

*WHY WE FIGHT*

a documentary film by

Alyssa Bistonath  
Bachelor Of Fine Arts, 2005, Ryerson University

A MRP presented to Ryerson University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Program of Documentary Media

Bloor Hot Docs Cinema, June 06, 2016  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2016  
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## ABSTRACT

*Why We Fight* is a love letter formed into a 17 minute documentary about Guyana, the birthplace of the parents of filmmaker Alyssa Bistonath. It is a land that embodies the values, stories, and memories that Bistonath attributes to her Caribbean identity. The film acts as an inquiry – what is the diaspora’s role and responsibility towards the country? The project juxtaposes a personal narration, with letters from the diaspora, and the lives of four individuals living in Guyana. Bistonath made *Why We Fight*, because she was concerned with how countries like Guyana are represented in the western media, and how that representation trickles into the identities of people of colour. The film seeks to strike a balance, bridging nostalgia with contemporary beauty – overwriting the colonial and tourist tropes with the lives of real people, addressing violence, and mending political cynicism with the person inquiry.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would have not been possible without the support of my parents Elizabeth and Oscar, and my siblings Jason, Trevor and Curt. Their attentive care and humour have championed a life long love of film and family.

An abundance of thanks to Sarah Davignon and Andrew Patten who have stood beside me with their enthusiasm, talent, and patience. And to our community – The Burkes, Manis, Mustafas, Svadjians, and the Derksens who have always surrounded us with extravagant love.

Thank you to the many who lent me their voices when I could not find my own: Pamela and Roy Geddes, Miriam Bonar, Fenny Adrian, Anthony Sattaur, Martin Rakesh, Pauline Lachman, Jennifer Singh, Marc Matthews, Jerilyn Roycroft, Mary Delph, Rupert Roopnaraine, Lloyd Nicholas-Garrett, Eze Rockcliffe.

I would have walked alone on this project without Gem Mahdoo-Naiscemento, whose love and commitment to Guyana is truly inspiring.

Finally thanks to Elle Flanders, my advisor, who leads by example with an abundance of generosity, belief, kindness, and your care – I thank her for helping me find my voice.

Edward Slopek, my supervisor for his fierce encouragement, for advocating on behalf of curiosity, and for sharing his excitement about connection, concern, and adventure with me. I am forever changed.

To our Program Director Katy McCormick, and the rest of the faculty and graduate students in the Documentary Media Masters Program at Ryerson University, thank you for giving me an unforgettable two years.

*For my nephew Addison, because your daily courage is a reminder to fight for what is  
honest, inclusive, and loving.*

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## 1. Introduction

“But it was only in the midst of this party, among my closest friends, that I realized I would be travelling back to the family I had grown from – those relations from my parent’s generation who stood in my memory like a frozen opera I wanted to touch into words.”<sup>1</sup> (Michael Ondaatje, *Running in the Family*)

*Why We Fight* is a 17 minute short documentary about Guyana, the place of my parents birth and land that embodies the values, stories, and memories that I attribute to my Caribbean identity. The film is shot during my first trips into the country and acts as an inquiry – what is the diaspora’s roles and responsibilities in a country they left behind? The project juxtaposes a personal narration, with these letters from the diaspora, the lives of individuals living in Guyana, and interviews with Guyanese politicians and artists.

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<sup>1</sup> Ondaatje, Michael. *Running in the Family*. New York: Vintage International, 1993, pg 4



## 2. Why we fight: a description of the visual project

The film opens with images of sugar cane fields growing amongst the century old dams in Guyana's countryside. Sugar is the crop that my indentured Chinese and Indian ancestors came to work after the end of the Atlantic slave trade. Filmed at the night, the cane blows in the wind to the sound of a shrill harp, and a box drum. The titles, that blow in and out by the *wind* read:

I AM A SEED  
ASLEEP FOR DAYS, WEEKS, CENTURIES  
MY ANCESTORS WOKE ME  
IN A LANGUAGE THAT I HAVE LOST

The seed motif comes from the etymology of diaspora, "...from the Greek "diaspeirein," "to spread about," where "dia" means apart and "speirein" means to sow or scatter.<sup>2</sup>" The diaspora according to John Duram Peters,

suggests real or imagined relationships among scattered fellows whose sense of community is sustained by forms of communication and contact such as kinship, pilgrimage, trade, travel, and shared culture (language, ritual, scripture, or print and electronic media<sup>3</sup>.

As a seed I have been scattered, but have laid dormant my whole life. I have had little participation or contribution to the Guyanese community and shared culture. The title "my ancestors woke me" appears over a womb-like circle of light projected onto the cane field. These titles set the stage for the rest of the film. Indicating a rebirth that I have experienced while finding my voice and a renewed identity, "I never thought about what it means to be Guyanese."

Identity refers to a comfort with my skin, appreciation of heritage, and a knowledge of the history of my ancestors. Language refers to patois or creole, and also the ability to speak with confidence about my opinions and experiences. It was through the production of this film that I began verbally expressing criticism towards the colonial history of Guyana, as well as

the cultural norms around race, immigration, and identity that I have grown up with in Canada.

The next sequence of images are meant to express the feeling of waking up from a dream. These images evoke memories that were shared with me in letters that the diaspora wrote – the Demerara River at sunrise, an abandoned rice mill on the Corentyne coast, a young woman with a kite, and children playing cricket in Springlands. On a personal level they point towards the emotions I felt when looking at photographs of my parents as children, and the folk tales of growing up in Guyana that I was told. These first few images begin weaving a portrait of place over the course of a “day” in Guyana.

A voicemail from Mary Delph, a person I met only once,<sup>4</sup> tells the audience that I am visiting Guyana. Delph cautions me not to “walk alone” implying that I am entering a dangerous place. This phone call is heard while the centre of Georgetown is seen – a frontal view of St. George’s cathedral. Being one of the tallest wooden structures in the world, the cathedral is a tourist destination in the capital city of Guyana (Georgetown.) At sunset, the beautiful building and concrete landscape house more birds than cars or people and reads as innocuous in contrast to Delph’s warning. The image dissolves into a similar frontal view of the garden of Roy and Pam Geddes, who live at the Roy Geddes Steel Pan Museum – another tourist destination.

Mrs. Geddes prepares us sandwiches in their kitchen as the country music of Jim Reeves plays in the background. The game show *Price is Right* plays on their TV. Jodi, the contestant, wins a trip to the Caribbean. In her joy and excitement she jumps up and down with praying hands and awkwardly suggests that the topless male model who presents the prize will accompany her on her vacation.

The cheesy pan music in the *Price is Right* blends into the expert scales demonstrated by Mr. Geddes. Geddes is a person who has had much opportunity to leave Guyana, but has chosen to stay and help build the country. The narration points out that nostalgia might be divisive by not allowing the country to break free from the constraints of time and memory in the minds of the diaspora. Memory is unstable. As Krasna says in Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983), "We do not remember, we rewrite memory much as history is rewritten. How can one remember thirst?"<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Geddes conscientiously locks his inner and outer gates every time he leaves his front yard to go into his garage or up into his house. He knows of the violence that Mrs. Delph warned me of. Mr. Geddes' gate dissolves into a cage of a fighting bird.<sup>6</sup> The film begins to explore nostalgia through the lens of the letters. A poem by Mrs. Delph's first cousin, Marc Matthews (a Guyanese poet living in England) refers to the shame of being a tourist.

