

**“South of the Burial Ground”:**  
***The Bio/Necropolitics of Environmental Racism and  
(In)justice in Georgetown, Guyana.***

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This research paper is dedicated to my grandfather, Herbie Harper, 1923-2013  
*who has always been my motivation  
and the person who inspired this work*

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## **Abstract**

This research is focused on the lived experiences of a marginalized, predominantly black community in Georgetown, Guyana, that has been and continues to be, subjected to environmental racism and injustice. The communities of Lodge and East La Penitence, which are referred to by elders as ‘south of the burial ground’, border a state-neglected cemetery (Le Repentir Cemetery) and an old landfill site (Mandela Landfill). Through a poststructuralist anti-racist framework, I explore the concepts of environmental injustice/racism in conversation with Michel Foucault’s ‘biopolitics’ and Achille Mbembe’s ‘necropolitics’ to provide a broader view of how the mortality of citizens is controlled and maintained. This may explain how environmental injustice is produced in some spaces, such as ‘south of the burial ground’, and prevented in others. By bringing issues of ‘biopolitics’ and ‘necropolitics’ to bear on environmental (in)justice theory and practices, I hope to suggest new ways that environmental injustices can be conceived, identified, and investigated.

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My indebtedness to the community residents whom I interviewed, dialogued and walked with must be noted – Kevon, Lawrence, Aunty Marva, Brittany, Tony, Ms. Jackson-Smith, Ms. Savory, Aunty Chandra, Aunty Carmen and her brother, the old man who scavenged the Mandela Landfill when it was in operation, the ‘young men’ on Princess Street, the ‘bird men’ at the Le Repentir Cemetery and all the other residents whom I chatted with, who did not disclose their names. Without these persons, this work would not be possible.

This work would also not be possible without Alissa Trotz, Jacqui Alexander, Honor Ford-Smith and Jin Haritaworn. Alissa Trotz has guided and mentored me throughout my academic journey and has proven to be one of my role models. Jacqui Alexander has guided me in my latter years of my academic life and I wish to deeply thank her for introducing me to new knowledges, new ways of interpreting and receiving information and for the transformative moment in my passion for research. I thank Honor Ford-Smith for guiding the embryonic stages of this research work at FES and providing grounding for its development, and because of our shared cultural appreciation and lived experiences from the Caribbean, I felt at home at FES during our conversations. Last, but certainly not least, I thank Jin Haritaworn from the bottom of my heart, for acknowledging my potential to succeed, for accrediting my work throughout the FES program, for keeping me focused, for the timely and excellent feedback with detailed comments and edits, for their insightful suggestions, for producing inspiring, brilliant work worth emulating and finally, for the inordinate, exceptional care that was exercised, supervising my work. I am truly deeply appreciative and grateful for everything that they have done, to help me through my journey at the FES program at York University.

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## **Foreword: Relationship of Major Paper to the Plan of Study**

The Area of Concentration in my Plan of Study is focused on Environmental Racism and Environmental Injustice. This includes developing insights into the North American rooted concepts of environmental racism and environmental injustice and how these concepts could be possibly employed in the analysis of the experiences of this type of injustice in a marginalized, predominantly black community in Georgetown, Guyana. The Learning Objectives outlined in the Plan of Study are as follows:

*Learning Objective 1.1 Critically analyse the socio-political history of Guyana through the lens of necropolitics and biopolitics bearing in mind people's relations to their political, social, cultural and physical environments.*

*Learning Objective 2.1 Engage with the discourses around environmental racism and injustice (some complementary and others controversial to my work thus far) to fully grasp the framework with which I will be centering my research analysis.*

*Learning Objective 3.1 Engage with discourses around civic engagement, specifically seeking methods and ideas of creating meaningful dialogue and critical awareness with regard to our own environment.*

This research is directly linked to my Area of Concentration, as it focuses on the socio-political climate of Guyana and the interplay of state and capital, in shaping urban space for the purposes of providing contextual grounds, to engage with the discourses around environmental racism and injustice in relation to the Guyanese community that have been subjected to living with a landfill site and state neglected cemetery just outside their windows. The topic areas also

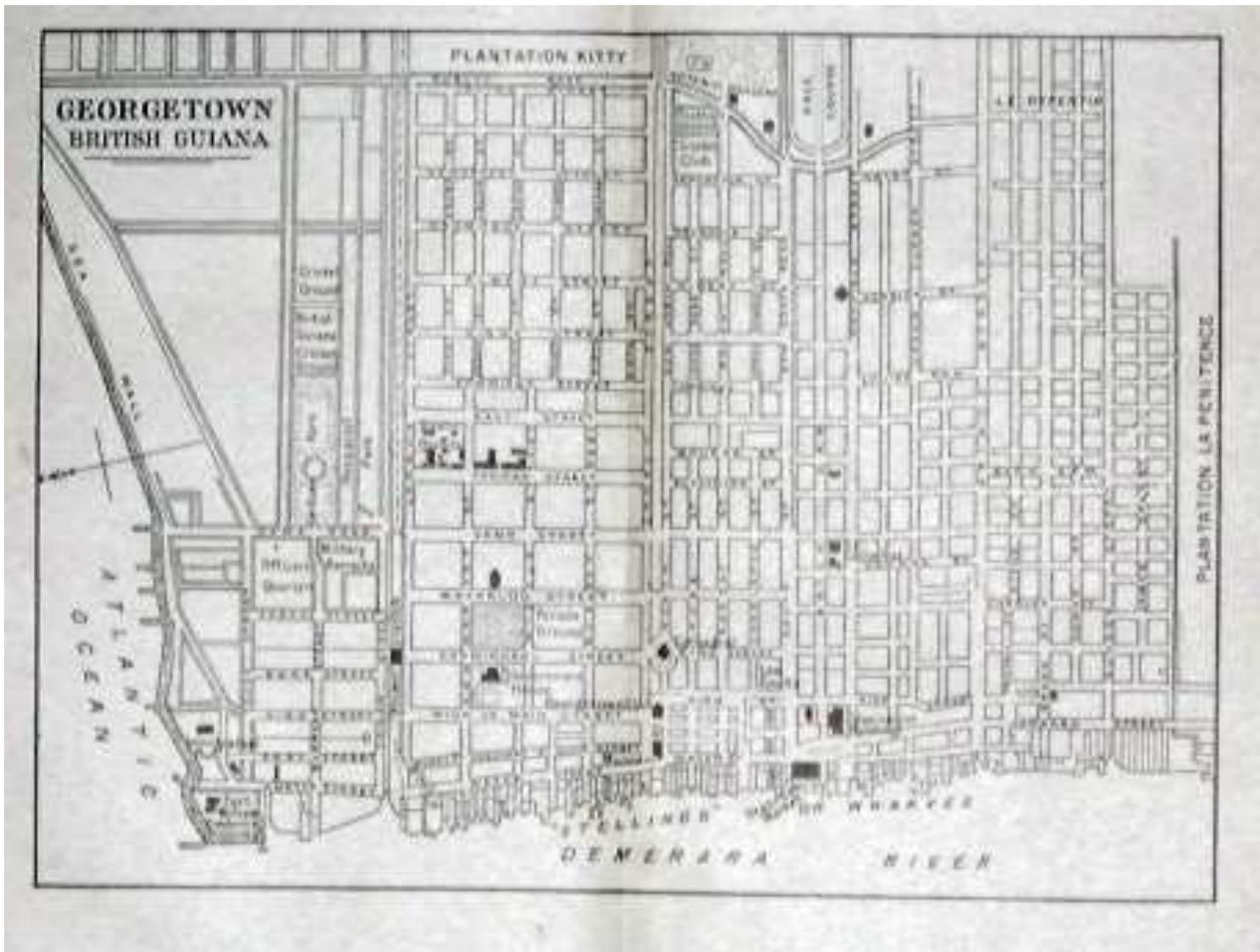
involve delineating the role of various movements, in response to environmental racism and injustice and how civic engagement and critical awareness play a part in possible preventative action, against the irresponsible municipal decisions made by the government and city council. These topic areas (or components) are all in connection to my research focus around the lived experiences of a marginalized, predominantly black community in Georgetown, Guyana, that has been and continues to be, subjected to environmental racism and injustice. Through a poststructuralist anti-racist framework, my interdisciplinary research approach required extensive analysis on socio-political history, oral history, economics, urban planning, post colonialism, civic engagement and activism. For me, these bodies of knowledge or disciplines are at once between, across and beyond each other and my goal is to understand them as a unification of knowledge within the context of environmental racism and injustice in Guyana, by fleshing out the ways in which the urban environment is constructed by and for, governing bodies and elites, in the context of spatial, historical, political, cultural and social understandings. In light of this quest, the pursuit was essentially to engage in effective and meaningful dialogue with the affected communities in question around civic engagement and creating a critical awareness of our environment.

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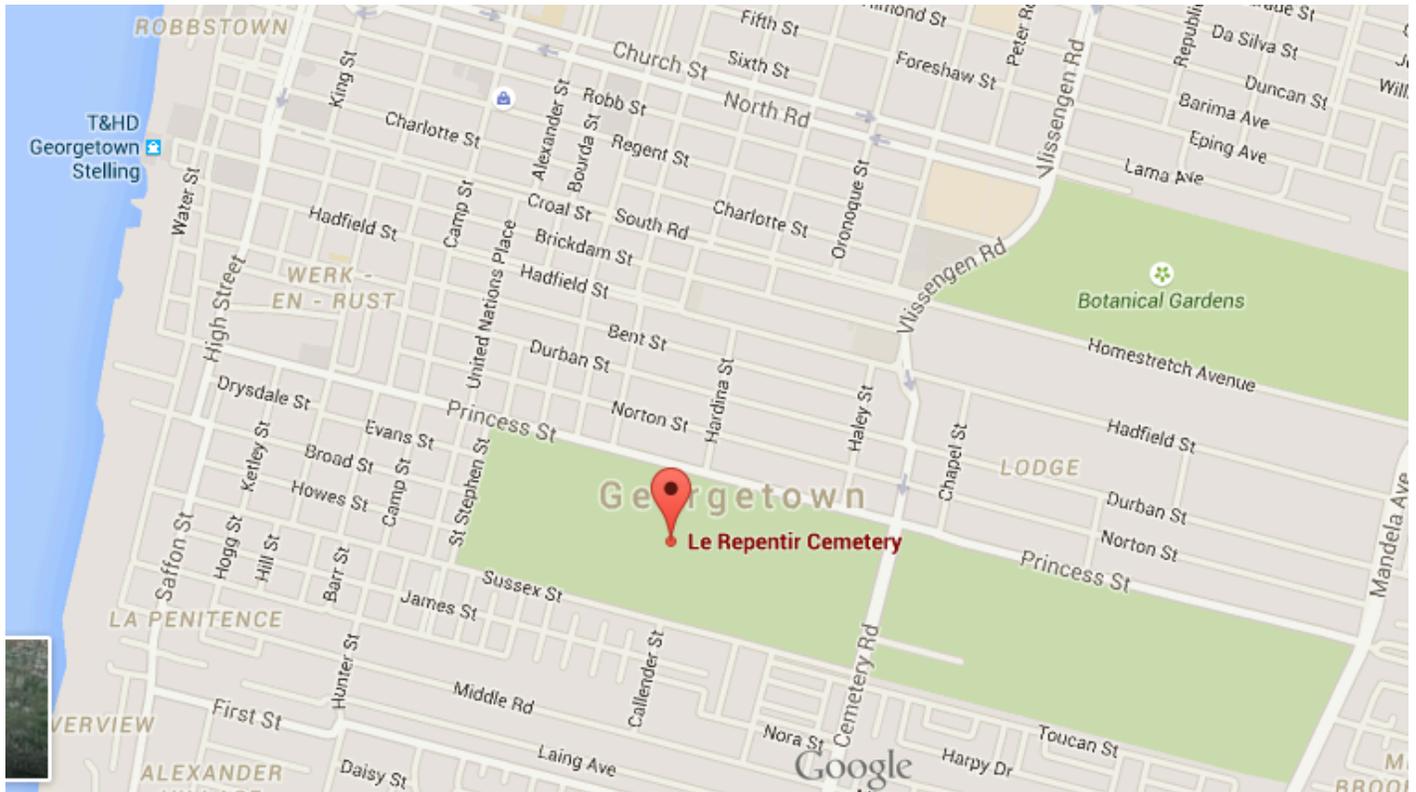
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## Maps



**Figure 1:** Image of an authentic map showing Georgetown, British Guiana in 1923. Le Repentir is seen in the top right corner of the map.

**Source:** Kauai Fine Arts: Antique Maps and Views from around the world. Retrieved from: <http://www.brunias.com/southamerica1.html>



**Figure 2:** Map showing Le Repentir Cemetery, Mandela Landfill Site and surrounding residential areas in Georgetown, Guyana.

**Source:** Google Maps, Snapshot photo taken by Chelsea Fung.



**Figure 3:** Google Satellite Image showing Le Repentir Cemetery & the old Mandela Landfill site which seemed to be smoking at the time that this image was taken.

**Source:** Image captured by Chelsea Fung on 2015-07-04 at 3:00.09 PM from Google Satellite Images.



**Figure 4:** Google Satellite Image showing a closer view of the Mandela Landfill site.

**Source:** Image captured by Chelsea Fung on 2015-07-04 at 3:02.27 PM from Google Satellite Images.

## **Introduction**

### ***Research Journey Beginnings***

I have lived the majority of my life in Guyana. I was born in England, and I have lived in Toronto for six years, gaining what many would perhaps describe as a ‘recognized,’ ‘respected,’ ‘conventional’ education. Nevertheless, I have spent my formative years and the majority of my life in Georgetown, Guyana, which I call home. As a Guyanese, I returned home two years ago with educated eyes and realized that the political landscape and the socio-economic climate that underlies its polluted state, is in almost as much distress as the ozone layer. My contention is that its consequent effects put an extreme burden on urban Guyanese minds and consciousness in relation to not only each other, but to their own land and space. Whilst exploring the Guyanese environmental consciousness or ‘consciousness’ over my first two semesters of the Environmental Studies master’s program, I shifted my own currents of thought to a particular urban community in Georgetown, Guyana, that borders a state-neglected cemetery (Le Repentir Cemetery) and an old landfill site (Mandela Landfill).

As a child living in Georgetown, Guyana, I would pass by Mandela Avenue every time I went to visit my grandfather. On Mandela Avenue there was an enormous landfill that was visible to the naked eye of the passerby: its nauseating stench was detected from a distance. Let alone to the daily horror of the communities living in the immediate environs of the ironically named ‘Mandela Landfill’. With my grandfather, I would also pass by the Le Repentir Cemetery and he would often despair the shamefully disgusting condition in which it was in and still is. We were both distraught when it became increasingly difficult to visit my cousin (his granddaughter) who is buried in such current, abhorrent surroundings. While being guided by D. Alissa Trotz during my Women & Gender Studies and Environment & Society program at the University of

Toronto, I crossed paths with her anecdotal commentary on the Mandela Landfill in her newspaper column, *In the Diaspora* (Alissa Trotz, January 17, 2011, “Playing Politics with People’s Lives: Something is Rotten in the State of Denmark”). Inspired by Trotz’s work, my contemplation grew around my feelings and memories of the Mandela Landfill and Le Repentir Cemetery and the fact that the communities proximate to these spaces, were being affected. The historical and continuous political neglect and deliberate targeting for toxic waste sites in black / Afro-Guyanese communities in Georgetown, have subsequently degraded these communities’ environments and their health and livelihood, which urged me to return to this site as an adult to investigate. The purpose of this research is for the people living in the East Le Penitence and Lodge communities, which are commonly referred to as ‘south of the burial ground’ (symbolic of the negative stereotypes of the people living closely to the cemetery) (Trotz, 2011), experiencing environmental racism and injustice and the brunt of social inequalities, to have their stories, experiences and voices heard.

My journey of thoughts and conversations was provoked by the ideas of a cosmology that was more or less unbeknownst to me – a cosmology of the Sacred. The journey of writing a book in 2011 for a University of Toronto undergraduate course, *Migrations of the Sacred*, taught by Professor M. Jacqui Alexander, a renowned Trinidadian author and feminist, evolved into a transformative experience for my own consciousness, as my research on just one plant, the woman-piaba, led to many revelations about my ancestral histories and cultural traditions, primarily through oral inquiry of narratives and knowledge from elders. My research allowed me to explore these types of knowledges that are not taught, learnt and most times not validated in spaces like the classrooms of a university.

I duplicated the methodology I deployed in my research on the Sacred and woman-piaba within a post structural anti-racist framework in my exploration of how a marginalised, predominantly black community in Georgetown, Guyana experiences environmental racism and injustice. The prevalence of urban land pollution in Guyana resulting from littering, garbage dumping in disenfranchised communities, the hapless and ineffective City Council and environmentally *consciousless* government, ignited my analysis of the experiences of environmental racism and injustice in urban Guyana. I believe that it is worth exploring this field of research in Guyana, as it constitutes a particularly different political and historical context that perpetuates colonial and racial divisions, despite its formally decolonised status. The Indo-Guyanese government of twenty-three years (1992-2015) had been carrying forth ‘colonial legacies’ (Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, 1997) that are now recast as geographic and racial divisions among the Indo and Afro-Guyanese people, which I argue, has a significant influence on decisions enacted by the state, such as decisions involving the erection of landfill sites in urban centres.

