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Sarah Wood and Catriona MacLeod, eds., *Locating Guyane*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018. vi + 238 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, and index. £80.00 (hb). ISBN 978-1786941114.

Review by Christopher M. Church, University of Nevada, Reno.

*Locating Guyane* opens with the observation that nearly all maps of France misrepresent the overseas department, showing it floating alongside the islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion, and Mayotte. Divorced from its geographical context, Guyane looks to be a small island floating somewhere just south of France, rather than a department on the northern coast of South America roughly one-sixth the size of the Hexagon. This geographical misrepresentation signals a wider misunderstanding about Guyane's place in French and American society, as it is revealed that most have at best a fuzzy comprehension of Guyane's complex past and interconnected present. The volume sets out to resolve this problem by properly "locating Guyane," which, the volume goes on to show, is far more difficult than it might otherwise appear. Guyane is exceedingly difficult to pin down, a testament to the diverse peoples who have inhabited its geography and the disparate goals animating its political life. At one and the same time New and Old World, African and European, indigenous and foreign, Guyane has much to teach us about the legacies of colonialism, the ambiguous effects of decolonization, and indeed the very nature of modernity itself. A recurring theme in this volume, therefore, concerns the agency of the Guyanais (black, indigenous, or Creole) and Europeans (French, Dutch, and Portuguese) as they interact in a region with fluid boundaries, shifting identities, and a complex, contested history.

To tackle the issue of Guyane's underappreciated complexity, the volume has collected essays from a wide variety of fields—anthropology, languages and literatures, comparative cultures, history, and linguistics—to explore the "possible conceptual locations of a territory which in geographical terms is at the juncture of the Caribbean and Amazonia but, in political and administrative terms, is French, and indeed, European" (p. 3). After an introduction by the volume's editors, the rest of the chapters are assembled into three sections that each address one piece of how Guyane complicates our understanding of place and identity.

The first section of the volume, entitled "Imagining the Tropics: Writing on and from Guyane," concerns the ways in which Guyane has been represented and misrepresented in texts both historic and contemporary. In this section, three chapters address three different media: anthropological observations, journalistic accounts, and poetry. Richard Price's chapter, "The Oldest Daughter of Overseas France," examines the plurality of identities in Guyane today by turning a critical eye to more recent anthropological writings, including those of Richard and Sally Price

themselves, about the overseas territory. Meanwhile, Kari Evanson's "Grand Reporters in Guyane: Bringing the Exotic Back Home" convincingly argues that interwar journalists portrayed Guyane as a hellish place of punishment, the locale of France's most famous overseas penal colony and home to its most incorrigible outcasts. Whether in favor of or against how convicts were treated at Devil's Island and the rest of the penal colony, she argues, "The [*grands*] *reporteurs* invited their readers not only to experience Guyane in the pages of the press but also reconsider and question this place of punishment" (p. 35). Finally, Kathleen Gyssels uncovers how the "violent and militant poetry" of the Creole poet Damas, often overlooked for its "simple opacity," in fact presented a highly complex image of what it meant to be Guyannais, black, and non-heteronormative by engaging with issues of gender left aside as too dangerous by other more canonical Caribbean poets (p. 49).

The volume's second section, "Colonial Locations: Imperialism and the Production of Place," teases out how Guyane exists as a place within and beyond colonial history. In "Frontier Politics: French, Portuguese and Amerindian Alliances between the Amazon and Cayenne, 1680-1697," Silvia Espelt-Bombin writes indigenous agency into the story of French-Portuguese colonial conflict. Recuperating the ulterior motives of Amerindians' political maneuvers during the age of European colonization, Espelt-Bombin demonstrates how "it is necessary to integrate all of the actors living in a specific geographical space in any discussion of the settling or establishment of international frontiers" (p. 85). Jumping forward a few centuries, Jonna Yarrington explores how in the nineteenth century this frontier space became "conceptualized as a territory with possibilities for French use beyond sugar extraction"—namely "the shipment, storage, and punishment...of people no longer in possession of French citizenship and undesirable to the mainland" (pp. 91-92). Like Espelt-Bombin, Edenz Maurice also recuperates indigenous agency in "A School in Boniville? Political Skills and 'Primitives' in Guyane (1930-1969)." Maurice shows how the Boni people advocated for the construction of a French-language school in order to shore up "their collective identity and their future within...Guianese space." (p. 118). Finally, Sarah Wood addresses departmentalization head on, evaluating the legacy of Félix Éboué, his entombment in the Pantheon, and how various political groups mobilized his memory to achieve their own political ends. In my opinion, Sarah Wood's essay stands out as exemplary in the volume. Highlighting the multifaceted aims of various actors, Wood beautifully shows the complexity of Guyane through the lionization of its most famous son. Her chapter underscores local agency in the face of national hegemony, and coupled with the volume's other essays, it drives home the collection's key insights into the difficulty of defining Guyane within the French polity.

