

## ANGLES OF VISION FROM THE COAST AND HINTERLAND

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### Preface

For Afro- or Indo-Guyanese ‘coastlanders’, the hinterlands to the south constitute a highly ambivalent space, which simultaneously presents the possibility of great wealth and the grave dangers of the truly unknown. The first part of the chapter shows how the spaces and communities of the hinterland, haunting the edges of the coastal imagination and normally an ‘absent presence’ to coastlanders, are rendered visible when they offer redemptive possibilities to the postcolonial Guyanese nation-state. The second part turns to a small subsection of the coastal population which has chosen to engage directly and personally with the ‘bush’, and explores how these out-of-place coastlanders make sense of the hinterland.

### Part 1: Saving Amerindians, Saving Ourselves: Reflections from Guyana’s Coast (Trotz)

#### *Introduction*

This section will discuss how the spaces and communities of the hinterland, haunting the edges of the coastal imagination and normally an ‘absent presence’ to coastlanders, are rendered visible when they offer redemptive possibilities to the postcolonial Guyanese nation-state. The argument is elaborated through a discussion of the United States administration’s anti-trafficking legislation and subsequent designation of Guyana as a non-compliant country in June 2004. This prompted a highly staged, vigorous and visible local response extensively covered by the local media, a performance that crucially depended for its success on rearticulating narratives of indigenous peoples, and women in particular, as victims. Drawing on newspaper articles,

editorials and letters, documents of the Government of Guyana, and interviews with state officials, representatives from the non-governmental sector, a representative from the US embassy and activists in Guyana, this essay explores how ‘Amerindian women’ became central to the debates on trafficking, in the service of a indebted post-colonial state apparatus whose actions demonstrated its inscription into broader relations of global capitalism.

*Trafficking: Framing the parameters, setting the boundaries*

As several researchers have noted, trafficking involves the illegal transportation of people across borders for the specific purpose of labour exploitation. While the emphasis tends to be on the crossing of national boundaries, internal trafficking is also recognized, which as we will see below is critical to the Guyanese context where it is the movement of Amerindian women from the interior to the urban areas of the coast that has drawn international attention. The discourse on trafficking has, at least from the nineteenth century, been highly gendered and sexualized, with much of the emphasis at the international level on rescuing girls and women forced or tricked into prostitution.<sup>1</sup>

The recent interventions of the United States are an excellent example of this approach. In 2000, the US Congress passed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, which requires an annual country report that is submitted by the Secretary of State. The report defines severe trafficking as:

- (a) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or (b) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or service, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

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<sup>1</sup> This is now an extremely rich debate. For a critique of the abolitionist position in trafficking, see Sullivan 2003, Kempadoo, Sanghera & Pattanaik 2005

Countries are ranked in three tiers according to levels of governmental compliance with the minimum standards established by the Act for the elimination of trafficking: Tier 1 refers to countries that are in full compliance; Tier 2 acknowledges that significant steps are being taken to meet the minimum standards; and Tier 3 is reserved for countries where it is determined that no such efforts have been established. According to the 2001 report, from 2003 onwards Tier 3 countries would face sanctions:

principally non-humanitarian, non-trade-related assistance. Such countries would also face US opposition to assistance (except for humanitarian, trade-related, and certain development-related assistance) from international financial institutions, specifically the International Monetary Fund and multilateral development banks such as the World Bank. Certain of the sanctions may be waived under certain circumstances, including upon a national interest determination by the President (U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2001).

As has been noted elsewhere, notwithstanding the apparent determination to address the concerns of women and children, the US administration's position is driven more by the logic of a security state and efforts to stem cross-border flows of illegal migrants (Kapur 2003; Kempadoo, 2004). Foregrounding punitive measures (with even protection in North America and Europe often contingent on co-operation with the authorities and only infrequently guaranteeing women's right to remain in the places they have moved to) obscures the global systemic inequalities that have precipitated such large-scale displacements of women in the first place.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the classification of countries by the United States and the threat of economic sanctions against non-compliant states underscore the significance of the reports as an important diplomatic instrument to impose conformity with the foreign policy agenda of the United States,

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<sup>2</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, Kempadoo (2004, unpublished) also notes that the US anti-trafficking policy is inextricably driven by neo-conservative, Christian imperatives which foreclose initiatives that attempt to address questions of health, poverty and HIV/AIDS prevention. Moreover, the discourse on trafficking has become so hegemonic as to foreclose any sustained analysis of the various locations of women in the sex trade.

a point Kamala Kempadoo (2004, unpublished) has made by noting that the countries designated by the United States as ‘rogue’ or ‘terrorist’ states all fall within the Tier 3 categorization.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the withholding of aid extends beyond bilateral issues to encompass various international financial institutions, holds significant implications for heavily indebted Third World countries like Guyana, which entered into a structural adjustment arrangement in 1989 that continued with little modification following the return to political democracy in 1992, political rhetoric notwithstanding<sup>4</sup>. Economic growth in the 1990s at a rate of 7% (1991-1997), has been followed by an annual growth rate of less than half a percent since 1998, the combined result of economic externalities and an unstable political and economic environment. In 1997 Guyana qualified as a Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC)<sup>5</sup>, making it eligible to receive debt relief from multilateral and bilateral (including commercial) creditors that included the World Bank, IMF and Paris Club. By the time Guyana reached the HIPC completion point in 2003, it was estimated that it was entitled to a reduction of about USD\$600 million in net present value terms, or over 50% of the country’s debt stock (after traditional debt relief). It is against this backdrop of external indebtedness that Guyana’s citation in the TIPS (Trafficking in Persons) report, and the government’s response, must be assessed.

In 2004, Guyana made its first appearance in the U.S. State Department’s TIPS Report, as “a country of origin, transit, and destination for young women and children trafficked primarily for sexual exploitation”. Given its lack of compliance with the three P’s – prosecution,

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<sup>3</sup> Consider the fact that Venezuela has been designated a Tier 3 country since 2004, and that a 2005 U.S. Presidential Determination order linked Venezuela’s Tier 3 status to political instability in the country, and, notwithstanding the fact that President Hugo Chavez is a democratically elected head of state, suggested the ‘provision of certain assistance to promote the democratic process in Venezuela [...and] to promote stable and legitimate leadership that will, it is hoped, make significant efforts to combat trafficking in persons.’ Not surprisingly perhaps, Cuba is also in the Tier 3 category.

<sup>4</sup> At its most recent party congresses, the ruling party (People’s Progressive Party, PPP) reiterated its belief in Marxism and its commitment to communism.

<sup>5</sup> Guyana and Haiti are the only two HIPC countries in the Caribbean.

prevention, protection – for reasons attributed in the report to inadequate resources and a ‘lack of understanding’, the U.S. State Department listed Guyana as a Tier 3 country and gave it 60 days to take steps before it would be re-evaluated (U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2004). In September, a White House press release provided details of a Presidential Determination Note authorized by George W. Bush (2004-46), which upgraded Guyana to a watch list of Tier 2 countries.

What had occasioned the promotion of Guyana to Tier 2? The official line insisted that various initiatives, including draft legislation, had either been introduced or were being considered “not because we want to satisfy the US State Department that we are doing something about it. We are doing it because of concern for our people” (Comments by Bibi Shadick, Human Services Minister, Stabroek News, June 21/2004). Letters to the editor were similarly indignant: “So the US is putting pressure on Guyana to stop the trafficking in human beings. Who gave the US the authority to dictate to other countries what to do or not to do? The US should clean its own house first” (Stabroek News, June 19/2004).

To be sure, reports began to surface in the media as early as April 2004 that the government was in the process of setting up a people trafficking unit and drafting a national strategy (Stabroek News, April 23 & 30, 2004). However, a number of people noted that, partly at the request of the American embassy which had conducted its own preliminary information gathering (and months before the US State Department issued its condemnatory report), a meeting on trafficking had been convened with representatives of the relevant government agencies and the police force, at which the “Americans had come to read the riot act”. It was also pointed out that it would have been highly unlikely that the Guyana government would not have

known well in advance of the June publication that the country was possibly going to be named as non-compliant (confidential interviews, July 2005).<sup>6</sup>

### *The local response*

Guyana is a country of origin, transit and destination for young women and children trafficked primarily for sexual exploitation. Much of the trafficking takes place in the interior of the country, where observers indicate that likely over 100 persons are engaged in forced prostitution in isolated settlements. Victims are also found in prostitution centers in Georgetown and New Amsterdam. Guyanese victims originate mainly from Amerindian communities; some come from coastal urban centers. Most foreign victims are trafficked from Northern Brazil; some may also come from Venezuela. Guyana is also a transit country for victims trafficked into Suriname (US Department of State 2004).