In this introduction to my major paper, I will firstly lay out the historical and contemporary context of race division in Guyana, which is necessary for discussions around environmental injustice/racism and bio/necropolitics. Thus the following section will introduce the theoretical concepts that I will be engaging – environmental (in)justice, environmental racism, biopolitics and necropolitics. I will then present how my research will contribute to the Lodge and Le Repentir communities and the environmental studies field. Finally, I will provide a layout of the study to map its components and structure.

### ***The Context of Race Conflict in Georgetown, Guyana***

The communities of Lodge and East La Penitence border a state-neglected cemetery (Le Repentir Cemetery) and an old landfill site (Mandela Landfill). The predominant ethnicity within the proximate communities is Afro-Guyanese (Guyanese of African decent) with a smattering of Indo-Guyanese (Guyanese of Indian decent) and other racially mixed persons. This is very much representative of the urban Guyanese reality and reveals how place and space have been colonially constructed and politically maintained. The entire country's population has traditionally been ethnically dominated by Indo-Guyanese but has been questioned as to its legitimacy in some quarters, such as the urban demographic, which has traditionally been dominated by Afro-Guyanese, and because of the deeply entrenched, racial division that existed and still exists in Guyana since colonialism. Reference to colonialism is important as social control during British colonisation, post-emancipation, was based on a variant relevant to its enterprise of 'divide and rule', in which different ethnic groups, who were already divided into independent villages (of emancipated African slaves and ex-indentured Indians, Chinese and Portuguese), "were afforded legally defined privileges controlling access to different economic sectors" (Pelling, 1999, p. 250).

Walter Rodney (1981) offers the roots of the colonial history in relation to the race question between Afro and Indo-Guyanese in his posthumously published work, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*. The specific time period that Rodney (1981) chose to document encompassed the struggles of the Guyanese working people in the height of the great depression which followed the collapse of sugar prices in 1884 until the riots of 1905 in which working class Guyanese, both African and Indian, man and woman, from urban and rural areas fought for higher wages from their colonial employers. Rodney's (1981) unconventional

contention was that the racial conflict between African sugar plantation workers and Indian indentured workers was much less evident than expected or exaggerated in other historical writings at the time given the way in which the two racial groups were deliberately “thrown into economic competition” (Rodney, 1981, p. 219). Rodney (1981) argued that the riots of 1905 illustrated his assertion of the recognised common interests between Africans and Indians, across race, class, gender and living and working quarters.

Predominantly a sugar plantation economy along the coast, British Guiana flourished cost-effectively by importing free labour from West Africa from the early nineteenth century until the abolition of slavery in 1834. With the abolition of slavery, the plantation economy was faced with a labour crisis due to ex-slaves demanding higher wages from planters (Rodney, 1981, p. 32). Thus, planters turned to indentured labour, starting with Portuguese, then Chinese and eventually from 1838 - 1843, East Indians, who thrived and formed the majority of indentured labourers in the plantation economy (Rodney, 1981, p. 32-33). The ex-slaves or Creole Africans sought work “away from the fields because most of the skilled and better –paid jobs were available in the factory” while the Indians endured hard working conditions and abuse, which made many of them believe that indentured labour was not much different from slavery (Rodney, 1981, p. 45). Following this, the working class society was constructed on the grounds of stereotypical connotations created by the planters in order to racially justify the hierarchy of labour whereby Indians, referred to as ‘Sammy’ (consequent to a lot of East Indian names ending in ‘Swamy’ or ‘Sammy’) who performed the most exhausting tasks were seen as hardworking, and Creole Africans, ‘Quashie’ (consequent to the first name on the list of Congo names) (Kirke, 1898, p. 240), were seen as too lazy to work on the fields (Rodney, 1981, p. 176). In the height of the great depression, Afro-Guyanese skilled workers were thrown out of work and more

Indian indentured labourers were imported, which required the reinforcement of the racial stereotypes of the lazy ‘Quashie’ and hardworking ‘Sammy’. In 1905, this operation of racial segregation failed as Afro-Guyanese and Indian indentured workers united and pursued violently to expunge their conditions of oppression and exploitation (Rodney, 1981, p. 179).

However, it was the Western imperialist forces that conspired to instigate a nationwide strike intent on removing the first democratically elected self-professed Marxist government in the Western Hemisphere led by the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) under the leadership of Premier Cheddi Jagan (of Indian decent) (Trotz, 2014, p. 2). The PPP government was subsequently removed and replaced by an Interim Legislative Council. In 1955, the PPP split into two factions – Cheddi Jagan remained leader of the PPP and Forbes Burnham, leader of the newly formed People’s National Congress (PNC) (Trotz, 2014, p. 2). Initially split along ideological lines, the two parties in competition for state power became increasingly dependent on support from Afro and Indo Guyanese (Trotz, 2014, p. 2). The resultant disturbances of violence, arson, rape and murder fuelled by politics, perhaps irrevocably divided the two races into permanent opposite camps, which forced Indo and Afro-Guyanese away from neighbours with whom they had shared bread, to conclaves almost exclusively dominated by their own race. This was evident in towns across Guyana and some of the wards within the capital city of Georgetown. The elections of 1964, racially homogenised the villages even further and not even political independence in 1966, fought for by both parties, was able to reunite the Guyanese people.

May 26, 1966 marked Guyana’s independence from colonial rule and the beginning of dictatorship driven by racial politics, the institutionalisation of corruption, concentration of power in the bourgeoisie, repression of political participation and suppression of revolutionary

ideas and attitudes (Swai, 1987, p. 122). As Fanon (1961) contends, “The economic channels of the young state sink back inevitably into neo-colonialist lines” (p. 166-167). What must be noted is that Forbes Burnham of the predominantly Afro-Guyanese PNC political party led this neocolonial dictatorship from 1964 until his death in 1985. The politically driven racial divisions were created in favour of the Afro-Guyanese, however, ultimately aiming to divide and weaken the working class people, to maintain power and sovereignty.

With the pivotal turn to electoral democracy in 1992, spatial and racial segregation was reinforced as political strategy rather than dissolved (Trotz, 2013). The political tables turned, as the predominantly Indo-Guyanese People’s Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) political party won the 1992 elections and remained in power for twenty-three years by strategically deepening the racial divisions between Afro and Indo-Guyanese. Working class Indo-Guyanese were granted with service and infrastructural provisions and middle class to upper class Indo-Guyanese with million dollar contracts and tax exemptions whilst all Afro-Guyanese were left on the side lines. Consequently, the capital city Georgetown, which is predominately populated with Afro-Guyanese, suffered with the lack of infrastructural developments in poor communities, pitiable waste management and overall social and economic exclusion. As Harold Lutchman (1970) suggests, “it is not unusual for ex-British colonies on achieving independence to fashion their political institutions after those of the Metropolitan country” (p. 97).

The complex political and social history of Guyanese outlined here will provide a background context to help make sense of my following discussions. In particular, around questions of environmental injustice experienced by a marginalised, predominantly black community in Georgetown, Guyana, I will now outline the methods employed to investigate the possible root causes of this injustice.

## ***Research Methodology***

Given the current distrust of authority and expert knowledge among many marginalized individuals and communities in Georgetown, my research approach employed a poststructuralist anti-racist methodology. This approach spoke to the expressive and oral cultures of these communities and featured the experiences, opinions and perspectives from residents with whom I had dialogue, during my field research activities in March 2015. These conversations were galvanized through semi-structured interviews, that is, interviews that are based on a general structure with a few main questions to allow the person being interviewed to have a fair degree of freedom in what to talk about, how much to say, and how to express it” (Drever, 1995, p. 7). Drever (1995) contends that semi-structured interviewing is a flexible technique for small-scale research, and has proven to be conducive to the oral and expressive culture of Guyanese and nature of this research topic. These interviews were then recorded, transcribed and analysed.

Field and participant observations, in which I walked the grounds of the Le Repentir Cemetery and the old Mandela Landfill as well as the bordering streets, Princess Street and North East Street were also conducted. From these field walks, I was able to spatially analyse the environment for further theoretical and practical discussions. These methods were accompanied by newspaper archive research to provide a historical and contemporary context of the Le Repentir Cemetery, Mandela Landfill and the affected proximate communities. The following will introduce my analysis of the consequent findings, which drew from the theoretical concepts of environmental injustice, environmental racism, biopolitics and necropolitics.

### ***Environmental (In)justice and Bio/Necropolitics***

Environmental injustices and environmental racism have always existed in Guyana, but they have not always been named or labelled as such (Rodway 1920; Westmass, 2005; de Barros, 2003; Trotz, 2011). Acknowledging that these are US-born concepts, my challenge was to theoretically and methodologically apply these concepts to the political and social context of environmental injustice in Guyana. Thus the approach to environmental injustice that I used in this research is informed by an understanding of the political, social and economic dimensions associated with the targeting of urban communities that are predominantly Afro-Guyanese for toxic waste facilities. Furthermore, I will engage with Michel Foucault's (2003) 'biopolitics' and Achille Mbembe's (2003) 'necropolitics' as these theories evidently have a particular purchase in the context of environmental injustice/racism whilst attending to 'politics over life and death' (Foucault, 1975-1976; Mbembe, 2003), they were used to investigate the current relationship between Guyana's central government, the City Council and the urban community in question, as reflected in the country's prevailing racial and political divisions, and the consequent environmental injustice.

The Indo-Guyanese Government (1992-2015) had a contentious political relation to the Mayor and City Council (MCC) of Georgetown as the Mayor, Mr. Hamilton Green (of African descent), had political alliances with the then oppositional party, which constituted predominantly Afro-Guyanese government officials and politicians. This antagonistic relationship that has spawned from racialised political differences, consequently manifested into an on-going political blame-game when it came to issues such as the neglected Le Repentir Cemetery, the old landfill and the affected proximate community. The Indo-Guyanese ruling

government strategically held the MCC accountable for the abandonment of the cemetery whilst depriving the council of sufficient funds for consistent and proper maintenance, with the underlying intent on proving that an opposition-led local council cannot govern. Meanwhile, the predominantly Afro-Guyanese residents of the proximate community continued to live alongside a cemetery being buried by overgrown trees and bush with insufficient drainage and an old landfill site in which garbage was and is still, being indiscriminately dumped by privately contracted waste disposal companies, consequently subjecting residents to the degradation of their physical health and well-being (Benschop, 2011). On the other hand, the lives of Indo-Guyanese are selectively maximized as they receive service and infrastructure provisions and benefits.

Within this context, this research study explored the ways in which Guyana, a contemporary sovereignty, deploys power to exercise control over the mortality of its citizens on the grounds of environmental injustices. Utilising these concepts in my research analysis, revealed that political power explicitly demonstrates who is invited into the realm of social life and who, instead, is confined to social death. My contention is that spaces/communities such as Le Repentir/‘south of the burial ground’ are admittedly experiencing environmental injustice/racism, (however, additionally) as a consequence of a necropolitical strategy. These spaces that are predominantly disenfranchised, black spaces/communities are not only subjected to unsanitary, disease-prone environmental conditions (environmental injustice) but also alienation, exclusion, and social death (necropolitics).

In order to fully understand the role that race and class play in relation to environmental injustices, I argue that a broader view of the politics of how the mortality of citizens is controlled and maintained is necessary to explain how the environmental injustice is produced in some

spaces and prevented in others. By bringing issues of biopolitics and necropolitics to bear on environmental (in)justice theory and practices, I hope to suggest new ways that environmental injustices can be conceived, identified, and investigated.

### ***Research Contributions***

Research on this topic is first and foremost crucial as the historical and continuous political neglect and deliberate targeting for toxic waste sites in black / Afro-Guyanese communities in Georgetown, have subsequently degraded these communities' environments and their health and livelihood. As previously mentioned, it is also worth exploring this field of research in Guyana, as it constitutes a particularly different political and historical context that perpetuates colonial and racial divisions, despite its formally decolonised status. While acknowledging that research has been done on environmental racism and injustice in North America, Europe, and other parts of the world, very few authors have focused on the Caribbean in general and Guyana in particular.

There is an acute shortage of research from a community perspective around the right to a clean environment, with clear drainage systems, clean air and other service and infrastructure provisions and benefits that have been regularly received in Indo-Guyanese communities. Within the Caribbean region, very few research studies have been done. David R. Dodman (2004) carried out a study on community perspectives on urban environmental problems, such as solid waste management and pollution, in Kingston, Jamaica. April Karen Baptiste (2008) evaluated socio-cultural impacts and effects on environmental awareness of rural communities in Nariva Swamp, Trinidad, which is in the vicinity of mining projects. However, in order to comparatively analyse similar studies across the Caribbean and North America, I will be engaging with these

works and others such as Cheryl Teelucksingh (2001) on racialised space and environmental justice in Toronto, Katherine McKittrick (2006) in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* and McKittick and Woods (2007) in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* analyses of space and place as deeply constructed through histories of colonialism and slavery then, and capitalism and criminalization now, Rachel Stein's (2004) "New Perspectives of Environmental Justice" and Mark Pelling's (2003) urban political ecology analysis on the vulnerability of Guyana's coastlands.

All of the above theorists, researchers and analysts discuss environmental racism and/or environmental injustice in some shape or form; however, the discussions and theorisations are either a microcosm of – or a differing context in relation to – my area of study. In this essence, it indicates the reason and necessity of my future work in connection to not only urban Guyana specifically but post-colonial urban environments globally as the knowledge around environmental racism and injustice in urban spaces, that is taught and learnt, is confined to a US/Canada-centric hermetic space that does not extensively explore post-colonial cities in the Caribbean, in relation to environmental justice.

There has also been a lack of research focused on engaging the voices of those subjected to environmental racism and injustice. This will be central to my research project, which aims to create space for these voices and lived experiences, in broader discussions around environmental racism and injustice. I am hoping that it may also be utilised as a resourceful tool, to hold the government accountable for human and environmental rights violations and that these perspectives could be useful to the community, local organisations who engage with environmental issues such as *Guyana Shines* and *Youths for Guyana*, and the Mayor & City

Council (MCC), in their efforts to address issues of environmental racism and injustice in Guyana.

### ***Layout of Study***

This major paper consists of five chapters inclusive of the Introduction. The first chapter outlines my methodology and theoretical discussions of environmental injustice and biopolitics and necropolitics, and explores how they intersect in the context of the Le Repentir Cemetery, old Mandela landfill and the affected proximate communities. The second chapter maps the history of Le Repentir and traces the series of events that have culminated in the community residents' subjection to a state neglected cemetery and an uncontrolled dumpsite. The third chapter features study's research findings, which include a spatial analysis of the area of study from field observation activities and residents' perspectives, opinions, and knowledge that was shared, from the semi-structured interviews that I conducted. In the fourth and final chapter I synthesize the research findings and conclusively put them in conversation with the theoretical discussions I engaged with. I also consider the implications for further activism and future research on environmental (in)justice in Georgetown, Guyana as well as other post-colonial urban environments globally.

## **Chapter 1: Methodology & Theoretical Discussions**

### ***Methodology***

This study employs a qualitative research analysis that is informed by a poststructuralist anti-racist framework. I chose this approach as it best suited my objective to gather a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of residents of the Lodge and East La Penitence communities with specific focus on persons residing on the streets that border the Le Repentir Cemetery and the old Mandela Landfill site. Two primary research questions guided my field research that was carried out during two field trips to Guyana. First, what are the lived experiences (past and current) of residents through their negotiation of their external environment, that is, an old landfill site and a state neglected cemetery? Second, how do community residents take action against, mobilise and/or resist environmental racism and social and structural inequalities? My research questions could have been investigated through a variety of methods, however, for the purpose of my study, my intention was to understand the historical trajectory of the community's relationship to the cemetery, landfill and any other urban community subjections to environmentally hazardous situations and explore the residents' lived experiences in an area that degrades their physical health and well-being. In order to fully grasp the environment of the residents, historically and presently, my qualitative research methods of collecting data on my field activities initially entailed participant and field observation, interviews, focus groups and newspaper archive review. However, during my fieldwork I decided against the focus groups, as the semi-structured interviewing method was so effective that I decided to continue solely with this technique, given the close positioning of the houses, the narrow streets and the residents being outdoors on weekends especially.

