

The Extent of Environmental Conscientisation and Social Mobilisation in a Context of Environmental Racism: a case study of the Residents in Merebank

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DECLARATION

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I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations,
references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being
submitted for the degree of MASTERS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE in the
Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of
KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been
submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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'The greatest weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed'
Stephen Bantu Biko

*'Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough; Give the world the best you've got
anyway'*
Mother Theresa

'...emancipate yourselves from mental slavery none but ourselves can free our minds'
Bob Marley (Redemption Song)

I would firstly like to thank my parents for all the sacrifices they have made over the years, so that I could realise my dreams. Most of all I would like to thank them for teaching me about justice, humility and sincerity, without these values I would have been less of a person. My heartfelt gratitude goes out to my supervisor and friend Dr. Harald Witt for showing me that the journey is more important than the destination. To my friends and family who guided me through the most difficult and trying moments in my life, this work is a product of your love and humanity. To the people of Merebank who made me feel like I belong, may this work inspire you to fight against environmental injustice so that we can sustain this 'place' we call home. Most of all I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Lord Jesus Christ who never ceased to hear my cries and never failed to deliver on his promise.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The social and theoretical constructs of environmental racism and its more advanced ‘cousin’, environmental justice have gained a new-found significance within the current global liberal-democratic milieu. In no other country is the original concept of environmental racism more applicable and the struggle for environmental justice more relevant than in post-apartheid South Africa. This is especially true for the communities of the South Durban Basin and, specifically for this research, the community of Merebank. A history of institutional racism exercised through overt segregationist policies such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 meant that black residential areas were intentionally and strategically sited in close proximity to hazardous toxic industries (Festenstein, 2001: 6; Horrell, 1956: 123; Maharaj in Smith, 1992: 77). As a result of such discriminatory policies the community of Merebank is surrounded by numerous ‘dirty’ industries including two oil refineries, a paper mill, a chrome processing plant, an airport and a number of chemical industries (International Development Research Centre report, 1993: 32).

Concerns over environmental injustice have been raised through the actions of the local grassroots environmental organisations including the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA). However, despite the concerted effort made by this organisation to gain mass support from the community, consistently poor turnouts at public meetings, the lack of participation in health studies regarding the impacts caused by toxic contamination, and mixed reactions concerning community participation in vital decision-making processes appears to represent a general lack of concern for environmental issues. This quiescence towards such pressing concerns is difficult to understand when one considers that the very same community was noted for being a hub of political mobilisation during apartheid (Chari, 2006).

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the impact that the legacy of environmental racism has had on how the predominantly Indian community of Merebank comes to perceive and subsequently act on their immediate environmental concerns. In so doing it would attempt to identify the possible reasons for the perceptive apathy that residents express towards toxic pollution. The thesis will go on to argue that the apathy of residents is a direct result of structural forces that have their origins in the apartheid era. It will use three core theoretical constructs namely post-materialism, spatial reality and political alienation as an analytical framework. This will be used to identify the various reasons as to why residents who are very conscious of their immediate pollution concerns choose not to engage in collective action to achieve environmental justice for past discriminations, which continues to be perpetuated in the current neoliberal democratic context. However, apathy is an elusive catchword, “it disguises more than it reveals and

thus misrepresents the underlying social reality” (Salamon & Van Evera, 1973: 1289). This thesis will attempt to challenge this idea by revealing more than it disguises. The primary aim of this thesis is to prove that the majority of residents in the predominantly Indian community of Merebank are in fact apathetic to their immediate environmental justice concerns. In so doing the thesis would attempt to achieve three major objectives. The first objective is to show the relevance of the environmental racism and environmental justice discourses as a conceptual framework to understand contemporary struggles of the predominantly Indian community of Merebank. The second objective is to explore the possible reasons for community apathy towards environmental justice concerns. Thirdly the thesis attempts to situate its primary aim, which is to prove that the majority of the residents in Merebank are apathetic towards environmental justice concerns within the context of the many debates surrounding environmental racism and environmental justice.

This thesis will be divided into five chapters. Chapter one will provide an introduction the thesis indicating the aim of the thesis and the background to the problem. It would also explain what methodologies were used in the research followed by a description of the possible limitations of the thesis. The second chapter provides a brief historical background to the theoretical and social origins of the constructs of environmental racism and environmental justice in the United States of America and traces how they came to assume a dominant position in post-apartheid environmental thinking and activism in South Africa. Chapter three provides a theoretical framework for understanding the possible factors that shape the environmental consciousness and behaviour of people towards environmental justice concerns. A parallel is drawn between the assumptions of these different theoretical explanations and how they apply to this particular case study. The fourth chapter analyses the findings from the interview schedule, focus group discussion and other source materials in order to test the hypothesis that the predominantly Indian residents of Merebank are apathetic to immediate environmental concerns. The assumptions of the core theories that were introduced in chapter three are subsequently used as a guide to test the hypothesis of this study in chapter four. The fifth and final chapter provides a conclusion for the thesis indicating whether the main aim of the thesis had been met. Furthermore it discusses the contribution of this study to the broader discourses of environmental racism and environmental justice. Finally it illustrates the new avenues of research that this thesis lends itself to.

Literature Review

This research does not rely on any particular primary texts *per se*, although it has been strongly informed by the accounts written and collated by the pioneering scholar in the discourse of environmental racism and environmental justice, American sociologist Robert D. Bullard (1986; 1989; 1992; 1993; 2001; 2005). Other works by prominent scholars on environmental racism and justice debates in the U.S.A. such as Joan

Martinez-Allier (2002), Eric J. Krieg (1998), Adam S. Weinberg (1998), Beverly Wright (2005) and others have also proved indispensable in providing a social and historical background to environmental racism. In terms of understanding environmental racism and environmental justice struggles in South Africa the following texts, *Going Green: People, politics and the environment in South Africa* edited by Jacklyn Cock and Eddie Koch (1991), *Hidden Faces: Environment, Development, Justice: South Africa and the Global Context* edited by David Hallows (1993), and *Environmental Justice in South Africa*, edited by David A. McDonald (2002) were invaluable as they provided a comprehensive account of the history of environmental racism in South Africa.

In regard to understanding factors that shape environmental consciousness and activism, which was the crux of this work, studies conducted on post-materialism and its impact on environmental concern by the founding father of post-materialist theory Ronald Inglehart (1981; 1999; 2005) were highly informative. A later study by American sociologists Kent D. Van Liere and Riley E. Dunlap (1980) expounded on post-materialist analysis by exploring how more basic socio-demographic indicators such as age, sex and religion affect environmental consciousness and behaviour. In understanding the relationship between space, ideology and identity and how this dynamic affects environmental consciousness and activism the work of post-modernist philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1989; 2000) and his concept of *habitus* proved to be beyond value, as it illustrates how the same space can assume different meanings as time progresses. The challenge of understanding the relationship between environmental racism, apathy and political alienation was made easier by the somewhat dated but still comprehensive work on apathy and political alienation by Dwight G. Dean (1960; 1969).

This research would not have been realised had it not been for extensive work done by Dianne Scott (1992; 2003) regarding the origin and history of environmental justice struggles facing the communities of South Durban Basin. Bill Freund's (1995) work entitled *Insiders and Outsiders: The Indian Working Class of Durban 1910-1990* gave insight into the uniqueness of Indians living in Merebank, their ability to succeed despite political, economic and social adversity, their strong sense of family and community and their unflinching political will to achieve justice. Last, though far from least, the fairly recent works of Sharad Chari (2006), tracing the history of political mobilisation in Merebank and its neighbouring community of Wentworth and looking at how it has come to translate into current struggles including pollution struggles provided the necessary stimulus to engage this topic.

