Scholars of the Caribbean have intellectually charted beyond colonial boundaries. For example, there has been an effort to study the Dominican Republic and Haiti as a single unit. A line of inquiry regarding the “Three Guianas” has pushed beyond colonial borders to explore the expanse of French Guiana, Suriname (formerly Dutch Guiana) and Guyana (formerly British Guiana) in the same conversation. Several conferences have followed this intellectual journey, including “Imagining the Guyanas: Ecologies of Memory and Movement,” at the University of London in 2016. This dialogue follows patterns previously generated by everyday people: crossing porous borders; traversing the Amazon; establishing networks of trade, communities, political alliances; small-scale mining and tourism; and the expansion of the informal economy. These three small states – with combined populations of less than 1.6 million – cover almost 465,000 km$^2$ in South America, with topography ranging from rain forest to savannah to coastal cities. Overwhelming majorities of their populations live on the coast, and they share vast ‘interiors’, including the Amazon Basin. Considering these three countries without ignoring differences imposed by empire and language, is the fundamental project of Post-colonial trajectories in the Caribbean: The three Guianas.

What is generative about examining the ‘Three Guianas’ side by side? These neighbouring countries were creations of three different empires. Guyana and Suriname are independent nations, gaining independence in 1966 and 1975, respectively. Meanwhile, French Guiana remains an overseas territory of France: its borders are literally European borders, and it has the highest GDP on the South American continent. Despite their location, by virtue of their histories and cultures, these countries are usually associated with the Caribbean and boast some of the most diverse populations in the region. Their geographic proximity to each other, however, has not integrated them, even though internal decisions made in one country can fundamentally affect the others. As several authors in the edited volume note, integration will be critical to their survival in a globalised world.

The first three chapters of the book examine each country’s political history, noting colonial context, the independence period, political culture, democratic practice (or lack thereof) and issues of ethnicity. Kate Quinn argues that authoritarianism, constitutional manipulation and ethnic polarisation in Guyanese politics are rooted in the colonial period and that the post-independence era has brought more continuity than change. Hans Ramsoedh’s chapter on democracy and political culture in Suriname argues that politicians have become colonisers of the state, leading to a fundamental lack of public trust in politics. In spite of this, voter turnout at elections is high, largely due to “ethnic mobilisation, clientelism and patronage…” (p. 45). In their chapter, Fred Réno and Bernard Phipps see French Guiana as a “distorting kaleidoscope” because, despite the universalist republican vision of Creoles (a minority that dominates the state), Amerindian and Maroon peoples continue to face exclusion.

Six comparative chapters exploring thematic topics follow the single-country chapters. Steve Garner examines the contested, contingent, and exclusive nature of political ethnicity, concluding that it operates “more as a puzzle to analyse rather than an analytical category” (p. 71). Simola Vezzoli explores factors, multifaceted patterns and regulations that shaped migration across time and territories. Paul Tijon Sie Fat, Ranu Abhelakh and Edward Troon argue the complexity and vagueness of the idea of ‘China’ in these countries, including ethnic Chinese, new Chinese migrants, and enterprises that range from small-scale businesses
to state-sanctioned or state-owned corporations: noting that, often, “Chinese investments are primarily commercial business ventures covered in diplomatic veneer” (p. 108).

Marjo De Theije’s chapter on small-scale gold mining is a fascinating exploration of an industry with growing impact on individual livelihoods and national economies in all three countries but that proves challenging to regulate because of its trans-border, often clandestine and spatially vast nature. Pitou van Dijck examines transport infrastructure and the development and integration of the three Guianas from local, national, subregional and regional perspectives, including helpful maps and noting some environmental, cultural and local risks. The question of energy security is completely tied to configurations of infrastructure development, investment and integration, as Anthony T. Bryan reveals in his chapter “Untapped,” which explores the vast energy resources of the Guianas, recognizing the economic management, border, and social and political challenges.

The introduction and the conclusion, written by the editors Rosemarijn Hoefte, Matthew Bishop and Peter Clegg, argue the central thesis of the book: that, even though the Guianas “have experienced something of a history of estrangement from each other, their post-colonial trajectories have mirrored each other in a great many respects” (p. 155). Although the book has made a convincing case for this assertion, French Guiana often seems to stand apart from the other two countries. The editors also highlight the Guianas’ growing relationships and challenges with Latin America, the weakening relations with CARICOM and regional Caribbean entities, global relations with the EU and China, and the potential for more formal economic and political arrangements among the three Guianas. This volume will find an engaged audience among those interested in small states because the three Guianas are a lesser-known part of the world, and authors delve into the challenges of governance, development and infrastructure, variability in sovereignty, the critical nature of integration, the options for economic diversification and vulnerability to global markets.

The editors recognize that the Three Guianas “have not always fit easily into studies on the Caribbean or Latin America” (p. 1). This is particularly true for Latin America, but Latin Americanists will find this volume interesting because it discusses the growing relationship among the Guianas, Brazil, and Venezuela; the migration of Brazilians and Venezuelans to these countries in search of small-scale gold mining and other opportunities; the road infrastructure projects led by Brazil; and the increasing interface with Latin American countries. On the other hand, scholars of postcolonialism may find less than expected – Postcolonial in the title is largely a marker of time rather than a reference to theory – given that, with few exceptions, the authors do not directly engage these debates.

The book will appeal to readers interested in diaspora studies: the Guianas are an extremely rich landscape for this. Moreover, several chapters refer to the challenges of land rights for Indigenous and Maroon communities and the relations that follow when peoples’ movements unsettle borders. This book should urge scholars to continue disrupting borders and see connections that elude due to disciplinary, language and living colonial boundaries.

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