Given the current distrust of authority and expert knowledge among many marginalised individuals and communities in Georgetown, my research approach employed a poststructuralist anti-racist methodology that spoke to the expressive and oral cultures of these communities and centred their opinions, knowledge and experience in my research. In foregrounding this framework, my research attempted to provide a space for the voices of these marginalized communities and place significant value on the experiences of these individuals. The injustice experienced by residents is at the core of my research, but this does not mean that my goal is to investigate “the truth” of the situation as Barbara Fawcett (2008) describes in her definition of poststructuralism. My objective is to isolate the meanings of the knowledge and experiences of residents and put them into conversation with the relevant academic theoretical discussions. The idea that I hope is reflected in my research, is to build bridges between these differing knowledge pools, in order to provide a textual frame within which the voices of the residents are heard. Through this work, genuine dialogue transpired, words were listened to and understood, relationships were built and through this text, I anticipate that residents would be able to utilize it as another avenue or option to effect change. Following this, it must be noted that the thought process of intertwining the threads of activism and academia or creating an “activist scholarship” (Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey, 2009) pre-fieldwork has proven to be a romanticized vision that I learned and assimilated during my university experience, however, during my field research I began to recognise the tensions and “danger of producing an idealised vision of collaborative or antioppressive research” and I fully understood the gravity of what is at stake, when these two worlds collide post fieldwork.

As a middle class, mixed-race Guyanese young woman, as well as coming from a university other than the University of Guyana and engaging with residents mostly from a

different ethnic background, I had to be very aware of my own positionality. The concept of 'positionality' has been driven by feminist discourse and is often read alongside Donna Haraway's (1988) articulation of "situated knowledges". It is understood as the acknowledgement of the dynamics of who we are (in relation to race, gender, class, nationality, sexuality), and how our social locations affect our viewpoints and the knowledges that we are able to produce. Accordingly, all knowledge claims are partial perspectives. Haraway (1988) asserts, "[p]ositioning implies responsibility for our enabling practices" (p. 587). Therefore, as a researcher, one must take into account and reflect upon one's relationship to one's research subjects, and ground one's whole self throughout one's research journey.

As a student of and advocate for this approach, I chose to interrupt the conventional disembodied research perspective and drew from what Paulo Freire (1970) and Jacqui Alexander (2005) refer to as a 'self reflexive praxis'. Thus I allowed my positionality to be centred within the context of my research. This afforded a constant awareness and assessment of myself regarding my own contribution and influence during my research process and the findings that it enabled me to generate. It allowed me to assume a self-conscious analytical enquiry of my self as a researcher, which subsequently led to insights and new hypotheses about my research questions.

In addition, I extended this praxis with the theoretical understandings of Freire's (1970) conceptualization of 'dialogue' as a conversation among equals that can raise critical consciousness of reality and "challenge domination". Freire (1970) asserts that dialogue can only be effectual if it is paired with critical thinking and in turn critical thinking will extend itself to transformation. With this, dialogue and conversations seemed to be a convincingly appropriate method to configure the grounds of my primary research that I conducted in Georgetown,

Guyana. Combining the learning experiences with dialogue from my fieldwork with the theoretical understandings of dialogue, allowed me to grasp the ways in which dialogue cannot only produce knowledge, but also create a critical consciousness of other people's realities of oppression and my own. Freire (1970) states, "dialogue cannot exist in the absence of profound love for the world and for people...No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation" (p. 89). This is a powerful truth that addresses the importance of one's own psyche and heart (if you will) in relation to effectively dialoguing with others. Freire (1970) also discusses the necessity of humility, faith, hope and critical thinking and argues that if dialoguers do not internalize or already have these key attributes, true dialogue cannot exist. Similarly, Margaret Ledwith and Jane Springett (2010) theorise the necessity of attaining a participatory worldview in order to change the world. They convincingly argue, "relationships within the self, between people and with nature lies at the heart of the participatory worldview that underpins participatory practice for community development as a practice for human and environmental wellbeing" (p. 59). Fragmentation and alienation created by western worldviews, does not allow for us to participate with the rest of the world, it only allows us to participate in it. As Ledwith and Springett (2010) further emphasise, "instead of seeing the world as something out there, we need to view ourselves as embodied participants of a greater whole, and thereby become more responsive" (p. 62). From these insightful and transformative writings, the aim of my field research was to develop a genuine relationship of humility accompanied by a mutual process of discovery and 'critical reflection and action' (Freire, 1970). Thus, I tried as best as possible to employ a model of 'dialogical' research whereby as researcher I was not as much studying environmental racism and injustice in Georgetown, but actually engaging with and learning from affected residents and activists. As

Jin Haritaworn (2008), in their methodological reflections, draw from Ann Phoenix's (1994) contemplation around the researcher/participant relationship. Haritaworn (2008) articulates that "participants are not merely raw, pre-theoretical sources of 'experience', but active producers of their own interpretations, which compete with those of the researcher" (para. 2.4). However, it must be acknowledged that "this competition does not occur on a level playing field, and the researcher has the last word at the stage of analysis" (Haritaworn, 2008, para. 2.4).

Dani Wadada Nabudere (2008), in "Research, Activism, and Knowledge Production", similarly draws on Freire's (1972) pedagogy and participatory action research approach. Nabudere (2008), quite succinctly, speaks directly to the guidelines that I followed throughout my research: "Key to both Freire's pedagogy and participatory action research is the sequence of action, reflection, questioning, researching hunches, drawing conclusions, evaluating options, and planning further action based on the learning that has been generated" (p. 70). This "spiralling sequence" warrants control over the investigatory learning process and disrupts the "participant/observer" dichotomy (Nabudere, 2008, p.70).

### ***In the Field***

My first field activity was conducted in Georgetown, Guyana from July 1 - August 15, 2014. During this first visit, I conducted preliminary field research work, which included building a rapport with the Lodge and East Le Penitence residents and conducting research on the literature around spatialised and racialised environmental injustice. It must be noted that during this preliminary fieldwork, I was introduced through friends, family and my social network in Guyana, to residents and activists, who became key participants in my research. The advantages to this approach are obvious, as it allowed me to connect with residents immediately

and trust was speedily built by our mutual association. However, there are definite limitations to this approach, as the dialogue between these participants and myself was not only affected by outside sources (literary or oral), but by our social relationship as well. Opinions and perceptions could have been altered or held back by participants in fear of confidentiality being broken with our mutual association. More on this will be discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to participants.

A professor of the University of Guyana, Mellissa Ifill, who specializes in sociology and whose interest lies with environmental and social issues supervised this work. Mellissa was extremely helpful in the initial steps of my field research as she provided me with contact information for key community activists, who had been involved in the activism around the removal of the Mandela Landfill site in 2010, such as Charlene Wilkinson, who is an activist and resident of East La Penitence. I was able to interview Charlene on Thursday, July 10, 2014 at the University of Guyana and had a fruitful conversation with regards to her own lived experiences as well as the ways in which she initiated the activism. At the end of the interview, Charlene generously provided me with relevant articles, letters and other information regarding the Mandela landfill removal campaign. This included contact numbers of the residents who willingly shared their information on the petition. Charlene also shared a contact number of a student of hers who lives in Lodge and who she thought would be interested in talking to me. The next day, Friday July 11, I called the student and had an insightful conversation with regard to the ideas around my work and what I planned to do on my second trip early in the next year to engage with residents on the prevalent issues concerning their environment. The student shared her willingness to keep in contact with me upon my return to conduct interviews. Through a ‘snowballing’ process, which Spradley (1979) and other research methodologists define as connecting with other residents through established contacts, I began to talk and meet with

residents from the communities, engage in light discussions about my work and arranged interviews for my second field research trip in March 2015.

During my first trip, I was also introduced to an employee of a friend (Kevon), who lives on what the residents refer to as North East Street, but is supposedly Toucan Street according to the city's maps (this being a symbolic aspect of our unique "naming" culture, that is, the Guyanese inclination to give a name other than the original name to anything or any person). North East Street forms the northern bordering street of the Le Repentir Cemetery and old Mandela landfill site. I met with Kevon on Sunday, July 27 in the afternoon around 4:30 and we began walking and chatting 'off the record' about varying issues around politics, work and daily life in Guyana. During our walk I was able to briefly meet a few other residents that Kevon knew and mentioned my work to them, as well as explain that I was coming back in a few months to conduct further research. This preliminary field activity paved the way for what I would deem as a very successful field research trip in March 2015, where I interviewed twenty-six (26) residents from both Princess Street and North East Street. These interviews were all conducted informally as I talked with residents, who were key participants, such as Kevon, and informally approached other residents known and not known by these key participants. I orally asked for their consent to participate in the study, as well as asked permission to record the conversations. During these conversations I made notes of significant information in case of any malfunctioning of the recordings. After conducting all the interviews, I transcribed and analysed the experiences, opinions and perceptions that residents expressed and I subsequently identified common themes among the responses to questions as opposed to structuring themes within the interview questions, with the exception of the question of environmental health impact which was asked directly (see Appendix).

In the course of my second field research trip to Guyana in March 2015, my fieldwork not only entailed conducting informal semi-structured interviews with residents, but also walking the grounds and observing the space, and newspaper archive research. I first walked the grounds of the Le Repentir cemetery, the old Mandela landfill and the bordering streets, Princess Street and North East Street, by myself in order to observe the space and observe the ways in which residents live and interact with their external environment. Observations consisted of recording field notes on the residents and their surroundings in which I assumed a “low-key role”, as Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest in *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, so that I have the opportunity to watch and record my observations whilst minimizing any influence on what was happening (p. 26). The second, third and fourth time that I revisited the community, I walked with Kevon, Lawrence (an employee of another friend that resides in Lodge) and Aunty Marva (mother of my mother’s friend). During these interviews I was able to collect oral histories and stories from residents and was very appreciative of having the opportunity to engage with elders who have lived in the community over a longer period of time.

With Kevon, I was able to walk on North East Street, where he introduced me to residents that he knew and I was able to interview them. They became “key informants” in my fieldwork experience, that is, individuals who engaged in genuine dialogue with me in which they openly shared their lived experiences (Spradley, 1979, p. 79). With Lawrence, I walked both Princess Street and the grounds of the Le Repentir Cemetery and the old Mandela landfill. I interviewed a few residents that day, but mostly walked the cemetery and climbed the landfill, which is now covered in vegetation and looks like a hill. Aunty Marva who lives in a community nearby also walked with me on Princess Street, as she knew a person that lived there. The person was not home at the time, however, we spoke to other residents who were outside in their yards

and also spoke to a shop owner, with whom we have mutual friends, but did not know this fact until fifteen minutes into our conversation! I also conducted interviews with residents that had a research relationship with the Red Thread Women: Crossroads Women's Centre, which is a grassroots women's organization that was involved in the activism around the Mandela landfill removal. These residents were mobilizers of the Mandela landfill removal and prepared a petition that was sent to the EPA with 596 signatures from the communities around the Mandela landfill (Trotz, 2011).

The explicit purpose of my interviews was to understand the lived experiences of residents through their negotiation of their external environment, that is, an old landfill site and a state neglected cemetery. Thus the choice to employ a semi-structured type of interviewing style, allowed interviewees freedom to share and express their opinions and experiences which gave rise to new ideas that were brought up during the interviews as a result of what the interviewees expressed (Drever, 1995). The details of my research purpose were discussed with residents before commencing interviews. Explanations that involved documenting specific stories and tape recording the interview were also relayed to residents as it facilitated transparency and enhanced the rapport built between the residents and myself. At the end of each day, I also noted observations and informal conversations with residents in my notebook.

In the case of my study, the reality of relations of power between community residents and myself was very evident and this was an important part of my work that I contemplated before, during and after my field research. One important factor was speaking in Guyanese Creole or "creolese" as we would say in Guyana. This was certainly something that I was cognizant of during my field research as I know that I was raised and schooled in Guyana with variations of our dialect, however, it was definitively evident that the way in which I dialogued

with residents marked the relations of power between myself and them. In my accounts of residents' experiences and perspectives, I equated residents' use of the terms "on our street", "in the area" or "this place" with notions of community, as the term "community" is not commonly used in urban Guyana and these terms may refer more to a common geographical area rather than the shared identity and values included in the term "community".

The difference in socioeconomic status was another marker that I had to negotiate and contemplate through my research journey. I followed the suggestions of Lyons et al. (2013) in "Qualitative Research as Social Justice Practice with Culturally Diverse Populations" which stated that in order to conduct research that addresses these markers, one must maintain an "alignment with an objective of social justice" and should "attend to and solicit participants' perceptions of research before, during and after data collection, consider potential benefits and negative consequences of the research and consider the practical utility of the project by involving community members in decisions about applications of the results" (p. 13). I discussed the feelings and opinions around the meaning and/or understanding of 'research' with residents and gained interesting knowledge of differing ideas and perceptions of the concept and process. I tried my best to include the voices and perceptions of community residents in every aspect of my research and to increase the level of responsibility and participation of the community in the process, avoiding as much as possible the problem of "speaking for others" as Linda Alcoff (1991) discusses in "The Problem of Speaking for Others". Similarly, Haritaworn (2008) conveyed this methodological challenge of "unmuffling marginalised voices" without making their words your own in their methodological reflections and guarded that self-reflexivity must be assumed in order to avoid possibilities of exploitation and appropriation (para. 3.6).

Finally, as part of my fieldwork, I reviewed local newspaper articles, primarily from the *Stabroek News* (generally considered the most informed and respected newspaper in Guyana), that addressed the Le Repentir Cemetery, the Mandela Landfill site and the affected proximate community. I found articles from 1989 to present that provided information and perspectives of residents of Lodge and East Le Penitence, other citizens and political leaders, municipal councillors and the like. Newspaper archives also provided information of how the layout and organization of the city was envisioned from 1989 and enacted by successive municipal governments. This also gave insight into the ways in which it has impacted communities and cityscapes.

During my newspaper archive search, I unearthed information about the developments of the Le Repentir Cemetery before it was inundated by garbage and it was emotionally interesting to discover that my grandfather, who I knew was once Deputy Mayor of Georgetown, had a vested interest in the cleanliness of the city and the environments of all urban Guyanese. During his term (1990-1994), the decision was made to erect the landfill on unused grounds at the Le Repentir Cemetery as a demonstration landfill site for a maximum of two years until a more suitable site could be located. The fact that I found this information that is just historical information to others, but personal to me, brought my emotions to the fore as my grandfather passed away less than two years ago. If I had known this information while he was alive and well, I would have been able to interview him! Fate, kismet, whatever one would name this ultimate coincidence, created an emotional dilemma for me and caused me to halt research and reflect, as my entire childhood was steeped in the love of and interactions with, my grandfather. Proceeding with my research, I was again dismayed to learn of missing newspaper records in the archives around the period of time that the landfill was erected, which created gaps in my

knowledge of the series of events. To know that this was the precise time of my grandfather's position as Deputy Mayor and that he could have filled these gaps with personal knowledge was difficult. However, this was salvaged somewhat by conversations with Deborah Lewis from the Public relations Department of the City Council, who was not only informative, but knew of and worked with, my grandfather.

The archive research also revealed that for twenty-five years there has been a culture of blame in the discourse of the Council, albeit between the Mayor and the Council, a new Mayor and a previous council or recently, the Mayor and City Council versus the previous government appointed Town Clerk and the Minister responsible for Local Government. Whilst the predominant discourse has been one of blame from 1989 to present, the city has suffered extensively from inadequate drainage, insufficient garbage collection and an abhorrently inefficient and ill-conceived waste management system, resulting in the seventeen-year "temporary" landfill site on Mandela Avenue.

### ***Theoretical Discussions***

As outlined before, my primary objective in this study was to create space for the voices and lived experiences of Georgetown residents who are subjected to hazardous environments, such as the Mandela Landfill Site, within broader discussions around environmental racism and injustice. While acknowledging that research has been done on environmental racism and injustice in North America, Europe, and other parts of the world, very few authors have focused on the Caribbean in general and Guyana in particular. It is worth exploring this field of research in Guyana, as it constitutes a particularly different political and historical context that perpetuates colonial and racial divisions, despite its formally decolonized status. The Indo-Guyanese ruling

government of twenty-three years had been carrying forth colonial legacies, that are now recast as geographic and racial divisions among the Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese people. Thus my final two research questions that invite theoretical analyses are 1) What is the role of the state in shaping and constraining the environmental consciousness of marginalised urban communities? and 2) Within this context of racism and colonialism, what do the findings from this research teach us about these overarching systems of oppression? To address these questions, the concepts of environmental racism and injustice are employed in this research, in addition to the theoretical understandings of Michel Foucault's (2003) 'biopolitics' and Achille Mbembe's (2003) 'necropolitics' to aid in the discussions of my findings. I must note that my approach will steer away from the deconstructive analytical aspect of poststructuralist methodology. I will not attend to any tensions around representational claims or essentialism that may or may not exist in the discursive texts that I have chosen to apply in my research (Fawcett, 2008). I will add to or build on rather than break down what theorists of bio/necropolitics and environmental justice have documented in order to thoroughly put the pieces of the unjust puzzle together.