I CANNOT DISTINGUISH SIX AMONGST FORESTS OF SAVANNAH TREES,  
NOR FLORA AND FAUNA THAT SURROUND.  
I AM A TOURIST IN A COUNTRY OF BIRTH, OF UNIVERSE.  
FACED WITH APPALLING IGNORANCE,  
HOW COULD I SAY WITH ANY CONFIDENCE I AM GUYANESE.'

Following Marc's poem we meet Anthony Sattaur and Martin Rakesh who are distant relatives of each other and friends. In contrast to the plight of being a tourist, these men are legit insiders. They go to the back-dam at 52 beach to catch crabs. The crab sequence is an opportunity to reflect on a portion from Pauline Lachman's letter about young boys chasing iguanas. She talks about their parentage not being a concern as Anthony rubs mud on his face to protect himself from insects. The nostalgic sequence forms back into the narration as I begin to talk about the colonialism that frames Pauline Lachman's letter.

A scarlet ibis flying away ends the sequence and dissolves into a front view of the Amerindian hostel where eleven year old Fenny Adrian lives. Out of all the people I met in Guyana, I see myself the most in Fenny. He is quiet, and when we first met him, he barely spoke. It was Sarah Davignon, the sound crew member who monitored his lavalier microphone, that pointed out that he habitually sang softly to himself as he rocked in the hammock and did chores... "If I were a tiny, small, little seed..." I wonder if his song is in the vein of the ones that I grew up with in Sunday school – referring to the Christian as being a seed, or if it is referring to the same passages in the Hebrew Bible that the word diaspora comes from.<sup>7</sup> Even if they do not, the song ties neatly back to the theme of being a seed that began the film. Fenny becomes more and more out-going, especially when him and his siblings are entertaining themselves with Youtube's *Sundar Learns English*<sup>8</sup> meme.

Following Sundar's jokes about learning English, I narrate a memory of an elementary school teacher scolding me for speaking patois. As a child I rarely spoke. I had an attentive family of brothers and parents who understood my cues and most often communicated for me. I had never been reprimanded before for being loud, or acting out, and so after the incident I readily fell back into my quiet routine.

As I tell the story, a sequence of children at play begins and it is without sound. The images begin to move in reverse hinting that the nostalgia is broken, or somehow unhelpful. That history needs to be rewritten, even if it is implausible to move back in time. Their inquisitive play with tiny blow fish, and handmade kites speaks back to the nostalgia of the opening sequence but this time with the added price of what nostalgia has prevented me from realizing. "You associate the place that you're from with a broken language, broken English,

a broken past. You don't know how much it stops you from speaking about the things that matter to you. And you become this person who thinks "oh what I have to say doesn't matter. Guyana unravelled that for me."

The film progresses to a car ride where a member of the opposition (People Progressive Party/Civic) Gillian R. Persaud reads an excerpt from Dr. Cheddi Jagan's 1960 open letter to Peter D'Aguiar<sup>9</sup> in response to the new government's proposed budget,

To the workers without work it will mean work; to the workers at work it will mean better wages; it will mean homes to those who need homes and land to those who need lands; for those who have farms or businesses it will mean expansion and prosperity; for everyone it will be a place in the sun.

Persaud is about to say that the budget is "just a lot of words." But before that can happen we see Miriam Bonar arrive at Mr. Geddes's gate for a lesson in playing the steel pan. In contrast to my experience, we see a student-teacher relationship that works to empower Miriam in a cultural pursuit. Mr. Geddes is teaching Miriam solfège through the seven-note diatonic musical scale "do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti" that is ironically taken from a hymn about being mute.<sup>10</sup>

Ut queant laxīs  
resonāre fibrīs  
Mīra gestōrum  
famulī tuōrum,  
Solve pollūtī  
labīī reātum,  
Sancte Iōhannēs.

(translation: Oh let your servants sing your wonders on, With loosened voice and sinless lips, Saint John,<sup>11</sup>)

Geddes is expressive with his disapproval and encouragement. He teases her about whether she practices at home. Miriam eventually gets the song after trying it a few times, but it is not too long before Geddes joins in and eventually takes over the performance with a hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" followed by "Jesus Loves Me." Miriam allows this, even smiling because the crew and her know that Mr. Geddes is a man who loves an audience.

The sound of Geddes' hands thumping on the bass steel pan merges with the hollow thuds of coconuts falling from a four-story tall coconut palm. The film simultaneously revisits Anthony and Martin and Pauline's letter (she speaks earlier of young men being hired to scale the coconut palm so her Granny could sell the oil and dried fruit). Amongst the beauty of the landscape the sequence shows the camaraderie between Martin and Anthony. They work easily together, joking and encouraging each other. They work seamlessly, passing the coconut back and forth each doing a task without needing to discuss or plan their method. I am in an isolated area with two men I just met, but my crew and I feel safe and happy – what Anthony and Martin have is rare. It is the product of growing up together, seeing each other everyday, and relying on each other for survival. I reference the "walk alone" theme, by saying that the diaspora walks alone in its own way.

The chopping sound of their cutlasses morph into the sound of Fenny playing keep-up with his soccer ball. He is alone in his front yard with no one to return his passes. The narration tells of an exchange that can happen between Guyanese in and outside of the country. Fenny comes down the front porch and peers into the camera, "So happy to see you guys."

With Fenny's warm smile comes an invitation to the outsider – "you are welcome here." But the violence in Guyana must be addressed for this invitation to be accepted. Fenny riding his bike morphs into Anthony arriving at home on his motorcycle to clean crabs with Martin, and his son Devin. Young Devin peers up into the camera and then definitely turns his back. He never fully accepts the crew. It is a good opportunity to acknowledge that a deep mistrust exists amongst Guyanese. And to also urge the diaspora and nationals to fight for our shared culture and identity.

The film changes pace and becomes a series of images set to bits and pieces of the letters of the diaspora. Music swells in, and the letters become a fractured conversation. The sequence of images show Miriam's day as she goes through her various lessons and activities. It also focuses heavily on agriculture and industry to remind the viewer that the country has not stood still economically as some may believe from the gossip amongst the diaspora.

The sequence takes the viewer further and further into the evening until it ends at dusk with Fenny and his family swimming off the stelling behind their house.<sup>12</sup> The warmth and love that this family has for each other is conveyed through their play, laughter, and unexpected jumps in and out of the water. It is here that the narration concludes to say, "You have a voice, and I have a voice."

The end title refers back to the opening sequence saying that not only am "I" a seed, but my cousins are as well. I realize that the search for identity, the desire for a voice, and the unity of the diaspora is something that happens best as a community.

As such, the voices of three prominent Guyanese people add to the narration of the film over images of the lively nightlife in Guyana. Rupert Roopnaraine, Lloyd Nicholas-Garret, and Eze Rockcliffe emphasize the necessity for a mended, vocal, and active Guyanese community.