Research Methodology

The primary methodological approach of this case study was ethnographic. An ethnographic study requires a holistic approach to research and emphasises the need to explore how the various social, political and economic factors are interrelated and how

this complex relationship is reconfigured as a result of historical change. Therefore the research did not focus on issues in the contemporary era only. It also adopted an historical approach to provide a background as to how a lack of environmental consciousness and mobilisation has been shaped by broader forces which influence societal attitudes towards environmental issues that have evolved over a period of time and continue into the present era. This approach conforms to the 'constructivist' position that this thesis espouses, which is a primary feature of an ethnographic study. The research was also qualitative although the main approach was exploratory in that it attempted to test the applicability of relevant conceptual theories to findings on the ground which required adequate fieldwork.

As a result data was captured by using both the interview schedule and focus group discussion methods. A single basic interview schedule was constructed for the sample group consisting of residents from Merebank. The methodology used for conducting the interview schedules was irregular and stratified. It was irregular because respondents were selected without subscribing to a specific pattern of selection, namely selecting every *n*th household or resident. Residents were selected in an *ad hoc* manner in each sub region. The purpose of this was to include the perspectives of residents across a wider geographical area. A random sampling approach would have prevented this diversity in response, since there were a very limited number of interview schedules that was administered in each of the designated sub- regions. It was stratified because an equal number of residents were interviewed in each of the four designated sub-regions (Fowler, 2002: 13). This approach to administer interview schedules was used because Merebank is spatially fragmented with certain sections of the community lying quite a distance away from each other, which poses its own challenges to research. Hence, the area of research needed to be stratified. Therefore the core sample area which was the residential area of Merebank was divided into four smaller sample area sub-sets. The Navy area which was sample area A; the Central or shopping centre region which was sample area B; the Mini Town region was sample area C and finally the Ridge on the hill face was sample area D. Ten residents in each of the four sub-regions were interviewed; as a result a total of forty residents were interviewed. All of the interviews were personally administered by the researcher to protect against any misconception if other individuals were employed to conduct research on his behalf. Interview schedules were structured to ensure that responses were aligned to test the applicability of relevant theories to the claim that the majority of residents are apathetic to environmental concerns. The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted between 20 October 2008 and 05 November 2008.

Data was also gathered from a single focus group interview. Focus group interviews are a powerful research tool for qualitative research, as it allows for "indepth discussion on any topic that is relevant to the situation raised" (Vaughn *et al*, 1996: 4). Most

significantly, it is designed to “discover why people act, think and feel as they do”, which is the primary objective of this particular study (Vaughn *et al*, 1996:2). The focus group interview was conducted by the researcher. The focus group interview consisted of a local government official, two members from the two prominent community-based organisations in the area, namely; the Merebank Residents Association (MRA) and Crisis Careline. Other interviewees who were part of the focus group included two known environmental activists; one a former member of SDCEA and the other is an independent environmental activist.

The interviewees of the focus group discussion were purposively selected. This gave insight into how the varying perspectives on environmental issues have been influenced by their respective positions within the community. It also helped to capture their personal experiences, which was molded by different historical and political contexts. Furthermore it showed how common trends or differences in environmental consciousness and social mobilisation amongst residents are impacted upon by broad factors pertaining to socio-economic status, spatial experience and political alienation. The focus group interview questions were semi-structured. This meant that the questions had to be both structured to ensure that the responses do not deviate from achieving its core objectives and open ended so as to allow for more generalised responses that could add value to the research. Structure was necessary as it ensured the separation of the broad factors being tested such as the impact of material needs, political design and spatial experience and their individual correlations with the formation of environmental attitudes, environmental consciousness and activism (Wengraf, 2001: 5).

Open ended questioning allowed the interviewees who are actively involved in fighting immediate pollution concerns to shed light on what they thought of the level of community awareness and mobilisation around immediate pollution concerns. Furthermore it gave interviewees greater freedom to share some of their more personal experiences in terms of what made them become actively involved in fighting pollution and some of the many challenges they face in mobilising fellow residents. This focus group interview was recorded, because the writing of session notes would not have captured many of the key points raised by all the interviewees who were part of the discussion. Also the nature of the discussion - consisting of many interviewees - made the task of coordinating discussion and writing extremely difficult (Wengraf, 2001: 192). Although this research was strictly qualitative, basic graphs were drawn to express the relationship between certain socio-demographic factors such as age and education levels with environmental concern. However, these graphs were not drawn to depict a proper scientific correlation between different variables, but were used as a heuristic device to illustrate simple relationships.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this particular research. Firstly methodologically, the research could have been more objective, subscribing to a more rigorous scientific approach to the questioning and analysis of findings. A second limitation to this research is that the findings of the research are unique and area-specific. The homogeneity of the Merebank community, being mainly Indian, means that the findings may be very different to neighbouring communities, such as Wentworth and Umlazi which also are part of the South Durban Basin. Chari (2006) captures this in his work entitled *Life Histories of Race and Space in Making of Wentworth and Merebank, South Durban*. This comparative study of residents in Merebank and Wentworth vindicates this by indicating how Merebank, which was the hub of political activism during apartheid, has now become quiescent to environmental struggles, whilst Wentworth which was 'ghettoised' during apartheid has now become the centre of current environmental justice struggles.

A third limitation pertains to how residents were approached to be part of the study. By indicating to residents that the study is dealing with understanding activism in the area, many of their responses may have been contaminated. For example, some people may be employed or have family members who are employed by surrounding industries. These individuals may be skeptical of the research and may feel threatened to respond to questions involving industries. My previous experience of conducting research in the area on pollution exposed me to individuals who openly indicated that they were employees of surrounding industries and were not willing to participate in a research project that possibly implicates their employers in any way, as this may threaten their job security. The fourth limitation of this research involves one of the questions asked in the interview schedules, testing for normlessness. Even though residents may accept money from industries to be 'quiet' it is highly unlikely that residents when asked, would disclose their real actions.

The fifth limitation also pertains to the interview schedules. The interview schedule was too long and some of the questions asked were unclear. In hindsight, a much shorter and more focused interview schedule would have made respondents more comfortable and would possibly have prompted more clear and accurate responses. The nature of the questions asked could also have been more direct. However the reason for this lack of precision in the framing of questions was a result of the difficulty in ensuring that the responses of people are not marshaled to suit intended outcomes, whilst at the same time allowing for greater scope and freedom to respondents. The final limitation involves the number of residents that were surveyed; perhaps a larger sample group of residents would have revealed clearer results.

Conclusion

Firstly, this chapter provided a background to the research area. It justified the need to explore the extent to which environmental racism has come to affect how the predominantly Indian residents of the community of Merebank conscientise and mobilise around immediate pollution concerns. Secondly it outlined the key conceptual and theoretical frameworks that were used to prove the hypothesis that the majority of residents are apathetic to environmental justice concerns. The works of prominent scholars in the relevant fields of study were identified and their importance to informing and setting the parameters to this thesis explained. Thirdly the chapter accounted for the methodologies used in research, the rationale behind their use, how they were applied and the value of adopting them. This section of the chapter explained what approach was used to writing and the combination of approaches that were used to conduct fieldwork. Finally the chapter ended by identifying the possible shortcomings of thesis. These limitations involve the methodological nature of the research, the complex dynamic between the various black communities located in the South Durban Basin sharing the same experiences, the difficulty of getting clear and accurate responses from respondents due to a conflict of interests and finally the structural flaws of the interview schedules which could have hindered data collection.