### ***Environmental (In)justice***

Since the mid-nineteenth century, environmental concerns were only focused on the human impact on nature (Taylor, 2000, p. 522) until the first documented person to question manmade environmental impacts on humans, Rachel Carson (1962, 1963). Carson interrogated industry and government practices regarding the use of pesticides and other chemicals and the ways in which it was impacting humans (Taylor, 2000). Moreover, Carson (1962) transformed the environmental framing of the environmental justice movement by investigating human

health, corporate-community relations and government-community relations in her renowned book *Silent Spring* (Taylor, 2000 p. 522). Consequently, the environmental justice movement gained many more supporters (Taylor, 2000) and advocates such as Benjamin Chavis.

Benjamin Chavis, African American civil rights leader, coined the term “environmental racism” in 1982 and defined it as:

racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the presence of life threatening poisons and pollutants in communities of color, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the environmental movement (Cutter 1995, p. 112).

Building on Chavis, Andil Gosine and Cheryl Teelucksingh’s (2008) *Environmental Justice and Racism in Canada: An Introduction*, outline that Chavis as head of the United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice co-authored the report *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States* in 1987 where he elaborated the term ‘environmental racism’. Gosine and Teelucksingh (2008) state that:

The commission found racial identity to be the strongest variable in predicting where landfills were located in the United States, and thus defined the term ‘environmental racism’ as the intentional siting of hazardous waste sites, landfills, incinerators and polluting industries in areas inhabited mainly by Blacks, Latinos, Indigenous peoples, Asians, migrant farm workers and low-income peoples (in the United States) (p. 4).

The term ‘environmental justice’ simultaneously grew in its understandings in the late 1980s and its implications became widely accepted (Gosine and Teelucksingh, 2008). The 17 Principles of Environmental Justice was thereafter drafted and adopted at the First National People of Color

Environmental Leadership Summit held in Washington, DC in 1991 (Gosine and Teelucksingh, 2008). Gosine and Teelucksingh (2008) contend that environmental justice involves a range of social movements, including “anti-racism movements, Aboriginal rights and sovereignty movements, labour union movements, and the mainstream environmental movement” and is the “broad goal that incorporates the more narrowly defined problem of environmental racism” (p. 11). The environmental movement’s inclusion of a consideration of socioeconomic status of people in affected communities has given rise to the here preferred term “environmental injustice”, Susan Cutter (1995) states in her article, “Race, class and environmental injustice”, which encompasses classism, racism and sexism evident within environmental conflicts such as the Mandela landfill site issue. For the purposes of this study and its finding, I will consider the term “environmental (in)justice” as a means to describe environmental injustice that not only includes all types of oppression but acknowledges the justice that was fought within the specific context of the unjust Mandela Landfill site in Georgetown, Guyana. Given that environmental racism and environmental injustice are politicized concepts from the US, I attempted to establish their applicability to the political, socioeconomic and historical reality in Guyana. This project explored the purchase of these concepts in the different context of racial and political divisions in Guyana, which have been historically developed between descendants of colonized enslaved Africans and colonized indentured East Indians. Despite these historical differences, these concepts allowed me to theorise the issue in question, in order to understand the political, social and economic dimensions associated with the targeting of urban communities that are predominantly Afro-Guyanese.

The literature that I researched allowed me to further grasp the conceptual and theoretical understanding of environmental racism and environmental (in)justice. Gosine and Teelucksingh

(2008) consider the systemic and institutionalized racism in Canada, experienced by indigenous and other non-white people, which they contend subsequently limits the ability of Canadians (and others) to discuss the negative experiences (bodies, communities and educational experiences) of living racialised lives. They argue that environmental racism is part and parcel of this process and sometimes becomes overshadowed and silenced as it is embedded in systemic institutional practices in Canada, “which on the surface may not appear to involve racism at all” (Gosine and Teelucksingh, 2008, p. 47). Michael Gelobter (1993) outlines in ‘The Meaning of Urban Environmental Justice’ that environmental injustice is “a three-dimensional nexus of economic injustice, social injustice and an unjust incidence of environmental quality, all of which overwhelmingly assures the continued oppression of communities of colour and low-income communities on environmental matters” (p. 842). He also contends that cities in the late twentieth century played a crucial role in our ideologies and organization of social space (Gelobter, 1993). This was validated in the case of Georgetown as significant decisions were made during this period regarding municipal space and were evident in the articles that I unearthed during my newspaper archive review outlined in Chapter 2. Rachel Stein (2004) inserts a gender perspective in the introduction to her collection, *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism*. She asserts that the environmental justice movement’s definition of environment as “we where we live, work, play, and worship” (p. 1) is more inclusive of human/natural interaction and brings environmental issues home, literally, and “makes it clear that environmental injustice includes a range of urban and rural issues that expose poor communities and communities of colour to unfair risks and burdens” (p. 2). “We view our bodies as “homes,” “lands,” or “environments”, Stein contends, and these bodies have been “placed at risk, stolen from us, and even killed due to social or physical harms

that may be exacerbated due to our gender and sexuality – we may understand the need for new perspectives on environmental justice that encompass such factors within our analysis.” (p. 2).

Stein (2004) argues:

Environmental justice activists and scholars have established that environmental justice organizations are composed of poor people and people of colour, working to protect their communities, however, another aspect of grassroots environmental justice movements that has received far too little attention is that women, primarily women of colour and working-class women, compose approximately 90 percent of the active membership of many organizations. Because environmental ills strike home for vulnerable communities, and because women have often been responsible for that domain, women engage in these movements in order to protect and restore the well-being of families and communities threatened by environmental hazards or deprived of natural resources needed to sustain life and culture (p. 2).

Keeping with this assertion, women were at the forefront of the grassroots activism that evolved from within the communities affected by the Mandela landfill in propelling the organizing and mobilization of community members in 2010. Within the framework that Stein (2004) is putting forth, the growth of activism of these women would be seen as a consequence of the severe constraints on their families’ livelihood options, for which they are essentially responsible. According to the colonial, political and social laws of gender, these women have to guarantee subsistence and the health of their families as an integral part of their responsibility of caring work.

Environmental injustice, however, needs even further contemplation I believe, as parallels need to be drawn with traumas of the past to understand the injustice of the present. Katherine McKittrick (2006) in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* and McKittick and Woods (2007) in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*

theorise space and place as deeply constructed through histories of colonialism and slavery then, and capitalism and criminalization now, manifested in what she calls ‘black geographies’. McKittrick (2006) sees past and present black geographies as “connective sites of struggle” (p. xviii). Black subjects being historically dehumanized, rendered invisible and expendable, provides easier grounds for the justification of injustice as these black geographies have become increasingly normalized and naturalized as sites of peripheral invisibility (McKittrick, 2006), such as ‘south of the burial ground’. Cheryl Teelucksingh (2001) in her dissertation *In Somebody’s Backyard: Racialized Space and Environmental Injustice in Toronto (Canada)* similarly addresses “both racialization and the inherent spatiality of environmental justice concerns” and utilizes her own term that she labels ““environmental racialization” as a means to describe environmental injustices that include racialization” (p. 4). Environmental racism, argues Robinson (2000), “is a new manifestation of historic racial oppression. It is merely "old wine in a new bottle"” (para. 6).

### ***The Bio/Necropolitics of Environmental (In)justice***

As mentioned, this study also engages with the concepts of biopolitics and necropolitics. These concepts allowed me to unearth a conceptual understanding of the ways in which Guyana, a contemporary sovereignty, deploys power to exercise control over the mortality of its citizens on the grounds of environmental injustices. The predominantly Afro-Guyanese residents of the proximate community, continue to live alongside a cemetery being buried by overgrown trees and bush, with insufficient drainage and an old landfill site in which garbage is still being dumped by privately contracted waste disposal companies, consequently subjecting residents to

the degradation of their physical health and well-being (Benschop, 2011). On the other hand, the lives of Indo-Guyanese were selectively maximised as they receive service and infrastructure provisions and benefits.

From my findings, I would argue that the PPP (Indo-Guyanese) led Government of Guyana (1992-2015) relentlessly constructed and maintained social inequalities through, on the one hand, the provision of service and infrastructural provisions within Indo-Guyanese communities and, on the other, measures that resulted in marginalisation and abandonment in Afro-Guyanese communities. Within this context, political power explicitly demonstrates who is invited into the realm of social life and who, instead, is confined to social death, which calls my attention to the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics. Biopolitics signifies the social and political power, and control of a sovereign state over the life and death of its citizens, in which the objective of ‘biopower’ is essentially to “make live and let die” (Foucault, 1975-1976). Disciplines of the body and regulations of the population marked the beginning of an era of “bio-power” during the classical period (Foucault, 1981). Disciplines that evolved included, but were not limited, to universities, workshops, public health, housing and migration (Foucault, 1981, p. 140). Thus an abundance of techniques for subjugation of bodies and population control subsequently developed which established the activation of “bio-power” (Foucault, 1981, p. 140). According to Foucault (1981), biopower is “a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (p. 138).

However, Foucault places emphasis on regimes inscribing bodies through the utilization of disciplinary technologies to exercise sovereignty, which was relevant for the era of the late eighteenth century that he was referring to but in the contemporary context of neoliberalism and capitalism we see the power of sovereignty exercised through the creation of zones of death,

where mass destruction, and living death become the dominant logics (Mbembe, 2003). Achille Mbembe (2003) offers necropolitics/necropower as an alternative to biopolitics/biopower to address contemporary regimes and state control that exercise domination through “social death”, that is, a concept coined by Orlando Patterson (1982) that spawns from the power relations underpinning the institution of slavery and explicates “the permanent violent domination [by slave masters] of natively-alienated and generally dishonoured persons [slaves]” (p. 13, *insertion mine*). The politics of death is operationalised by way of the sovereign-like authority acquired by the slave master, through ritually and institutionally, reconstituting the slave’s social existence into one that is representative of exclusion, dehumanization and ultimately social death (Patterson, 1982). In relation to this, Mbembe (2003) takes up Foucault’s labelling of the term ‘racism’. As claimed by Mbembe (2003), Foucault’s (1975-1976) conceptualization of racism connotes that control operates in the presupposition of “the distribution of human species into groups, the subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the establishment of a biological caesura between the ones and the others” (p. 17). Mbembe (2003) builds on this by asserting:

That race (or for that matter racism) figures so prominently in the calculus of biopower is entirely justifiable. After all, more so than class-thinking (the ideology that defines history as an economic struggle of classes), race has been the ever present shadow in Western political thought and practice, especially when it comes to imagining the inhumanity of, or rule over, foreign peoples (p. 17).

How race and racism configure into the biopower and subsequent necropolitics framework speaks to my contention that black spaces/communities such as Le Repentir/‘south of the burial ground’ are admittedly experiencing environmental injustice/racism, (however, additionally) as a consequence of a necropolitical strategy, that is, a strategy that is directed by the state and is aimed to create “zones of death” (Mbembe, 2003). Drawing on Mbembe’s (2003)

notion “topographies of cruelty” and Elizabeth Povinelli’s (2011) notion of “economies of abandonment”, Haritaworn et.al (2013) draw attention to the spatial workings of life and death in “zones of abandonment”. Their discussion takes into account the unexpected or (in)visible sites of death in which people (or subjects) are alienated, socially excluded and ultimately left to die (p. 8). Haritaworn et.al (2013) assert, “In these zones of social abandonment, social inclusion is realized through practices of ‘letting die’, that is, through dying in abandonment (p. 8). Within this realm of the necropolitical, sovereignty is distinguished as the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not (Mbembe, 2003).

Patricia Ticineto Clough and Craig Willse (2011), in their book collection *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death*, gather essays that also mobilize Foucault’s theory of biopolitics in the analysis of governance of life and death while extending its application to studies of “policing of migration, military occupation, blood trades, financial markets, the war on terror, mass death, media ecologies, branding, and the production of political memory and amnesia” (p. 2).

To conclude, this research draws on multiple methods - a newspaper archive review, semi-structured interviews and participant and field observation – in order to contribute to the growing pool of studies on biopolitics, necropolitics and environmental (in)justice, particularly as they pertain to non-western contexts such as Guyana. As discussed, I have particularly been interested in exploring the applicability of concepts such as biopolitics and necropolitics, which help explain the relationship between governance, sovereign power and life and death, with the politics of life and death that have played out in urban Guyana. I also wanted to keep an open mind about alternative frameworks, including ones that have emerged from Guyana itself, as I will discuss next. In the chapters that follow, I will further examine the link between the landfill,

the cemetery and the neglected proximate communities. I will explore the possible triggers and/or motivations that would have put the waste and the 'wasted' socially (and literally) dead in the same vicinity. If there was a coded message, I will decipher it.

## **Chapter 2: News on Le Repentir Cemetery and Mandela Landfill Site**

In this chapter, I will map the history and historical events that preceded the current Lodge and East Le Penitence community that is lumped with the cemetery and dumped with old garbage. I have captured this history from a few documents salvaged from our colonial past and our more recent history from newspaper archives. I will trace these events, from colonialism to present, to provide context for Chapter 3, which will consider the conversations had with the residents of Lodge and East Le Penitence during my fieldwork.

### ***Colonial Le Repentir***

Georgetown has historically had contentious issues with the disposal of waste. As the town began to urbanise in the late eighteenth century during the early years of British colonisation, the population increased, road-building expanded, the printing press was established and plantation owners began to sell their land to the government in order to develop the town. Eventually, by the early nineteenth century, the town expanded and covered the estates of Vlissengen, La Bourgade (now known as Cummingsburg), Eve Leary to the North, and Werk-en-rust and La Repentir to the South (see Figure 1) (Munro, 2006, para. 1). With this expansion and increasing development of the town, the disposal of waste and sanitation proved to be a contentious issue with the local political and economic elites (De Barros, 2003, 65-67).

The accounts of Georgetown by James Rodway (resident at the time) and Robert Shomburgk (temporary sojourner at the time) discussed the poor sanitation of the city as outlined in de Barros' research, and according to Juanita de Barros (2003) in "Sanitation and Civilisation in Georgetown, British Guiana", throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century,

Georgetown has been widely considered a “cesspool city” (p. 65). De Barros (2003) extended that “the narrow city streets were chronically untidy, filled with yard refuse. The canals that bisected the city – necessary to drain the low-lying coastal plain upon which Georgetown is located – and the drains running alongside the streets were rubbish-filled and odorous, the smell inescapable” (p. 66). All of which caused frequent epidemics, primarily yellow fever epidemics (de Barros, 2003).

What De Barros (2002, 2003) submits is that over the period of 1889-1924, a sanitarian discourse developed, which represented a dynamic relationship between sanitation, disease and racist perceptions. In *Order and Place in a Colonial City*, De Barros (2002) investigates the conflicting visions of public areas held by local political and economic elites and by the non-white urban poor in Georgetown, demonstrating that the period of study was marked by class and racial tensions as the social and political landscape of the city changed significantly. In Chapter 3 of her book, De Barros (2002) contended that during the late nineteenth century, the legislature increased government responsibility for urban sanitation but property owners, local city officials and other elites ignored the laws and continued to do so into the early twentieth century, leaving many Georgetowners, primarily Afro and Indo Guianese, to live in unsanitary conditions “and contributed to a discourse that represented the city’s non-white masses as filthy and uncivilized” (De Barros, 2003, p. 80). Fast-forward seventy years and we see history repeat itself but with an interesting twist.

Le Repentir was once a coffee plantation during French colonization in the early eighteenth century, owned by a French duelist, Pierre Louis de Saffon. De Saffon had escaped from France to exile in Guyana and later became a wealthy land owner (Kaieteur News, February 9, 2014, “Le Repentir rehabilitation unlikely – Mayor Green”, para. 5). According to

Kaieteur News, “after he had fought his brother in a duel and killed him, De Saffon dedicated two of his estates Le Repentir – the repentant, and La Penitence – the penitent as a lasting memorial of his sorrow for having killed his brother” (Kaieteur News, February 9, 2014, “Le Repentir rehabilitation unlikely – Mayor Green”, para. 2). After his death in 1784, portions of his estates were sold to JH Albouy who furnished the name of a street and a ward (Albouy Street and Albouystown, respectively) (Stabroek News, July 15, 2007, “The Plantation city”, para. 11). In a somewhat eerily unexpected ending to this historically dramatic story, Plantation Le Repentir was sold to the government in 1860 and on March 1, 1861 became Georgetown’s largest cemetery, which some refer to as the National Cemetery, named Le Repentir Cemetery (Public Relations Department, City Council Records). According to Rodway (1920), Le Repentir has the tomb of Pierre Louis de Saffon to indicate the burial ground of the planter and his friends and relatives (p. 22). Rodway (1920) posits the Le Repentir plantation perhaps had its own burying ground before the establishment of the cemeteries, as similar indications were made for the Werk-en-Rust cemetery in Georgetown (p. 22). It was also noted that dead slaves were most likely “buried under a tree and not in the family burying-ground” (Rodway, 1920, p. 22).

