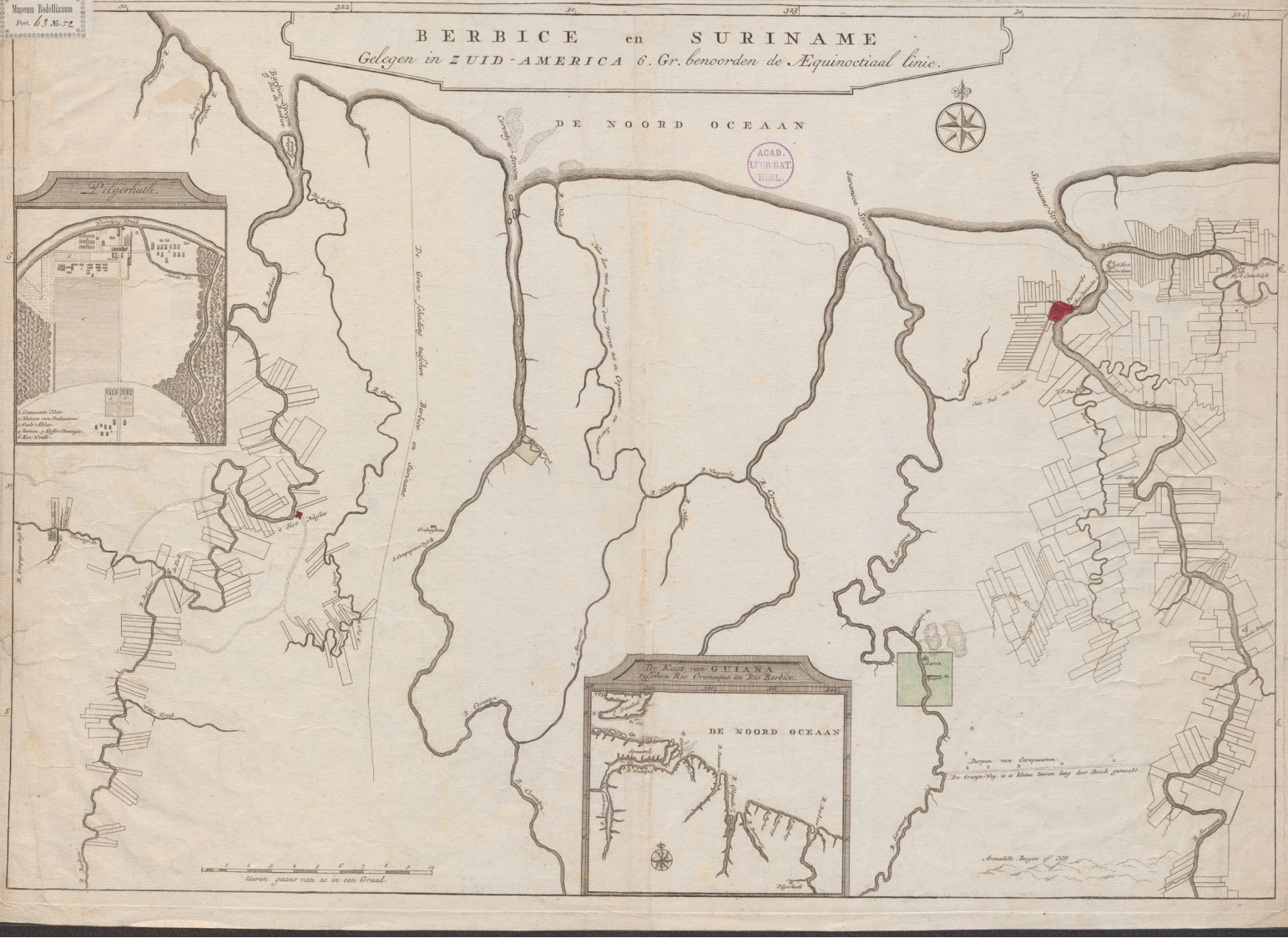


FIGURE 2. Printed map of the three Moravian missions in Berbice and Suriname (marked green), from left to right: the Pilgerhut community below the inset map of Pilgerhut (see Figure 1), the mission along the Corentyne river, and the mission along the Saron river. The government buildings Fort Nassau and Fort Zeelandia of Berbice and Suriname respectively are marked red. LUSC, COLLBN Port 63 N 52, 'Berbice en Suriname Gelegen in Zuid-America 6 Gr. benoorden de Aequinoctiaal Linie'. Copies of the same map can also be found in the Moravian Archives: MA, DP Collection of Drawings and Prints, inv. no. f.051.1.a–b.

missionary communities, all three of them highlighted in green, were literally part of the same picture.

The directors in Amsterdam, the governor, and the council in Berbice, however, thought differently; they did not regard the relationship between the Society of Suriname and the Moravian missionaries as a point of reference for their own policy, and they persisted in their demands. As the six missionaries were still refusing to take the oath, they were temporarily brought outside, for the council to deliberate on the situation. The governor used this moment to

bring up a new, but according to him related issue: the influence of the missionaries on the Amerindians living in the colony.

The Lord Governor told the Council to have been told that by some practice they people are holding up the Indians of this country, which is detrimental to the colony and the private persons because of the service which those Indians are required to do.⁴³

Next, the bailiff was asked how many Amerindians he had seen at the residence of the missionaries, to which he replied that he had seen several white persons and Amerindians, both men and women, who preached and sang together. At the end of the meeting, Colier decided that he would inform the directors about this and ask them whether the Moravians were allowed to continue to live in Berbice. In the meantime, he prohibited them to "hold meetings" and to "delay Indians who owe any service".⁴⁴ Whereas the

