



***Liminal Spaces: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora***

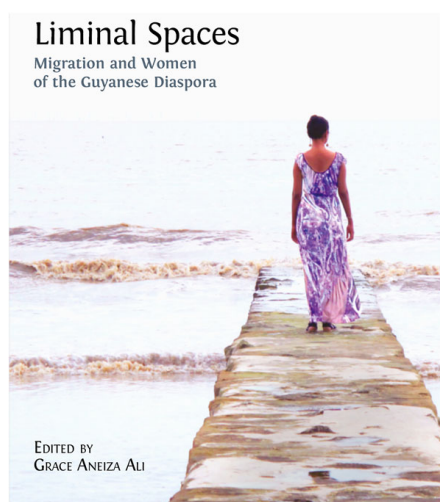
Grace Aneiza Ali, ed

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'Outside.' That's what my host mom V said when I first asked where her husband was. As a young American teacher new to Guyana, I didn't understand what she meant. Was he standing outside by the rain-water barrel and I'd missed him? I asked again. She



told me he was in New York, working, and had been there for years.

V was one of many women I'd met in Guyana whose life was impacted by migration. When I asked my students where they saw themselves as adults, many of them declared 'outside'. There was that word again. Once a British colony, the small West Indian country is now dubbed a 'disappearing nation' with more of its people living outside its borders than inside. I found out twenty years later that V had left Guyana for New York, gotten divorced, and immigrated to London with a new husband. Perhaps she was tired of her ex-husband's absence defining her presence.

But what did I know of her journey? *Liminal Spaces: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora* gives me a glimpse. With its dedication page to mothers and grandmothers, the book unapologetically reclaims women's integral role in migration narratives. What follows is a memorable 'visual exhibition on the page' edited by Guyanese-born curator Grace Aneiza Ali, who threads together a collage of perspectives from fifteen women living in the Guyanese diaspora communities of London, New York City, and Toronto, as well as Guyana itself. From broken promises to joyful homecomings, systemic failures to everyday feats, the past colours the present in this four-part book that seamlessly mingles visual art and prose. To situate the reader, Aneiza Ali frames each chapter with historical context that skews academic while remaining accessible.

As a whole, the book's structure mirrors the migration arc with various points of entry for anyone who's experienced migration, whether forced or voluntary. 'Mothering Lands' begins with artist Keisha Scarville's striking photographs of herself draped in her late mother's brightly coloured clothes, followed by Erika DeFreitas's equally engaging portraits of herself and her mother, their faces decorated in cake icing as a rumination on tradition and impermanence. The incongruous facets of migration are then laid bare in a series of tender letters between the mother-daughter duo of Serena and Natalie Hopkinson. Says Serena: 'Moving is awful. It's a pain. But it is so thrilling' (52).

What about those who stay behind? Grace Aneiza Ali's elegant essay recounts her fissured relationship with a childhood friend who remains in Georgetown, their paths separate, while actress and playwright

Ingrid Griffith details from a child's perspective what it's like to see your parents off to the States. On departure day, she writes, you dress in the best you can afford so you can 'leave Guyana looking like you already were a success story' (112). Conversely, in Khadija Benn's bold black-and-white portraits of Amerindian mothers, the women reflect on watching their children leave while they remain anchored by a deep connection to Guyana.

'Transitions', the most loosely tied together chapter, explores the remaking of identity upon arrival in a new land. Artist Suchitra Mattai, whose family first came to Guyana as Indian indentured servants, uses domestic objects to explore the otherness she's felt her whole life while searching for 'home'. Her vibrant multimedia pieces are a nod to the women in her lineage. A standout from this section, however, is acclaimed poet Grace Nichols. 'So I pick me up a new-world self', she says about moving to Britain in her poem 'Wherever I Hang' (129). Like many in the book, she must learn to navigate the territory that comes with being suspended in-between worlds, anchored by a fierce determination to fashion her own way forward.

For those who intimately know Guyana's contours – how the boom boom minibus plays the loudest dancehall or that the hot wiri wiri pepper is an essential ingredient – reading the entire book is its own act of returning. The final chapter tackles this head-on, from the perspective of daughters who have a deep desire to know the land of their ancestors. Curator Michelle Joan Wilkinson's lilting prose examines the language we lose and find in the process of migration, as well as the sacredness of familial heirlooms like her granny's filigree gold. Similarly, Maria del Pilar Kaladeen's essay confronts the ghost of Guyana via her father, who arrived in the UK in the 1960s as part of the *Windrush* generation. We see how his reluctance to claim his birth country shaped her life, and the image of his return is hard to forget.

*Liminal Spaces* couldn't come at a more apt time, as we are all collectively living in a liminal space fuelled by the pandemic. Vaccine distribution is underway, yet the virus still rages. Borders are in various states of closure and travel is limited, yet migration continues. Whether embarking for a new locale or staying resolutely put, the concept of home has never been more interrogated.

It's refreshing to see women at the centre of migration narratives rather than relegated to the margins. This is the first time women's voices from Guyana and its diaspora have been gathered together in a collection. Hopefully, it is not the last. A meditation on the fraught, fragile, and complicated love for place, *Liminal Spaces* is ultimately an act of resistance. The fifteen women refuse to give in to the label of 'disappearing'. Their words and art demand that they be seen.

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***On Borders: Territories, Legitimacy, and the Rights of Place***

Paulina Ochoa Espejo

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A man was seen carrying a coffin. Another had a pig on his back. These were scenes of a heist in the second week of July 2021, in a post trending on my Twitter page about the recent uprising of xenophobia in South Africa. Xenophobia comes with different attritional violence for humans and for non-humans. It is also contingent on the question of identity, as locals continue to perceive immigrants and foreigners as