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<sup>2</sup> McClennen, Sophia A., *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures*, Purdue University Press, 2004, page 15

<sup>3</sup> Peters, John Duram, "Exiles, nomadism, and diaspora - the State of Mobility in Western Cinema," *Home, Exile, Homeland - Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, pg. 21

<sup>4</sup> I met Mary when she dropped off Marc Matthews letter. She later called me. I was so moved by her voicemail that I recorded it for my own records, and later used it in the film. Our short interaction made a large impact on me. The idea of "walking alone" became a theme I would refer to many times throughout the process of making the film.

<sup>5</sup> *Sans Soleil*. New Yorker Video, 1993. DVD.

<sup>6</sup> A phenomenon that I read about in the New York Times, saw in "The Bastard Sings the Sweetest Song," and in a *Macleans* magazine in an article by Larry Frolick,

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<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 28:25, "esē en diaspora en pasais tais basileiais tēs gēs" translated to mean "thou shalt be a dispersion in all kingdoms of the earth" and secondly in Psalms 146(147).2, in the phrase "oikodomōn Ierusalēm ho Kyrios kai tas diasporas tou Israēl episynaxē," translated to mean "The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel". Kantor, Mattis, *The Jewish time line encyclopedia: a year-by-year history from Creation to the Present*, (New updated edition), Jason Aronson, Northvale NJ, 1992 pg. 81

<sup>8</sup> *Sundar Learns English*, Flat Tire Productions, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTGcddlHfE>, Online

<sup>9</sup> D'Aguiar was the then leader of the United Force (UF). The letter was published in the *Daily Chronicle* of Saturday, 15th October, 1960 [http://www.jagan.org/CJ%20Articles/In%20Office/cj\\_in\\_office3.html](http://www.jagan.org/CJ%20Articles/In%20Office/cj_in_office3.html)

<sup>10</sup> Forsyth, Mark. *The Etymologicon: A Circular Stroll through the Hidden Connections of the English Language*. New York: Berkley Books, 2012. pg. 69

<sup>11</sup> Forsyth, Mark. *The Etymologicon: A Circular Stroll through the Hidden Connections of the English Language*. pg. 69

<sup>12</sup> I walked this stelling with my mother and father on my first trip to Guyana, and my father told me how he used to ride his motorcycle down to the very end. Now the stelling can hardly bare the weight of Fenny, his family, and the camera crew.



### 3. Why I Fight: an awakening

I began *Why We Fight*, because I was concerned with how countries like Guyana are represented in the western media, and how that representation trickles into the identities of people of colour.<sup>13</sup> From my past experience I was often the only person of colour on a Canadian media team working in the developing world. I was uneasy with the way that people who looked like me were objectified by the simplification and marketing of their stories. The organization would assign me near identical story and image requests from countries as different as Mali, India, and Brazil. A one-size-fits-all story that made the strategy of “fixing” the developing world seem simple to a western gaze. I realized, that these assignments had homogenized my photographs of the developing world. As my inquiry progressed I wanted to better understand post-colonial theory, discussions about silencing, and the traditions of third, exilic and diasporic cinema. What has made *Why We Fight* simultaneously exciting and painful was the opportunity to study how complicated identity really is. Without really understanding it at the time, my project was about finding a voice – *can the grandchild of the subaltern speak?*<sup>14</sup>

If distant people and abstract principles are to get a grip on our emotions, therefore, these emotions must somehow position them within our circle of concern, creating a sense of “our” life in which these people and events matter as parts of our “us,” our own flourishing. For this movement to take place, symbols and poetry are crucial.<sup>15</sup>

As a voice that is halfway between a *distant people*, and *our circle*, the visibility of Guyana required me to reflect on language in a way that Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas point towards in their manifesto *Towards A Third Cinema*.<sup>16</sup> They emphasize that colonial powers use tools like cinema to subjugate Latin identities,

Sooner or later, inferior man will recognize Man with a capital M, and this recognition will mark the collapse of all his defences. If you really want to be a man, says the oppressor, you must be like me, speak my language, deny your essence, alienate yourself in me. Neo-

colonized man, the intellectual, the artist, have value only when they are recognized by the metropolis. The paternalism of European culture.<sup>17</sup>

A counter-language can be created to build a strong and united voice. In films like *The Hour of the Furnaces*, the filmmakers combat neocolonialist mass media by experimenting with visual form that frames their era with a narrative that is distinctly their own. As insiders Getino and Solanas have created a film that mirrors its audience back to itself.

One of the most effective ways artists can create a counter-archive is to document not only their own stories, but also to 'retroactively' document the oral histories that preceded them. However, presenting a language that can communicate a larger sociological trauma is tenuous. As a Canadian born Guyanese I will always be an outsider in Guyana, but perhaps people like me can act as bridges between the west and the global south.

Thinking today is, as always, thinking difference. In this time of globalization this means that visual thinking transcends as much the romantic conceit of nationalism as the geometric orders of a homogeneous transnationalism. We need images of transits, of crossings and interchanges, not only visual discourses but also open, flexible reflections, which find a way between these two intense activities: the nationalist fundamentalism which seeks to conjure magically the uncertainties of multiculturalism, and on the other, the globalizing abstractions of the market and the mega exhibitions, where one loses the will and desire for reformulating the manner in which we are thought.<sup>18</sup>

I wanted to experiment with more balanced ways of relaying narratives about Guyana. I learned through the process that fairness includes tethering my own story to the project, and making myself as vulnerable as the people represented in the film. Linda Alcoff talks about speaking for oneself, and making work that creates a conversation<sup>19</sup> in her essay *The Problem of Speaking for Others*. While I have the privilege to reconcile aspects of my own identity, I am simultaneously creating films that represent the minority group that I belong to.

The sociological impact of a documentary piece often depends on whether the form is a good match for the audience of the era that the artist is working in. In my professional practice, form has always been an important element of my own voice. The image has helped

me express myself in way that words never could. As an image-maker, I was interested in merging the photojournalism style of my commercial work with the painterly style of my fine art practice. I had imaged *Why We Fight* taking the form of animated GIFS, but I realized that even the most innovative forms can still be oppressive when a history is *hidden* or *invisible*.

I began to look for contemporary images and words about Guyana. The only recent footage of Guyana I had seen was in 2008 when a Toronto pop band called Bedouin Soundclash released a music video for their song *Gysai Went Home*. The video was a travelogue of the band's trip to Guyana where their bassist Eon Sinclair's family is from.<sup>20</sup>

Guyana is not without its major cultural influences on the world. Its landscape contains the worlds' only pristine rainforest and is a backdrop to many colourful adventures – from the myth of El Dorado, to the setting for Arthur Conan Doyle's *Lost World* to the inspiration of the mountain platform in *Disney Pixar's Up!*<sup>21</sup> More recently this backdrop has inspired a tradition of non-fiction exploration such as Wernor Herzog's *White Diamond* (2004), Charles Montier's *Exploration Guyana* (2011), and editorial works such as Larry Frolick's piece for the *Walrus*, *Dem's Fightin' Birds* (2012) which inspired Toronto's own Christy Garland to make the documentary *The Bastard Sings the Sweetest Song* (2012).

However, the above works are not what come to mind when many recall Guyana. The country is most know as the location of the 1978 Jonestown Massacre where over 900 people committed suicide at the instruction of cult leader Jim Jones. There have been numerous documentaries that have tried to unravel the story,<sup>22</sup> but few of them have explored Guyana further than as a backdrop to the tragedy.