CHAPTER TWO

Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism: Understanding Theory, Origin and Application

Introduction

This chapter will provide a theoretical and social background to the discourse of environmental racism and illustrates how and why it serves as a major tool of analysis in understanding current environmental justice struggles in South Africa. The first part of the chapter traces the origins and evolution of environmental racism and the environmental justice movement in the U.S.A. where the concepts first originated. Following from this, the chapter goes on to explain how environmental justice struggles are articulated and contextualised within the current neoliberal democratic milieu. Some of the major challenges facing the environmental justice movement are identified and discussed. However, the main purpose of this chapter is to find possible answers as to the extent to which environmental racism has come to impact on how black South Africans think about, and act on environmental concerns. Therefore the remainder of the chapter will address the question on how environmental racism has affected the manner in which black communities in South Africa mobilise around environmental justice struggles specifically within an urban context. The chapter concludes by arguing that much emphasis has been placed on what approach should be used to achieve environmental justice as a result of environmental racism. It highlights the inadequacy of the dominant rights-based and materialist approaches as being efficient vehicles for facilitating environmental awareness and activism. As a result of this scholarly preponderance, no effort has been made to assess how broad structural forces, which are themselves products of racism, such as socio-economic levels of development, spatial reality and alienation from decision-making affects how black communities such as the predominantly Indian community of Merebank come to perceive and act on environmental justice struggles.

A Conceptual Framework of Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism

Environmental justice is a heavily laden concept. Traditionally, it was used by grassroots organisations in the U.S.A. in their fight against the unequal distribution of hazardous industrial and waste facilities in communities consisting of what is referred to in the U.S.A. as 'minorities' or 'communities of colour'. These communities did not "employ the language of uncompensated externalities but rather the language of racial discrimination" to articulate their struggles against unequal exposure to environmental risks (Martinez-Alier, 2002: 169). 'Communities of colour' were deliberately targeted for the siting of toxic industries and waste dumps. It is argued that as African American, Asian and Native American communities were 'deliberate targets'; this constituted an intentional act of racism on behalf of the relevant political, industrial and commercial

actors. However this position has been highly contested among environmental justice scholars. Weinberg (1998: 25) indicates that a vast number of researchers have documented unequal exposure without placing enough emphasis on how low-income 'communities of colour' come to be disproportionately exposed to environmental risks. This brings the issue of 'causality' to the centre of the environmental justice debate. Understanding how 'communities of colour' come to be exposed to environmental risks enables researchers to test the claim that these communities are victims of intentional acts of racism (Ringquist & Clark, 1999: 76). A study published by Vicki Been in 1994 lays a direct challenge to this correlation between 'race and exposure', which is the basis upon which environmental justice issues are framed. That is to say environmental justice is a direct response to environmental racism (Weinberg, 1998: 26).

Been criticises previous studies which had arrived at the conclusion that race is the primary indicator of unequal exposure to toxics as being historically flawed. Through an astute assessment of migration patterns Been found that people of colour move into areas where toxic industries and waste facilities are already well established due to lower property values (Weinberg 1998: 26-27). Despite this research indicating that the opportunity of securing cheaper housing is a major attraction it failed to include the fact that these people also move into such areas due to its proximity to social amenities and the availability of employment opportunities. Although from this perspective the decision to move into environments that pose a significant threat to health and livelihoods can be seen as an exercise of free choice and is therefore 'voluntary' it does not address the fact that these people have no other alternative (Bryner in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 46). They are limited by their socio-economic status within society and subsequently the option of living in more expensive areas which are aesthetically appealing and where social amenities are easily available and accessible and absent of hazardous facilities, is not possible. Furthermore this hypothesis is ahistorical and does not analyse why a substantial number of people within 'communities of colour' also belong to the low-income bracket within the socio-economic hierarchy, especially in the American south (Pulido, 2000: 16).

Constructing Environmental Injustice: From Institutionalised Racism to Neoliberal Democracy

A long history of Jim Crowism¹ or institutionalised racial segregation beginning with slavery and ending with the struggle for civil rights as late as the 1960s in the American south, has meant that people of colour have long been the victims of overt racial discrimination (Bullard, 2001: 164). It is therefore difficult to eschew the central role that broader structural forces or social injustices such as racism have played in terms

¹ Jim Crowism refers to the segregationist policies that were enacted by southern states in the U.S.A between 1876-1965, which advocated the segregation of public spaces and facilities along racial lines.

of causing environmental risks to be distributed unequally along racial lines. The extent to which racism permeates all facets of social consciousness and behaviour subsequently exacerbating environmental injustices was well captured by *The Commission for Racial Justice* report published in 1987 (Lee cited in Bullard, 1993: 41; Ringquist & Clarke, 1999: 75-76):

Racism is racial prejudice plus power. Racism is the intentional or unintentional use of power to isolate, separate and exploit others. This use of power is based on a belief in superior racial origin, identity or supposed racial characteristics. Racism confers certain privileges on and defends the dominant group, which in turn sustains and perpetuates racism. Both consciously and unconsciously, racism is enforced and maintained by the legal, cultural, religious, educational, economic, political, environmental and military institutions of societies. Racism is more than just an attitude it is an institutionalised form of that attitude.

However, central to this debate on how black communities come to be exposed unjustly to toxics, is the question of why do the same communities continue to be targets of environmental injustice within established democratic political systems of governance, and can the perpetuation of these injustices be articulated using the vocabulary of environmental racism.

The majority of communities that were victims of environmental racism have been politically, economically, and socially disenfranchised over time. Most of these communities lack the resources needed to challenge the necessary structures responsible for perpetuating environmental injustices (Bryner in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 34; Capek, 1993: 8). In some cases people are simply ignorant of the dangers that toxic pollution poses to their lives and that of their children, whilst others are aware of these environmental threats but make a conscious decision not to act. A lack of knowledge concerning their basic rights, education and information pertaining to the health risks posed by exposure to various toxic effluents are possible reasons for the ignorance shown by some communities towards immediate environmental justice concerns (Bryner in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 38).

There are a number of more concrete reasons as to why some communities who are aware of environmental injustices are unwilling to actively pursue justice. Some of the reasons can be due to state repression and procedural alienation of communities from environmental decision-making as a result of elite-based democratic practices exercised by the associated stakeholders namely state, industry and civic organisations within neoliberal democracies (Hamilton, 1995: 114). Another simple reason could be the fact that poor people are more preoccupied with securing their economic survival than being concerned with the impact of pollution on their health and well-being. However, key to an understanding of why previously disenfranchised black communities continue to be the targets of environmental injustice within a functional democracy is due to a much

deeper and more pervasive factor that is endemic to the current neoliberal democratic discourse and which has come to dominate most societies throughout the world, namely capitalism.

The logic of capitalism is predicated on the unhindered accumulation of profit through the exploitation of labour and externalisation of the costs of production. In order for the capitalist mode of production to survive and reproduce itself, the necessary social conditions must also be reproduced (Wolff, 2005: 225). As Krieg (1998: 5) explained, “poor communities and ‘communities of colour’ lacking control capacity provide the social conditions that are conducive to cost externalization”. For instance black communities that are exposed to toxic industries are very often dependent on industrial capital for their socio-economic survival. Furthermore these communities provide an ideal political climate for industrial capital to exploit, since they do not challenge industries effectively on issues pertaining to the external costs attached to industrial development such as the effects of pollution on health and property value (Krieg, 1998).