In both the external designation as well as official local responses, Guyana's interior communities became visible as sites to be talked about and acted upon in certain ways. The interior appears in the U.S. report in three configurations, each linked to differently nationalized or racialized groups of women: as a space through which trafficked 'foreign' women and children are moved (as in those coming into the country from Venezuela and Northern Brazil); as an area to which non-Amerindian women from coastal urban centers are taken (and here it is closely linked to mining camps); and as a site that generates Amerindian women who are trafficked for prostitution to coastal communities. It plays a central role, then, as a place where trafficked women originate from, end up in, or pass through en route to somewhere else. Most of the movement to the coast related to Amerindian women and girls in the Trafficking Reports (2004-2006), and also dominated media accounts. Without denying the centrality of the interior in discussions of the exploitation of women's sexual labour (see Trotz & Peake 1999), this essay

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<sup>6</sup> Some of the interviewee names have been kept confidential as these individuals work with, or interact with the government as part of their daily work routines; naming them could make them vulnerable.

reflects critically on precisely *how* interior communities, and Amerindian women in particular, are discursively mobilized to become visible in the government's anti-trafficking campaign that got underway in earnest in the second half of 2004.

For some organisations, such as The Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana (TAAMOG), the Guyanese Organization of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP), Red Thread Women's Development Organisation and the Guyana Human Rights Association, the sexual exploitation of Amerindian women in the interior and on the coast had been documented and raised long before 2004, but to little avail (Interview with Mike McCormack, Guyana Human Rights Association, July 2005; Red Thread 1998, 2004, Stabroek News, August 2, 2004. Also see Colchester, La Rose & James, 2002). Yet, between June (when the TIPS report was made public) and December 2004 (when the Guyana parliament passed anti-trafficking legislation), over 100 newspaper articles, editorials and letters to the press appeared in the three major newspapers, the Stabroek News, Guyana Chronicle and Kaieteur News, giving the impression for the most part that this was a completely new phenomenon that the government was responding to.

Charged with taking the lead role, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security convened an inter-agency, inter-Ministry steering committee which included the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and issued a National Plan of Action in April 2004 to combat TIPS in Guyana. Between June and August 2004, Minister Bibi Shadick and a team had visited all ten of the country's administrative regions on a fact-finding, information-sharing and public relations blitz, covering over 30 communities and some 3,000 people – mostly Amerindian and located in hinterland and riverine areas - in the process. The campaign also included letters to businesses, meetings with religious and business leaders, the development of advertisements and publication of a TIPS leaflet. Seminars and workshops were held on the coast, and

representatives were sent to a TIPS meeting in Miami organized by the International Organization on Migration (IOM), as well as to other sessions in the Caribbean. The workshops were intended to train some 300 representatives from different administrative regions and relevant agencies (social workers, police officers, Ministry of Health officials) to recognize TIPS and to understand their role in reducing it. A special workshop was held with Community Development Officers attached to the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and police officers stationed in interior communities.<sup>7</sup> Draft legislation on trafficking was presented to parliament in July 2004, referred to a Select Parliamentary Committee and passed by the National Assembly less than six months later, on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004, to become the *Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act* (No. 2), 2005. Under the Act, sentences for convicted traffickers range from three years to life as well as the confiscation of assets procured through trafficking. The steps taken in 2004 were followed up in 2005 by the establishment of a counter-trafficking unit (with four staff) in the Ministry of Labour, now recognized as the “focal point for the national programme on TIPS” (Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, October 2004). Most recently, discussions have begun with the Chief Justice to get a special magistrate assigned to expedite TIPS cases through the judicial system (Kaieteur News, June 21, 2006).

In a telling comment by Guyana’s then ambassador to Venezuela Odeen Ishmael, Guyana had fast-tracked plans to avoid a cut in funds from international lending agencies and hoped to be recognized for its efforts in the mid-September evaluation (Guyana Chronicle, September 1, 2004). As noted earlier, just a few months after it made the U.S. TIPS report for the first time, Guyana was moved from Tier 3 (non-compliant) to a Tier 2 (not fully compliant) watch list. By 2005, Guyana was again reclassified by the U.S. State Department, this time

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<sup>7</sup> In an interview with an official in the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs in July 2005, it was noted that all of the Community Development Officers at the time were Amerindian; however, there were no women.



securing its position among Tier 2 countries, for the “appreciable progress [shown] over the last year, particularly through its enactment of anti-trafficking legislation, improvement in government coordination and aggressive public awareness campaigns” (Guyana Chronicle, June 6, 2005; U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2005). In the 2006 Report Guyana remains at Tier 2, leading the Minister of Human Services and Social Security to complain that the ranking was unfair in light of the significant steps the government is taking and surmised that Guyana would have been promoted to Tier 1 status had the US State Department been fully informed of everything that had been accomplished (Kaieteur News, Guyana Chronicle, June 21, 2006).

#### *Victimhood in out of way areas*

Amerindians are the only ‘group’ that has shown a consistent population increase in Guyana, a country that in the 1990s was experiencing negative population growth rates largely due to outward migration.<sup>8</sup> According to the most recent Census in 2002, Amerindians constituted 9.2% of the population (68,819), up from 6.5% in 1991. They reside primarily in the interior (Regions 1, 7, 8, 9) and in Region 2 on the coast, constituting as much as 62%, 76% and 89% in Regions 1, 8 and 9 respectively. Although the general sex ratio shows an almost equal number of men and women, the ratio is lowest in the interior regions<sup>9</sup>. The smaller numbers of women are possibly indicative of the inward migration of men looking for work in the timber and mining industries that have opened up under structural adjustment, as well as the movement

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<sup>8</sup> The Guyanese Census divides the population into six ethnic groups – Blacks, Indians, Mixed, Amerindian, White, Chinese, Portuguese. While this essay is about the representation of Amerindian women, it is critical to note that diverse socio-cultural practices and residential patterns are effaced by such a generic application. In Guyana, those identified as Amerindians by the state and coastlanders (the term is also used in different ways, including for purposes of political identification, by some indigenous peoples) can more precisely be named as Akawaio, Arawak, Arekuna, Carib, Makushi, Patamona, Wai Wai, Wapishana, Warrau, although even these groupings can efface the fact that these peoples have long been part of a larger regional ‘Guianas’ context.

<sup>9</sup> The numbers of men relative to every 100 women is as follows: Region 1 (112); Region 7 (114); Region 8 (132); Region 9 (107).

of Amerindian women to the coast (It is only in Region 4, where the capital city, Georgetown, is located, that the sex ratio imbalance favours women - 96 men to every 100 women).

The interior has become key to national economic growth projections following the implementation of structural adjustment policies: the granting of timber and mining concessions; the promotion of eco-tourism; the building of roads connecting Guyana to Brazil; plans to increase agricultural production (Colchester, La Rose & James 2002). This planning has been done with little if any consultation with indigenous communities. The interior with its large forest canopies, borders with Venezuela and Brazil, has also positioned Guyana as a crucial transshipment location for the international drug trade. Yet, whether resources are generated in the hinterland or passing through it, the beneficiaries have not been the peoples who live there, and who continue to fare the worst on almost all socio-demographic indicators: almost 80% of Amerindians are estimated to be below the poverty line, a situation aggravated for women; over 70% are engaged in subsistence activities in agricultural sector; average life expectancy is almost 10 years below the national average; few households (less than 13%) receive secondary schooling; health services are extremely scarce in the interior in the midst of such diseases as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, some of which have been introduced or exacerbated by the spurt in the mining industry (World Bank 2004).

These overwhelming structural disparities are accompanied by the ideological construction of Amerindians as primitive and undeveloped, representations which have a long colonial history. As Neil Whitehead (p. 70) notes, “successive waves of spiritual and material development have pounded native communities leading to the continuous ideological

construction of indigenous peoples as obstacles to progress”.<sup>10</sup> Today, ninety percent of the – primarily non-indigenous - population resides on a ribbon of coastal land reclaimed from swamp, and there is a deep material and imaginative division between coast and hinterland. The coast is characterised by a deeply racialised political landscape in which Africans and Indians (descendants of slaves and indentured labourers) continually compete over who is fitter and more deserving to hold the reins of national power. This monopoly leaves virtually no room for indigenous peoples, seen as living more or less ‘behind God’s back’. This is reflected in the racist term ‘buck’ used casually on the coast to refer to any indigenous person, and which contains within it associations of tradition, backwardness, simplicity, stupidity. It stands for everything that the modern coastlander is not (Mentore 1992).