43 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 102, p. 102–107; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 104, p. 22–28. Dutch citation: "Den Heere Gouverneur aan den Hove gesegt ter hoore gekomen te zijn dat zij lieden door eenige practijcque d'indiane van dit land op houden, 't geene naadeel geeft aan de colonie en particulieren door den dienst dewelke die Indianen sich hebben verplicht te doen".

44 Idem. Dutch citation: "onder verbod van geene vergaderige te mogen houden ende geen indianen den elke

contact and interactions between the Moravian missionaries and the Indigenous population were never perceived as a problem before the directors had sent Colier to the colony, this had now suddenly become an issue of careful attention for the governor, who shared his worries with his superiors in the Dutch Republic.

In subsequent years, the issue of the oath – and the civil duties in general – remained a subject of conflict. Only after Governor Colier promulgated a resolution in 1752 stating that all missionaries had to swear the oath and that they would be banned from the colony if they refused to do so, the majority of the missionaries took the oath.⁴⁵ The obligation to pay the capitation money seemed to be less a matter of contention, given that already at the beginning of the year 1750 the Moravians paid their dues over the year 1749.⁴⁶ This was not the case with the requirement to participate in the civil militia, which prompted the captain of the civil militia, Joseph Dietzscholt, to write a letter of complaint to the governor and the council in 1751. Although the "Moravian brothers [...] have themselves answered 'we will behave like obedient citizens'", Dietzscholt

dienst schuldig sijn oponthoud te verleenen".

45 Staehelin, Teil II. Zweiter Abschnitt, 4; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no 1, p. 242–244; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 16, 195–197.

46 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 110, p. 369–374.

wrote, no weapons and ammunition were found with them during his inspection – something that was considered part of participating in the civil militia.⁴⁷ The importance of the issue of the civil militia is remarkable, as even in the sparsely populated colony of Berbice the Moravian missionaries would not make a significant contribution in terms of manpower. Why, then, had the strict enforcement of the Moravian missionaries’ civil duties become such an issue for both the local and metropolitan colonial authorities?