The final section of the volume, "Relocating Culture: Language, Art, and Identity," focuses on the moving target of identity and culture as the two adapt to an increasingly globalized world. In "Palikur, a Language between Two Worlds," Antonia Cristinoi and François Nemo analyze the language spoken by the Palikur people, an Amerindian population spanning the modern-day boundary between Brazil and Guyane, to show how in the face of cultural upheaval and change "Guyane transcends its current political borders" (p. 166). Likewise, in "Maroon Art in Guyane: New Forms, New Discourses," Sally Price describes how assimilationist politics and tourism have imbued Maroon woodcarving with an invented tradition supposedly rooted in slave rebellion, inter-gender communication, superstition, and the symbolic coding of colors. Catriona MacLeod's "Performing and Parading Gender in Guyane's Carnival" maintains the thread of change and performativity, illustrating how the heightened popularity of the *travesti* and the *touloulou* uncover how Carnival has "increasingly become a festival of difference" between men

and women, while at the same time negotiating a middle ground between “European and African cultural legacies” (pp. 197-198). Just as Catriona MacLeod attends to the tensions of Guyane’s “increasingly diverse and populated society” (p. 198), Bill Marshall shows in “Equality and Difference: Queering Guyane” how the overseas department’s gay politics present an opportunity to question the “hierarchical (hetero)sexual binaries” that animate “symbolic formations such as nations, diasporas, and even *départements*” themselves (p. 217).

Together, the volume’s three sections elucidate how Guyane’s colonial past and its ethnically and culturally diverse present put pressure on French universalism and assimilationist rhetoric. They also demonstrate, moreover, what is lost in locating Guyane only in its bleak penal history, its domination by European colonialism, or the lasting socioeconomic inequities both caused. While true and tragic, such narratives do not tell the whole story of Guyane’s rich history, adaptive culture, and unique modernity. Like the maps described at the volume’s outset, they are overly reductive and portray Guyane as nothing more than a “colonial outpost” without a history of its own (p. 224). With the harsh words of Nicolas Sarkozy, the conclusion drives this point home, as it highlights contemporary debates over the place of Guyane within French society and stresses the need to fully understand “the multifaceted relationship between (former) colony and (former) imperial metropole, at a time when the future of this bond is in question” (p. 220).

While the essays, taken as a whole, tell a clear and compelling story about the difficulty of “locating Guyane,” the organization of the volume feels at odds with its contents. The volume is split into three sections: 1) the tropes of writing about Guyane; 2) Guyane’s place within and beyond colonial society; and 3) identity and culture as they evolve in the face of not just decolonization, but globalization. Like their subject matter, however, the essays defy this categorization. For instance, Richard Price’s chapter in the first section could have easily fit into either of the other two, dealing as it does with colonial legacies and the forces of globalization as much as it does with the tropes of anthropological writing. And this could easily be said of many of the other essays. Though, to be honest, this tension between the editorial organization and the volume’s content should be lauded rather than criticized. The volume beautifully illustrates its argument with essays that so thoroughly engage with one another, that they each push beyond the editorial boundaries set forth in the introduction. Form follows content, as the porous borders of Guyane are reflected in the porous boundaries between the volume’s three sections.

As a place that contemporaries joke sits at the “ends of the earth,” Guyane and its history seem to invite scholarly explorations of space, such as those presented by this volume. For instance, Peter Redfields’s *Space in the Tropics: from Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (2000), explores several themes similar to those found in this volume, including the role of technological modernity in both forming and mitigating the displacement felt by so many Guyanais.[1] Similarly, Miranda Frances Spieler’s more recent *Empire and Underworld: Captivity in French Guiana* (2012) moves beyond the geographic distance created by the Atlantic Ocean to explore what it would mean to consider Guyanais history as integral to France.[2] In some ways, Joshua R. Hyles’s *Guiana and the Shadows of Empire: Colonial and Cultural Negotiations at the Edge of the World* (2014) goes in the opposite direction, describing how the homogenous “Guiana shield” became differentiated into three distinct European states: British Guyana, Dutch Suriname, and French Guyane.[3]

Nevertheless, English-language works on Guyane are comparatively few and far between, and *Locating Guyane* rectifies a lacuna in the wider scholarship by exploring what makes it distinct

from its fellow “old colonies” of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Réunion. Given the volume’s interdisciplinarity and the essays’ breadth, the short volume speaks to a wide range of academic disciplines, and consequently it serves as an excellent scholarly primer on Guyane, its colonial legacy, and its place in an increasingly global, modern world. As such, *Locating Guyane* is best suited for the advanced undergraduate to graduate classroom, and should be of interest to historians, anthropologists, linguists, demographers, post-colonial scholars, and gender theorists alike.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Sarah Wood and Catriona MacLeod, “Introduction”

Richard Price, “The Oldest Daughter of Overseas France”

Kari Evanson, “Grand Reporters in Guyane: Bringing the Exotic Back Home”

Kathleen Gyssels, “Kor and Karnival, the Carnal Road of Léon-Gontran Damas: ‘Evidence of Things Not Seen’”

Silvia Espelt Bombín, “Frontier Politics: French, Portuguese and Amerindian Alliances between the Amazon and Cayenne, 1680–1697”

Jonna Yarrington, “Producing the Periphery”

Edenz Maurice, “A school in Boniville? Political Skills and ‘Primitives’ in French Guiana (1930-1969)”

Sarah Wood, “Reclaiming Félix Éboué: Departmentalisation and Politics of Commemoration in Guyane, 1944-2012”

Antonia Cristinoi and François Nemo, “Palikur, a Language between Two Worlds”

Sally Price, “Maroon Art in Guyane: New Forms, New Discourses”

Catriona MacLeod: “Performing and Parading Gender in Guyane’s Carnival”

Bill Marshall, “Equality and Difference: Queering Guyane?”

“Conclusion: Remaking Guyane?”

#### NOTES

[1] Peter Redfield. *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[2] Miranda Frances Spieler. *Empire and Underworld: Captivity in French Guiana* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

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[3] Joshua R. Hyles. *Guiana and the Shadows of Empire: Colonial and Cultural Negotiations at the Edge of the World* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014).

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