Rodway (1920) did not reveal any accounts of the conditions of the Le Repentir Cemetery, however, Henry Kirke (1898), a former sheriff of Demerara (county of British Guiana), unveiled the horrid state of the Le Repentir cemetery at the time:

I have known cases where funerals were delayed owing to the necessity of bailing out the water. In the cemetery of Le Repentir, which is the principal burying-place for Georgetown, most of the coffins are placed in a shallow hole, barely a foot deep, and are then built over with bricks and mortar, and covered with cemented concrete. The heat and

rain frequently crack this covering in a short time, and I have seen coffins exposed to view of persons who have only been buried a few months before. (p. 20)

Kirke (1898) further advocated for the necessity of cremation practices as for sanitary reasons and argued that it should be more enforced as “the present system of burial is most detrimental to health in all countries, but in Demerara it is absolutely suicidal” (p. 20). There is much uncertainty as to what took place between the late nineteenth century and early/mid twentieth century as I did not find any documentation from that period. One would presume however, that better measures or systems were possibly put in place and perhaps beautification projects were carried out at the Le Repentir Cemetery. Pleasant memories of the Le Repentir Cemetery are still vivid in the minds of Guyanese citizens who would have had the experience during the 1970s, 80s and early 90s of passing by the cemetery and seeing the tall beautiful palm trees lining the cemetery’s paths, fishing in the canals or burying a loved one under the casted shadows of those beautiful palm trees (see Chapter 3 for residents’ recollections). However, those pleasant memories are far from the reality of the ruinous state of the cemetery today, interestingly with similar horrid elements to what Kirke (1898) described.



**Figure 5:** “Le Repentir Cemetery in the 1980s”. Photograph featured in a Kaieteur News article.

**Source:** Kaieteur News Staff Writer, February 9, 2014. “Le Repentir rehabilitation unlikely – Mayor Green”, Kaieteur News.

***Le Repentir Cemetery: 1980s - 90s***

To trace back to the developments that led to the cemetery’s demise, the Stabroek News archives have assisted in revealing a confounding series of events since the end of 1989 to present day regarding the Le Repentir Cemetery. On Saturday, December 23, 1989, Stabroek News journalist, Cecil Griffith, reported the resurrection of the “vandalism of tombs episode”, which involved over 1,000 tombs being broken sometime earlier in the last quarter of the year, I would presume from the article (Stabroek News, “Vandalism of Tombs Resurrected at City Hall”). The New Mayor, Mr. Compton Young and Deputy Mayor, Mr. Herbert Harper (my



**Figure 6:** Photo showing the cattle pound in the Le Repentir Cemetery as part of a Stabroek News advertisement placed by the Mayor & City Council.

**Source:** Stabroek News, December 20, 1994. Photo by Ken Moore.

grandfather) addressed the issue of security for the cemetery amongst other municipal issues on January 10, 1990 and assured the public that they and the new council would be solving all of these matters accordingly (Stabroek News, “The New Mayor Means Business”). On April 18, 1990, Stabroek News reported that the gates of the Le Repentir Cemetery were missing and that the Mayor was troubled about the effectiveness of the new security system (Stabroek News, “Cemetery Security Bothers Mayor”). September 30, 1990, Cecil Griffith reported that

Councillor Sam Moffatt declared that the City Council should get into the funeral business in order to assist in funding the maintenance and security of the Le Repentir Cemetery. He submitted that “we own the cemetery and we are only collecting the crumbs” (Stabroek News, “Mayor Defies Challenge to his Authority”). After the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) won the 1992 election, the newly appointed Prime Minister Sam Hinds, who was also the minister responsible for local government, dissolved the Mayor and City Council and replaced them with an interim body, (Interim Mayor & City Council - IMC), pending local government elections (Stabroek News, January 14, 1994, “City Council bill passed”).

On August 8, 1994, Hamilton Green, Former Prime Minister of Guyana under the People’s National Congress (PNC) and of the subsequent Good and Green Georgetown (GGG) party, won the Mayoral Elections and the People’s Progressive Party Civic (PPP/Civic) mayoral candidate, Philomena Sahoye-Shury won the post of deputy without a fight after the PNC councillor Jose Da Silva Senior turned down the nomination (Stabroek News, September 6, 1994, “Green elected Mayor”).

One of the first issues that Mayor Green tackled was the abundance of stray animals in the city, by opening a new animal pound in the vicinity of the Le Repentir Cemetery, with an increased fine for the animal owners to pay (Stabroek News, Alim Hassim, December 8, 1994, “New City animal pound open”). The structure was built on a concrete foundation with the capacity to accommodate approximately 50 animals such as cows, donkeys and mules (*Ibid*), “to ensure the health requirements are met”, Mayor Green said. The City Council Public Relations Officer, Royston King, submitted that the rationale for constructing the pound is not to have people pay a fine but “to act as a ‘monument’ to urge people to do the right thing” (*Ibid*). Goats, horses and sheep are used to graze the grounds of cemeteries in other countries, such as the US,

at the Congressional Cemetery in Capitol Hill, to prevent the overgrowth of vegetation (Donovic, 2014), however, the City Council of Georgetown infringes on the space of the cemetery and builds a pound for unwanted animals on the roadways, to teach animal owners a lesson. The fact that an area within the cemetery was specifically allocated to unwanted animals, for the purposes of disciplinary action, poses some important questions. First, what did this communicate to residents of Le Repentir? And second, is the respect for the relatives and loved ones of people who have passed and are interred within the grounds of the cemetery, considered? The period of time in which this facility functioned was not found, however, in recent years, the Le Repentir Cemetery has also acted as a “monument”, if you will, of the abandonment of decomposing bodies amidst a community who would not be faulted for expressing their own feelings of abandonment.

### ***Le Repentir Now: From Cemetery to Dump***

*“The city was planned with a number of open spaces being provided for recreational purposes as well as the development of community-based facilities. Over the years, the council has utilized a number of these open areas as landfill sites.” ~ Royston King, 2009*



**Figure 7:** Photo illustrating “Overgrown vegetation at Le Repentir Cemetery” featured in a Stabroek News article.

**Source:** Stabroek News Staff Writer, February 6, 2014. “Still no rest for the dead in city cemetery”, Stabroek News.

Until September of 2014, thick clusters of wild vegetation buried the tombs across approximately 129 acres of land with the balance of approximately 22 acres covered by a mountain of garbage concealed with its own vegetation (Kaieteur News, February 9, 2014, “Le Repentir rehabilitation unlikely –

mayor Green”). Today in 2015, after the prisoners were put to work in August and September 2014 as part of the government’s \$1 billion Guyana dollars “Clean-up My Country” campaign in which 500 million was allocated to clean up the cemetery (iNEWS Guyana, September 16, 2014, “Massive improvements at Le Repentir Cemetery, as ‘Clean up’ campaign continues”), we now see tombs crumbled by the weathering of decades with garbage surrounding them and huge trunks of trees left on top of the tombs to add to what seems to be a never ending burial process for the relatives and loved ones of Guyanese citizens.

Over the years, Le Repentir Cemetery has been known as a site of death and now in addition to vegetative growth it has consequently functioned as the dumping site of decomposing bodies from gang-related and domestic murders. From 2002 to 2006, there were reportedly 200 plus deaths resulting from murders, drugs and gun-related activities and kidnapping (Stabroek News, October 5, 2008, “Is the phantom squad still lurking in Guyana”). From these deaths, numerous bodies began to show up at the Le Repentir Cemetery. On January 5, 2004, the brother of an informant, George Bacchus, of the notorious gang (phantom squad) was gunned down outside his home on Princess Street, which lies just outside the Le Repentir Cemetery (*Ibid*). On January 25, 2005 the mutilated body of 20-year-old Diona Warrick, who was pregnant at the time, was also found in Le Repentir Cemetery (Seales, October 10, 2005, “No sign of abatement in violence against women – some 30 murdered in nine months”, Stabroek News). As decomposing bodies continued to show up in the cemetery and the vegetative growth began to sprawl, citizens voiced their concerns. On May 11, 2008, a frustrated citizen, *Mervyn Major*, wrote a letter to the Stabroek News press stating her dissatisfaction with the “jungle cemetery” when trying to visit her deceased mother. Mervyn Major wrote:

*Dear Editor,*

“Oh Mama, you know that I always love you. The day you departed you tore my heart. Please forgive me Mama for not placing any flowers on your grave. Instead I had to throw dozens of flowers into the Princes Street canal after failing to locate your grave in the middle of the jungle.”

The Le Repentir cemetery has now become a national disgrace, thanks to the city council. I am now left to wonder if our Mayor is planning to promote our city as the only capital with a jungle in its centre. Now is the time for the mayor to start acting as if ants are in his pants and do something about what has become an eyesore. Could somebody please tell me what is preventing the city council from clearing the cemetery?

Come Mothers' Day I will try once again to take some fresh flowers for my mother, and if the jungle still remains I would no longer pollute the canal, instead I would take the flowers and drop them off at the doorstep of the Mayor requesting him to make a delivery.

As the song says, 'Shame, Shame, Shame, Shame on you.'

*Yours faithfully,*

*Mervyn Major*

Several other citizens reported their frustrations with trying to visit their passed loved ones at the Le Repentir Cemetery and incidences of decomposing bodies being dumped at the cemetery would occur and appear in the local newspapers from time to time up until the last quarter of 2011, which marked the period of a 'clean up' campaign of the Le Repentir Cemetery. On August 23, 2011, the Government Information Agency (GINA) reported that the Government provided 15 million Guyana dollars to the restoration of the Le Repentir Cemetery "catering for spraying overgrowth in the cemetery and cleaning the drains" ("With Gov't \$15M injection, Le

Repentir cemetery enhancement ongoing”, para. 10). After these efforts were made to clean the cemetery, two years passed and the cemetery went right back to its prior ‘jungle’ state.

On April 18, 2013, Kaieteur News reported that there was “a foul stench emanating from Le Repentir Cemetery and upon checking, it was discovered that the scent was coming from two decomposed bodies that were dumped there by the Lyken Funeral Home” (“Bodies dumped at Le Repentir Cemetery”, para. 1). The Lyken Funeral Home is located proximate to the Le Repentir Cemetery and it was revealed through this Kaieteur News report that the Managing Director, Gordon Lyken admitted:

whenever families of the dead don’t identify them, then it’s customary for them (the funeral home) to leave the bodies at the cemetery until the police are ready to bury them (bodies). When asked as to how long the bodies will be there for, Lyken said he has no idea. (Kaieteur News, April 18, 2013, “Bodies dumped at Le Repentir Cemetery”)

This report sparked a response in a young activist and videographer, Francis Bailey, creator of *Real Guyana*, who produced a short documentary called “Dumping the Dead in Guyana”, which became part of a two-part series that focused on the abhorrent state of the Le Repentir Cemetery. The two decomposing bodies that were reported in the article that was “tucked away” inside



**Figure 8:** Photo showing the two decomposing bodies dumped in boxes in the old Georgetown city mortuary in the Le Repentir Cemetery featured in a Kaieteur News article.

**Source:** Kaieteur News Staff Writer, April 18, 2013. “Bodies dumped at Le Repentir Cemetery”, Kaieteur News.

Kaieteur News, according to Francis Bailey’s social media comment on *Facebook*, posted the day after the article was published. In his post, he also declared that he visited the cemetery and the bodies still happened to be there along with two cemetery

workers whom he interviewed. The video revealed that the place in which the Lyken Funeral Home was dumping the bodies, happened to be in the old abandoned Georgetown city mortuary located within the grounds of the Le Repentir Cemetery. This facility was once functional with the proper refrigerated boxes and was responsible for storing the remains of the unclaimed dead. Incidentally, Lyken now has the contract of storing the remains of the unclaimed dead, decomposing bodies or “poor dead”, as the cemetery worker referred to these persons in the documentary

After the billion dollar ‘Clean-up My Country’ campaign, on February 5, 2015, *Real Guyana*, publicised on social media, the second video of the two-part series entitled, “Son Of The Soil - You Won't Believe Where Walter Rodney Is Buried!”. Following the Le Repentir cemetery clean-up of burning and slashing the vegetation, Francis Bailey took another walk through the cemetery and was able to clearly see the disgusting remnants of garbage, human bones, filthy drains and ruined tombs. Bailey stated in his video description:

Those of you who shared part one helped exert some of the pressure needed to prompt a major change. You got the government to stop turning a blind eye to the dumping of bodies in the abandoned Mortuary which were then allowed to rot and be devoured by scavengers only a few feet from a road little kids use to walk to school every day. You helped highlight the issue so much, someone built a new mortuary only this time it's not a public facility. (*Real Guyana*, February 5, 2015, Youtube *Real Guyana* Channel)

With the clearance of vegetation, Bailey also filmed and made reference to the large hill created by the old Mandela Landfill site which was now much more visible in its close proximity to the Le Repentir Cemetery.

### ***Mandela Dumpsite meets Le Repentir Cemetery***

*“...forcing those people who have already been rendered dirty, impure, and hence expendable to face the most immediate consequences of environmental destruction.” ~ Andrea Smith, 2005*

In 1993, while my grandfather was Deputy Mayor, the Mayor and City Council unilaterally made a decision at a statutory meeting (the exact date was not found) to utilise approximately 22 acres of the Le Repentir Cemetery for what was intended to be a demonstration landfill for an interim of two years, while another location was to be sought for a longer life-span of at least twenty years, but King stated “this did not materialise” and “the council was forced to return to the Mandela landfill site after using another location temporarily” (Royston King, March 6, 2009, Stabroek News Letter, “The Georgetown Solid Waste Management Programme will improve environmental conditions”). King further provides a background context in his letter:



**Figure 9:** Photo showing the Mandela Landfill slowly creeping into the Le Repentir Cemetery in 2009 featured in a Stabroek News article.

**Source:** Stabroek News Staff Writer, May 8, 2009. “The Mandela landfill meets the Le Repentir cemetery”, Stabroek News.

The city was planned with a number of open spaces being provided for recreational purposes as well as the development of community-based facilities. Over the years, the council has utilized a number of these open areas as landfill sites. One such area is the current site being used for waste disposal, off Nelson Mandela Avenue, which is part of the land allotted for the Le Repentir Cemetery. This site which has been in use since 1993, was thought to be the most feasible location after most of the other large open spaces had either been previously used or were not available (Ibid, para. 4).

For the erection of the landfill site, King submitted that roadways were constructed, a drainage system was established and the natural barriers created by the drainage canals and surrounding vegetation along with security personnel, secured the site (*Ibid*). King also claimed that the disposed waste was covered on a regular basis at the site, however, the length of time that this and the other systems put in place that he mentioned, was not specified (*Ibid*). Nevertheless, King did admit in his letter that “as the situation at the Mandela landfill site deteriorated it began to affect residents in the neighbouring communities” (*Ibid*, para. 6). This was definitely an understatement.



**Figure 10:** Photo showing the landfill at Le Repentir “beyond its capacity” featured in a Kaieteur News article.

**Source:** Kaieteur News Staff Writer, July 4, 2010. “Haag Bosch to open with synchronized closure of Mandela Dumpsite”, Kaieteur News.

Fifteen years passed and the Mandela landfill became more and more abhorrent to the communities as the waste was increasing by “400 tons every day,” stated by Guyana Citizens Initiative (GCI) and Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA) in a Press Release issued on September 19, 2008 (Trotz, 2011). Alissa Trotz (2011) further discloses in a newspaper article,

*Playing Politics with People's Lives: Something is Rotten in the State of Denmark*, amongst other Press Releases the GCI and GHRA had challenged the City Council and central Government of Guyana “to set aside their wrangling and take urgent steps to address the public health concerns of the residents and to devise and implement the required short and long-term technical and managerial solutions to the environmentally safe disposal of the waste” (para. 4). Trotz (2011) expressed that, “tragically, two years and more than 300,000 tons of garbage later, these press releases could have been written just yesterday” (para. 5).

As previously mentioned, the site was first erected in 1993, as a demonstration sanitary landfill in Le Repentir, immediately adjacent to the largest cemetery in Guyana and an area that Guyanese elders refer to as “south of the burial ground”, which is symbolic of the negative stereotypes associated with the people living there so closely to the cemetery (Trotz, 2011, para 1.). One would argue that the social inequalities produced through policies and inaction, are explicitly demonstrated by the initial non-response from the communities, as a dumpsite in their neighbourhood is something that is expected and unquestioned. The predominant ethnicity within the proximate communities is Afro-Guyanese with some Indo-Guyanese and other racially mixed persons. This is very much representative of the urban Guyanese reality and reveals how place and space have been colonially constructed and politically maintained. An Indo-Guyanese government ruling a country whose population has traditionally been ethnically dominated by Indo-Guyanese, but has been questioned as to its legitimacy in some quarters, such as the urban demographic, because of the deeply entrenched, racial division that existed and still exists in Guyana since colonialism.