The shift from institutionalised racial discrimination as the source of unjust distribution of environmental hazards to the current dependence on industrial capital does not represent a change in terms of exposure to environmental risks. Instead the only form of change is in the causal nature of environmental injustice. In other words, past injustices caused by the overt practice of ‘racism’ adopt new and more subtle forms and therefore continue to persist even in societies where democracy exists. For example, people who have historically been the victims of structuralised racial discrimination would inevitably fall victim to capital interests, which perpetuates social, economic, political and environmental injustice. Although in a neoliberal democratic context within which capitalism thrives the language used to articulate these struggles would no longer be race but class (Dodson in McDonald, 2002). However, this approach poses a major challenge to meeting the ends of justice. This is complicated by the fact that polluting industries continue to be attracted to low income black communities, where a vast number of polluting industries are already well established due to racially segregationist policies of the past. It would therefore be difficult to prove that the decision of a toxic industry to site its operations within a low-income ‘community of colour’ is a race-conscious decision and therefore constitutes ‘an intentional act of racism’ (Bryner in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 48).

The race-class dialectic is complex, especially when applied to current environmental justice debates. Within a neoliberal capitalist society governed by market forces which are ahistorical in their application of justice the connection between unequal exposure to toxics and poverty due to racial injustices of the past, and present class inequalities, is not made (Getches & Pellow in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 18). As a result low-income black communities who were the victims of environmental injustices under racially oppressive systems of governance because of their racial identity continue to be victims of class

inequality within neoliberal democracies. It is therefore problematic to presume that the presence of democracy predisposes the exercise of justice:

The idea of justice and the idea of democracy fit very precariously together. They clash constantly in application. Any actual structure of rule will face incentives quite distinct from and often sharply at odds with the requirements for the fluent operations of a capitalist economy (Dunne, 2005: 149).

The rationale behind polluting facilities continuing to expand or introducing new operations in black communities is based on the need to promote economic growth, which is the primary objective of a capitalist economy (Ringquist & Clarke, 1999: 75). Expanded and new developments in low-income black communities equates with the creation of more jobs for poor disempowered peoples and is considered the way forward in terms of achieving social redress and justice.

However, whilst the state and corporations emphasise the economic benefits that expansive industrialisation brings to the disempowered, little if not any attention is brought to the externalities associated with industrial expansion, namely an increase in pollution caused by a dramatic increase in toxic waste production (Hamilton, 1995: 108). This ultimately leads to an increase in environmental risk or burden, which unfortunately has to be shouldered by these communities. Low-income black communities often express ambivalence towards industrial development. On the one hand they fall under the false pretences that the state and industry have their best interests at heart and are responsible for enhancing their standard of living and on the other hand they are more skeptical as to the reasons which lie behind this decision, whether it would improve or worsen their existing situation (Higgins, 1993: 287-288).

In terms of the former approach people often succumb to economic job blackmail² as they are threatened with job losses or plant closure and are therefore less willing to engage in collective protest action against industries (Bullard & Wright in Dunlap & Mertig, 1992; Higgins, 1993: 288, Krieg, 1998: 5). Focusing on the latter approach, the concerns of the affected communities regarding disproportionate exposure to environmental risks and the improbability of receiving substantial economic rewards confines affected people to a position of political apathy, which inevitably worsens their plight. Despite knowing that the environmental risks far outweigh the economic benefits, these people are often powerless to prevent the expansion of industries in close proximity to their living spaces.

The economic logic governing the distribution of environmental burdens is itself determined by dominant elite interests both locally and globally who argue that it makes

² Economic job blackmail was a term coined by Kazis & Grossman in 1982. It was used effectively to describe the economic risks that individuals and communities have to face when they challenge polluting industries (Krieg, 1998: 5).

economic sense to transfer the costs of development to communities that are already suffering the effects of unequal exposure. This intentional class-conscious decision to transfer environmental burdens to communities that offer minimal resistance to capital interests due their political powerlessness, low socio-economic status, and weak influence and social standing in relation to broader political struggles was highlighted in a memo written by the chief economist of the World Bank, Lawrence Summers:

I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that. Rather than internalise externalities associated with pollution or ecological damage, the ready solution is attempting simply to displace these somewhere where political power is negligible and the immediate environmental implications are less visible in the name of overall economic growth. After all inhabitants of low income countries typically die before the age at which they would begin suffering prostrate cancer associated with toxic dumping. And in any event, using marginal productivity as a measure, low income Africans are not worth much anyhow. Nor are Africans aesthetic concerns with air pollution likely to be substantive as they are for wealthy Northerners (cited in Bond, 2002: 28).

Although Summers' ideas resonate with global inequality, concerning the unequal distribution of environmental burdens along the lines of the 'Third World-First World' dichotomy it can be applied to understand the motives behind local acts of injustice within neoliberal democratic countries, the U.S.A and South Africa being a case in point. As Bullard (1989) explained whether it is within a developed or developing society one can be assured of the existence of 'Third World communities' who are victims of environmental injustice which is perpetuated on a localised level. The economic logic used by Summers to express the rationale behind the distribution of environmental costs and benefits is in direct contradiction to the ends of environmental justice which is to address past injustices in terms of the disproportionate distribution of environmental risks and benefits and to ensure equality and fairness in the distribution of current environmental burdens and benefits.

The emergence of Environmental Racism

The Environmental Justice Movement was borne out events that occurred in 1982, when the predominantly lower-class African American community of Warren County, North Carolina carried out a mass protest against the development of a landfill used for the dumping of highly toxic polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) within their community. This community protest action led to the arrest of some 500 people and brought significant attention to the relationship between race and the unjust distribution of environmental burdens (Chavis in Bullard, 1993: 3; Martinez-Allier, 2002: 169; Pinderhughes, 1996: 240). The claim was that 'communities of colour' were the deliberate targets of toxic industries and waste facilities. In 1983 the Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA) employed the General Accounting Office (GAO) to conduct a study to test this claim. The GAO study verified this claim when they revealed that three out of four toxic waste facilities in one specific EPA study region were all located in 'communities of colour' (Bullard & Wright, 1986: 77; Getches & Pellow, in Mutz *et al* 2002: 8; Lee in Bullard, 1993: 42). A later study carried out in 1987 entitled *Toxics, Waste and Race* convened by the United Church of Christ's Commission on Racial Justice (UCCC) went a step further identifying race as being the most significant factor in determining the distribution of environmental hazards (Bullard, 2005: 20). In 1990 Robert Bullard published '*Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality*'. This study on environmental racism showed how the siting of hazardous waste facilities was linked to a historical pattern of racial segregation. It was also one of the first studies to look at how the social and psychological impacts of racism shape community response to environmental injustices. It was due to the outcome of these findings that the theoretical and social construct of environmental racism was forged.

Environmental racism was defined by the former president of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), Rev. Benjamin Chavis in the following manner:

Environmental racism is discrimination in environmental policy-making. It is racial discrimination in the enforcement of regulations and laws. It is racial discrimination in the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste disposal and siting of polluting industries. It is racial discrimination in the official sanctioning of the life threatening poisons and pollutants in the communities of colour. And it is racial discrimination in the history of excluding "people of colour" from mainstream environmental groups, decision-making boards, commissions and regulatory boards (Chavis in Bullard, 1993: 3).

It was within this context of environmental racism that the function of the environmental justice movement was defined. The concept of justice in this regard meant fairness and equality in the distribution of environmental hazards such as the distribution of waste facilities and polluting industries across black communities. According to Martinez-Allier (2002: 169) the environmental justice movement is a;

...self conscious movement, environmental justice fights against alleged disproportionate dumping of toxic waste or exposure to different sorts of environmental risk in areas of predominantly African American, Hispanic and Native American populations. The language employed is not that of uncompensated externalities but rather the language of race discrimination, which is politically powerful in the U.S.A because of the Civil Rights struggle.