This is not surprising as Guyana's archive is littered with a history of documenting the *physical* rather than the *emotional*. Gaitura Bahadur,<sup>23</sup> an author with a knack for extensive archival research, provides a modern Indo-Guyanese and feminist voice that became essential to my research. She describes the documentation of the physicality of Guyanese women as a phenomenon of the colonial gaze:

Rather than speaking for themselves in the historical record, they were spoken for—coolie women are described by countless government officials and the authors of fanciful narratives, almost all of them white men. An extensive paper trail—colonial travelogues, captains' logs, ship surgeons' diaries, and confidential Colonial Office dossiers on errant overseers—provides evidence of the women's physical lives, but does not—indeed cannot—reveal much about what they thought or felt.<sup>24</sup>

When documented by colonialists rather than nationals, the historical representation of the Caribbean often utilizes tropes such as "paradise," "pirate adventure," and "patois" in a caricature-type manner that depicts a "backward" culture culminating in a style that can only be described as Edward Said's term *orientalism*.

This is very much the case with the British Pathé archive<sup>25</sup> that I found from the 1950s and 60s. In particular, *The Royal Tour - Technicolor 1966*<sup>26</sup> is a testament to the colonial narrative archive left by the British. Regardless of the intended audience, the images became a part of the way that racial groups in the colonized world would internalize their identity leaving little room for representation of their emotional identities, generational traumas,<sup>27</sup> and complex community structures.

In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag states that the archive as a collective memory is 'a fiction,' and suggests that the existence of the archive can be used as a mode of collective instruction instead. Meaning that altering the archive can alter what we think of as 'collective memory.'<sup>28</sup>

"The familiarity of certain photographs builds our sense of the present and immediate past. Photographs lay down routes of reference, and serve as totems of causes: sentiment is more likely to crystallize around a photograph than around a verbal slogan. And photographs help

construct—and revise—our sense of a more distant past, with the posthumous shocks engineered by the circulation of hitherto unknown photographs. Photographs that everyone recognizes are now a constituent part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about. It calls these ideas “memories,” and that is, over the long run, a fiction. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as collective memory—part of the same family of spurious notions as collective guilt. But there is collective instruction.<sup>29</sup>”

And why the cultural theory of Stuart Hall has become so important to me.

We should not, for a moment, underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery, which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails. ‘Hidden histories’ have played a critical role in the emergence of many of the most important social movements of our time - feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist.<sup>30</sup>

This legacy is what made Guyanese artist, Roshini Kempadoo’s lecture *State of Play: Photography, Multimedia and Memory* a meaningful find. Kempadoo who studied in the tradition of Stuart Hall challenges us to simultaneously critique and change the archive.<sup>31</sup> The emergence of hidden history<sup>32</sup> is a strong counter narrative. The new archive provides a context, a juxtaposition, and an accuracy that were previously missing in the colonial one.

The frame of Kempadoo’s challenge, the study of Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas’ manifesto *Towards a Third Cinema*, and their film *Hours of The Furnaces*, and works by Patricio Guzman made the discovery of the little known Guyanese Third Cinema essay-film *The Terror and the Time* by the Victor Jara Collective an exhilarating discovery. The collective was a Japanese production team lead by Guyanese director Rupert Roopnaraine. Roopnaraine writes that, “A film, like any form of artistic production, is consciously or unconsciously an intervention into a specific conjuncture, an intrusion into a set of existing concrete relations.”<sup>33</sup> Meaning that film can upset conventions in language, the archive, and in social structures. The team also collaborated with other Guyanese artists by using the words and voice of Guyanese poet, Martin Carter and the music of the Yoruba Singers. *Terror and the Time* takes the viewer through history, politics, and speaks of ideological nourishment for the people.

it's a fugue-like procession of images (cane fields burnt in protest and sun-and-leaf longingly glimpsed through prison bars), music (insistent drumbeats evoking parallel global turmoil... and word (recitations of the confiscated and banned poetry of Martin Carter, one of the jailed leaders...There's a subtle layering here of the two eras: the dark times which the film depicts and the dark times during which it was made.<sup>34</sup>

These are the inspirations that made the challenge of this project so worthwhile.

<sup>13</sup> Trin T. Min Ha (discursive violence) W.E.B DuBois (double consciousness)

<sup>14</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988: 271-313.

<sup>15</sup> Nussbaum, Martha C., *Political Emotions – Why Love Matters For Justice*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1947 pg.11

<sup>16</sup> Getino, Octavio and Solanas, Fernando. "Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World," in *New Latin American Cinema*, Vol 1: Theories, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations, Michael T. Martin, ed., pp-33- 58. Wayne State University Press, 1997

<sup>17</sup> Getino, Octavio and Solanas, Fernando. "Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World,"

<sup>18</sup>Canlini, Nestor, Garcia, "REMAKING PASSPORTS Visual thought in the debate on multiculturalism", *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoff (1998) Routledge. Pg. 373

<sup>19</sup> Alcoff, Linda, "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique*, Winter NC: Oxford University Press, 1991-2. 5-32

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/embed/aMt8ZjKzbPk>

<sup>21</sup> Guyana's gifts to the world, BBC News, May 26, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35929577>, Accessed May 26, 2016

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>23</sup> I had long awaited the opportunity to follow in Bahadur's footsteps and look up my ancestors in the National Archive in Guyana, but despite the best efforts of the staff I found little. I had experienced a frustration towards the lack of family records back in my teens when my Canadian friends simply could go to a local archive and find information that seemed lost to me. To have documents is to have visibility, to have roots, to have a stable history. It felt like mine would be unstable unless I went to Guyana, India, and China and dug around.

<sup>24</sup> Bahadur, Gaitura, "Postcards from Empire," *Dissent Magazine*, Spring 2015, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/postcards-from-empire> Accessed: July 19, 2015

<sup>25</sup> British Pathé, <http://www.britishpathe.com/search/query/guyana>

<sup>26</sup> The Royal Tour - Technicolor 1966, <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/the-royal-tour-technicolor/query/guyana>

<sup>27</sup> LaToya Ruby Fraiser

<sup>28</sup> Susan Sontag *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003, 85

<sup>29</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 85

<sup>30</sup> Hall, "Cultural identity and diaspora"

<sup>31</sup> Kempadoo, Roshini. "State of Play: Photography, Multimedia and Memory." Lecture, Glasgow School of Art. Feb 5, 2010. <https://vimeo.com/62421134> (accessed March 10, 2015)

<sup>32</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural identity and diaspora" Jonathan Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: community, culture, difference*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990

<sup>33</sup> Jardine, Monica and Andaiye, "The Terror and the Time Interview with Rupert Roopnaraine," *Jump Cut*, no. 26, December 1981, pp. 36-38

<sup>34</sup> Bahadur, Gaitura, "Guyana: The Terror and the Time", Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, August 4, 2015 <http://pulitzercenter.org/blog/guyana-colonial-turmoil-CIA-revolution-race>, Accessed April 15, 2016

#### 4. Notes on form, collaboration, and country music

At the beginning of the project, I did not know many Guyanese people. I began with interviews with my extended family. It was a moving experience to sit down with my uncles and aunts and to ask them questions about their childhoods, and their lives before and after they immigrated to Canada. In a sense, the camera allowed me to get know some of them for the first time. I was surprised to learn that many of them did not want to leave Guyana, and always thought that they would go back.