As we shall see below, these discourses were easily available to be deployed in the Guyanese state’s elaboration of its anti-trafficking agenda. Official identification of the causes of trafficking has focused overwhelmingly on the problem of individual coastal predators. In this regard, the machinery of public relations and workshops have been geared almost entirely to defining TIPS, warning people to be on the lookout for strange persons in their communities, and training locals to spot and respond to instances of trafficking. Targeting individuals – as both potential predators and civic-minded citizens - dovetails with the US insistence on legal measures to combat trafficking via an emphasis on the apprehension, prosecution and punishment of aggressors.

This raises the question of the way in which the privileging of technical and legal remedies works to efface more complex analyses of the issue, a point made by some local civil society organizations, which commented that the broad ‘spectrum of social problems’ facing

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<sup>10</sup> In his discussion of Kanaimà, Neil Whitehead describes an ideological construction that distinguishes between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ native. In the case of trafficking discussed here, ‘natives’ – particularly women - were overwhelmingly typecast as innocent and naïve.

society should not be simply addressed by resorting immediately to prosecution without the necessary research and commitment to a systemic solution (Trafficking in Persons, Stabroek Daily News, July 7, 2004).<sup>11</sup>

In the opening paragraphs of the Guyanese government's anti-trafficking National Plan of Action, it was recognized that trafficking was associated with "recent developments in mining, logging and related activities in the hinterland locations, and which have triggered internal migration between the coastal and hinterland locations as well as between interior villages and mining locations" (Ministry of Labour 2004: 3). The report notes that the factors contributing to TIPS are both supply-oriented (poverty, low levels of education and literacy, lack of jobs for women and girls) as well as demand-based (developments in the entertainment industry, the drug trade). Yet, notwithstanding the initial identification of this wider context, the 'overall strategic objective' was to 'eradicate or to minimize trafficking in persons in the entire society' (p. 6), by focusing entirely on educating the public, identifying and rescuing victims, training personnel and pursuing perpetrators. By effacing the structural causes of trafficking, the state absolves itself from any responsibility for the ongoing economic, social, political and cultural marginalization that underpins the movement of Amerindian women and the exploitation of their sexual labour in coastal locations.

Consequently, in this narrative the state emerges as the doer par excellence – apprehending, enacting, helping, legislating, organizing, protecting, punishing, reporting, training, visiting, warning – as evidenced by the dizzying array of purposeful measures reported on an almost daily basis in the local newspapers in 2004. This sets the stage for the rehearsal of a colonial paternalistic script in which the contemporary state becomes the benevolent rescuer of

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<sup>11</sup> Although beyond the scope of this paper, this concern appears to be supported by an examination of the Trafficking Act, which mirrors almost exactly the definitions and language of the US Victims of Trafficking Act.

trafficked Amerindian women from individual coastal predators, cast as the villains of the piece. In fact, the production of the state as capable of governing and resolving trafficking, is achieved by denying Amerindian peoples any complexity or agency. They exist in official documents and media reports primarily as communities to be spoken on behalf of, as a problem to be solved. The hinterland, for example, is completely flattened in various accounts as a generic place from which victims are recruited for sex work in coastal entertainment spots, notwithstanding the fact that these specific forms of exploitation of Amerindian women and men do not happen uniformly throughout the interior, but rather that it is those communities that are closer and more accessible to the coast that are especially vulnerable (interview with Virgil Ferreira, Amerindian hostel, July 15, 2005). Although the National Plan implies the interior in several sections (it talks about remote communities, notes the link between logging and mining and displacement, the list of places it identifies for official visits are mainly in the interior), Amerindian communities and peoples are only explicitly identified *once* in this 23 page document, viz “The [anti-trafficking] strategy must also take cognizance of the culture and belief systems of various communities, such as Amerindians” (Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, April 2004: 7). Yet at no point are we told exactly what taking Amerindians seriously would entail, how engaging with indigenous notions of personhood and community might disrupt more familiar racist stereotypes of Amerindian backwardness and helplessness, how different communities will bring specific histories and experiences to bear on the question. Additionally, this fleeting reference to belief systems elides the material context of cultural practices, in effect foreclosing any focus on the specific dimensions of Amerindian marginalization in the contemporary context. Thus legislative solutions become an easy fix; while important, they should not substitute for a systemic investigation into racism, hinterland poverty, land titles, displacement

resulting from timber and mining concessions, and lack of job opportunities (comment from the Amerindian People's Association, SN, June 19, August 5, 2005; interview with Jean La Rose, Amerindian People's Association).

Amerindian women emerge in the state's response to trafficking as victims to be rescued and then protected under the provisions of the Trafficking Act, to be put up at shelters until safe return to their communities is possible. The National Plan's description, for instance, of 'young people from remote poor communities' as uneducated, innocent and gullible, conjures images of unsuspecting women being tricked by sophisticated and duplicitous coastal predators. Although the focus is primarily on women<sup>12</sup>, the absence of Amerindian men implies that they are incapable of defending their communities against the illegal migration of women to and subsequent sexual exploitation on the coast.

Amerindians (women and men) also become visible as those who are beneficiaries of the state's tutelage. The majority of TIPS field trips organized in 2004 under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security and described as outreach, occurred in hinterland and riverine areas such as Mabaruma, Port Kaituma, Moruca, Maracabai, Micobie, Tumatumari, Kato, Lethem. The flow of expertise is, however, clearly envisioned as uni-directional, with visits framed as encounters with state officials and policymakers who educate Amerindians about the dangers of trafficking. Here the 'problem' is reduced to a lack of adequate information. Once enlightened, residents are expected to stop the enticement of women and put an end to trafficking in their communities. In short, it appears that the Ministry's declaration of its intention to collaborate with 'other government agencies, NGOs and all stakeholders' (Ministry of Labour, 2004: 7), does not even include Amerindians as junior

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<sup>12</sup> Although the US TIPS reports note that Amerindian men are also forcibly exploited in timber camps in the interior, the predominant response in Guyana has been to the notion of trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation.

partners,<sup>13</sup> but rather relies on the idea of coastal experts bringing knowledge and ultimately salvation to Amerindian communities.

The representation of Amerindian communities and women as needing to be rescued was also pervasive in media reports. In a discussion of some methodological issues arising in their exploratory study on trafficking in persons in Guyana, the Red Thread Women's Development Organisation noted the influence of the general assumption that TIPS and Amerindian women were synonymous:

As research proceeded...we became increasingly concerned at the degree to which the exclusive focus of all parties... returned to the exploitation of Amerindian girls and women... our objection is that some of the statements made, including in the media, while acknowledging the particular ways in which power is abused against Amerindians, reflected the paternalism in coastal/interior relations and/or an acceptance of the prevailing stereotypes about Amerindians in general and Amerindian girls and women in particular (Red Thread, 2004: 19).

The letter below to a daily newspaper is also a good example of the particular place that 'the Amerindian' occupies in the general coastal imagination:

Once again the news of the exploitation of Amerindian girls by unscrupulous restaurant owners on the coastland is in the open. This is a blight on the national conscience of Guyanese...I would call on all kind-hearted and peace-loving Guyanese to boycott any restaurant which exploits young girls (Boycott restaurants that exploit Amerindian girls, Stabroek Daily news, July 15, 2004).

The comments evoke outrage by establishing the difference between the unscrupulous coastlander and his conscientious counterpart (and by extension all peace-loving

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<sup>13</sup> In fact the stakeholders involve governmental (social workers, police, health workers, officials from Geology and Mines) and nongovernmental agencies, virtually all of whom are based on the coast. Although beyond the scope of this essay, the language of stakeholder that has become so popular as a way of foregrounding the participation of civil society, is highly misleading because it begins from the assumption that all stakeholders are operating on a level playing field. With regard to the argument being made here, in the National Plan the word stakeholder suggests that everyone has the same say or will be equally heard, which as we have seen here is patently not the case.