From the resolution of the 13th of May 1749 onwards, the directors of the Society of Berbice played a significant part in the evolving conflict with the Moravians. This was, for one reason, because of their contact with the local colonial authorities and their influence on how they – especially the governor – reacted to the presence of the Moravian missionaries in the colony of Berbice. In a resolution from November 1750, at a moment when the conflict on the issue of the oath was still unsolved, the directors

made it clear to the governor and the council that they still wanted the resolution from the 13th of May 1749 to be implemented. Otherwise, they stressed, “our authority will be greatly weakened”.⁴⁸ Whereas in 1741 the directors had never heard of the presence of the missionaries in the colony, leaving a lot of room for the former governors Waterham and Lossner to make agreements with the Moravians, they had now taken an active role in the colonial relationship with the Moravian community. In the same year, one of the directors, Jacob Boulé, was sent to Berbice “to bring the mentioned Colony on a better footing”.⁴⁹ In 1751, after having received letters from Boulé saying that the “so-called Moravian brothers are trying to back out on their duties”, the directors repeated their call for the implementation of their earlier resolution.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the directors themselves had contact with the Moravian missionaries, when the latter directed their request for a treatment similar to the situation in Suriname to the directors. The request, signed by Anth. Buyn

47 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 110, p. 80–81. Dutch citation: “Moravische broeders [...] hebben deselve tot andwoord gegeven wij sullen ons gedraagen als gehoorzame burgers”. For the regulation considering the mandatory armament of civilians see: PG, the 9th of July 1750, ‘Controle van de verplichte bewapening van burgers door officieren van de burgerij op alle plantages in hun divisie’; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 219, p. 93.

48 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 16, 102–106. Dutch citation: “onse autoriteit zeer word verswakt”.

49 PG, the 2nd of September 1750, ‘Jacob Boulé wordt naar Berbice gezonden als gedeputeerde van de Staten-Generaal’; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 219, p. 153–156.

50 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 16, p. 108–116; NL-HaNa, 1.05.05, inv. no. 1, p. 131–141. Dutch citation: “zogenaamde Moravische broeders zig aan de verschuldigde pligten op de colonie tragten te onttrekken”.

and Lodewijk Wijs⁵¹, addressed all three mentioned aspects of the civil duties: the oath of allegiance, the capitulation, and the participation in the civil militia with the obligation to carry weapons. Discussing the request in their meeting, the directors decided not to grant an exemption on all three points – a decision they communicated to the local authorities in Berbice.⁵²

As was the case in 1748, the arrival of two Moravians in the colony in 1751 led to renewed colonial attention for the position of the missionaries in the colony. The arriving Moravians, Dehne and Beutel, had already been in Berbice from 1738 and 1740 respectively, but both went to Europe for several years in 1747, after which they then returned to Berbice. Governor Colier mentioned their arrival in a letter to the directors, in which he also stated that the missionaries were expected to take the oath of allegiance at the next meeting of the council. However, Colier added, "I have already noticed that they will not want to do this" – expecting yet another confrontation.⁵³ Although Dehne and Beutel were already told by directors in Amsterdam, who granted them their

passports, that they were obliged to take the oath, Dehne and Beutel themselves thought that they could continue on the same footing as when they left the colony in 1747. The two missionaries, having missed the previous conflicts and confrontations with the governor, had a different understanding of what it meant to take the oath. In contrast to the first confrontation between Moravian missionaries and Governor Colier at a meeting of the council, this time, the latter was not willing to let the Moravians go easily. When Dehne and Beutel refused to fulfil Colier's demands, the council decided "that they must leave this colony at the first opportunity, no later than with the first from here departing ship".⁵⁴

Shortly before this decision was made, while Dehne and Beutel were waiting outside, another group was also summoned at the council meeting: thirty-three Amerindian captains were called to account for the actions of some Amerindians providing shelter and help to runaway slaves, while they were supposed to hand them over directly to their owners. Directly after the Amerindian captains left the meeting, the bailiff was asked by the governor whether he had seen many Amerindians with the Moravians, to which he answered that "there were about three hundred

51 Sometimes also spelled as 'Weiss'.

52 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 1, 150–153; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 16, 126–129; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 1, 157–159; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 16, 130–132.