The idea to put out a call for mail art sprung from a fascination that I have with the work of On Kawara. There is an intimacy to mail that I have always loved. I wondered if it was possible use it to extend my network and see how people I did not know felt about their Guyanese identities. I was interested in the language that they would use, the memories they would evoke, and the perspective they had on Guyana's current state. I sent the call for submissions out electronically via email, online forums and Facebook groups:

What would you write to Guyana if the country was a person? Would you write about a vivid memory of the sea? Would you wish it well? Would you remind it of a close friend? Draw a map to a specific place, or write a commentary, or send a piece of fabric, or an aspiration for the country etc. Creative letters, post cards, poems, sound clips, illustrations, and photographs are encouraged. The collection of letters/mail will be documented online, and will form the basis of the music and script. You may send them anonymously if you wish. If you include a return address, you will receive a limited edition photograph in response to your contribution.<sup>35</sup>

Many of the submissions came in by word of mouth. My community began speaking about the project and found that they had many Guyanese people in their lives that they did not know about. I had asked for the submission to be mailed to me because I envisioned using the tactile pieces as a form of collage in the film, but most of the pieces were submitted electronically. And while I received letters from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, I did not receive any from Guyana. This shaped how the project proceeded by helping to place diaspora and the nationals living in Guyana into two distinct groups.

A theme throughout many of the letters was that Guyana was better pre-independence, and now it was a paradise lost. I wondered if that reflected the confidence we have in Guyanese people to make the best decisions for Guyana. This remains consistent with what I knew of Guyana from my research, and from the stories of family members, but I needed to find out how nationals living in the country viewed this narrative.

I was lucky to have the support and enthusiasm of my mother's childhood friend Gem Mahdoo-Nasciemento. Mahdoo owns her own theatre company in the capital of Georgetown Guyana, a resort on the Essequibo River, is from the Corevtyne coast (like my parents) and is also married to a former member of parliament from Kitty. Through her network, I had an extraordinary amount of access. As I researched Guyana's art and political scene, I began to ask her about specific filmmakers like Rupert Roopnaraine, Richard Pittman and Kojo Macpherson, musicians like the Yoruba Singers, and other culture-makers – she was friends with them all. Once she knew what I was looking for she suggested I meet people like Roy Geddes.

A problem with the way I collected media in my previous job, was that I would fly into the country with a list of assignments, complete them and return home without building genuine relationship with anyone other than the fixers and drivers that the organization employed. I wanted to travel to Guyana to simply get to know people, to have conversations about mutual interests, concerns, and future plans. In April 2015, I traveled with the support of Ryerson's SF grant in photography to Guyana for research and development.

Because of the Guyana narrative they had been exposed to, my parents were concerned for my safety and decided to come with me. It was my first trip to the country, and they had not been back for 40 and 20 years respectively. It was my privilege to see Guyana



through their eyes – the way they searched for their favourite fruit, the way they slipped back into creole, and the way they pointed out places I had heard about for decades. There are so many little idiosyncrasies that my parents have that make sense to me in a way they did not before – this alone has made the project worth while.

We met many people and talked to as many of them about the project as possible. While my interests naturally lead me to musicians and filmmakers, I conducted informal informational interviews with artists, politicians, academics, labourers, retired individuals, school children, etc., and I gained a lot of perspective about the circle of concern that Guyanese feel about themselves, the diaspora, and the status of their country. Some expressed a desire for Guyanese talent to return home,<sup>36</sup> and others expressed that they did not want charity from west, but rather they would like to have a government that provided equal opportunities for the talent within the country.<sup>37</sup>

I returned to Canada and moved into production. It became clear that with animated GIFS, there was a risk that individuals might become “props” to narratives of my own making, because the technical process of creating animated GIFS would require me to know already what I wanted to say and then execute a precise rendering. By contrast video would provide a method to observe and learn more. It was natural to explore Guyana through a moving lens, and I felt comfortable doing so. I decided to go extremely wide screen in order to make the film more cinematic and pull it away from the “newsy” footage that is typical of the BBC. I learnt to slow down my camera movements and let the camera sit. I began to really enjoy how people and scenery would come in and out of a fixed frame.

This type of cinematography made formal interviews seem very rigid on camera. By contrast, I enjoyed the informal conversation that happened while chatting with individuals as

they went about their daily routine. I remembered that the most honest photo essays I have done in the past have been when I have spent large amounts of time with a person. So I decided to adopt a “day in the life of” model that would show the similarities and contrasts of people in the diaspora and in Guyana.

Sound became a primary concern for the production. I enlisted friends and colleagues Sarah Davignon and Andrew Patten (of the band The Most Loyal) to come to Guyana to record environmental sound, music, and the voices of the onscreen characters.

When we returned for filming in August 2015, many of characters that I had intended on working with ended up going on vacations or had last minute scheduling conflicts. Instead, I stumbled upon other people who were open to the project, and who gave me incredible access. I felt that it was important to work with as diverse a group as possible. Each of the four characters are from a different heritage representing the West African, Indian, AmerIndian, and European ethnic backgrounds respectively.

In the capital Georgetown, the retired couple Pam and Roy Geddes were warm hosts. The garden and their home which also acts as a museum were immediately a striking visual story. Every inch of their wall space is covered in visual history of the steel pan. When Roy’s elementary student Miriam Bonar arrived we realized that we had met her earlier in the week on a day trip to Mahdoo’s resort in Essequibo. Miriam’s busy schedule is similar to many children in Canada. She goes to children’s events at the library, swimming lessons, language lessons, karate lessons, music lessons, and many others.

In Berbice, the region that my parents are from, I had originally intended to film Fenny Adrian’s sister Anisa, but she went on a last minute trip to visit their mother in Suriname. Fenny lives in a hostel for AmerIndian travellers with his grandparents, sisters, aunt and uncle.

During the school year Fenny is surrounded by children who come from the interior to live in the neighbouring residence as they study, but when we came in August, he had no one to play with.

My original intention with Anthony Sattaur was to film him working at the rice mill where I met him in April, but he did not have work there when we arrived. Instead he had already planned to catch crabs and pick coconuts to supplement his income, and he took us along.

When I returned from my filming the feedback from my production class was that the filming the “day in the life of” of diaspora did not seem necessary because of the sheer amount of footage I captured in Guyana. At first I was enthusiastic about this because it seemed more in line with the length I was aiming for. Now I realize how much this decision has affected the way the film is written. I filmed events in Guyana that I believed I could find North American counter-parts to in order to create parallels and tension, but then I was left with one half of a whole. If I could go back and do it again, I would probably have gone to New York and shot in Toronto as well to fulfill the original plan.

The pains of script writing and editing upon returning from Guyana can be attributed to the limited experience I have as a filmmaker. I have a long way to grow. By creating an intimate shooting environment in Guyana I became emotionally attached to the characters and became worried about representation. Knowing a lot more critical theory than I did when I conceived the project I became bogged down by the fear of getting things wrong and I lost confidence that I could do what I had set out to achieve.