The environmental justice movement was an offshoot of the civil rights movement as opposed to mainstream environment movement. The confluence of civil rights concerns with environmental issues occurred fairly recently. Environmental justice concerns such

as unequal exposure to environmental hazards at home, in the workplace or on the playground were issues that were on the agenda of the civil rights movement when it was at its zenith in the 1960s. For example, Martin Luther King visited Memphis in 1968 to address the concerns of African American garbage disposal workers who were fighting against the hazardous conditions under which they were working (Bullard, 2001: 151). In the same year African American college students protested against the death of an African American child who drowned in a pile of garbage whilst playing in a dump-site close to her home. Whilst these examples are often used to illustrate that environmental justice concerns were part of the civil rights agenda the fact remains that these struggles were not clearly articulated in terms of the use of the environmental justice frame until the 1980s (Lee in Bullard, 1993: 45).

Integrating Civil Rights and Environmental Justice

Growing appeals made by the vast number of grassroots community organisations in the U.S.A. during the 1980s and 1990s for equality in the distribution of environmental burdens and benefits were largely ignored by the relevant authorities. This was exacerbated by the fact that calls for better environmental policy, offering protection to formerly disenfranchised communities from becoming targets for further injustices related to the unequal exposure to waste and access to cleaner and safer environments at home and in the workplace, also went unheard (Bullard & Wright, 1986: 72). As a result many struggles used the rhetoric of 'racial discrimination' which is found under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in which to pursue litigation against environmental injustices during much of the 1980s and into the 1990s (Bullard, 2001: 152). However in most of these cases it was extremely difficult to prove that hazardous industries and waste facilities were deliberately distributed along racial lines. For example in *East Bibb Twiggs Neighbourhood Assoc. v MaconBibb County Planning & Zoning Comm'n* (1989), the plaintiffs challenged the decision for a permit to be granted for a landfill site to be located in a predominantly African American community on the basis of unequal exposure (Bryner in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 35).

The case was unsuccessful because racial intent or a pattern of historical racial intent in the distribution of hazardous facilities could not be proven (Getches & Pellow in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 7). Since the late 1980s an introduction of new policy measures has managed to remedy the past injustices of unequal distribution of environmental risks in 'communities of colour' by preventing such actions from reoccurring. President Clinton's Executive Order 12, 898 issued in 1994 made it a standard requirement for all federal agencies to ensure that previously disenfranchised communities who have been the victims of environmental injustice be protected against any form of new development that may negatively affect their health and livelihoods (Bullard, 2005: 71; Melosi, 1995: 9; Getches & Pellow in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 15; Martinez-Alier, 2002: 171).

One of the most widely acclaimed success stories in recent years, which is testament to how this new policy initiative has increased the chances of communities achieving environmental justice, has been that of the community of St James Parish in Convent, Louisiana (Wright in Bullard, 2005: 102). In 1996 a Japanese corporation, Shintech proposed that three chemical plants and an incinerator should be built along the Mississippi River within four miles of the predominantly African American community of St James Parish who constituted 81 per cent of the total population of 3, 895 residents (Hines, 2001: 780; Wright in Bullard, 2005: 100). Besides the vast majority of residents that would have been affected by the construction of these polluting industries being African American, they were also extremely poor with the average income of African American residents hovering around \$5000, 00 a year and the unemployment rate fixed at 8.5 per cent, which was three points higher than the overall state level (Hines, 2001: 781). Most significantly St James had already been home to a large number of petrochemical industries that were responsible for emitting carcinogens into the atmosphere (Wright in Bullard, 2005: 93).

The community argued that the primary motivation behind choosing St James Parish as the proposed site of the Shintech plant was due to their status of being a low-income 'community of colour', which provided a significant counter to Shintech's claimed motivation that the industry would help remedy the high unemployment rate. The various grassroots organisations like the St James Citizens for Jobs and the Environment (SJCJE) and Louisiana Environmental Network issued the services of Tulane Law Clinic who requested the Environmental Protection Agency of America (EPA) to reject Shintech's permit for the proposed site on the basis of President Clinton's Executive Order 12, 898. This lawsuit made history as it was the first time that the EPA was asked to reject a permit on the grounds of environmental racism (Hines, 2001: 783). The successes experienced by grassroots groups who have used the environmental justice framework to effect policy changes in the U.S.A has been a result of their ability to raise environmental consciousness and mobilisation in 'minority low-income communities' and 'communities of colour' persistently despite a lack of resources.

Translating Environmental Justice into Ecological Justice

In the U.S.A 'people of colour' have historically been alienated from participating in environmental decision-making processes and from serving as active members on decision-making boards within mainstream environmental movements such as the Sierra Club and Audourbourne Society. 'Green issues' focusing on conservation and preservation of the natural environment were seen as being predominantly white-middle class concerns. 'Brown issues' on the other hand were reserved for the interests of low-income 'communities of colour' and dealt exclusively with matters of social justice involving human rights such as access to basic needs and better health and quality of life (Taylor in Bullard, 1993). The reason for this split in 'environmental ideology' is a

product of the different levels of economic development experienced by the different race groups as result of institutionalised racism (Guha & Martinez-Allier, 1997: 16). According to Inglehart's (1980) theory of post-materialism, groups that are able to achieve self actualisation beyond the satisfaction of basic-needs would shift their concerns towards luxury issues, such as environmental protection. This hypothesis would be one of the key areas of focus to determine how socio-economic levels of development affect how Indian residents in the community of Merebank come to perceive immediate environmental quality concerns in the remaining chapters of this thesis. Inglehart uses Maslow's hierarchy of needs analysis to illustrate how societies that are able to realise heightened levels capitalist development show greater initiative towards addressing environmental issues. Post-materialist analysis is a powerful indicator of environmental concern. For example, 'people of colour' were denied opportunities to access higher paying jobs, rights to better housing, healthcare, education and the freedom to live in cleaner, safer and aesthetically pleasing environments (Bullard & Wright, 1986: 72-73). Subsequently the main concerns drafted onto the political agenda of social movements fighting for justice was to fight for the rights to these amenities and the freedom from their position of racial subjugation and poverty:

For many years the conventional wisdom was that the poor were 'too poor to be green'. If you look at the countries that are interested in environmentalism, or at the individuals which support environmentalism within each country, one is struck by the extent to which environmentalism is an interest of the upper middle classes. Poor countries and poor people simply aren't interested (Thurow, 1980: 104-105). 'It is no accident wrote Eric Hobsbawn (1994: 570) that the main support for ecological policies comes from the rich countries and from the comfortable rich and middle class (except from businessmen who hope to make money by polluting activity). The poor under employed wanted more 'development', not less (Martinez-Alier, 2002: 209).

Whites on the other hand by virtue of their colour enjoyed the many political, social, economic and environmental privileges that were denied to 'people of colour' and therefore assumed their position within the upper echelons of the class ladder in societies that were dominated by racism. As a result whites shifted their focus to issues outside of basic human need to embrace wider moral concerns such as environmental protection-becoming advocates for the preservation of the natural environment (Sprout in Roeloffs *et al*, 1974: 164; Martinez-Allier, 2002: 209; Mitchell *et al* in Dunlap & Mertig, 1992: 16). Conversely a preoccupation with socio-economic concerns has meant that 'people of colour' were not able to extend their focus and assume moral issues such as the protection of natural environment into their broader struggle consciousness (Bullard, 1989: 42-43).