53 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 108, p. 26–30. Dutch citation: "dog heb ik al gemerkt dat sij deselve niet sullen willen doen".

54 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 109, p. 152–157. Dutch citation: "dat zij met de eerste geleegentheijd uijt deese colonie moeten vertrecken, en dat ten uijtersten, met het eerste van hier vertreckende schip".

Indians there”.⁵⁵ Likely, the fact that those issues were discussed after one another at the same meeting was no coincidence. For Colier, the concerns regarding the presence of the Moravian missionaries in his colony on the one hand, and the importance of the Amerindian groups for the oppression of the majority enslaved population, on the other hand, were very much connected. Already when Colier mentioned the arrival of Dehne and Beutel in the colony, he ended his message for the directors by saying that “it was to be wished that those people had never come to this colony, attracting all Indians under the Pretext of Religion”.⁵⁶

“I FEAR WE WILL LOSE ALL INDIANS”

From the very first moment he arrived in Berbice until the very last moment he wrote to the directors on the situation in the colony, Colier expressed his worries about the interactions between the Moravian missionaries and the various Amerindian groups living at or visiting Pilgerhut. It is clear that he, as well as his superiors in the Dutch Republic, did not regard these

interactions as beneficial for the colonial administration. The colonial relationships with Amerindian populations, and especially the Arawaks, were of great importance for the Dutch. Instead of regarding the contacts of the Moravian community with those groups as a possible contribution to the Dutch cause, Colier and his superiors worried that the influence of the missionaries would be at the expense of their own desired influence over the Indigenous peoples. During both confrontations at the council meeting, Colier asked the bailiff to provide him with more information on the missionary community. According to the bailiff’s remarks and the documentation of the missionaries themselves, the Pilgerhut community attracted many Amerindian people – as visitors, residents, and Christians. A Moravian diary even describes a visit from a delegation of Amerindian people coming all the way from the Orinoco river in Spanish colonial territory west of Essequibo.⁵⁷ This influx of different Amerindian groups visiting the Pilgerhut community must have been a striking event for the local colonial authorities as well as the planters living near the missionaries. As the alliances with the Indigenous populations were vital for the colonial society of Berbice, in particular for the maintenance of the institution of slavery, Governor Colier did not lose sight of the events taking place at the Moravian community.

55 Idem. Dutch citation: “dat wel omtrend drie hondert indiaenen daer waeren”.

56 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 108, p. 26–30. Dutch citation: “t waere te wenschen dat die luyden nooit in deese colonie waeren gekoomen, trekkende sij onder Pretext van Religie alle de Indiaanen naar zig”.

57 Staehelin, Teil II. Zweiter Abschnitt, 38.

Even when, years later, a new governor had arrived in the colony, who came to be on much friendlier terms with the Moravian missionaries, their relationship with and influence on the Amerindian populations remained a very important concern.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as a consequence of increasing European colonisation, the various Amerindian groups living in the region of the Guianas – the Arawaks, the Caribs, the Waraos, and the Akawaios – became more intertwined with European powers both through trade relationships and military alliances.⁵⁸ Although both Europeans and Amerindians became more and more dependent on each other as the centuries progressed, it was especially the former that was highly dependent on the military aid of the latter – both concerning their rival European powers and the majority enslaved population. In the eighteenth century, this was certainly true for the Dutch colonies of Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara. In Suriname on the other hand, after the seventeenth century, Amerindian groups remained largely at the margins of the colony – both politically and geographically.⁵⁹ In

Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara, only when the institution of slavery came to an end under British rule in 1833, and when the military aid of the Indigenous populations was no longer needed, did this dependency cease to exist, and the Amerindians then retreated away from the colonial societies.⁶⁰