Guyanese), enabling the representation of the coast as a neutral space and those who live there as, for the most part, innocent bystanders (on innocence see Razack & Fellows 1998). The letter also establishes the coastlander's distance from Amerindians, for it relies on a divide between Guyanese and Amerindians, placing the latter on the outside of the nation-state looking in. The indignant tone calls forth pity, sympathy and charity on the part of the readers, sentiments which reinforce a sense of coastlander largesse, as those who must act for and on behalf of (never with) Amerindian peoples.

Displacing culpability onto individual offenders absolves us from addressing ongoing economic, social and political inequalities that structure relations between the coast and the interior. That is to say, what is missing from such expressions of concern is any recognition of collective responsibility that would entail an interrogation of historical and contemporary relations of privilege that produce Amerindians as subordinate 'others', such that an Amerindian woman could note of her movement from the North West District to Georgetown to go to school, "Things were different here. I was always called 'Buck Girl' as if it were a curse or a disgrace, as I'm sure many others are called today" (letter to the editor, *Stabroek News* September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2004). It would require hearing and addressing Amerindian descriptions of their marginalization, where in response to the Ethnic Relations Commission Hinterland Outreach Programme in Region One, one man stated "People believe that Amerindians are at the bottom, every other race thinks they are above us and that is how it has always been. I have been told personally that we are nothing and people still say it up to now" (*Stabroek News*, June 19, 2005, *Guyana Chronicle*, June 21, 2005. Also see *Stabroek News*, Monday November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005).

Thus, calling for patrons to boycott restaurants that exploit young Amerindian women misses the fact that it is not just proprietors but also patrons who are the beneficiaries of



the so-called 'buck nights', racist and misogynist coastal vernacular for bars offering a night on the town for men to be 'entertained' by Amerindian women, where "a lot of these girls don't see the money. The men pay the boss to go with these girls. What the boss feel like giving them, they give them" (interviews with Jean La Rose, Amerindian People's Association & Virgil Ferreira, Amerindian Hostel, Red Thread 2004:). Moreover, what occurs in the bars is symptomatic of the wider and mutual interaction of race, class and gender that situate Amerindians in the lowest echelons of the occupational hierarchy. Reports that employers threaten to accuse their Amerindian employees of stealing from them if they complain about their working conditions also highlight the confidence that the legal/judicial systems are stacked in favour of coastlanders, with few avenues for recourse. Speaking of the general labour exploitation of Amerindian employees on the coast, the co-ordinator of the Amerindian hostel in Georgetown remarked, "Is a cultural advantage. Here at the centre we get a lot of calls looking for domestic workers, clothes washer and so. People think Amerindian girls stupid, that there is nobody to represent them, you could do anything to them" (interview with Virgil Ferreira).

Nor can this be reduced to a dynamic that exists between coastal men and Amerindian women. Non-Amerindian women appear as employers of domestic labour, and some operate as restaurant proprietors. Women were also named as procurers in at least half of the instances of suspected trafficking reported in the media in 2004, their involvement underscoring the significance of gender in the establishment of relationships with Amerindian communities and ensuring the recruitment of women. As one interviewee stated, "usually a female would go into the communities, they would become middle persons to recruit". A general sense, then, that Amerindians 'belong' in the interior situates them as outside of civilization, reinforcing romantic stereotypes of simplicity but also predisposing a culture of abuse towards those who are 'not like

us', 'less than us'. Such widespread sentiments also structure the hierarchical, exploitative and demeaning experiences Amerindians endure on the coast, encounters that are intended to reinforce the sense that they are out-of-place there.

### *Visibility and salvation*

This essay has explored how Amerindian peoples, and women in particular, became visible in particular ways as the effect of anti-trafficking discourses and media-hyped interventions in Guyana. Immediate local responses to the country's appearance on the US non-compliant list clearly demonstrated the post-colonial state's vulnerability in the international arena:

Persons familiar with the problems plaguing Amerindian communities...would be aware that the exploitation of young girls is [not] recent...It is...odd that, nearly five years into his presidency, Mr. Jagdeo has only now announced measures to tackle the problem (Editorial, Trafficking in Amerindian girls is not new, Stabroek News, June 15, 2004).

Although Amerindian women appeared to be central to the demonstration of official will to find and protect victims in the national interest, they were in fact the grounds upon which a claim could be made by the Government to take Guyana off the Tier 3 List and thus ensure that funding from multilateral and bilateral creditors would not be threatened. As Red Thread, which wrote a report on trafficking in persons in Guyana, noted,

“...the Government of Guyana was forced into a position where [unless] it took active steps against TIP, it risked losing external aid. It will not be possible to combat any social problem in Guyana – not only TIP but the conditions that facilitate TIP...as long as our very assessment of that problem is or is being seen as externally-driven” (Red Thread 2004: 69)

As we have seen, trafficking has been a hypervisible issue in the local media. Yet, notwithstanding this dizzying array of purposeful activity, there have been no successful prosecutions or convictions to date; the witness protection program, described as central to successful prosecutions under the Act, has not been activated<sup>14</sup>; there is no independent shelter for women who have been trafficked, and it is not clear whether any buildings will come from government funds or appeals for donations. For all the resources put into fact-finding missions, creation of specialized anti-trafficking units, educating and sensitizing police, social workers and the general public, we still do not know (or have not been told) how big a ‘problem’ trafficking is, which Amerindian communities are most severely affected, the numbers of women suspected of being duped or forced to come to the coast.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, perhaps we are looking in the wrong place, in that the intended effect of these initiatives was not to decrease the illegal movement and exploitation of Amerindian women, but rather to underscore the legitimacy of the state machinery on both a local and international stage. Insisting on the country’s sovereignty in relation to the anti-trafficking campaign and in response to critics deflects attention away from the country’s unequal incorporation into the ‘international family’ of nation-states (Alexander, 1997; Malkki 1994), and the potentially devastating economic consequences of limited sanctions from the international community if Guyana had remained on the non-compliant list.

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<sup>14</sup> Red Thread’s (2004) discussion of the palpable fear among many informants and its influence on the interviewing process in their study of trafficking, notwithstanding extensive publicity about TIPS at the time, is significant in this regard.

<sup>15</sup> I was told that for the US TIPS reports, trafficking is used when the number of women is at least 100. This was the only time I heard any discussion of the scale of the issue, and even here it was not specifically related to Guyana. In fact, while doing interviews, there appeared to be a paradox of hypervisibility and invisibility. Several respondents indicated that there were two messages coming from the government: that much was being done to combat trafficking; and doubts that trafficking really existed in Guyana, to the extent that it warranted being noticed by the US administration (also see the discussion of this paradox in Red Thread, 2004: 68-69). One could also argue that there are far more Amerindian women and men who have not been trafficked to the coast whose structural disadvantage in the labour market deserves attention. The danger of the trafficking hype is that it forecloses a more sustained engagement with pervasive practices of discrimination.

In this regard, the interior, having been named in the US TIPS Report, becomes the solution to the problem, but a solution that has to be managed.<sup>16</sup> The redemptive agency of the state is predicated on the feminization of the interior and the victimhood of indigenous peoples; the idea of the latter as tradition-bound, dependent and therefore requiring outside intervention and rescue, becomes the condition of possibility for the modernity of the former, as evidenced in the passage of laws, the geographical concentration of resources on the coast and the fact that the initiatives go from the coast inland, never the other way around. In this context, there is little room to advance the argument that it is precisely such intervention that has historically produced the marginalization experienced by communities and peoples in the interior, and that leads Amerindians (women and men) to seek jobs elsewhere. Trafficking and Amerindians have now become so synonymous in the public imagination that a more complex reading of patterns of indigenous migration and exploitation is obscured. What we see here is an example of the hinterland and hinterlanders drifting into sight as the result of externalities (US foreign policy), in ways that stabilize a set of practices, relations and identities that reflect coastal preoccupations. In the final analysis, the representation of the Guyanese state as saviour of trafficked Amerindian women barely papers over the reality that in fact the main storyline, as usual, was about the salvation of the coast.

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<sup>16</sup> As Terence Roopnaraine notes, one can trace the practice of seeing the hinterland as solution to the earliest days of colonial contact: “at various overlapping moments in history, this has taken the form of quests for gold, diamonds, wood, medicine, ‘the rainforest experience’, ‘the Amerindian experience’ ” (Personal correspondence, 3/15/2005).