Davignon and Patten on the other hand come home and quickly recorded a whole EP of songs based on our experiences and the samples they had recorded in Guyana. As an

exercise in overcoming the growing fear I had around post-production I edited the footage to one of their songs as I had done numerous times in the past with other projects we have collaborated on.

Editing a trailer helped me work through some of the mental barriers. I let the trailer be earnest which I had been afraid to do in the critical academic environment. I began expressing the emotional instead of just the physical beauty by layering the video to pull it away from the language of adventure documentaries and pushing it towards the poetic. I began experimenting with footage in reverse, highlighting the impossibility of moving backwards in time. I focussed on images that represented what I felt in Guyana rather than just what I saw. My emotions about what I had experienced in Guyana were still very raw and they evoked a lot of the pain that I felt about growing up as a minority in Canada, and about my previous career as a photographer in the international development sphere.

Feedback to the trailer was overwhelmingly that the film was too nice and there was no tension or conflict. Being in a production environment, I was averse to rushing into saying critical things about Guyana when I was unsure of where I really stood. At the time, I wanted to make something that was life-affirming for Guyanese people, so that they could see their homeland as something that was pure.

One of the best pieces of advice that I got during this time was to decide who my main audience was. It is Guyanese people (nationals and the diaspora). This is particularly important because many people will not understand the creole, and I made it a conceptual choice to not subtitle the language.

One quality of that poetic language is its subtle use of a Guyanese creole construction – ‘is they...’ – a device which opens the poem up to all sorts of echoes and resonances. And while the written language of the poems never ventures far from standard English, that same cast and inflection of voice is evident in many of the later poems, helping to establish a verbal connection between the philosophical musings of ‘the poems man’ – as one small first dubs him – and the life of the society he speaks to and from.<sup>38</sup>

It speaks to the pain I experienced of having lost the language and struggling to understand the people I was working with. As an adult visiting Guyana, I felt a deep regret for having lost a tongue that would make communicating with the Geddes, Anthony, Martin, Miriam, and Fenny so much richer. Excluding subtitles is a declaration that the language that I was born from is not *broken*. Claude Lanzmann, the director of *Shoah* (1985) explained “that historical truth may be transmitted in some cases through the refusal of a certain framework of understanding, a refusal that is also a creative act.”<sup>39</sup> The audience must live with the uncomfortable feelings (if any) of not understanding language that the un-subtitled scenes evoke, and perhaps it will help them consider a culture that has neither forced or permitted them to tune their ear to creole the way they have to colloquial British. I’m not even asking the audience to consider that colonialists purposefully erased the mother tongues of West African slaves, and Indian, Chinese, and Portuguese indentured servants as an act of subjugation. “The act of refusal... is therefore not a denial of a knowledge of the past [or in this case a convention of making Western audiences comfortable], but rather a way of gaining access to a knowledge, this refusal opens up space for a testimony that can speak beyond what is already understood.”<sup>40</sup>

When I first met Anthony at the rice mill, he was the only person who offered to give me a tour. Despite my Canadian accent, and his creole we generally understood each other, but found during the interview that we needed my Mother to translate. On my second visit in August 2015, he spoke of how his colleagues teased him for not being able to “speak properly” for the camera – but it is through Anthony that I learn how to understand creole again. Anthony spoke slowly when we were communicating about production logistics, but he spoke a quick creole when the camera was turned on. A Canadian audience may not

understand how incredibly funny a line like, “How do you find all the samples bai?” is. It’s an idiom that I have heard throughout my life when one Guyanese person teases the other person for eating too much during the collection and cooking of food. It was through the controversy about subtitling that I realized that I felt more comfortable with Anthony than I did with my peers at school.

Looking back, what bothered me was that I didn’t know how to talk about the violence in Guyana without making the whole film about the carjackings, the high rates of suicide in Berbice, and the members of the diaspora who had been robbed and murdered while trying to visit their family homes.

In October 2015, a young British filmmaker of Guyanese descent named Dominic Bernard went to Berbice and he was murdered within hours of arriving. His family did not know he was dead until December, and his murderer (his God-brother) was not charged until January.<sup>41</sup> This is when I decided to include the voicemail I had received from Mary Delph warning me “don’t try to walk alone” in Guyana. Walking alone is something that women are taught to feel vulnerable about. I have lived on my own in Toronto since I was 18 years old. While a photographer on assignment overseas I was always assigned male drivers who double as security – it’s a cliché, but the worst things that have happened to me have happened on my street, in my city, and at my school. It is a theme that I could relate to. I decided to carry the theme through the film stressing the importance of community for safety in Guyana but also community for the sake of identity outside of Guyana (for the diaspora).

I arrived at a three-act structure that breaks the film into manageable parts of i) establishing voice ii) showing the nostalgia and iii) pointing towards the complexity of Guyana and its people. I had originally intended that the narration in the film be a

culmination of my research, the letters, the interviews, and my own thoughts written into a script and performed by an actor.

I thought that the visuals would be my “voice” as they had been in the past, but received feedback suggesting that I should use my “actual” voice to build in the tension that I was missing. I had not up until that point considered that this film would be about finding my own voice as a Guyanese-Canadian image-maker. In figuring out what I wanted to say I realized that I needed to express the grief, anger, happiness, luck, and massive confusion I had come to feel during the course of the project.

The narration was recorded in four separate sessions. In the first session, Davignon and Patten micro-phoned me and we recorded a conversation about Guyana between the three of us. In the second session I listened back to what I said in the first conversation and spoke back to myself locating loop holes, expanding on frustrations, and even getting angry at myself. The third session, similar to the first was a conversation with Davignon, Patten. After watching a rough cut of the film with my previous two sessions of narrations cut in with our friends Hazel Ottley (who is of Caribbean descent) and Peter Sam (who is an immigrant from India) we recorded a conversation. I found myself getting deeper and uncovering a lot of hurt with them. After finalizing the cut of my previous sessions, the fourth session was to record the letters from the diaspora which Davignon and Patten put into the sequence at the end of the film as if they were lyrics in a song.

After realizing that I needed to find my own voice, it seemed appropriate to point the end of the film at artists living and practicing in Guyana over images that show a contemporary Guyana that members of the diaspora would not expect. Rupert Roopnaraine – a Comparative Literature professor at Cornell turned filmmaker, an activist who was jailed

and accused with trying to overthrow the government, and now the Minister of Education in Guyana<sup>42</sup> was a logical and personally gratifying choice. Actress and communications manager for the nation's President David Granger – Lloyd Nicholas-Garrett is the second voice. And we end off with the beautiful voice of the Yoruba Singers' lead singer – Eze Rockcliffe. These individuals bring my film back to the research that fuelled my interest – adding positive voices to the archive of Guyana.

It was important to seek out the music archive as well. I knew that Guyana had traditions of soca, dancehall, reggae, chutney, and religious music. I knew that my parents liked country music artists Jim Reeves as children – I grew to know every word to every song, having sung them at family gatherings as a child, and listened to the albums countless times during road trips between Winnipeg, Manitoba and Queens, New York.

The Guyanese love affair with country music, like much about Guyanese history and culture, has left few traces in the archives and in institutionalized memory...The narratives Guyanese listeners heard within country music were not just about separation, but also about connection. For my grandfather, the pantheon of classic country western singers is incomplete without Jim Reeves, an American country music singer who became popular in Guyana in the 1960s. His songs were deeply personal, but more spiritually oriented. His voice is clear, distinct, overpowering.<sup>43</sup>

What I did not know was that Guyana had its own country and folk music tradition. I was fortunate enough to track down and interview artists like Nesbit Chhangur in Canada, and learn of other artists like Wesley Hamilton while in Guyana.