The failure of the mainstream environmental movement to adopt social justice issues into its area of concern created a degree of bitterness amongst grassroots organisations, particularly in 'communities of colour'. Grassroots organisations that used the

environmental justice framework to articulate their struggles expressed a sense of hostility towards 'white environmentalism' and were against mainstream environmental slogans such as 'Save the Rainforest' (Martinez-Alier, 2002: 170). Although the environmental justice movement had been highly critical of the parochial nature of the mainstream environmental movement, it was also guilty of being quite narrow in its initial focus.

Firstly the environmental justice discourse was confined in its application to an urban context and therefore dealt solely with urban related issues such as exposure to hazardous industries and waste facilities and access to basic needs (healthcare, electricity and water). It was not until the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, that environmental justice discourse came to embrace and incorporate the livelihood struggles of rural communities into its overall principle framework (Getches & Pellow in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 24). Accessibility to natural resources for rural communities who depended directly on the natural environment for their basic needs such as firewood, food and medicinal plants represented a fundamental environmental benefit beyond the right to better housing and to an environment that is clean and healthy but the right to life itself.

The struggles of communities in the 'Third World' who fight against logging companies to protect the natural forest from which they obtain firewood, food and building material illustrates how poor rural communities often are at the vanguard of environmental conservation (Sachs, 1995: 7). These communities assume the responsibility for protecting the natural environment from complete decimation as a result of commercial enterprise, whilst at the same time ensuring their right to access these natural resources. Their struggle to protect the natural forest from commercial enterprise ensures the long term survival of both the natural environment and themselves. This analogy highlights the fact that the pursuits of social justice in terms of having access to natural resources ('brown issues') can inadvertently benefit the 'green' conservationist agenda (Harvey, 1998: 346). Martinez-Alier's concept of the 'environmentalism of the poor' expresses these livelihood struggles of subsistence communities in the 'Third World' and the integration of their concerns within the ambit of environmental justice.

Secondly the language of racism is not entirely applicable to environmental justice struggles in all parts of the world, especially within racially homogenous communities, where social stratification along the lines of ethnicity, gender and class determine how environmental burdens and benefits are distributed. The construct of an 'environmentalism of the poor' as opposed to environmental racism is therefore inclusive of other forms of discrimination.

From the above discussion it is quite clear that the environmental justice movement had evolved by the 1990s. This was due to its practical applicability to social justice struggles beyond urban pollution and access to social amenities to include rural issues of

accessibility to natural resources. It is suggested that it would be best to understand these dynamic environmental issues under the rubric of ecological rather than environmental justice.

Whilst the environmental justice movement has not changed its primary objective, which is to prevent black communities from unequal exposure to environmental hazards, it has widened its appeal and scope to embrace the vast array of issues facing marginalised peoples throughout the globe. This widening and deepening of the environmental discourse was captured at the First People of Colour Conference of Environmental Justice held in 1991 in Washington D.C. Here various grassroots organisations such as womens rights organisations, environmental groups and community based organisations from the 'Third World' gathered to draft the principles of environmental justice that was to be applied throughout the world (Getches & Pellow in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 9).

Environmental Racism in South Africa

Apartheid Environmentalism

In the late nineteenth to early twentieth century environmentalism in South Africa was dominated by an authoritarian conservationist discourse (Cock in Cock & Koch, 1991). The establishment of Nature Reserves³ led to the forceful removal of indigenous black South Africans who were blamed for the destruction of the natural environment. Racially motivated environmental policies often promoted wildlife preservation at the expense of the livelihood and survival strategies of indigenous black South Africans (Cock & Fig in McDonald, 2002: 133).⁴ The establishment of apartheid and the consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism in the mid twentieth century ushered in a new wave of racially discriminatory environmental regulations (Carruthers in Griffiths & Robin, 1997: 128). The enactment of policies such as the Reservation of Separate Amenities (Act 49 of 1953) stipulated exclusive access and use of public spaces to particular races. This Act was used by the relevant state authorities and departments to deny black people access to Game or Nature Reserves either for subsistence or recreational purposes (Khan in McDonald, 2002: 22).

³ **Note:** The Kruger National Park was the first Nature Reserve established in South Africa in 1898 and is also the second oldest national park in the world (Cock & Fig in McDonald, 2002: 132).

⁴ The practice of veld burning to stimulate fresh vegetative growth in order to attract game and the collection of medicinal plants were often perceived as another factor contributing to the loss in biodiversity (Beinhart & Coates, 1995: 3; Beinhart, 2000: 298). The authorities implemented draconian hunting and poaching laws in order to prevent natives from extracting these natural resources. Ironically, these protected wildlife areas became recreational playgrounds reserved for white's only with trophy hunting of game qualifying as a form of recreation whilst indigenous people who depended on natural resources from these reserves for their basic necessities such as food, clothing, and medicinal herbs as well as for cultural practices were seen as environmentally destructive (McDonald, 2002: 1; Carruthers, 1997: 31).

Conservationist policy in South Africa was therefore very much a product of racial discrimination. Environmental policy, driven by this conservationist discourse, was therefore seen as an instrument of oppression in South Africa by the vast majority of previously disenfranchised black South Africans. The highly racialised nature of pre-1994 environmental legislation in South Africa has had a major impact in terms of how black South Africans have come to perceive and subsequently respond to environmental issues. This claim is validated by Khan (in McDonald, 2002: 22) who purports that the alienation of blacks from areas rich in natural resources in order to make way for the establishment of Nature Reserves and the further exclusion of blacks from enjoying access to amenities such as “nature and game reserves, hiking trails and picnic and camp sites had a detrimental effect on their environmental attitudes and perceptions of the affected communities.” Alienation from environmental amenities argues Khan (in McDonald, 2002: 22) was a major contributing factor to the lack of interest and sometimes quite overt hostility that blacks had expressed towards conservation in South Africa.

The Environmental Justice Movement of South Africa

The early 1990s witnessed the unbanning of anti-apartheid organisations and political parties such as the African National Congress. This period was defined by the opening of democratic spaces which allowed black political organisations to debate issues, previously ignored during the liberation struggle (McDonald, 2002: 2). One of the key issues which took precedence on the agenda of black political parties surrounded concerns over environmental decay. It was within this liberal democratic context that the concept of environmental justice gained relevance and meaning to black communities in South Africa.

The concept of environmental justice was imported to South Africa through a combined effort of the environmental justice movement of the United States of America and Earthlife Africa.⁵ A conference organised by Earthlife Africa in 1992, entitled 'What Does it Mean to be Green in New South Africa' made the link between environmental degradation and social justice in South Africa. The crux of the conference focused on identifying and expressing a host of environmental concerns (Hallowes, 1993). These included the lack of social amenities, green spaces, and safety standards for black workers in industry. It also highlighted that the siting of toxic industries next to black communities, threatening their health and livelihoods, was the result of environmental racism and emphasised the relevance of adopting the environmental justice discourse to apply to the environmental struggles facing black communities in South Africa (Alston in

⁵ Earthlife Africa (ELA) was formed in 1989. It was the first environmental organisation in South Africa to incorporate social justice concerns into the broader environmental discourse. Due to its roots in the anti-apartheid struggle ELA came to adopt the environmental justice framework to express the everyday environmental struggles of black communities in South Africa (Hallowes, 1993).

Hallowes, 1993: 189).

A number of community-based environmental justice struggles emerged during this period in South Africa's history. There have been a variety of environmental conflicts involving black communities and corporate and state interests. Some of these struggles include the forced removal of goat-farmers in Namaqualand by the mining company Gold Fields in order to establish a game reserve in the area. Another example was the struggle of the Mafefe community to get an asbestos dump site on the outskirts of their village removed due to a vast number of residents suffering from mesothelioma (Cock in Cock & Koch, 1991: 3-16; Felix in Cock and Koch, 1991:33-35).