## Part 2: Further (Dis)Locations: Praxis and Poetics in Guyana's Hinterland (Roopnaraine)

...I sensed, over the years, as a surveyor, that the landscape possessed a resonance. The landscape possessed a life, because the landscape, for me, is like an open book, and the alphabet with which one worked was all around me. (Wilson Harris, in Bundy 1999:40).<sup>17</sup>

We now turn from the conceptual positioning of the hinterland and hinterlanders in the discourse of Guyana's coastlands to the physical presencing of coastlanders in the hinterland. The coastlanders in question are the itinerant, small-scale miners of gold and diamonds known in Guyana as porkknockers, and this part of the chapter focuses upon their relationship with the landscape and culture of the vast interior lands lying to the south of the coastal belt.<sup>18</sup> Products of a postcolonial coastal culture which is deeply ambivalent about the hinterland, and heirs to a trope of extractivism which extends five centuries into the past, porkknockers travel south to attempt to wrest wealth from a disorienting and difficult land. In doing so they mediate between coast and bush, and merge the chimeras of the past with those of the future.

The ethnography upon which this section is based was carried out in the Pakaraima Mountains of southwestern Guyana principally during 1993-1994, with additional field trips in 1997. These mountains constitute the traditional homelands of the Patamona and, on their southern flanks which border the North Rupununi Savannahs, of the Macuxi.

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<sup>17</sup> Wilson Harris, as a writer, is intensely preoccupied with the landscape of Guyana's interior, which he experienced intimately as a young man on surveying expeditions. The landscape looms large and oneiric in his magical-realist fiction, which derives much of its richness from the tensions inherent in trying to impose a trigonometric order on a placed of bewildering complexity.

<sup>18</sup> The Guyanese diamond miners referred to in this chapter are known in the vernacular as *porkknockers*. There are several possible etymologies for this name, but the one I think most likely refers to the practice of 'knocking' a piece of salted pork on a pot of rice to impart flavour when there is no meat to add. Porkknocker refers particularly to miners of diamonds and gold who practice their trade with little or no mechanised technology, relying chiefly on manual extraction techniques.

*A Story About a Story About a Story*

All around us, the rain beat down through the trees, turning the large holes and trenches in the clearing into treacherous mud baths and dripping through small holes in the weathered tarp. Five hammocks were slung from the shelter's wooden frame, two of which were occupied by sleeping men; a third man, the *bair* or camp cook, hunched over a campfire, stirring a pot of rice.

Scattered around the shelter were the tools of the trade: pickaxes, the long-handled spades known as criminals, machetes, a chainsaw, several buckets, coils of rope and the all-important sets of sieves used for separating diamonds from their gravel matrix. Red Man pulled out a small plastic tube fashioned from a Vicks Nasal Inhaler. He popped off the lid and tipped out a rough diamond. The stone was not very big: perhaps a carat and a half. But it was a beautiful one: a perfect octagon, clean and shining, with no obvious surface flaws. Red Man looked at the diamond thoughtfully and began: "We were two days out from Chenapau, prospecting a creek which was showing some good indications. One night a man came into our camp, right in the middle of the night, he just walked out of the bush. We still had food in the pot so we fed him and let him tie up in the camp. His name was Romeo—he was a big strapping guy with big hands and an ugly face. He showed me a diamond and told me he'd got it out of a creek far, far up the Potaro, way behind here. He told me the creek didn't have a name, but you'd know it from the shape of some rocks in the middle, which looked like two tigers. He told me the creek was full of diamonds, but that he'd got fever and had to run and catch landing before he could get them out. I didn't really believe him then, it just sounded like one of those old porkknocker stories." Now Red Man rolled the diamond between his hard fingers, and continued "the next morning, when we got up, Romeo had left the camp already. On the table he'd left a Bible. When I opened the Book, I found this diamond inside. I've never sold the diamond but from then I believed the

man's story, and I've always wanted to go up there and take a look, maybe make a few checks. One day I'll go up there and take a look. That was years ago. I never saw Romeo again and I don't know why he left the Bible and the diamond."<sup>19</sup>

Like a piece of Geertz's thick description which gets thicker with each telling, this is a story about a story about a story (Geertz 1973:3-30). Porkknockers' stories are in many senses mythic, not least in their continual re-articulation and transformation of a set of core themes. These themes would not be unfamiliar to other researchers who have worked among small-scale miners of precious minerals in different contexts.<sup>20</sup> Life in mining camps is experienced through myth and memory expressed as historical narratives about people, diamonds and places. Red Man's story about Romeo thus plays on certain well-known keys: an itinerant stranger passing through the camp, unannounced and apparently from nowhere; this mysterious stranger telling a strange tale in the night; the traveller then slinking off before dawn, leaving behind some material representation of his tale (here in the form of a diamond). Red Man was reluctant to sell the diamond, not just because it was a reminder of Romeo's story, but because it was a physical piece of both the story and the possibility of a huge strike which it had dangled before him: a shining one and a half carat metonym. The story also made reference to the Bible, anointing it with the moral accents which often accompany these accounts. Romeo's story, as told to Red Man, also exhibits a range of tropes which we have seen before: a pile of imagined wealth in a little-known part of the forest; the unnamed site marked by stones shaped like jaguars; this mother lode having been just-missed because of the encroaching fog of malarial delirium and the

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<sup>19</sup> Note that direct ethnographic speech was expressed in the Guyanese Creole vernacular; for simplicity, I have translated this as much as possible into standard English.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, Candace Slater's fine analysis of the *casos* of Brazilian *garimpeiros* (Slater 1994).

panic to get out of the backdam and back to civilisation; a single diamond claimed as part of a much larger lode waiting for someone bold enough to go and find it.<sup>21</sup>

This is not simply about discourse (if anything can be *simply* about discourse) but also about practice and the borderlands where discourse and practice meet and infuse each other: in other words, it is about showing that the activities involved in mining for diamonds in Guyana's interior forests are at least in part informed by a cultural logic. In this sense, my position here will be both perpendicular and complementary to the theories of the political economy which have so far dominated the analysis of artisanal Amazonian mining—primarily gold mining. Here I am thinking of the excellent studies done by David Cleary and Gordon MacMillan, which go a long way towards sorting out the socio-economic logic underpinning the mighty gold rushes in Amazonian Brazil during the 1980s and 1990s. Cleary (1990) is particularly strong on the organisation of people and labour in the *garimpo*, while MacMillan (1995) closely examines the very important and frequently overlooked articulation of the gold mining industry with other economic forms and structures in northern Brazil. Neither of these authors, however, directs very much attention towards the relationship between mining as a source of cultural elaboration, and mining as a way of making money, and this places certain limits on their analyses. Focusing on the transformation of ritual, Michael Taussig (1980) does seek to recuperate culture in his re-analysis of June Nash's (1979) ethnography of Bolivian miners, but even here it plays a junior role in what is essentially a Marxist critique of the

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<sup>21</sup> 'Backdam' as used here refers to the place of work, the site of mining itself. Conceptually, it is opposed to the 'landing', which is an area connected by river, road or air to larger urban centres. Typically, the backdam is remote and has no built environment or commerce, while the landing is less remote and may have some dwelling, bureaucratic and commercial infrastructure.



transition from a moral sociality to an amoral individual, from reciprocity to greed, from use to exchange, and from subsistence economy to waged proletariat.<sup>22</sup>

Porkknockers' relationship with the hinterland is complex and shaped by the collision of a coastlander ontology with a world of radical difference, both physically and culturally. In this essay, the exploration of this relationship maps out along two interpenetrating axes. The first of these is hermeneutic, and contends that in coastlander discourse, the construction of the hinterland and the people who make their home there is defined by a series of contradictions and negative polarities.

The second axis explores, through ethnography, processes of self-transformation through the physicality and narration of porkknockers' experience of the hinterland, arguing that *being* in the hinterland is not in fact about survival in an unknown wilderness, but about the gradual acquisition and embodiment of knowledge and physical hardness through processes of enskilment and lived experience: it is this intellectual and physical transformation which makes life in the interior physically and (sometimes) economically viable for persons raised on the comparatively urbanised coastal belt. This part of the chapter ends by examining some aspects of the relationship between praxis and poetics. It is argued that porkknocker culture is given shape and form in the resolution, by a transformative rather than dialectical process, of the oppositions which define coastlander ambivalence towards the hinterland. Thus poverty becomes wealth, disorientation becomes familiarity, the wild becomes the dominated and constraint becomes freedom. As shown over the course of the essay, porkknockers' discourse forms a backdrop to the day-to-day lived practice of artisanal mining. Is the discursive then better regarded as charter or narrative of the physical?

