

BOOK REVIEW

Re-imagining the Guyanas

Lawrence Aje, Thomas Lacroix and Judith Misrahi-Barak, editors

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This book represents an attempt to examine common yet somewhat diverse themes in the three Guyanas—Guyana, Suriname and French Guyane a region of physical or geographic and cultural richness often ignored in the view of editors. While acknowledging that individual academic works have brought considerable attention to the individual islands they argue that few have offered broad cross-disciplinary views of the region. *Re-imagining the Guyanas* is the result of several academic conferences focused on the area and driven in part by a desire to acknowledge the anniversaries of the independence of Guyana and Suriname and the 70th anniversary of the *déparmentalisation*.

With a focus on the historical develop of the Guyanas the work is divided into four sections that contain 16 chapters, a bibliography, abstracts and biographical notes. The first consists of two parts that explore the Rose Hall plantation in Guyana and a second that examines loss of identity owing to a varied circumstances. Badahur, Seecharan and Shinebourne discuss how Rose Hall fostered the development of a cultural identity while Dabydeen demonstrates how Rose Hall has served to play an important role in inspiring novels and poetry that connect personal and national narratives. In the second section entitled “Emancipating Memory” Boon, Fosdick and Gyssels examine how historical factors have influenced in and out-migration and how personal and collective identity have become linked to the environment of natural resources that have influenced personal and familial histories.

The third section— “Mapping and Charting the 3 Guyanas” examines how forced and voluntary emigrations have led to shifting identities over time. Kahn and Kloss discuss how these events have resulted in the emergence of multi-layered identities that while fostering a national identity have as in the case of Guyana seen a politics based on racial lines. Of interest is Hopkinson’s suggestion that while the Masharamani carnival may serve to foster a united national culture it may inadvertently prevent an opportunity to address longstanding social and racial antagonisms. Of importance are papers by Grund and Janette Bulkan. Both address the need to include consideration of issues relating to indigenous and tribal peoples in the Guyanas. Bulkan details the resistance of tribal peoples to territorial

encroachment and their demands for land tenure rights. She argues that land rights ensure cultural survival as it is a part of cultural identity. Bulkan views land tenure rights as essential to national reconciliation with tribal peoples.

Section four of *Re-Imagining* is entitled "Writing and imaging the 3 Guyanas". This section reflects upon the ways in which literature, primarily that of Edgar Mittleholzer and Wilson Harris have captured the natural and cultural landscape of the Guianas. Cox and Neiva examine the multi-layered nature of Mettleholzer's work while Cribb and Mitchell and Neiva explore how Wilson maps a journey into the mind through postcolonial fictional strategies.

Re-Imagining the Guyanas does in most ways fulfill its stated objectives of providing a broad cross-disciplinary view of the region. The papers are generally well conceived and well written and provide jointly a unique view of area. This book should be a must read for anyone interested in the Guyanas. The book, as noted, contains abstracts of the papers. My one criticism of the book is a minor organizational one. Having the abstracts as a lead into the editors' introduction would have been helpful. I would encourage readers to review the abstracts first as they find their way through the book.