The strong position of the Caribs and Arawaks in Berbice is visible through their easy access to gifts and guns. Faced with their dependency on Amerindian allies and times of European competition over Amerindian favours, the Dutch needed to enlarge their investment in the indigenous alliances.⁶¹ This included reaffirming the alliances with gifts and guns. Moreover, in threatening to lay down their agreed-upon tasks such as capturing runaways, the Amerindians strengthened their bargaining position. Not all inhabitants of the colony, however, treated the Indigenous populations as important actors who needed to be kept as friends, something the metropolitan and local colonial authorities tried to prevent by issuing several ordinances and instructions to protect the position of their Amerindian allies.⁶²

58 Neil Lancelot Whitehead, "Ethnic Transformation and Historical Discontinuity in Native Amazonia and Guayana, 1500-1900," *L'Homme* 126/128 (1993): 292, 297–98, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3406%2Fhom.1993.369641>.

59 Gert Oostindie and Wim Klooster, *Realm between Empires: The Second*

Dutch Atlantic, 1680-1815 (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2018), 143.

60 Hoonhout, *Borderless Empire*, 42.

61 Hoonhout, 37; Kars, 267.

62 PG, the 20th of October 1736, 'Waarschuwing de Amerindianen met rust te laten'; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 219, p. 32–33; PG, the 3th of June 1749, 'Instructie voor Gouverneur Colier', second instruction point 12;

It is also important to note that not all Indigenous people were seen as important or valuable allies that needed to be pleased with gifts or protected against the violence of planters: Amerindian slavery was part of the colonial slave society of Berbice and the so-called 'red slaves' were frequently bought from Carib or Arawak groups. The colonial officers, however, trying to avoid provoking a conflict, always attempted to make sure no people of allied groups were bought as slaves.⁶³

This concern for the relationship with their much-needed allies played a central role in the position and attitude of the local colonial authorities towards the Moravian missionaries. Noticing that the Pilgerhut community attracted a significant number of Amerindian people, Colier and his council repeatedly expressed their worries to the directors in Amsterdam. On the one hand, there was a general

feeling of unease concerning the mere fact that the few Moravian missionaries attracted and converted tens or hundreds of Amerindian people. Because the aid of the Indigenous allies was a necessity for the colonial authorities, and because most of the time cooperation "was by no means a forgone conclusion", this interaction was seen as a threat for the colony.⁶⁴ The Amerindians, they feared, were influenced by the Moravians. On the other hand, there was a more specific concern regarding those Amerindian people who were part of the Pilgerhut community, namely that they would not carry out their agreed-upon duties. While "keeping a watchful eye on their behaviour", Colier and the council did not fail to report all the possible "evil consequences of the so-called conversion of the Indians by the Moravian brothers".⁶⁵

In Suriname, where the Indigenous populations were not as important for the colonial society as in its neighbouring Dutch colonies, the local colonial authorities had a very different attitude towards the Moravian missionaries living in their colony. Besides the earlier mentioned privileged status of the Moravian Church in Suriname regarding the

NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 16, p. 64–86; PG, the 7th of October 1760, 'Verbod de Amerindianen lastig te vallen'; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 130, p. 23; PG, the 3th of September 1764, 'Instructie voor Gouverneur Heyliger', point 26; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 18, p. 218–224.

63 PG, the 21th of April 1746, 'Verplichting van Amerindianen om voor ze Amerindiaanse slaven aanbieden die aan de Gouverneur te tonen'; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 219 p. 105–106; PG, the 7th of January 1751, 'Verplichte registratie van gekochte Amerindiaanse slaven'; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 219, p. 166–167.