Inspired by Alan Lomax<sup>44</sup> whose recordings and later the recording philosophies of Bernie Krause,<sup>45</sup> I was hoping to include as much found audio and music from the soundscape as possible.

Guyana does not have noise regulations like Canada. There is often loud music playing, car horns, trucks that drive around and advertise events with loud speakers, motorcycles racing, and not to mention the loud natural landscape from birds and insects. It can be chaotic to the foreign ear.



These snippets of audio in Guyana help add to the sense of time and place. Jim Reeves on the stereo, the *Price is Right* on the Geddes' TV; the scales on the steel pan, Fenny's folk song; *Sundar Learns English* on youtube; the budget coming down on the radio; "Doe a Deer" were all strokes of luck. I began looking at the sound as a type of "opera" allowing each sound, voice, and pause to add to the narrative. Reeves, "Doe a Deer," and even the budget speech contribute to the nostalgia, while other sound pieces such as the *Price As Right*, *Sundar Learns English*, and Delph's voicemail help situate us in a contemporary time.

In order for these moments to stand out we had to simplify the noisescape. And while the "media noise" that I recorded in the landscape has been useful in providing contrast to the agricultural images, it did not add the tension I had hoped for.

This confirmed what I already wanted – that there was room for the music of Davignon and Patten. The score helps divide the film into chapters. When I speak about voice we hear Davignon's soft "ahhs," when I read a letter a minor chord comes in to accompany the reverb on my voice that differentiates the narration from the borrowed words. The morose song that opens the film is "You are the cup" which heavily features samples Davignon and Patten took from Geddes' steel pan. The song in the end is one that features a cheese grater (similar to Geddes' muffler with holes in it) and a back beat that Patten and I often used in songs when we played in a band together.

The film ends with a song by Ram John Holder,<sup>46</sup> one of the more famous musicians in the Guyanese diaspora. The vintage track points to a new nostalgia, one that activates memory along with a knowledge of Guyana's current landscape.

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<sup>35</sup> (Please see Appendix "B" for a list of respondents and Appendix "C" for samples of the letters)

<sup>36</sup> Marilyn Dewar Interview

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- <sup>37</sup> Kojo Macpherson Interview
- <sup>38</sup> Carter, Martin. *Poems of Resistance from British Guiana*. Lawrence and Gishart, 1954.
- <sup>39</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. 154
- <sup>40</sup> Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. 155
- <sup>41</sup> Five charged over death of Briton in Guyana, *The Guardian*, January 16, 2016 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/16/five-charged-death-briton-guyana> Accessed January 16, 2016
- <sup>42</sup> Bahadur, Gaitura, "Guyana: The Terror and the Time", Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, August 4, 2015 <http://pulitzercenter.org/blog/guyana-colonial-turmoil-CIA-revolution-race>, Accessed April 15, 2016
- <sup>43</sup> Misir, Nadia, "Guyana ♥ Country", *Open City Magazine*, Asian American Writer's Workshop, March 13, 2015, <http://opencitymag.com/guyana-country/> Accessed: July 19, 2015
- <sup>44</sup> Rose, Joel, Alan Lomax's Massive Archive Goes Online, NPR Music, <http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2012/03/28/148915022/alan-lomaxs-massive-archive-goes-online>
- <sup>45</sup> Krause, Bernie. *The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places*. Back Bay Books. 2013.
- <sup>46</sup> Holder plays PorkPie in the BBC television series.

## 5. The visibility of Guyana and the problem of representation

The lofty balance that I wanted to strike with *Why We Fight* meant bridging nostalgia, with contemporary beauty, overwriting the colonial and tourist tropes with the lives of real people, addressing the violence, and mending the political cynicism with personal inquiry.

The problem with reconciling the folk history I was told as a child with my own experience as a visual image-maker is that the photographs in my parents' albums locked my Guyanese identity in the nostalgic past. *Why We Fight* filled a deep need to create an archive of images of modern Guyana for myself and for Guyanese people regardless of their generation or location. I still believe that it is important to pair the diaspora's nostalgia with a discomfort regarding any apathy they have towards the country at present. "Without a sense of woe – people grow comfortable in the diaspora.<sup>47</sup>" I crave a reconciled history and identity that bridges time, space, and nationality.

I understand now that reconciliation means going past the tourist tropes. The cheesy palm trees, and stock steel pan music in the *Price is Right* clip play into the stereotype of what a journey in the Caribbean is expected to be.

"For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. Every native everywhere lives a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and desperation and depression, and every deed, good and bad, is an attempt to forget this. Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. But some natives – most natives in the world – cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere...."<sup>48</sup>

The contestant Jodi's excitement stirred my own shame at being a tourist in a country that holds the name of my background, "Guyanese." We often go away in order to *find ourselves*, but we forget that the place we are going to has a life of its own. I would much rather participate in the banal. It seems a more genuine way to get to know Guyana.

As Guyanese abroad we rarely hear about the banal or even positive aspects of the country in the international or Guyanese press and art community. Nestor Garcia Canclini speaks about this in his essay *Remaking Passports, Visual thought in the debate on multiculturalism*:

Even when our people migrate extensively and a large part of our art work and literature is dedicated to thinking about the multicultural, Latin America continues to be interesting only as a continent of a violent nature, of an archaicism irreducible to modern nationality, an earth fertilized by an art conceived as tribal or national dreamy and not as thinking about the global and the complex.<sup>49</sup>

The global and the complex is precisely what Guyanese nationals are thinking about. In the car scene with the radio playing, opposition MP Persaud during the parliamentary session evokes the archive with a decades old speech by Dr. Cheddi Jagan. She talks about the budget of the new party in power being “mere verbal expressions of their campaign promises or fictions of their imaginations.” Her political cynicism points towards a colonial legacy that says that Guyanese people cannot have what other people in the world have.

The world as it is beautiful, but it is also a mess, and much of the suffering it contains can be ameliorated by a wiser use of our time in the world. A creative reach toward something better is a key feature of most societies that strive for decency and justice, and that striving needs a vision of its goal. Striking the right balance between aspiration and acceptance is one of the most difficult and delicate tasks of political life, as of the personal.<sup>50</sup>

Persaud criticizes the idea that we can add hope to a vision of Guyana’s future.

We have found ourselves at what I hope is a turning point where issues such as race, intersectionality, immigration, and representation are on the hearts and minds of media makers. To be misunderstood often factors into the construction of identity. In order for *Why We Fight* to be about finding your voice, it needed to also be about the silencing that Guyanese individuals face.

Berbice, the area that I filmed half of the documentary in (and the also the area that my parents are from) has the highest suicide rate in the world.<sup>51</sup> I wonder if this crisis has to

do with all of the silencing, the untold stories and the generational trauma. The point of this film is to make visible what has been invisible. To tell the story of a place that is rich with history, and rich with people who should be seen and heard more and not condescended to.