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<sup>22</sup> Taussig has been criticised by Michael Sallnow (1989) on the grounds that he has misunderstood history, and by Terry Turner (1986) on the grounds that he has misunderstood Marx.

### *A Landscape Divided*

Guyana, squeezed between Amazonia and the Caribbean, a lone Anglophone outpost on a mostly Latinate continent, was a British colony until 1966. The British, succeeding the Dutch colonial rulers in the early nineteenth century, had no real aspirations to open up the Amazonian frontier or ‘settle’ the hinterland, at least not in any formal, institutionalised sense. With the exception of a handful of hardy individuals who travelled south to start cattle-ranching enterprises in the Rupununi Savannahs, the British preferred to contend with the low-lying coast, combining Dutch techniques of sea defence with an enslaved labour force to reclaim vast tracts of land for sugar plantations (Rodney 1981, *passim*). This decision would ultimately steer the cultural, political and economic orientation of Creole Guyanese society northwards towards the islands of the British Caribbean, and concomitantly away from the harsher continental landscape to the south.<sup>23</sup>

The result of this policy was to create a sharp demographic division between the highly humanised landscape of the coast, and (in the eyes of the coastlander) the chaotic forests and endless savannahs of the interior lands to the south. The coastal belt, as the eighty-kilometre wide strip of land alongside the Atlantic is called, is where almost all of the Creole population lives. It is the centre of the most important national economic activities, sugar and rice cultivation. It is where the capital city and the centres of State power are located. And it is very firmly oriented towards the north: to the islands of the Anglophone Caribbean, and beyond that to the diasporic havens of the United States, Canada and England. Implicit in this northward gaze

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Creole’ is used here to refer to the ninety percent of the Guyanese population, for the most part resident on the coastal belt, which traces descent from coerced African and Indian labour forces, rather than from any of the indigenous groups in Guyana. It is a term of convenience which in fact obscures much of the ethnic differentiation which is so salient a part of Guyanese life; however, this essay does not depend on disaggregating ethnicities.

is a rejection of most of what lies to the south. Geo-politically, this means that Guyana has trading arrangements with Caribbean neighbours, but few with its South American ones. Linguistically it means, among other things, that almost no-one who does not live on one of Guyana's borders speaks Spanish, Portuguese or Dutch. Culturally it implies certain things which I will now discuss.

What is this land to the south, which after all constitutes more than ninety percent of the land area of the country? What does it mean in terms of how coastlanders assign meaning to place? One entry point into such a set of questions is to begin by noting that the Creole Guyanese of Guyana's coastlands express a deep ambivalence about the landscape to the south. On the one hand, these forests and savannahs have long dangled the possibility of vast wealth in the form of gold and diamonds. This is an ur-trope dating to Walter Raleigh's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century quests for the gilded king, El Dorado, and the city he ruled over, Manoa, which Raleigh was convinced lay somewhere between the Amazon and the Orinoco rivers. In his work on cartography and exploration in Guyana, the American historian Graham Burnett has referred to this as the 'Raleighness of Guyana's history' (Burnett 2000:17). As described below, this Raleighness also finds expression in the names which miners post on claim boards, such as 'Sir Walter', 'Golden City' and the like. This possible wealth, moreover, is of the most democratic kind: there for the taking by anyone stoic or stupid enough to take the risks involved in acquiring it. Yet it is a wealth guarded by a landscape of horror: mile after mile of disorienting forest and swamp, populated—so the stories go—by blowpipe-wielding natives and inhabited by dreadful animals, teeming with disease and threatening starvation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> As George Mentore (1992) perceptively notes, 'With all the fear and suspicion produced and attached to the unknown and seemingly untameable forest, Guyanese creole society has attributed negativity and inferiority to the Amerindian abode and to the Amerindian person'.

This ambivalence about the hinterland regions of Guyana extends to the policy of the State itself, which tends to frame this land as a national larder, a panacea for the country's chronic economic maladies. Thus the last few administrations have worked hard to attract multinational investors in large-scale logging and mining projects. Yet at the same time, the State has largely ignored the interests of the approximately 70,000 indigenous people who live in these forests and savannahs, jeopardising and ignoring time and again Amerindian claims to land rights. There is a strong sense in which the hinterland regions of Guyana are visible to the State only insofar as they offer the possibility of profit, of shoring up claims to wise environmental stewardship, of multiethnic nationhood, and as Alissa Trotz demonstrates in this chapter, of cleaving to the interests of powerful neighbours to the north. Following the British lead, the postcolonial Guyanese State has never expressed an interest in the kind of push to open up the frontier which we have seen in other parts of Amazonia, most notably in Brazil during the 1970s. The State has never tried to effect homesteading initiatives of the Brazilian kind, and nor have coastlanders made much effort to settle in hinterland locations, although a small number of entrepreneurs have established shops and businesses in mining areas in order to profit from the extractive economy by supplying food, fuel, tools, credit, drink and prostitutes to miners.

In part, this lack of enthusiasm for hinterland settlement can be attributed to a lack of land pressure. Guyana's population, after all, stands at around 800,000. It can also be partially explained by a lack of transportation infrastructure which is related to the State's lack of interest in these areas: most of the interior zone is inaccessible by road and can only be reached by light aircraft, or tortuous journeys by river or on foot. But most of all, I would claim, it is to do with the fact that coastlanders are raised to see the hinterland not as a viable abode, but as an economic resource to be tapped when needed. One direct result of this is the fact that most

Creole miners regard the interior lands of Guyana as a place where one might go for a temporary mining foray, but not as a place where one would want to live. The porkknockers discussed in this essay are very much the products of a culture which configures the landscape of the southern forests and savannahs in resolutely ambivalent terms.

We can see the hinterland, or ‘bush’ as it is more commonly called in Guyana, framed in these different modes by the State and by the coastlander population: as a source of enormous potential wealth, and as a place which is variously invisible or dangerous, depending on one’s point of view. There exists, however, another perspective on this landscape, which is a concomitant of these two. This is the idea that the interior lands offer the possibility of various kinds of freedom. At one level, drawing on the image of the bush as a place of invisibility, it is freedom from the surveillance of both the domestic household, and from the State and its agents. Porkknockers in the hinterland told me over and over again that one of the things which they liked about being away from the coast was that one could breathe freely: one could smoke a little dope or visit a prostitute without risk of being caught by either the police or one’s family.<sup>25</sup> Indeed one of the central features of the hinterland areas is the relative inapplicability of national laws. Police outposts are few and far between, and chronically under-resourced, rendering effective law enforcement difficult or impossible.

At another level, the hinterland offers a different kind of opportunity: freedom from proletarianisation. This is an important point, to which coastlander porkknockers, most of whom come from poor socio-economic backgrounds, refer often. The possibility of mineral wealth, of striking it rich in the forest, incorporates the possibility of breaking away from the drudgery of

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<sup>25</sup> It is not uncommon for porkknockers who spend a long time in the interior to establish ongoing sexual relations (with a greater or lesser commercial flavour) with Amerindian or Brazilian women living near mining areas. In some cases, such relationships can continue for years, including the possibility of children, and porkknockers will make reference to their ‘bush family’.

work at the lower levels of the coastal economic ladder. One of the ideals of being a small-scale miner is to be an independent agent, answerable to no-one and free of the shackles of poorly-remunerated wage labour on the coast of Guyana. Miners may go weeks on end without a single strike, but they also work with the knowledge and the hope that literally millions of Guyana dollars may lie just inches below the tip of the shovel, in a place where no-one is obliging them to punch a time-card.

*The Land, the Mind and the Body: Learning to Be in the Hinterland*

How do porkknockers, products of such a coastlander culture, raised to see the interior lands in such ambivalent terms, get to grips with the art of living (albeit temporarily) and working there? In this section, I shall argue, through ethnography, that achieving such a thing depends upon resolving the contradictions and oppositions inherent in the coastlander construction of the hinterland, and furthermore, that such resolution is in turn achieved through processes of intellectual, moral and physical transformation. This transformation lies at the very core of the ontological shift from proletarian coastlander to porkknocker.