64 Kars, 266–67.

65 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 111, p. 27–30. Dutch citation: "een wakend oog over hun gedragh te houwden", "de kwaade gevolgen dewelke de soogenaamde bekeeringe der Indiaanen door de Moravische gebroeders [...] souwde konne te weege brengen".

oath of allegiance and the civil militia, in the 1750s and 1760s, the Moravians received permission to settle in different parts of the colony for their missionary work. A couple of years after missionary Dehne was banished from Berbice, he was sent to Paramaribo to revive the mission in Suriname.⁶⁶ Interestingly, the old Governor of Berbice Lossner was involved in the negotiations between the missionaries and the Governor of Suriname, Pieter Albert van der Meer, by emphasizing the positive influence of the Moravian missionaries in the colony.⁶⁷ This view of the Moravians as an added value for the colony was fundamental for the attitude of Governor Van der Meer – as well as his successors – towards the Moravian community in Suriname. As Cronshagen shows in her article, the local colonial authorities were satisfied with the missionaries forming a “European frontier” between their plantations and the Maroon communities by fulfilling a diplomatic role for the colonial government.⁶⁸ Several years after the Society of Suriname had granted permission for settlement, the role of the Moravians as colonial agents became even more explicit as the then Governor Crommelin asked the missionaries to establish a community near the Maroons in Saramacca. In return, they would

66 Weiss, “De Zending Der Herrnhutters,” 187–88.

67 Weiss, 188; Cronshagen, “A Loyal Heart to God and the Governor,” 7–8.

68 Cronshagen, 9.

receive “a church, houses, and even a salary”.⁶⁹ Because the Maroons in Suriname had a very different role in the colonial society than the Amerindians in Berbice – they were a threat rather than a vital ally – the presence of Moravian missionaries and their interaction with the Maroons was welcomed.

When Colier had left the colony of Berbice and was replaced by the new Governor Hendrik Jan van Rijswijk in 1756, the issue of the relationship and interaction between the Moravians and the various groups of Amerindians did not disappear from the colonial mind. Once back in the Dutch Republic, Colier wrote the directors of the Society of Berbice a memoir on how to bring the colony into a “more flourishing state”.⁷⁰ One of the points he mentioned was the presence of the Moravians in the colony and their relationship with the Amerindian populations. The “Indians”, he wrote, “must be kept under subordination”. They must be told that “the mentioned Herrenhutters are not their chiefs”, but that the Government had always retained power over them and the missionaries.⁷¹ According

69 Cronshagen, 10.

70 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no 223. Dutch citation: “in een bloeyender staat te brengen”.

71 Idem. Dutch citation: “moeten ook wel onder subordination gehouden worden, en haar wel in te prenten dat de gemelde Herrenhutters [...] egter hunnen opperhoofden niet zij maar dat het Gouvernement altoos deselve magt over hen behoude als te voeren,

to Colier, who acknowledged the importance of good understandings with the Indigenous populations, the missionaries were standing between the colonial administration and their allies. He clearly had the feeling of a need for a restoration of the power relations between the colonial authorities, the Moravians and the Amerindians. Given the strong dependency of the colony on the Indigenous populations, however, it is highly questionable whether his view of the balance of power was close to reality.

With the memoir and all other previous letters from Colier in mind, the directors of the Society of Berbice continued their distrustful attitude regarding the Moravian community, which they saw as an undesirable presence in their colony. Thus, when the new Governor Rijswijk reported in one of his first letters to the directors on his pleasant visit to the Moravian missionaries at Pilgerhut who, according to him, "seem to live there very quietly and simply", the directors rapidly replied that they were not to be trusted.⁷² At the same time, they made sure no more Moravian people were admitted into Berbice, stating that "more than too many of those men were found on the colony".⁷³

For the missionaries at Pilgerhut, this refusal of granting passports to their fellow Moravians was a final push to redirect their focus on the new missions in Suriname. Not only would the newly arriving people from Europe and North America go to Suriname instead of Berbice, but at the end of the 1750s the Pilgerhut community itself – both missionaries and baptized Amerindians – largely resettled in Suriname territory. After two decades of successful missionary activities in Berbice, the conflicting relationship with the colonial authorities together with the increasing social unrest at the plantations of the colony drove the Moravian missionaries to leave for Suriname.