As mentioned in the Introduction, social control during British colonisation, post-emancipation, was based on a variant relevant to its enterprise of ‘divide and rule’, in which

different ethnic groups, who were already divided into independent villages (of emancipated African slaves and ex-indentured Indians, Chinese and Portuguese), “were afforded legally defined privileges, controlling access to different economic sectors” (Pelling, 1999, p. 250). Political independence in 1966, racially homogenised the villages even further and with the pivotal turn to electoral democracy in 1992, spacial and racial segregation was reinforced as political strategy rather than dissolved (Trotz, 2013).

Given the colonial and political contextual connection, an Indo-Guyanese ruling government carrying colonial legacies in the reality of not only intensifying geographic and racial divisions, but also targeting those who have already “been rendered dirty, impure, and hence expendable”, to live amongst garbage (Smith, 2005, p. 57). The fact that this area is also contiguous to the largest cemetery in the country and completely neglected and ruinous is testimony to environmental racism. Cheryl Teelucksingh’s (2001) further contemplation of environmental racism in Toronto, Canada specifically, helps to theoretically engage with the concept as it involves the notion of racialised space as a significant implication in environmental injustices. Teelucksingh (2001) asserts, “environmental injustices that impact on particular geographical locations have a readily apparent fixed spatial aspect” and that “a broader view of the politics of how space is produced and reproduced...is necessary to fully understand the role of race, immigrant status and class” (p. 5). In the context of Guyana, the colonially constructed geographic and spatial segregation contoured by racial and socioeconomic lines provides easier grounds for securing an Indo-Guyanese political machinery (for the past 23 years) rooted in preserving race and class tensions for the benefit of their governance and control.

The buck does not stop there, as objectification of these spaces and bodies involve subjection to the degradation of physical health and well-being of the people, such as

those neighbouring the Mandela landfill. According to a Stabroek News article, on February 22, 2010, a resident related that she was forced to miss church yesterday since according to her, “the smoke was too much” (Stabroek News, February 22, 2010, “Mandela landfill flares up again”). She stated that the fires are “so frequent” that she and her family members have become “immune” to their effects (*Ibid*). Residents have been experiencing a range of health problems including skin infections, fever, vomiting, headaches and respiratory difficulties, many caused or aggravated by the fires emanating from the dumpsite (*Ibid*). The article also pointed to the infestation of rodents and flies and referred to the potential commercial loss of value of properties (*Ibid*).



**Figure 11:** Photo showing uncontrolled fires at the Mandela Landfill site featured in a Stabroek News article.

**Source:** Stabroek News Staff Writer, February 22, 2010. “Mandela landfill flares up again”, Stabroek News.

Residents made repeated efforts to contact a range of authorities, including the Ministry of Health, Environmental Protection Agency, City Council and even the local office of the Pan-American Health Organization (Trotz, 2011). Despite residents’ appeals, all of these entities refused to take any responsibility, kept referring the issue to another agency, and failed to see it as an urgent matter that required a co-ordinated response (Trotz, 2011). Residents then collaborated with the GHRA and GCI to distribute hundreds of leaflets on how to take every-day precautions to households as well as the St. Sidwell’s Primary (Elementary) and Lodge Nursery (Kindergarten) schools (Trotz, 2011, para. 11). A petition was also sent to the EPA with 596 signatures from the communities around the Mandela dumpsite (Trotz, 2011, para. 11). In hindsight, after the assertive action and efforts of residents, the Mandela landfill site was shutdown at the end of

2011, however, the new landfill, the Haags Bosch landfill, is now located aback of Eccles (needless to say) where predominantly Afro-Guyanese communities reside.

In light of this, women were at the forefront of the grassroots activism that evolved from within the communities propelling the organizing and mobilization of community members. This reality suggests that the geopolitical needs also consign the informal and domestic economy, and those located within it, assumed by primarily women, to marginality or invisibility. Within a poststructuralist anti-racist framework through a feminist lens, the growth of activism of these women would be seen as a consequence of the “severe constraints on their families’ livelihood options,” that they are essentially responsible for (Rocheleau et al., 1996, p. 16). According to the colonial, political and social laws of gender, these women have to guarantee subsistence and the health of their families as part and parcel to their responsibility of caring work (Rocheleau et al., 1996, p. 16).

Today, the Mandela Landfill site is covered with trees and grass with patches that are burnt from the continuous small fires that occur due to the trapped methane in what now looks like a hill. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) as part of their funded Georgetown

Solid Waste Management Programme have installed large polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipes to allow the methane to escape from the old landfill in order to prevent combustive activity. After climbing the old landfill, Lawrence (resident from Lodge) and I investigated the pipes and found that they were blocked



**Figure 12:** PVC pipe found on top of the old Mandela Landfill during my field activity with Lawrence.

**Source:** Photo by Chelsea Fung.

with soil, decomposed matter and whatever else

that are currently enclosed in the landfill. Initially, I reckoned that this might have been a contributing factor to the prevalent occurrences of heavy smoke coming from the old landfill due to combustion. However, after further research I found that the PVC pipes are actually filled with material that allows the gas, mainly methane and carbon dioxide, to escape in an environmentally acceptable manner according to the Inter-American Development Bank who funded (also known as loaned money) the multi-million dollar landfill project (“Georgetown Solid Waste Management Program – GSWMP – (GY-0055): Environmental Impact Assessment”, 2005, p. 40). Before the landfill was closed the United Nations Environment Program’s (UNEP) (2009)

published an Integrated Environmental Assessment of Georgetown entitled *Urban Environment Outlook: Georgetown*. In this document it was reported that the quality of air within Georgetown is partly affected by the uncontrolled burning from the Mandela landfill site:



**Figure 13:** Lawrence pointing at the soil matter in one of the pipes planted in the old landfill.

**Source:** Photo by Chelsea Fung.

The decomposition of waste in the Mandela landfill site produces odours and gases, primarily carbon dioxide and methane, which also affects south Georgetown. When combustion occurs at the dumpsite, it is usually accompanied by heavy smoke. In addition, combustion of organic matter may produce polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and dioxins may be produced if there is organic matter and chlorine present during combustion and the temperatures are sufficiently high (p.32).

The report further stated that when spontaneous combustion occurs, “there is distressed generation of particulate matter which is also likely to induce respiratory disease, especially among the residents of South Georgetown” (UNEP, 2009, p. 32). What they also highlighted was the fact that in addition to the many health impacts, there are socioeconomic consequences such as “depreciation of property values as a result of poor air quality and ugly environs, excess costs to repair and maintain property after the air has caused severe damage, especially in the area of the Mandela dumpsite and finally the likely costs of seeking medical attention for respiratory infections” (UNEP, 2009, p. 56). What should be prerequisite knowledge given to the residents of Lodge and East Le Penitence, is the potential effects of the current air quality. Is the air quality any better now that the landfill operations have been shut down? What are the health effects of the prevalent smoke emissions from the old landfill? These and several other comments and/or questions, residents voiced during my field research activities that will follow in Chapter 3.

Potential environmental risk in vulnerable communities is usually not communicated to community residents, Gosine and Teelucksingh (2008) assert, and these residents usually lack the information about how to participate in decision-making processes and/or lack the time to participate, which provides other stakeholders, often middle-class and educated persons, leeway to represent the voice of vulnerable communities to other stakeholders such as corporations and government bodies (p. 18). Subsequently, “members and organizations with more power and resources are able to safeguard their interests and still ensure that undesirable land uses become situated in someone else’s backyard” (Gosine and Teelucksingh, 2008, p. 18). In the context of the Mandela Landfill removal campaign, this scenario was partially played out as a resident of East Le Penitence, Charlene Wilkinson, who is also a professor at the University of Guyana, was

one of the significant initiators of the Mandela Landfill removal campaign. In my interview with Charlene, she outlined the ways in which she took action and they included sending emails to friends in the Guyana Human Rights Association and other organizations such as Red Thread Women's Organization (Interview with Charlene, July 10, 2015). This led to other social and political activists, Mark Benschop and Freddie Kissoon (who are not residents of any of the nearby communities), to get involved and form a campaign based on petitioning and physical blockage (using their vehicles and bodies) of the entrance to the Mandela Landfill Site, which subsequently resulted in imprisonment for a few days (Interview with Charlene, July 10, 2015). Charlene also wrote an anonymous letter in the form a full-page advertisement in the Stabroek News on December 25, 2010, titled "As Within, So Without" where she stresses:

And how will we, the people of Guyana play, when we examine our hand in this terror-filled game of the human conscience? Will we continue to live in our own hollow and pathetic shells, dodging each others' eyes, denying that our garbage is really, at the bottom of it all, our responsibility, denying our complicity in the bringing or sending of plastics and Styrofoam and discarded computers and televisions and scrap metal and much more dangerous forms of toxic waste from our homes and hospitals and shops and bars and restaurants from everywhere on this coastland and even interior areas and dumping upon fellow citizens? Or will we seize the moment to share a common anguish and move to the only right action there is – to stop resolutely and absolutely any further dumping at Le Repentir by any peaceful means, and cease the assault on the health of those communities huddled in despair on and around Savage and Princess Streets, of Cemetery Road and (Creator forbid!) Mandela Avenue. (Stabroek News, December 25, 2010, p. 15, para. 3).

On January 25, 2011, a petition was sent to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a formal complaint from the community residents against the operations of the Dump Site, and to request their "urgent investigations into its compliance with the Environmental Protection Act

and an urgent examination of its health effects on our families” (Copy of petition letter given to me by Charlene Wilkinson, para. 1). Almost immediately after the petition was sent, the Mandela Landfill was officially decommissioned. Charlene admitted that the campaign was most likely not the primary reason for the landfill removal and that “It seems as if they were planning to close it down anyways. It would be arrogant of me to say they closed it down because of our petition because the two things happened too close to each other. It looks as though they were planning to do it but I believe that the activism pushed it further” (Interview with Charlene, July 10, 2015). The new site at Haag Bosch aback Eccles, another predominantly Afro-Guyanese community as previously mentioned, was already prepped at that time for operations to commence. Four years have passed since this landfill site has been in operation and complaints have already started to pile up along with the piles of garbage at Haag Bosch landfill and just as recently as July 21, 2015, 15,000 spectators at the National Stadium were treated to waves of putrid stench while watching an international cricket match. As my friends and family relayed, embarrassment that the world media was present to witness our incompetence, was the least of our problems.

I declared that the scenario outlined previously by Gosine and Teelucksingh (2008) was partially played out on the basis of the intentions of Charlene Wilkinson in her activism and utilization of the resources she had at hand. Charlene was not only safeguarding her own interests as she did not agree with the alternative landfill site to be placed at Haags Bosch, so it was not a situation of wanting the problem to be transferred to ‘someone else’s backyard’.

Charlene expressed:

We haven’t been able to build self-activities, self-motivated and sustainable community organization to keep the momentum...Because you see what’s happening at the new

landfill site again. At Haags Bosh [new landfill site], I hear, I haven't seen it, I hear it's filling up. (Interview with Charlene, July 10, 2015)

In this chapter, I have described the context of my research topic as one that is shaped by neglect, abandonment, environmental racism, and death (literal and social), which showed the unravelling of the ways in which the state and the overarching systems of oppression operate with these theories. As highlighted by the residents and activists cited here, who used newspaper comment sections, social media and other outlets to express their dissatisfaction, the uneven terms of life and death in this context are heavily contested by those most affected by them. This theme of contestation (and lack thereof) against the negative effects of the old Mandela Landfill and the state neglected cemetery also emerged, from the semi-structured interviews that I conducted, in addition to other identified themes that will be discussed in the following chapter.

### Chapter 3: Life in ‘South of the Burial Ground’

In this chapter, I contemplate the space and context of the Le Repentir cemetery, the old Mandela Landfill and the bordering streets, to fully grasp community residents’ experiences and understandings of environmental impact and environmental risk, in relation to the old Mandela Landfill site and the state neglected Le Repentir Cemetery from my fieldwork findings. There are also themes that I identified from my research methods of participant and field observation and interviews that provide a holistic understanding of both the past and present contexts of the area in focus. Through these research methods, the perspectives and lived experiences of residents were illuminated. I believe that the use of these methods was the ideal approach to dialogue with residents in the spirit of environmental justice grassroots research, as coined by Bullard (1990) and defined by Teelucksingh (2001), discussed in the last chapter, as research that “sought to incorporate and validate local residents’ voices and experiences as important contributors to the emerging environmental injustice and environmental racism” (p. 177).

#### *Space and Context of Residential Life by Le Repentir Cemetery and the old Mandela Landfill*



**Figure 14:** Image showing the canal along North East Street.

**Source:** Photo by Chelsea Fung.

Traversing the streets on either side of the Le Repentir Cemetery and the old Mandela Landfill, from the Cemetery road in the west to Mandela Avenue in the east was a revelation. To the south of this monumental space is North East Street and to the north, Princess Street. I walked

these streets on many occasions and observed both similarities and differences that are worthy of note. On both streets, there is a canal that separates the old landfill and cemetery from the narrow streets, however the southern North East Street features a wider picturesque canal whereas the northern Princess Street canal resembles a trench. The positioning of the cemetery and landfill site are far closer to Princess Street than North East Street and although the houses on both streets are in close proximity to each other, the size and materials used to build these houses, differ. On North East Street there are more concrete houses than wooden houses as opposed to Princess Street where the opposite is true. Moreover, North East Street is visible at night with the streetlights that were installed in December 2010 (just before the 2011 general elections) as mentioned by Kevon and his friend (Interview with Kevon, March 8, 2015), and Princess Street is left in the dark. The very condition of the streets showed obvious preferential treatment in that North East Street as it was smoothly paved compared to Princess Street with gaping potholes.



**Figure 15:** Image showing the canal along Princess Street.

**Source:** Photo by Chelsea Fung.

According to Kevon, who lives on North East Street, around 2002 in the height of the crime wave, there were a lot of criminals in the area (Interview with Kevon, March 8, 2015). They would drive around in expensive SUVs with tinted windows. One particular criminal gang, the ‘phantom squad’ as mentioned in Chapter 2, was reportedly closely associated with elements

of the government of the day and were granted certain privileges. The convicted drug lord Roger Khan, (head of the phantom squad) now residing at the pleasure of the United States of America criminal justice system, gave evidence and took out a full page advertisement in the local papers, that he was recruited to help the government rid itself of the crime wave (Stabroek News, March 17, 2009, “Roger Khan pleads guilty...may serve 15 years for 3 charges”). It is not inconceivable that although gang members resided in areas such as North East Street, the government could use their influence to improve their environment. My contention here is that the previous predominantly Indo-Guyanese government possibly provided infrastructural development to a predominantly Afro-Guyanese community, on the basis of gang-related relations for political and economic advancement. Such a notion complicates the theory of biopolitics and necropolitics even further. The criminal resources that these residents were able to provide superseded the racial and socio-economic markers of marginalization for the residents of North-East Street. Subsequently, the state grants this community with infrastructural provisions and residents are made to live while residents on Princess Street are left to die (Mbembe, 2003). Furthermore, it is worth questioning whether the fact that the brother of an informant of the phantom squad, George Bacchus (mentioned in Chapter 2), who was gunned down outside his home on Princess Street, is symbolic of the infrastructural neglect that Princess Street experienced during the period of government campaigns and infrastructural urban developments prior to the 2011 elections.

### *Walking on the grounds of Le Repentir Cemetery and the old Mandela Landfill*

To provide a holistic picture of the area of study, it will be useful to describe the Le Repentir Cemetery and old Mandela Landfill as experienced during my walk with Lawrence. We attempted to get to the old landfill from the Mandela Avenue entrance. When we arrived at what is now a hill covered in grass, the sides were too steep for us to climb so we decided to make our way through the cemetery in order to get to the hill. From Princess Street, we found a plank of wood over the canal that connects to the grounds of the cemetery.

Lawrence got to the other side with ease and let me just say that there was far more drama involved when it was my turn! Lawrence proceeded to climb on top of the tombs and make his way to the hill and I followed with trepidation. While we were hopping from tomb to



**Figure 16:** Image showing desecrated tomb.

**Source:** Photo by Chelsea Fung.

tomb and negotiating our way to the hill, Lawrence mentioned that as a young boy, he and his friends would play on the tombs. Just after saying this, we saw one particular tomb that was desecrated so badly, that we could see the skull of the deceased that was buried within. While processing what I saw and juxtaposing children's games with real life skulls, we continued towards the end of the cemetery, which was where the hill began. The two were separated by

what seemed to be a half dried trench with puddles of a thick black liquid. Lawrence pointed it out to me and suggested that it could be chemicals from the old landfill. He was possibly correct, as the thick black liquid looked very much like the leachate that has been described and illustrated in articles that explain the operation and effect of landfills as seen in “How Landfills Work” by Dr. Craig Freudenrich (Freudenrich, 2000). We were able to manoeuvre our way over



**Figure 17:** Image showing sea of tombs at Le Repentir Cemetery.

**Source:** Photo by Chelsea Fung.

trunks laid on top, I could not help but reflect on the effect of this picture, on the psyche of the residents, who would wake up each morning to such a view. To have placed a landfill adjacent with access through the burial ground speaks to a greater contempt. Reference must be made to McKittrick’s (2006) notion of the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of black people in the Canadian context. I use this here in relation to this black geographic space that is almost hypervisible in its physical sense but invisible in its social, economical and political sense. What message is being sent to the residents as to their value, when you have provided nauseous landfill

the leachate and managed to climb the hill without completely falling and while gasping for air at the top of the hill, I was overwhelmed by the vastness of the space. As I looked at the sea of tombs of the newly buried and those in various degrees of desecration with garbage laid in between and tree

fumes to perfume their air and tombs for their children's playground? What value to a life juxtaposed with waste and death?