Choosing where to begin digging for diamonds is a complicated and often opaque business. When I first began work with diamond miners, I spent a great deal of time trying to understand how they decided where to begin looking for diamonds in a systematic way. For a long time, their decisions struck me as essentially random; I was unable to see any obvious logic behind choosing one spot over another. Gradually, though, patterns began to emerge. At the surface level, these patterns are based in part on a body of shared general knowledge about where diamonds are found in Guyana. But this alone does not narrow down the search area very much, for huge tracts of land in Guyana are classified as diamondiferous. So in addition to this

very general knowledge about the possible locations of diamonds, miners draw on a constantly unfolding set of narratives about mining and prospecting trips in the past. Narratives such as Red Man's story above can form the cartographic basis for prospecting ventures. The point about these stories, then, is that while they embody elements of both myth and history, they also serve as maps and catalysts which point would-be prospectors in the right direction; in other words, these are more than just stories about real or imagined exploits in the past: they are charters for possible action in the future.<sup>26</sup> At night, in mining camps and in the little temporary trade shops which, on mining landings, turn into bars and brothels at sunset, porkknockers constantly tell and retell these stories; as I spent more time in these places, I came to understand that these accounts, traded back and forth, really constitute a kind of forum for the exchange of information, some of it useful and some utterly apocryphal. In exchanging this information, miners gradually and reciprocally fill in the blank spaces in their own internal maps of the landscape. Physical features and landmarks are invested with meaning as places where things happened in the past or as places where things might happen in the future.

Memory also plays an important role in selecting likely places to begin prospecting. In these areas, almost all travel is done on foot. The landscape is therefore experienced slowly and sensuously, as a synaesthetic passage. When passing through the forest, miners will often stop and gaze around, looking for places which might be interesting to prospect in the future, making mental notes of a dry river bed here, or a diamond-trapping bend in a shallow creek there. On many occasions when I travelled with a prospecting party, we began prospecting at some point recalled by one of the men as a likely spot he had identified the year before, en route to somewhere else but in too much of a hurry to stop.

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<sup>26</sup> There are clear parallels between these stories and those of Western Desert Aboriginal people, such as the Pintupi, which serve, among other things, to narrate the land into meaningful human action (Myers 1986).

Because prospecting is generally self-funded, it must be carried out swiftly and effectively: the best prospectors are those who can find diamonds quickly and minimise the expenditure of time, effort and rations on fruitless assay trenches. Prospecting for diamonds is a very specialised activity, based on a body of prized local knowledge about mineral geology, and becoming a good porkknocker requires the acquisition of this knowledge. Lacking formal training in mineral exploration geology, prospectors rely instead on a complex blend of different kinds of knowledge. This knowledge is derived from both formal ‘textbook’ mineral exploration practices such as cutting directed assay trenches, following placer deposits and simply mining where there are visible minerals in reasonable quantities, and ‘folk’ exploration methods such as seeking ‘indications’: signs in the gravel and physical formations in the landscape which point to the presence of diamonds. Some, though not all, of these indications have a ‘legitimate’ geological basis.<sup>27</sup> In practice, however, prospectors do not elaborate these distinctions, instead collapsing the categories into a single interpretive corpus.

In diamond prospecting, the prospector must therefore be familiar not merely with gross topographical associations, but with a wide range of these indications. The presence of diamonds does not often announce itself literally; the stones themselves are evasive and elusive. The prospector must know what the correct indications are for a given area and how to interpret them. Two more or less universal indications exist: graphite (called ‘lead’)—unsurprisingly as this, like diamond, is a carbon allotrope—and gold. Prospectors say that, in any exclusively diamondiferous area (as opposed to an auriferous area where one would expect to find gold), the presence of small quantities of gold always points to diamonds. Graphite is said to be a sure

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<sup>27</sup> I am aware of the value judgement implicit in the use of adjectives such as ‘folk’ and ‘legitimate’. I have chosen to use these terms as a shorthand for emic and etic respectively, distinguishing between those practices which would be recognisable to a scientifically trained diamond surveyor and those which would not. To better reflect the discursive reality, I have however chosen to situate what an outsider might define as belief within the realm of knowledge.



indication for diamonds; indeed the size of the graphite chunks is supposed to correlate to diamond size. Big pieces of graphite mean that big diamonds are around. The most promising pieces of graphite are 'fresh' ones: these have sharp edges, meaning that they are not worn out by hydraulic action. 'Old' graphite, with smoothed-off edges, is thought to be a sign that the ground has been worked before. Beyond these two universal indications there exists a range of other minerals and crystals which are interpreted as location-specific indications: beryl might be meaningful in one area but not in another; crystalline quartz can be a deceptive 'sweet man' or false indication in Maikwak but an indication in Muribang, twenty kilometres to the east. Because indications, with the exceptions of graphite and gold, tend to be location-specific, a prospector must be au fait not only with the general body of experience and information about prospecting, but also with highly localised knowledge accumulated through lived experience and the informal pedagogy handed down by other, more tested, prospectors. Indications therefore constitute an important part of this knowledge, and indeed are the subject of intense speculation and discussion among miners. Indications gradually derive their validity and meaning through association with successful mining ventures; thus, for example, when a porkknocker named Rasta told me that quartz was an indication in the Muribang area, he prefaced this assertion by telling me that a long time ago, a prospector had found several pieces of quartz next to the large diamond which started the Muribang 'shout'. Ever since then, prospectors have known that in that area, one should be on the lookout for quartz. The location-specificity of indications is, in this sense, a kind of knowledge which is constantly under construction. It is also a key element of the continual process of map-making to which I referred earlier: in exchanging information about past mining ventures, miners associate potentially valuable information about specific indications with places on the map.

The complexities of diamond prospecting lie not in the actual visual apprehension of diamonds; conveniently for the prospector, the world market favours highly visible diamonds. In an odd twist, the more valuable a diamond is, the less expertise is required to spot it. The difficult diamonds to see are small, industrial-grade crystals or highly flawed little gemstones. Diamond prospecting is made difficult by the rarity of the valuable stones; finding these, and more importantly, finding them in quantity, is an exercise in understanding how the earth speaks. While sieving for diamonds requires a certain amount of technical skill, it is nevertheless something any reasonably coordinated person can master with practice. The real challenges in diamond prospecting lie in learning to interpret the subtle nuances of geology and hydraulics with signpost diamondiferous gravel. Without this understanding, even a technically skilled prospector is naked against the sheer rarity of gem-quality diamonds.

If the prospecting venture is successful, that is, if the assays look promising enough, the work of actually extracting the diamonds can begin. The first stage in this process is staking a claim to the workground. Technically, staking a claim to a workground involves surveying the area, then applying to the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission for a formal claim permit. After this, as long as the claim owner pays the nominal rent, the claim is exclusively his to work as he wishes. This procedure is, however, rarely followed, not least because it is extremely inconvenient and prohibitively expensive to travel to Georgetown. So, in practice, the prospectors who have identified a likely workground normally establish their claim by nailing up four signboards, enclosing a rectangular piece of land where they intend to mine. A claim sign names the primary owner of the claim and, by tradition, also names the claim itself. Claim names frequently make reference to historical mining ventures, but names of girlfriends, wives and daughters prefixing some optimistic phrase such as Daphne's Luck or Mary's Fortune are also

common. As noted above, references to El Dorado are iconic and popular; the fact that Raleigh's quests were among the most spectacularly unsuccessful prospecting ventures in history being apparently lost on the claimants.

Such claims, because they have not been registered and gazetted by the State, have no legal validity. They possess, however, a binding moral validity among other miners. Claim-jumping, or working a claim illicitly, is one of the worst offences among diamond miners. In practice, it is so heavily censured that it rarely happens, existing more as a negative feature of allegorical discourse than as a living action. Depending as they do upon a sustaining network of reciprocal relationships, miners are very reluctant to risk the infamy associated with claim-jumping. This raises an important point about diamond fields: although, as argued above, the bush is, in many ways, regarded as a free and lawless place, this does not imply that it is lacking in ethical codes, but rather that these are not necessarily coterminous with the laws of the State. Miners are swift to identify and censure individuals who break these rules, and new porkknockers quickly learn that if they are to be able to function within this particular moral economy, they must learn and abide by its norms. Claim-jumping, or stealing diamonds, money, goods or food are all regarded as serious offences; minimally, people who perpetrate these kinds of breaches are likely to find themselves ostracised and cut out from the important loops of reciprocity which are so important in the diamond fields.