In contrast to the directors, Governor Rijswijk received the news about the plans of the missionaries to leave the colony as bad news. Being aware of the close relationship between the Moravians and some groups of Amerindians, Rijswijk wrote to the directors that if it were true that the missionaries would leave for Suriname, "I fear we will lose All Indians, at least two-thirds, which would cause irreparable damage, to Your Honourable and to the whole colony".⁷⁴ Although the new

en dat de Herrenhutters daar aan selfs onderdanig zijn".

72 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 124, p. 22–31. Dutch citation; "die mijn voorkomen daar seer stil en eenvoudig te leven"; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 2, p. 219–221.

73 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 16, p. 214–221; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 17,

p. 11–13; NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 2, 157–158. Dutch citation: "dat bereyds meer dan teveel van die luyden op de colonie werden gevonden".

74 NL-HaNA, 1.05.05, inv. no. 125, p. 675–677. Dutch citation: "ik dat wij Alle de Indianen zullen verliesen, ten minsten twee derde, dat een inreparable schade zoude verwecken,

governor had a different view on the Moravian missionaries than both his predecessor and his superiors – he did not see how “those people could cause us the slightest hindrance”⁷⁵ – he did have a similar concern for the much-needed allies of the Society of Berbice. This time, however, it was not the presence of the Moravians that caused a threat to the colony, but their plans to leave. In both cases, the reaction of the colonial authorities to the missionaries, and their strong focus on the Indigenous groups interacting with the missionaries, tell us something about their own priorities, limits, and fears.

CONCLUSION

The Moravian mission in Berbice came to a final end when the last missionaries living at Pilgerhut fled the colony during the major slave revolt of 1763. During this revolt, in which the colonial authorities were on the edge of defeat, it was the Amerindian military cooperation that played a central role. Without their help, “the Dutch colonial power likely would have failed” to suppress the enslaved resistance.⁷⁶ The case of the Moravian mission in Berbice shows that this important characteristic of the Berbice slave

revolt – and the colonial society in general – was already visible in the decades before 1763. In their reaction to the presence (or absence) of the Moravian missionaries and the interactions they had with various Amerindian groups, the metropolitan and local colonial authorities were constantly focused on their much-needed allies. For the colonial society of Berbice, maintaining access to the cooperation of Indigenous groups was of vital importance. Instead of solely examining the Moravian missions in the Atlantic as either being part of a Moravian global community or as missionary events in itself, the history of the mission in Berbice shows that it is also part of the bigger story on the interactions and entanglements between Europeans, Africans, and Americans in the early modern Atlantic world. Using the colonial archival material on the Moravian community in Berbice, this article has opened a new window through which this history can be investigated. It shows the colonial perspective on the interactions between European missionaries and Indigenous groups while revealing the metropolitan and local authority’s priorities, limits, and fears.

During the two and a half decades of the Moravian mission in Berbice, the relationship between missionaries and authorities was primarily defined by the (desired) interactions of both parties with the Amerindian populations. Whereas in the beginning, this relationship was cooperative, which enabled the

aan UWelEd Agtb en aande heele colonie”.

75 Idem. Dutch citation: “ik kan niet sien die mensche ons de minste hindernisse kunnen toebrenge”.

76 Kars, 251.

missionaries to establish a growing religious community, from the arrival of Governor Colier onwards, this had given way to conflicts and confrontations. Because the Moravians had religious objections to the demands of the metropolitan and local authorities and thus refused to fulfil the civil duties, some missionaries were banned from the colony. More importantly, explicitly calling them a threat to the colony, the decision was made to stop admitting new Moravian people into Berbice. In Suriname, there was the opposite situation, where the Moravian missionaries were part of the solution to the threat rather than the threat itself: they could keep the dangerous Maroon communities at a safer distance from the colonial plantations, the governor reasoned. The attitudes of the colonial authorities in Berbice and Suriname to the Moravian missions were thus very much influenced by their relationships with the Amerindian and Maroon populations respectively. It is in this way that the complexities of the colonial society of Berbice are reflected in the story of the short but successful mission of the Moravian Church on the northern coast of South America.