When I worked in international development, I often wondered if an artist can ever get it “right,” but through this project I have realized that it doesn’t matter if I am right, it matters if I bring visibility to an issue that needs attention and that it starts a conversation. My awareness of all of the problems of representation helped me to measure the output of my concern.

It is not only the wit of picture or the will of the artist that is inserted in or isolated from social history; it is also the interaction between the diverse members of the field (as both cultural system and market) which situates the significance of art in the vacillating memory of the world.<sup>52</sup>

I feel that it is the responsibility of a new generation of artists to collect into the archive pieces like Martin Carter’s poetry, *The Terror and the Time*, along with contemporary work by Bahadur, Kempadoo, and to build upon them. To be trained to be quiet from birth, whether intentionally or not, is a profound breach of trust. It was not until recently that I realized that *speaking is survival*.

I am happy that the timing of this documentary means that it will be completed the week of May 26, 2016, which is the 50th anniversary of Guyana’s independence. For the country and its diaspora it is a moment to reflect on the past, and also on the future of the country. It has been a year since Guyana has won a long awaited multi-ethnic<sup>53</sup> approach to governance. There are Caribbean representatives demanding reparations from Britain. It is a time for celebration.

And so  
if you see me  
looking at your hands  
listening when you speak  
marching in your ranks  
you must know

I do not sleep to dream,  
but dream to change the world.<sup>54</sup>  
(Martin Carter)

Word count: 9,235

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<sup>47</sup> Peters, John Duram, "Exiles, nomadism, and diaspora - the State of Mobility in Western Cinema," *Home, Exile, Homeland - Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, pg. 17-41

<sup>48</sup> Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. New York: Plume, 1988. page 18-19

<sup>49</sup> Canclini, Nestor, Garcia, "Remaking Passports: Visual Thought in the Debate on Multiculturalism", *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoff (1998) Routledge. Pg. 373

<sup>50</sup> Nussbaum, Martha C., *Political Emotions - Why Love Matters For Justice*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1947 pg. 117

<sup>51</sup> "Guyana: mental illness, witchcraft, and the highest suicide rate in the world", *The Guardian*, June 3, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/jun/03/guyana-mental-illness-witchcraft-and-the-highest-suicide-rate-in-the-world>, accessed June 5, 2015

<sup>52</sup> Canclini, Nestor, Garcia, "REMAKING PASSPORTS Visual thought in the debate on multiculturalism" Pg. 373

<sup>53</sup> Gupta, Girish, "A Multiethnic Movement Emerges in Guyana to Counter Politics-as-Usual," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2015

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/world/a-multiethnic-movement-emerges-in-guyana-to-counter-politics-as-usual.html?ref=world&r=1> Accessed January 17, 2015

<sup>54</sup> Carter, Martin. *Poems of Resistance from British Guiana*. Lawrence and Gishart, 1954.

## APPENDIX A: List of films and television about the Jonestown Massacre

1. Jonestown, 2013 short film
2. Jonestown: The World's Biggest Mass Suicide (TV episode of BBC's Storyville, 2008)
3. Witness to Jonestown (TV Movie 2008)
4. Jonestown: Paradise Lost (TV Movie 2007)
5. Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple, a 2006 PBS documentary
6. Guyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones (TV Movie 1980)
7. Guyana: Cult of the Damned (1979)

## APPENDIX B: List of respondents to the call for mail art submissions

1. Marc Matthews (poet, United Kingdom)
2. Patricia Lachman (Canada)
3. Abel Peters (writer, United States)
4. Emily Sideen (student, Canada)
5. Jerliyn Roycroft (retired elementary school teacher, Canada)
6. Jennifer Singh (Dean, Seneca College, Canada)
7. Andy McQueen (actor, Canada)

## APPENDIX C: Mail art submission samples

"No fancy locks on a house—just a flimsy latch holding the door shut against the wind. I cannot remember anyone carrying around a bunch of keys. And in a rainstorm it was all right to seek shelter below someone's wooden house, standing on stilts.

From my window I often watched young men, not Black or Indian or of mixed parentage just youths having fun as they chased iguanas across our property, even following them up coconut palms. Once the reptiles were caught the cook-out began. The most brazen of the group would holler out to my grandmother, "Aunty, can you lend us a pot. And if you don't mind can you spare a bit of coconut oil and some garlic please". Then as an afterthought he'd add, "And a piece of onion if you have any." Granny always obliged because some of these "boys" would be later hired to scale the tall coconut palms in order to harvest the dried fruit which was sold for oil-making."

"Is this nostalgia or loss of innocence? I wish the FEAR of walking the streets of Guyana, without always looking over one's shoulder, would just disappear; that people once again live in harmony, recognizing each others strengths and weaknesses and work together for a stable country."

Pauline Lachman

"I must also thank you for the gift of rhythm and music. Scenes like this steel band passing were common in my childhood, and although I was too small to join them, my older sister would go "tramping"" with our cousins behind the band, returning home when everyone was worn out."

Jerilyn Roycroft

#### APPENDIX D: List of interviews conducted in Guyana (April, 2015)

1. Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine (filmmaker *The Terror and The Time*, Minister of Education, professor)
2. Gem Mahdoo-Nascimento (theatre producer National Theatre Guild),
3. Eze Rockcliffe (singer The Yoruba Singers),
4. Obnie Kwane ( acting curator National Art Gallery)
5. Kojo McPherson (writer, filmmaker, activist)
6. Richard Pittman (radio host, filmmaker)
7. Marilyn Dewar (folk musician, piano teacher)
8. Dr. Seeta Shah (producer, Guyana Learning Channel)
9. Dr. Winston McGowan (retired history professor, University of Guyana)
10. Dr. Al Creighton (art history professor, University of Guyana, teacher, National Theatre School)
11. Colette Jones (teacher National Theatre School, painter)
12. Anthony Sattaur (rice mill worker)
13. George Lewis (student of my father in 1964/65, music teacher)
14. Devenaand Ghanie (senior pastor of Agape Ministries)
15. Easerdea Beepat (maternal great Aunt)
16. Students from Springlands Afterschool Program



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## GLOSSARY

**COUNTER-NARRATIVE:** an argument, story, or history that goes against what is traditionally believed to be the truth.

**ETHNOGRAPHY:** an examination of the culture of a specific group of people presented from the point of view of the subjects of study.

**EXILIC CINEMA:** often called accented cinema, a tradition of film from the perspective of a displaced individual or member of a specific diaspora.

**DISCURSIVE VIOLENCE:** an aggressive rhetoric (used whether knowingly or unknowingly by the perpetrator) that subjugates or puts down an individual or person.

**DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS:** the navigation of an identity that individual has forced upon them by the social perception of a group as opposed to the way that they perceive themselves.

**HIDDEN HISTORY:** a record of an individual or a group that has been suppressed by a lack of representation or misrepresentation.

**NEO-COLONISM:** the use of pressures such as economical, political, or environmental to leverage or subjugate another country.

**ORIENTALISM:** the representation of a group of people based on a colonialist perspective.

**SUBALTERN:** a person or group of people who are considered outside of the circle of political or social elite and as such have a suppressed voice and little representation.

**THIRD CINEMA:** a tradition of cinema started in Latin America in the late 1960's that pushed against neo-colonialism, capitalism, and the systems of representation that Hollywood and European cinema perpetrated.