The first most highly publicised environmental conflict in South Africa got underway in 1990 in KwaZulu-Natal. Under the auspices of a newly formed environmental movement, Earthlife Africa, black residents from a nearby informal settlement, white farmers, environmental activists, and unionised workers joined forces to protest against Thor Chemicals (Koch in Cock and Koch, 1991: 25). Thor Chemicals had been responsible for the importation of the highly toxic chemical, mercury from the U.S Multinational Corporation American Cyanamide. Poor maintenance of storage facilities within the Thor Chemicals plant as result of impotent environmental legislation and monitoring meant that vast quantities of highly toxic mercury had leaked into the Umgweni River (Butler in Bethlehem & Goldblatt, 1997: 202). Tests that were conducted on water samples from the river revealed some of the highest levels of mercury contamination in the world (Butler in Bethlehem & Goldblatt, 1997: 198).⁶ The mass mobilisation of South Africans across the broad spectrum of race and class in response to this particular environmental conflict seemed to have invoked a new spirit of 'environmentalism' that permeated the racialised nature of environmental thinking in South Africa (Koch in Cock and Koch, 1991). This protest indicated that there was 'potential for a powerful rainbow alliance between green groups (white dominated) and the country's black labour movements' (Compton cited in Butler in Bethlehem & Goldblatt, 1997: 199).

Demands for an expansive environmental justice movement incorporating the various forms of social injustices that occur within the environment in which we work, live and play eventually led to the formation of the Environmental Justice Networking Forum of South Africa (EJNF), which was an outcome of the 1992 conference called by Earthlife Africa. The EJNF was to serve as an umbrella body to a variety of grassroots organisations community-based organisations, environmental organisations, social

⁶ Mercury levels in the Umgweni river were 1000 times higher than the World Health Organisation drinking water standards and was 5000 times higher than what is required by U.S.A standards in order to classify a chemical as being hazardous (Note: one of the reasons why the corporation, America Cyanamid chose to export mercury waste to South Africa was due to weak environmental legislation that was enacted by the apartheid regime) (Butler in Bethlehem & Goldblatt, 1997: 198-199).

movements, worker organisations, and associations fighting for the rights of women. All involved in a vast array of ecological conflicts that fell under the umbrella of environmental justice (McDonald in Bullard, 2005: 260; Khan in McDonald, 2002: 32; Peek in McDonald, 2002: 205). However the historical dichotomy between conservation concerns and quality of life or needs-based environmental concerns made the task of bringing these issues together extremely difficult in terms of promoting a holistic approach to creating environmental awareness and mobilisation across the barriers of race and class.

Racial identity influenced how certain groups perceived what issues were seen as being *a priori*, which created tension and conflict amongst them. Disenfranchised black communities were in favour of industrial development since it was of economic benefit to them and were less concerned about the externalities associated with such developments, especially if they involved an infringement or threat to wildlife (Khan in McDonald, 2002). White dominated conservation movements on the other hand focused specifically on the protection of wildlife and had a more antagonistic view of development despite the fact that it provided economic relief to poor black communities (Khan in McDonald, 2002: 30).

This conflict of interests was highlighted through a controversy that emerged in 1995 following the proposal for a steel plant to be built in Saldhana Bay on the Western Cape coast. Mainstream white dominated environmental organisations such as the National Parks Board and the Wildlife Society opposed the construction since it would have posed a threat to wildlife in the nearby West Coast National Park and the Langebaan lagoon. The surrounding black communities on the other hand were in full support of this proposed development (Khan in McDonald, 2002: 38). The Wildlife Society along with the National Parks Board eventually lost this battle as the Steel Plant was commissioned to continue with operations in 1998.⁷

⁷ Liz Linsell who is the coordinator of the Green Coalition, the Western Cape of the Environmental Justice Networking Forum expressed disappointment with the fact that environmentalists and communities were divided. In her opinion the cost-benefit analysis of building a steel industry close to the Langebaan lagoon had major implications for both the long term development capacity of the surrounding community as well as the natural environment. Little emphasis was placed on the effect of industrial effluent on mariculture (mussel cultivation) in the region, which provided lucrative economic support to the surrounding communities. The expansion of mariculture would have ensured better protection of Langebaan lagoon ecosystem, as well as seeing to the socio-economic interests of the community. According to Linsell this project was funded by the central government in order to offset the losses caused by the closing down of the Vanderbijlpark operations. Furthermore ISCOR was to receive 50% of the profits generated by the steel mill, and the state was issuing tax benefits to the industry to boost profits. As result very little of the profits if any actually trickled down to the local community. Therefore according to Linsell the fact that environmentalists and the local community was not able to find a common ground points to a much larger problem of big capital undermining small business. However the reason for the community not aligning themselves to environmentalists points to issues surrounding how disenfranchised people come to perceive big capital-as a providing a quick fix to socio-economic struggles rather than weighing out the long terms

As Amartya Sen argued economic development should be understood as freedom (Bryner in Mutz *et al*, 2002: 49). This is especially the case for black communities who see democracy as providing them with an opportunity to secure an economically viable future for them and their children, which takes precedence over quality of life concerns, such as living in a clean and healthy environment and ensuring the survival of other sentient beings by reducing pollution. Black residential communities located in close proximity to toxic industries express a sense of ambivalence towards fighting against these polluting industries (Higgins, 1993). These industries are acknowledged as polluting agents that destroy the health and livelihoods of people yet are also seen as being sources of economic growth since they provide much needed employment for the majority of disenfranchised black people.

The Future of Environmental Justice

The theoretical and social construct of environmental justice has gained a newfound significance within the context of a neoliberal democratic milieu in South Africa. This has been validated through the enshrinement of environmental rights within the South African constitution which states that:

Everyone has the right-

- (a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health and well-being; and
- (b) to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations through reasonable legislative and other measures that-
 - (i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation;
 - (ii) promote conservation; and
 - (iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development⁸

The establishment of the National Environmental Management Act (107) of 1998; a body of law dedicated, solely to addressing issues surrounding ecological conflict was an affirmation of the government's commitment towards ensuring environmental justice (Ruiters in McDonald, 2002: 117). Jan Glazewski who is an expert on environmental policy in South Africa believes that the consolidation of an abstract body of

costs both in terms of self sustainable development and environmental management and protection. Bringing attention to these issues involves more effective resource mobilisation-education of local communities as to how environmental management actually means development and not backwardness.

(Linsell, L. 'The Saldanha Bay Conflict: Of pelicans and people, steel and survival'

<<http://www.ccr.uct.ac.za/archive/two/4/p7.html>>

⁸ See Section .24 of the *South African Bill of Rights* in *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996.

environmental rights has the potential to become an effective legal tool that can be used by citizens to challenge environmental injustices within a court of law (McDonald, 2002: 8). However, whilst this bodes well for addressing current acts of environmental injustices perpetrated against individuals, these policies do not enable groups of people to challenge environmental injustices that were a result of past discrimination (environmental racism).