**Figure 18:** Image showing the view of the Le Repentir Cemetery and old Mandela Landfill from Princess Street.

**Source:** Photo by Chelsea Fung

### ***Community Perspectives and Insights from Interviews***

As mentioned previously, there are themes that I identified from the participant observation and interviews that provide a holistic understanding of both the past and present contexts of the area in focus. The first theme I acknowledge is the health impact on residents from the Mandela Landfill site when it was in operation and the current environmental risk they continue to experience even though the landfill has been decommissioned. The responses to the consequent effects were expressed by affected residents, constituting the second theme, through notions of

immunity and lack of contestation and urgency pertaining to the effects from the state neglected cemetery and old landfill. The third and final theme highlights the multiple ways in which residents utilise or interact with the Le Repentir Cemetery and Mandela Landfill site. This chapter will discuss these three themes outlined above.

### ***Impact on Health***

During my interviews, almost every resident mentioned that the smoke from the fires at the Mandela Landfill when it was in operation affected the health of themselves, a relative and/or a neighbour that they knew. Brittany, one of the residents on North East Street, who was about 13 or 14 when the dump was in operation revealed:

My sister had a problem. One of her nostrils was blocked up because of this and it had an effect on her because she has to do a surgery for it and she went to find out why...you know...we thought it was just a normal problem but the doctor said it was the smoke so...you know... that's just one of the main problems that we had. The persons living over there (she pointed across the street), one of her (the sister's) friends had the same thing but it wasn't as serious as hers. We don't really interact with the people around here but she is the only person we know about because it's my sister's friend. (Interview with Brittany, March 8, 2015)

Chandra who I now refer to as 'Aunty' Chandra (respectful term sometimes used affectionately to those who are older) on Princess Street mentioned that "the children next door had rashes on their skin and the children down the street had vomiting and went to the hospital. We had this dump for a long time" (Interview with Aunty Chandra, March 11, 2015). One of the young men of the group of 19 year olds that were 'liming' (equivalent to "hanging" or "chilling") on the side of Princess Street disclosed that his little brother got ill. He said "my lil brother get sick. He get

asthma” (Interview with ‘young man’, March 29, 2015). Charlene Wilkinson, mentioned in Chapter 2, who was one of the activists that was at the forefront of the Mandela Landfill removal campaign, conveyed to me that she had developed abscesses on her skin at the time when the Mandela Landfill was in operation:

I didn’t have any scientific sense, it was just a hunch that somehow the water we were using might have been poisoned because we use ground water. We use well water from the well that is not very far away from the dumpsite... One day I went to visit the school around the same time of the campaign and the entire school was engulfed in smoke and I asked the principle why she didn’t send the children home and she said she tried it before but the Ministry [of Education] told her that she and the teachers are just lazy and want a day off. (Interview with Charlene Wilkinson, July 10, 2014)

Charlene also revealed that residents got sick and some died, however, as she noted, there was no proof that the deaths were correlated with the effects from the landfill:

Children got sick and they have died. Royston Peters’ cousin died and she used to live in there. Of course we can’t prove it but we know! I understand that one of the Parish Priests died as well from St. Pius Church [see Figure 2]. (Interview with Charlene Wilkinson, July 10, 2014)

As Robinson (2000) rightfully points out, residents of communities experiencing environmental injustice “suffer shorter life spans, higher infant and adult mortality, poor health, poverty, diminished economic opportunities, substandard housing, and an overall degraded quality of life” (para. 5). However, as this is known and experienced by the residents of Lodge and East Le Penitence, unfortunately there is no Erin Brockovich (renown environmental activist and legal clerk from the US who built a case against a gas company that evidently contaminated drinking

water in the southern California town of Hinkley) to investigate the issue and prove or disprove any findings.



**Figure 19:** Image showing combustive activity at the side of the old Mandela Landfill that faces Princess Street residents.

**Source:** Photo by Chelsea Fung

Residents also mentioned the fact that there are still reoccurring small fires that erupt from the old landfill. There is smoke constantly being emitted from the landfill and when there is rainfall the smoke increases from interaction between the water and the chemicals. I

questioned a middle-aged man living on Princess Street about the effects of the Mandela Landfill site and he responded with:

It affect everybody, you ain see it still smoking. When it stink and smoke it affect everybody. Once rain fall, is start. It is a hazard because you ain know what coming out ah deh. (Interview with man on Princess Street, March 11, 2015).

Tony said more abrasively, “Right now ya got a time bomb deh. It still smoking. At least we got the breeze now...that they clear up here but it gon grow back again” (Interview with Tony, March 8, 2015). Aunty Chandra differently iterated, “When the rain start to fall in the morning, ya want to know what smelling!” (Interview with Aunty Chandra, March 11, 2015). On my last site visit, I noticed that the entire side of the hill that Lawrence and I climbed the previous week

was completely burnt. I asked the 19 year old boys if they knew what had happened and they replied:

They had a fire right there. The white pipe don't push out the gas properly. We is check out the pipe. It block up. You could see the smoke blowing in the air. If the rain fall, there's a possibility of seeing it better. (Interview with the 'young men', March 29, 2015)

The fact that there is still combustive activity (see Figures 3 and 4) in addition to the leachate that was found at the bottom of the old landfill is testament to the lack of disregard of proper termination and continued maintenance of the closed landfill. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the PVC pipes are actually filled with material that allows the gas, mainly methane and carbon dioxide, to escape in an environmentally acceptable manner, which dismisses the young man's and my assumption that the PVC pipes were somehow blocked and are not doing what they are supposed to be doing. According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) website report, "Landfill cells [where the trash is stored within the landfill] have been covered with 3 meters of clay and includes methane pipes which allows for ventilation" (2005, p. 40). However, this raises the question why this information is not shared with the residents of Lodge and East Le Penitence. Several residents nonchalantly asked me, "so what they doing with it now?" With spontaneous fires still occurring and leachate still emerging (which may be unbeknownst to the City Council) at the old landfill, residents are not informed of what the potential health impacts are and what plans are in the making (if any) presently or in the near future.

### ***Normalised Immunity***

The notion of immunity in relation to the effects of the Mandela Landfill and Le Repentir Cemetery was a recurring theme that I observed in the North East Street and Princess Street

interviews. Immunity was perceived in two different ways; some believed that the fact that they were immune to the effects was unfortunate and others believed that it showed their strength as individuals. Brittany, responding to a question about how she felt about having to smell dead bodies being dumped by the cemetery, stated:

You would get a scent from anything rotting there. Recently they dumped a dead horse there. It was really bad. I think the garbage was most impactful though. For some sad reason we have become immune to stuff like this. Being immune to it and stuff, it's hard to say that it actually impacts us. But I think if somebody strange came along they would say "what's that, y'all not smelling something?"...but becoming immune to it is very sad.

(Interview with Brittany, March 8, 2015)



**Figure 10:** Image showing workers pumping water from the flooded Le Repentir Cemetery into the main canal along Princess Street, featured in a Stabroek News Article.

**Source:** Photo by Adrian Brown. Stabroek News Staff Writer, June 3, 2015. "Draining cemetery", Stabroek News.

On the other hand, Tony, another North East Street resident, expressed that when the Mandela Landfill was in operation, the effects were "rough", however he did not get ill and he seemed very proud of this seeming

resilience to environmental ills. He mentioned that he was also not impacted by the historic 2005 flood that left stagnated, sewage infested waters in homes for weeks,

but particularly worrying in areas adjacent to the landfill and cemetery:

Chelsea: It (the landfill) had any health effects on you and your family?

Tony: [It was] rough, real rough. I had my Nephew had trouble with asthma. It wasn't healthy at all at the time...I ain really never tek no sick, but still it was dangerous so it was really rough.

Chelsea: When you flood out, it doesn't worry yall that the cemetery right here?

Tony: When they had the flood in 2005, people say oh yall living by the burial ground, the burial ground water gon give yall germs but me ain get a itch pun me foot, me ain get a boil pun me foot.

Chelsea: Did you hear about anybody else around here that was affected?

Tony: At least not around here. People that living up the East Coast where have a cemetery – deh foot turn out, swell big, buss way with sores. I used to go to work in de water everyday, come home back in de water. Ya got to come home. (Interview with Tony, March 8, 2015)

The simple fact that the everyday constant negative effects from the state neglected cemetery and old landfill have become normalized speaks to what McKittrick (2006) refers to as 'sites of peripheral invisibility' (highlighted in

Chapter 1) in which black geographies, such as Lodge and East Le Penitence have become increasingly normalised

and naturalised. Both those within the communities and those looking on from the outside have accepted the unjust space as the norm. There is an undergirding historical dimension of black people being dehumanised and rendered invisible and expendable, which does not only provide easier grounds for the state's justification of the injustice but also those that are subjected find ways to justify and accept their unhealthy living environment.

Moreover, after revisiting all the recordings and notes from my conversations with



**Figure 21:** Le Repentir Cemetery on July 16, 2015 after heavy rainfall.

**Source:** Photo by Renik Evelyn

residents, there was only one resident that expressed any real urgency with regard to any current possible environmental risk that they may be exposed to. Charlene Wilkinson reflected on this reality as she notices it within her community in East Le Penitence:

That is what racism does, it completely disempowers and immobilizes people and those are forms of oppression. Even though we have history of fight back in Guyana, I don't think the people in Georgetown relate to that, our history of resistance of years since 1823 [referring to the Demerara Rebellion in which there was an uprising of over 10,000 slaves]. Somehow they're disconnected from the larger history of resistance like the Hatian Revolution. It seems to be a funny phase that we're in, in the world today. I don't know if it's the calm before the storm. (Interview with Charlene Wilkinson, July 10, 2014)

### ***Multi-functionality of the Le Repentir Cemetery and Mandela Landfill***

Given the environmental health impact on most community residents, there was another dimension that was uncovered through my conversations with residents as people expressed the ways in which the old landfill and cemetery functioned as a positive site. The different ways in which residents use the space challenged the preconceived notions that I carried with me before conducting my field research activities. While I was walking on Princess Street with Aunty Marva, there was an older man, seemingly destitute, who spoke of the scavenging activities that he and others practiced while the Mandela Landfill was in operation:

When the landfill site was in operation, I used to go in deh and I get a magnifying glass so I could see the obstacles better. When they had KFC, I used to hustle for the chicken to cook. The chicken look clean but with the microscope the chicken had worms and maggots. You know how much gold and money I find. 1768 coin. I went on Regent and Wellington Street to sell it. I get over \$300,000 for the coin.

Aunty Marva added that a man once approached her with a box of chocolates that he was trying to sell to her. He told her that it only just expired. She asked him where he got it from and he

replied “the dump”. Following our conversation with the man, Aunty Marva expressed, “People used to profit from the dump as well”. After climbing to the top of the garbage dump that was about 20 feet high at the time when the landfill was in operation, Charlene and her friend discovered for themselves that “when stores dumped expired food people would go and extract the food and sell them back” (Interview with Charlene Wilkinson, July 10, 2014). The group of young boys on Princess Street that I spoke to also said “We go over there steady. We is take a walk up there”. I followed up by questioning if they go up there to just ‘lime’ (equivalent of ‘hanging out’) and one of them replied, “Yea we is just go” (Interview with the young men, March 29, 2015).

On that day I walked through the cemetery for the last time and I came across two other young men who were carrying birds in small cages. One of the men was picking something in between the tombs resting his birdcage on one of the tombs in the process. The other young man hung his cage on a post. I told them about my research and they were willing to chat with me so I asked them what they were doing with the birds:

We setting for birds here and picking grass seeds. Is seeds for de birds. The plants is grow in between the tombs. You see it there [one man pointed to the plant to show me]... Every day we is come here to pick seed. Nuff people is come in here [referring to other ‘bird men’], not we alone. (Interview with ‘bird men’, March 29, 2015)

I asked them if there was anything else that they observed when they come to the cemetery and one man said “people is get rob and the thief dem [thieves] is run through here and go to the back [of the landfill]”. On my walk with Lawrence, he revealed that a few years ago (during the height of crime which was between 2002 and 2006) he was in a ‘bad place’ and that he knew people that would hide guns at the landfill site. What is now a combined geographic space of the

cemetery and old landfill, has functioned in the past and present not only as a site of death and waste but as a site of play, livelihood, survival, vandalism and criminality. As much as the landfill and cemetery are a health hazard on so many levels, the multi-functionality of the space reflects the landfill and cemetery having a life of its own. This qualifies Foucault's theory of biopolitics that may undervalue the agency of the residents and their every day acts of survival while living in a zone of abandonment. However, necropolitics recognizes moments of power that emerge in the realms of the living dead, "for death is precisely that from and over which I have power. But it is also that space where freedom and negation operate" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 38). Life and death are not a binary in this case, but there is a dynamic relationship between them that those seemingly confined to death are actively and agentially navigating and reworking their (literal and social) death worlds. What Neferti Tadiar (2012) refers as "remaindered life-times" could be applicable to the understandings of this relationship as it signifies marginalised individuals and groups as living beyond their life expectations and/or expected end to life "by finding a sustainable and independent way of making life" (p. 797). These practices and modes of 'life making' become a surplus in the pockets of the state as "it is the leftover and excess of social reproductive work not only on the part of disposable peoples but also in the forms of social life making that persist beyond and despite capitalist subsumption – not directly absorbable by capitalist industries, not completely assimilable within forms of productive life, or, and this is increasingly (though not yet) the same thing, failing to fulfill the protocols of subjectivity and sociality under the political order of democratic life" (p. 798). The man who the state would deem as already dead finds a coin on the mountains of a dumpsite, cashes in, and contributes to the capitalist economy.

Nearby residents and non-residents not only find ways to profit from the cemetery and landfill but utilize the space for recreational and other purposes. Elders on Princess Street provided an illumination of the ways in which the residents would interact with the space in the past. Two women in particular told me stories that shone some light on the stark differences between the community back then to the community now. Mrs. Jackson-Smith expressed:

When the fire start, it was terrible. They need not to do this. I born in this place. I live in this place as a child. This place would get ‘Aunty Desmond’ (a tiny rich purple wild berry of African origin) and we would pick and make wine. In this black water trench, we used to wash clothes. In the trench we would cetch big big hassa (type of fish)... We need the support from others. When it clean here is we clean it. If you go up the road, a man has a nice garden. We plant this here (she pointed to the flowering plants across the street). We try to make the place look nice. With flowers and so on... The cemetery should look good but it don’t look good. Not until this clear I know so much tombs there. I got a grandson bury in there and only now my daughter can go in. I live most of my life here... Before they had council in the village that would manage the place. But not now. (Interview with Mrs. Jackson-Smith, March 11, 2015)



**Figure 22:** Image showing garden along Princess Street.

**Source:** Photo by Chelsea Fung.

Similarly Mrs. Savory expressed her feelings concerning the change from the election of the local village council prior to Guyana’s Independence in 1966, to being included in the larger city council

where wards were allocated to councillors, but were not elected for or from the specific wards (villages) (Records from PRO, City Council). It was her conviction that her environment would never have been treated so shabbily if oversight came from within the community itself, as in the olden days:

All the politicians studying is money to put in they pocket. Since I small I never see this place like this. Never see Georgetown like this. Is better they leave lodge as lodge village. If it wasn't a part of Georgetown and then the government take it... Since I know myself, is the first time this cemetery in this condition. It was always clean. We would go across there and fly kite. Over there was clean. They had these nice palm trees. From small I know they had Arthur Cheong, Burnham, Cheddie and then Hoyte [past presidents of Guyana] but I never see this place like this. [This] is the largest burial ground. Until up to Lamaha [Street] was the burial ground. I got a son-in law there, grandson, son in there... when you try to find them is hell! You could directly go in before. When you go through Cemetery Road, the middle path you could walk right down and cetch Broad Street [see Figure 2]. Now you cant get there. This ain come back to how it was before... I would love that cemetery to come back to how it was. Christians we don't cremate. You can't even get in there to clean up your family tomb. (Interview with Savory, March 29, 2015)

Following Mrs. Savory's reference to the burial practices of Christianity, it should be noted that the predominantly Indo government is not only Indian but also Hindu, which means they do not believe in burial but in cremation preferably by the ocean. Three sites have been transformed and upgraded for such purposes, which doubly exacerbates feelings of exclusion and unfairness. One of the three that is worth further elaboration is the new 'state of the art' crematorium located on the grounds of Le Repentir Cemetery. According to the Kaieteur News article the "“Memorial Gardens and Crematorium,” is a multi-million dollar facility, set to meet the internment needs of all Guyanese and transform the landscape of Le Repentir cemetery, said the man behind the

project, Dr. Carl Niamatali” who is an oncologist (“Entrepreneur opens modern crematorium at Le Repentir”, 2014). Dr. Niamatali also stated the following:

This crematorium was created to meet the burial needs of all Guyanese regardless of their religious persuasion or social standing because as we all know of recent, there has been some difficulty associated with burying the dead. This project was created to ease that burden...I have a number of overseas- based partners who contributed to the financial aspect of the project...The Georgetown Mayor and City Council, Go-Invest, the Guyana Revenue Authority, (GRA) and President Donald Ramotar are just some of the supporters of this project from start to finish. (Kaieteur News, “Entrepreneur opens modern crematorium at Le Repentir”, 2014, para. 2)

This speaks volumes to Gosine and Teelucksingh’s (2008) reference to “environmental inequalities”, which “become apparent when consideration is given to who gets what resources and by what means” (p. 51). The Indo-Guyanese ruling government at the time was evidently involved in the funding of this crematorium which is just one of the examples of the ways in which the past government constructed and maintained social inequalities through uneven distribution of service and infrastructural provisions between Indo-Guyanese communities and Afro-Guyanese communities. We might further expand the necropolitics framework to explain how the state demonstrates (based on race and religion) who are abandoned and left to die (Mbembe, 2003), are also undeserving of a decent and respectful final place of rest, while others are gifted with ‘state-of-the-art’ facilities for their dignified closure of life, here on earth. Necropolitics discusses proclivities to life and death, but that death itself is subject to the same processes of valuation is being explicitly gestured here by the state. In this case, these proclivities to life and death of the living are inherited by the dead, as the state is making it pellucidly clear that the Indo Guyanese dead body is worth more than the Afro Guyanese dead body.

