Lawrence Aje, Thomas Lacroix & Judith Misrahi-Barak (eds.), *Re-imagining the Guyanas*. Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2019. 321 pp. (Cloth €29.00)

The Guyanas (usually spelled “Guianas”) are generally considered to be part of the Caribbean, and indeed they share a history of European colonization, African slavery and Asian indentured labor, and a strong orientation toward their former metropolises and/or the United States. At the same time, of course, they differ from the insular Caribbean because of their geographical size and location and the important presence in their populations of so-called Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, whether Amerindians or Maroons.

In the preface to this collection of essays, editors Lawrence Aje, Thomas Lacroix and Judith Misrahi-Barak deplore the general ignorance of, and lack of interest in, this part of the world. The volume, they write, endeavors “to draw links between the three countries and invite comparison” (p. 14), but of course one of them—Guyane (French Guiana)—is not a “country.” The book is the result of three conferences, in Amsterdam, London, and Montpellier—typically, perhaps, in the three (former) metropolitan states, rather than in any of the former colonies—which contributed to “understanding how a focus on the Guianas could promote a clearer understanding of the political, social and environmental issues at stake in the Caribbean as a whole, and possibly elsewhere” (p. 15).

I cannot say whether these conferences indeed fulfilled such high expectations, nor can I confirm that the contributions to this book go a long way in offering a clearer understanding of the political, social, and environmental issues at stake in the Caribbean, much less “elsewhere.” In fact, there is little attempt by most of the contributors to either discuss political, social, and environmental issues in one breath, or to make comparisons that cover the three Guianas jointly, let alone to incorporate their insights into a wider Caribbean, Latin American, or broader framework.

As with many edited volumes, this book has little cohesion beyond the general aim to discuss the Guianas—which I guess is something different from and slightly less ambitious than “re-imagining” them. There is also a gross imbalance in the coverage of the relevant territories. Of the sixteen contributions, no less than twelve focus exclusively on Guyana, as against only one on French Guiana and one on Suriname. (There are also two others on Guyana, one combining it with French Guiana and a second with Suriname and Belize.) If there is a real center, it lies in the disciplines drawn on, with the majority of contributions engaging the field of literary studies. One particular writer, Guyanese Wilson Harris, receives pride of place: he is discussed in no less than five contributions.

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Enough criticism. On the positive side, virtually all the articles are well written and interesting, so there's much to enjoy for anyone interested in learning more about the culture, history, and particularly literature of, well, mainly Guyana. At the end of the book, there are summaries of the articles in English and French (though not in Dutch, the official language of Suriname), as well as short vitae of all the contributors, except the editors. This only confirms the impression that the book more closely resembles the special issue of a journal than a genuine edited book focusing not just on one part of the world, but on a shared central question.

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