Once the claim has been delineated, and the camp made more comfortable for long-term habitation, the miners begin the process of extracting pay gravel. To do this, they first strip off the soil overburden ('backing the dirty'), which may be several metres thick. This can require days or even weeks of sustained digging to expose a large enough area of gravel to be worth extracting. The gravel is then removed, washed in an elongated trough, and sieved. The first

sieving of the newly-extracted gravel tells all. It is the highly-anticipated moment of truth, where the miners discover whether their efforts and prospecting skills have paid off. It is entirely possible that the gravel is worthless, in which case the porkknockers must pack up their camp and return to the landing empty-handed. In the event that a small number of diamonds are found in the gravel, the miners need to decide, based on experience and their faith in the workground, whether to continue working it, or to sell up the diamonds and move elsewhere. If the miners 'lash out' or find a substantial quantity of good diamonds, the first objective is to remove all the gravel which has been exposed in the claim, wash it and sieve out any more diamonds. This process may take several more days, depending on the size of the first pit which has been dug. At this point, the crew will leave the claim and travel to the nearest landing to celebrate and replenish supplies, the aim being to return to dig another pit on the claim within a few days.

On the landing, the diamonds need to be converted into hard cash. The most common arrangement for effecting this transaction ('doing business') is to sell the diamonds to a shopkeeper, although at times when word gets out that a 'shout' is on (i.e. that diamond production is very high), buying agents will fly in from Georgetown, or cross the border from Brazil, to purchase the production. Diamond trading is a complicated and somewhat subjective business. Unlike gold selling, which is done by simply weighing the gold and consulting the day's price, diamond trading involves evaluating each stone for size, colour and clarity or flawlessness. Of these parameters, only the first is truly objective, the rest being subject to discussion, argument and negotiation. Because of this, the process of doing business involves skill on both sides: miners need to learn how to evaluate their own production; failing to do this leaves them exposed to the possibility of sharp trading by unscrupulous buyers.<sup>28</sup> Once business

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<sup>28</sup> To provide a sense of the sums involved at the time of research, in 1994, a one-carat diamond of good colour and quality commanded a price of approximately forty thousand Guyana dollars. By contrast, the minimum wage at the

is done, some of the proceeds are immediately skimmed off to repay the inevitable debts at landing shops. The remaining money is split. Among porkknockers, who wear their egalitarianism on their sleeves, these proceeds are divided equally, even when a crew member has, for some reason such as illness, been unable to do his full share of the work.

One of the first stories one hears in Guyanese mining areas concerns a miner who has struck it rich, finding a vast mother lode of diamonds somewhere in the bush. After extracting and selling the diamonds, he is so wealthy that he jumps on the first plane to Georgetown, where he immediately charters a taxi to chauffeur him around the bars. In the taxi, the porkknocker reclines at ease, propping his feet up on the passenger seat or, in some versions, on the shoulders of the driver. In the bars, he buys round after round of drinks for his friends. He treats everyone to dinner, and hires girls for the evening. Finally, he accidentally drops his last hundred-dollar bill to the ground. Unable to see it in the dark bar, he rolls up a twenty-dollar note and ignites it with a match, using it as a torch to find the hundred note, which he retrieves and uses to buy a final round of drinks. This story almost always prefaces a second account, which concerns another miner, who has also struck it rich. Unlike the first miner, this one is stingy. He sells his diamonds in a secretive deal with a shady Brazilian buyer, and quietly hoards the money, refusing to treat his friends to drinks. He spends the money on himself instead, drinking and whoring alone. Finally, when the money runs out, he returns to the diamond fields, where he never finds another diamond in his life. In more severe versions of this story, he dies painfully from snakebite or fever.

Taken as a contrastive pair, these stories become moral fables, allegorically laying out exactly how the good miner should spend his money. The point of the first is that profligate

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time was less than ten thousand dollars a month. A sale of, for example, twenty such diamonds thus involves a considerable sum of money.

and highly public expenditure is expected. The obvious moral of the second is that stinginess doesn't pay. Miners flush with cash after selling their production take these points seriously, hosting generous binges which last until their money runs out. Frequently, these carry on for days at a stretch, until, broke and poisoned by too much cheap rum, the porkknockers decide to return to their workground and try their luck on a new pit. One practical result of these very public celebrations is to spread the word about a newly opened mining area. If it seems, from the scale of the miners' expenditure and the quantity of diamonds they have sold, that they have been particularly successful in a given area, other mining crews may begin to move in, establishing claims nearby. It is understood that the original claimants have the right of first refusal on areas contiguous with their original claim. That said, it is equally well understood that no crew has the right to claim more ground than they can reasonably work by themselves. To attempt to exercise rights of exclusive ownership, as opposed to the rights inhering in actual use, is regarded as a deeply antisocial act. In those cases where the 'shout' develops a true momentum because of the volume of production, word travels fast among the surrounding backdams. Other miners will begin to arrive from different locations. Prostitutes, diamond buyers and other opportunistic actors are next to arrive on the landing. As the shout develops, it is gradually historicised, invested with new meaning, and incorporated into the porkknockers' discursive repertoire.

“You see this scar (a jagged cicatrice running down Douggie's left forearm)? I got that from a cutlass, clearing the bush at our workground. And look at this one (here he rolled up his trouser leg): this is where I fell in a pit on top of a mattock. You see these hands (hard and thickly callused)—I am a hard fucking man.”

If the mind constitutes a site of intellectual and moral transformation through the absorption of technical skills and ethnical norms, then the body represents a site of transformation of a different kind. I refer here to the ‘hardening’ which is an important part of the overall process of self-transformation. One of the many negativities assigned to the interior forests by coastlanders is the sheer difficulty and danger of such a landscape. Becoming and being a porkknocker depend not only upon the acquisition of technical prospecting and mining skills and ethos, but upon the ability to live and work in an environment which is alien and at times brutally difficult. Walking substantial distances through the forest, often ‘drugging’ heavily laden *warishis* (wicker backpacks bought from Patamona and Macuxi communities) and then putting in weeks of backbreaking labour excavating assay trenches and mining pits is tremendously physically demanding. When new porkknockers arrive in the backdam, they are said to be ‘soft’ and ‘green’ because they lack not only knowledge, but physical hardness, resilience and strength. The process of hardening the body is also set against a moral backdrop which privileges masculinity and self-reliance: complaining about the hardships or worse, failing to pull one’s weight in the camp or on the trail, are seen as signs of weakness. A man must learn to ‘carry himself’ well, ‘drugging’ a full load and participating fully in the work. Conversely, to offer to carry another man’s load or to do his work on an excavation is to implicitly and unfavourably judge his strength and masculinity.

As a porkknocker’s biography and experience is gradually inscribed upon the surfaces of the body, in scars, calluses and sinewy muscles, so the changes are reflected in the way he situates himself in discourse about the coast and the bush. Where once the bush was the negative pole, and the coast represented security and comparative safety, we see a gradual inversion. Porkknockers, now hardened by many forays into the backdam, speak derisively of the

‘soft,’ ‘antiman’ (homosexual) life on the coast. The hinterland in turn becomes valorised as a place where a man can—and indeed must—achieve a masculine ideal which is considered to be unattainable on the comfortable coastland.

The main approach of this essay has been to present and discuss ethnographic material which points the way to understanding how coastlanders become porkknockers, in other words, how a sub-population of Guyanese Creole society makes sense of a world which is conceived of as deeply ambivalent. Ambivalence suggests contradiction and opposition, and we may consider this particular ambivalence to be cast in terms of a set of oppositions: poverty/wealth, disorientation/familiarity, wildness/domination, constraint/freedom. I have argued here that becoming a successful porkknocker depends on the coastlander’s ability to resolve these oppositions, transforming poverty into wealth, disorientation into familiarity, dominating the wild and escaping constraint. Achieving this in turn requires a process of self-transformation, through enskilment, insertion into a new moral economy, and physical tempering. In these various processes of transformation, the discursive achieves a key salience. Almost never empty narrative, porkknocker discourse is in this context a charter and guide for transformative action.

#### Conclusion: Angles of Vision

Redemption, salvation, escape, extraction, exploitation and domination. Like the historical relationship between the Old World and the New, the awkward affinity between Guyana’s coast and its polysemic interior can be written in these terms. In this essay of two parts, we have sought to further unpack aspects of this relationship by focusing on a pair of complementary perspectives. The first of these concerns the ways in which the interior and the people who live



there are drawn physically and discursively into the coastlands, achieving passing visibility as instruments in the State's crusade to appear both legitimate and obedient in the demanding gaze of the US State Department. The second perspective reflects upon those coastlanders who are drawn physically and discursively into the hinterlands, arguing that such a move ultimately demands engagement with a process of self-transformation and ontological re-casting.

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