In this chapter, the themes that emerged from my conversations with residents, paint a very abstract but fathomable picture of the daily lives of residents living adjacent to the Le Repentir Cemetery and Mandela Landfill, their past experiences and current perspectives on their environment. Theoretical discussions of environmental injustice and racism and biopolitics and necropolitics, allowed me to contemplate the overarching systems of oppression that are operating within the context of the past and current daily lived experiences and psyches of residents. As highlighted earlier, environmental health effects and risks were communicated to me by residents who were impacted from primarily the stench and smoke from the existence of the landfill, the spontaneous fires caused when it was in operation and the continuance of combustive activity causing smoke emissions to date. Asthma, skin conditions, typhoid, amongst other illnesses, affected the health of the residents with whom I spoke, a relative and/or a neighbour that they knew. The correlation between the health effects and the landfill was never officially investigated, however, organizations such as the Guyana Citizens Initiative and even the City Council acknowledged the health impact on residents. These ‘environmental health effects’ were not recognized as such but environmental (in)justice theoretical and practical research identifies these correlations and effects and provided space for further discussions in this chapter.

Feelings of immunity in relation to the health effects and risks that were expressed by residents signalled the consequences of colonial legacies on the psyches of individuals that are continuously disregarded, let alone subjected to hazardous environments and disenfranchised. Complacency and justifications of being invincible as opposed to being outraged raises important questions of not only the physical health impacts, but also the psychological effects on residents. In the final section of this chapter, I also highlighted the different interactions and usages of the

cemetery and old landfill that residents would have experienced in the past. Flying kites, fishing in the canals and washing clothes were fond memories recalled by some residents and in the recent years – scavenging the landfill, hiding weapons and dumping bodies. There are, then, stark differences between the two time periods that are more than likely correlated with the degradation of the space. However, walks/climbs for recreational purposes and picking of birdseeds for livelihood are current activities that occur at the cemetery and the landfill and reflect this space as having a life of its own. The following chapter will further synthesise these findings in conjunction with the theoretical concepts with which I have engaged.

## **Chapter 4: Synthesis of Findings and Concluding Thoughts**

Using a framework of environmental (in)justice and environmental racism, this study has explored how distributions of environmental risk and hazardous environments within Georgetown, Guyana are uneven. Based on which communities the state deems as living and deserving of life and those they consider already dead or destined towards death, I have described the (sub)conscious deliberations of the state to lump and dump those they classify wasted with literal waste, typifying bio/necropolitics at its ultimate. In particular, this framework has allowed me a broader view of the politics of life and death in how environmental injustice occurs in some spaces rather than others, and in particular how the mortality of citizens is controlled and maintained. By bringing issues of biopolitics and necropolitics to bear on environmental (in)justice theory and practices, my objective was to offer alternative avenues that environmental injustices can be conceived, identified, and investigated. Moreover, this paper has sought to explore new ways of not only understanding urban Guyana specifically, but post-colonial urban environments globally. I have argued that knowledges of environmental racism and injustice in urban spaces are often typically confined to a US/Canada-centric hermetic space given that these concepts were named in North America. Due to its inherent insular nature, research has not probed experiences beyond these borders, let alone in post-colonial Caribbean and other global south cities.

In this final chapter, I will provide an overview of the empirical and theoretical contributions that this research study attempts to make. I will also revisit my empirical findings in light of the theoretical concepts introduced in my earlier literature discussion, articulate my

final reflections, and consider the study's implications for future research and activism for environmental justice in Georgetown, Guyana.

### ***Overview of the Study's Findings***

The findings from this study offer a preliminary basis of evidence that there is an association between the uneven distributions of environmental risk, specifically in relation to toxic waste sites, and marginalized, predominantly Afro-Guyanese communities. This research also contributes theoretically and methodologically to the field of environmental studies, particularly the research area of environmental justice and environmental racism. It explored theoretical understandings of biopolitics and necropolitics in relation to environmental injustices, and raised new questions such as: What information can spatial analysis provide in the context of environmental injustice and necropolitics? How are colonialism, colonial legacies and racism significant in the understanding of environmental injustice and other overarching systems of oppression? And finally, what does a consideration of biopolitics and necropolitics bring to environmental (in)justice research?

In the remainder of this section of my paper, I present my main research findings, which I will organise according to the research methods that I have applied in this study. These included newspaper archive research, field and participant observations and semi-structured interviews. As outlined in Chapter 2, journal articles and books by British colonizers, such as James Rodway (1920) and Henry Kirke (1898) gave a thorough account of the Le Repentir Cemetery in the colonial period. From what was described by Kirke, the cemetery was in a despicable state with decaying tombs and flooded grounds. Fast-forward an entire century; newspaper archives, interview accounts and my own fieldwork observations depict the Le Repentir Cemetery in the same appalling state, if not worse.

From my field observations, I also noted infrastructural differences between the two streets that border the cemetery and landfill. Through a spatial analysis I discerned why these differences exist even though the two communities share the same environment, and found that this was due to differing levels of marginalisation. Hopping on tombs and climbing up the old landfill as part of my field walks, I was able to get a closer feel of the environment and observe desecrated tombs among the refuse abandoned in the cemetery's pathways and canals, smoke and stench emanating from the old landfill contaminating the very air you breathe and the visible evidence of the toxic black leachate, possibly seeping into groundwater. Following this, I was able to gain knowledge of landfill operations through further online research from credible science based accounts, such as those from Dr. Craig Freudenrich (2000), highlighting all that was wrong with the old Mandela landfill. Semi-structured interviews gave birth to the themes discussed in Chapter 3 that I will now revisit. In particular, I was struck by new themes that emerged from the interviews, especially residents' feelings of immunity and the multi-functionality of the space. The following section will conclude the discussion of these themes and other findings in view of the theories.

### ***Findings in Light of Theories***

In Chapter 1, I deliberated the approach to environmental injustice used in this research, which informed an understanding of the political, social and economic dimensions associated with the targeting of predominantly Afro-Guyanese, urban communities for toxic waste facilities. Engaging Michel Foucault's (2003) 'biopolitics' and Achille Mbembe's (2003) 'necropolitics' helped me further understand environmental injustice in the context of Georgetown, Guyana, as

part of a politics of life and death, as reflected in racism and the uneven distribution of service and infrastructural provisions.

Chapter 2 provided a contextual background, including a series of events culminating in the environmental injustice experienced by residents neighbouring the cemetery and landfill, for the past decade. Some of these events posed environmental justice concerns, as seen in the case of the animal pound facility built on the grounds of the Le Repentir Cemetery at the end of 1994, shortly after the ‘temporary’ demonstration landfill was erected on the very same supposedly “sacred” grounds. The fact that an area within the cemetery was specifically allocated to unwanted animals, and waste, advanced some important and practical questions, as to what messages such actions convey to the living and non-living people at Le Repentir. Is the message from a twenty-three year old predominantly Indo-Guyanese state that Afro-Guyanese people are most comfortable in squalor? Is the message that Afro-Guyanese people *deserve* to be in squalor? Or is the message that the cultural and religious tradition of the East Indian (Hindu) last rites of passage that burn the body and spread the ashes on the flowing sea, is superior to the cultural and religious tradition of the African (Christian) burying practices of loved ones? One would surmise that the Indo-Guyanese led government, initially catering to the working class Guyanese, evidently turned to a strategic politics of blatant racism, previously disguised.

The chapter that followed featured the conversations I had with residents along the streets bordering the cemetery and landfill, Princess and North East Streets. After transcribing these recorded informal interviews, I discussed in Chapter 3 the previous and daily experiences of residents in a degraded environment, in relation to theoretical and practical discussions under the umbrella of three broad themes that I identified.

First, the environmental health impact on residents in the proximate Lodge and East Le Penitence communities was significant. The debilitating short and long-term effects on their health were shocking, both in their manifestation and the almost disdainful apathy displayed by the government towards the affected community. What struck me about these research findings was that the term ‘injustice’ was never used to describe this case, let alone environmental injustice or environmental racism! Further research might investigate how these US-based politicised concepts could be expanded to embrace and apply the dissimilarities of the politically and colonially driven racism, peculiar to Guyana and those of other territories. Given that this is realised, we can introduce the conversation, stimulate research and investigation, and allow justice to prevail.

The second theme was the notion of immunity, which I suggest reflects a lack of contestation and urgency in relation to the negative effects of the Le Repentir Cemetery and Mandela Landfill. These feelings were expressed by affected residents that unmasked the manner in which the environmental consciousness of marginalized communities are shaped and constrained by the historical and contemporary decisions and actions of the state. This in addition to the insinuations and discord emanating from the state towards race and racial segregation between Indo and Afro-Guyanese, aid in the inhibition of environmental consciousness among marginalised Afro-Guyanese individuals, living in communities that are neglected and disenfranchised.

The third and final theme identified was the evident multi-functionality of the monumental space that constitutes the state neglected cemetery and the old landfill, and how it functions as a site of play, livelihood, survival, vandalism and criminality, whilst acting as a health hazard on so many levels. I argued that describing this space in purely biopolitical terms

would underestimate the agency of the residents and their every day acts of survival while living in a zone of abandonment. Future discussions of necropolitics might explore ways of pinpointing and acknowledging how subjects confined to death negotiate death worlds through modes and practices that nevertheless find ways to survive. For example, Tadiar's (2012) notion of "remaindered life-times" fleshes out the connection between the state and the 'living dead' that find sustainable methods of making a living and making a life/'life-making' while living in a death world or zone of abandonment. (Un)beknown to the state, Tadiar (2012) argues these methods and practices of life-making (in)directly contribute to the capitalist economy and ultimately the state. Throughout my discussions of the research findings, these theoretical concepts offered a grounding and a space to understand the operations of overarching systems of oppression, raised questions for further contemplation and generated ideas of effecting change and better ways of living.

### ***Final Reflections and Actions***

As a researcher, I took into account, reflected upon and grounded my whole self throughout this research journey. Being self-reflexive and acknowledging my positionality permitted me to assess what is at stake in relation to my research. In what ways could this study affect community residents? How should I structure my questions so that residents trust that my research is not just an assignment, but that I actually care? Should I speak Creolese during my conversations with residents? These and other questions and contemplations were deliberated throughout my research journey. Choosing a self-reflexive approach afforded a constant awareness and assessment of myself regarding my own contribution and influence during the research process and its consequent findings.

Most residents stayed away from talking politics when conversing with me on the issues related to their environment. There were a few innuendos suggesting that the government at the time, which was PPP led, was responsible for the degradation of the national cemetery and their environment. It is common for Guyanese to avoid political discussions, especially when these conversations are with people one does not know well, or with someone who could potentially be a supporter of a party other than one's own, based on the colour of one's skin, texture of one's hair, and other racial markers. Knowing the racial and political dynamic and knowing that my complexion could mislead one to think that I am Indo-Guyanese, I sidestepped political questions and disclosed the reasons why I cared to do this research. I mentioned to residents that my cousin, who died at the tender age of 17, is buried in the Le Repentir Cemetery. Not being able to find my cousin's grave in the cemetery, after countless visits, became the driving force behind my increasing passion to document, create and effect change around this issue.

During a few of my conversations with residents, I questioned how they perceived the concept of research. Most stated that they think it is a good thing once something is actually done with the research. Visionary ideas spawned from these comments and discussions and I concluded that I would transform my research into different formats that are effective and accessible to the communities, the city council and local organizations such as *Guyana Shines* and *Youths for Guyana* who passionately and practically address environmental problems in Georgetown and Guyana as a whole.

In addition to using this research as a resourceful tool for holding the Government of Guyana accountable for human and environmental rights violations, other mediums can be produced that would reflect and communicate the research in different ways. In this regard, I plan to extend this research to create a proposal to present to the Mayor and City Council. As

mentioned in Chapter 3, residents are not being informed of the potential environmental risks and health impacts of the old landfill site, thus public advisories through the media and the distribution of pamphlets in the affected communities, is what I envision. Additionally, in order to reach citizens across Guyana, I plan to publish photo essays on social media.

There is hope that we may see changes in this uneven distribution of service and infrastructural provisions in both urban and rural areas across Guyana, as there is a new government elected just two months ago on May 11, 2015. This new dispensation is led by the A Partnership for National Unity and the Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) coalition party, which is predominantly Afro-Guyanese. Their coalition's platform was focused on putting an end to the politically driven racial division among Guyanese citizens and creating a level playing field for all. Thus it will be interesting to see what kind of urban and rural service and infrastructural decisions and developments will be made in the upcoming months and years of their governance. Only time will tell.

Reflecting on the long academic and activist journey that brought me to this research unearths feelings of gratitude and complete admiration for the key persons that spurred the pivotal moments in my academic life. Alissa Trotz paved the way for my intellectual development pertaining to the Caribbean and Guyana in particular, through her courses, work and mentorship. Her passion driven energy was like a virus that you contract and I was fortunate to be a lucky victim, as it ignited latent characteristics in me. In my latter years of academia, Jacqui Alexander offered a classroom space where I learned new perspectives about knowledge, which progressively transformed the ways I receive and interpret information that is presented to me. My own subjectivity and understandings of subjectivity was transformed, which provided a type of research approach that I continued to follow in the duration of my academic life and as I

did here. My recent learning experiences at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University opened my eyes to different mediums of communicating knowledge and experiences. My political awareness also blossomed, allowing me to transgress conventional understandings of research and learning. Jin Haritaworn, Honor Ford-Smith, Deborah Barndt and Chris Cavanagh were instrumental in these revelations as their teachings advanced the borders of my political and environmental consciousness. Jin in particular, guided my research journey from beginning to end, and expanded my understandings of theory and activism by illuminating how these two fields can actually coincide and work together. These learning experiences and revelations were the backbone for this research. Although it was impossible to have answers for all the questions raised, sufficient were answered that will inspire me to carry on this journey and answer more.

## **Appendix: Interview Question Guide**

This interview is part of a study about the ways that the Mandela Landfill site and Le Repentir Cemetery has affected you and still affects you. I am a graduate student in the Environmental Studies Program at York University in Toronto, Canada. All of the interview participants in my study will be asked a similar set of questions.

### QUESTIONS:

Is it okay for me to record our conversation?  
[turn on tape recorder]

#### Introduction:

1. Were you born and raised in East Le Penitence/Lodge?
2. How long have you lived here [East Le Penitence/Lodge]?
3. Do you like living here?

#### Environment:

4. How has the Mandela Landfill affected you when it was in operation?
5. How does it [Mandela Landfill] affect you now?
6. Does the Le Repentir Cemetery affect you in any way?
7. When it floods, does it [Le Repentir Cemetery] affect you?

#### Closing:

8. What would you like to see changed to the old landfill and cemetery?
9. What are your thoughts on the research?

Thank you very much for taking the time to chat with me and be a part of my research. Do you know anybody else living in the area that would be willing to participate in this research/talk to me?

[Turn off tape recorder]

Sometimes, some of the questions were not all asked because residents shared their opinions and experiences without me having to ask them. The conversations were structured in a way that allowed the interviewees freedom to express their knowledge, experiences and opinions. Probing questions were asked based on the answers to the main questions to further delve into their experiences and opinions.

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