This rights-based approach towards achieving environmental justice is not enough to protect against the perpetuation of environmental injustice argues Greg Ruiters (in McDonald, 2002), who is a staunch advocate of the adoption of a materialist approach to addressing environmental injustice. The problem for Ruiters is that too much emphasis has been placed on judicial equality in terms of the issuing of constitutional rights to address environmental inequality, whilst minimal effort has been placed on more tangible materialist inequalities within the environmental justice context. Unlike their more successful counterparts in the U.S, black grassroots environmental organisations in South Africa lack the resources needed in order to be effective. Many of these organisations are small and are underfunded and there is no coordination between them and a larger environmental justice movement that is able to collate these concerns within a broad environmental justice agenda on a national level. In some instances activists and grassroots organisations find it extremely difficult to mobilise a substantial number of people, consistently. For example, the inability of the Environment and Mazaar Action Committee's (EMAC) to maintain support from Muslims and environmental activists against development in Oudekraal on the lower slopes of Table Mountain, where Muslim grave sites and shrines were situated is testament to the problems facing black environmental justice movements (Khan in McDonald, 2002: 36). However, the struggle against this development was taken over by new environmental groups, 'Save the Mountains Campaign' and 'Models for the Mountain' thus conforming to the tradition of mainstream 'green' environmental organisations in South Africa as established during apartheid and epitomised by organisations such as the Wildlife Society.⁹

Entitlement or the availability of rights does not guarantee the exercise of justice. In other words Ruiters (in McDonald, 2002) materialist approach focuses on the need to provide the means to realise those rights in terms of education, funding and organisational support structures. There are cases where community based organisations are not aware of their environmental rights or simply do not understand what it stipulates and how it can be applied to environmental justice struggles. They may not have the finances to fund advertising campaigns, which is necessary in order to raise awareness and actively

⁹ **Note:** The Wildlife Society has recently renamed itself the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) - subsequently becoming more holistic in terms of the environmental issues that it addresses. Besides being involved in wildlife preservation it has extended its range of concerns to embrace issues related to social justice namely; access to natural resources, clean drinking water and pollution concerns. <<http://www.wessa.org.za/aboutus.asp>>

mobilise people. They may also lack broader organisational support structures which would provide the necessary advice and expertise.

Matters pertaining to resource mobilisation are just one component of the materialist approach to environmental justice. Mackinnon (cited in Ruiters, 2002: 118) criticises the environmental equity position and its naive dependence on procedural justice even further by indicating that the rights-based approach towards environmental justice is responsible for making civil society complacent with regards to fighting against environmental injustice:

...the rights discourse has the potential to keep people passive and dependent on the state, because it is the state, which grants them their rights. Individuals are only allowed to exercise their individual rights to the degree that the state permits. Legal strategies tend to weaken the power of the popular movement by allowing the state to define the movement's goals. Rights discourse may therefore be as paralysing as it is enabling. It may mobilise but also immobilise, it delimits the range of programatic options, thereby narrowing outcomes (Ruiters in McDonald, 2002: 118).

Ruiters (in McDonald, 2002) warns against the use of the environmental justice framework which subscribes to the rhetoric of environmental racism in order to justify calls for environmental justice in a currently neoliberal democratic South Africa. The racial approach to the unequal distribution of environmental risks is naïve and assumes communities to be homogenous in relation to class and is ignorant of the role that class differentiation plays in determining who should bear the burden of development and where the sites of toxic waste production should be located. However in the post-apartheid context race is no longer necessarily convergent with class and racial oppression is not strongly associated with the majority of low-income groups. People may be moving from the lower to the middle-upper classes but still continue to live in communities that have been located near polluting industries, as a result of racially segregationist policy implemented during apartheid.

This is an important point since blacks are able to experience class mobility within a democratic milieu because there are no restrictions on their economic growth potential. This is of particular significance as black people are able to buy their way out of unequal exposure to environmental risks. Whilst this brings attention to how class replaces race as the determining agent governing where environmental risks are produced and distributed, it is unsympathetic as to how these broad structural forces both past and present come to shape attitudes and consciousness which inevitably affects community behaviour towards environmental justice concerns within black communities, irrespective of class. Ruiters (in McDonlad, 2002) analysis is reductionist, in that it does not account for why some black people, despite experiencing upward class mobility continue to live, work and play in communities that pose a major danger to their health and livelihoods in a democratic South Africa.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief account of the evolution of the environmental racism and justice debate and how it has come to gain specific relevance and meaning to understanding toxic struggles in the South African context. It draws attention to elements that hinder black people from mobilising around immediate environmental concerns. The chapter concludes by indicating that the structuralised nature of environmental racism manifests itself in broad social forces that also shape the attitude and behaviour of black people towards environmental justice concerns. This thesis attempts to argue that broader structural forces such as political alienation, spatial reality and socio-economic status, which are products of specific political contexts, are crucial to our understanding of why the predominantly Indian residents of Merebank are disinterested, unaware, or hostile towards conscientising and mobilising around environmental justice issues.

CHAPTER THREE

The Psychosocial Impacts of Environmental Racism on Environmental Consciousness and Activism

Introduction

This chapter will explore the correlation between environmental awareness and activism. It is proposed in this thesis that the predominantly Indian residents of Merebank may be apathetic towards immediate environmental justice concerns. Therefore the main purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical background to a perceived lack of interest that residents have towards mobilising around pollution concerns. The core assumptions of three broad structural forces namely post-materialism, spatial reality and political alienation will be analysed to determine why residents choose not to mobilise against polluting industries. Through an analysis of the various theoretical models within each of these three broad structural forces, this chapter hopes to highlight the significance that a political context plays in shaping peoples attitude and behaviour towards immediate pollution concerns. The chapter proposes that attitude and behaviour has been shaped by institutionalised racism of the past and by the current subscription to a neoliberal democracy. Therefore the claims of post-materialism, spatial reality and political alienation are structured because of the institutionalised nature of environmental racism in South Africa. The chapter alludes to the fact that the psychosocial impacts of environmental racism has major implications for how black people, such as the residents of Merebank, come to perceive and act on immediate environmental justice concerns. The first part of the chapter identifies and explains the basic premise of post-materialist theory and its value in understanding how it shapes peoples attitudes and behaviour towards immediate environmental concerns. The chapter then explores the role that spatial reality plays in psychological conditioning and the implications this has for environmental consciousness and mobilisation. The final section of this chapter investigates how the three dominant forms of political alienation namely; powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation affects environmental consciousness and mobilisation.

Post-materialism

Post-materialist theory derives from Maslow's hierarchy of needs¹⁰ hypothesis, which indicates that individuals of low socio-economic status are preoccupied with satisfying basic material needs and are less concerned about higher ranked non-material needs, such as fighting for the right to live in a clean and healthy environment. Post-materialism postulates that concern for environmental quality is a 'luxury' which becomes

¹⁰ **Note:** There have been a number of studies that have tested the validity of Maslow's hierarchy of needs hypothesis, since its inception in 1953. One such study conducted by Aronoff in 1967 on a Caribbean island validated the need hierarchy, by applying the theoretical framework of the hierarchy of needs on a community of cane cutters and a fishing community. The community of cane cutters frequently suffered from malnutrition. In this community family relations were also breaking down. However, when nutrition improved marital relations, parent-child relations and community participation improved, to the same level as the fishing village which consistently experienced good nutrition levels (Davies in Hermann, 1986: 42).

significant only after basic material needs have been adequately met (Whitaker *et al*, 2005: 436; Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980: 183). Therefore environmental concerns are reserved for the middle to upper classes that have already met their basic needs and are free to engage issues of moral and aesthetic value, such as the environment. Poor people on the other hand require material goods and desire economic development more than environmental protection (Milbrath in Hermann, 1986: 113). A national study initiated by the main protagonist of post-materialist theory, Ronald Inglehart, in the 1970s attempted to validate this hypothesis by measuring societal value shifts relative to changing levels of socio-economic development.

According to Inglehart (1981: 880) changes within civil society concerns represent a distinct value change either from materialist to post-materialist concerns as a result of increasing levels of socio-economic development or a shift in the opposite direction from post-materialist to materialist concerns during periods of economic crisis. These value shifts, therefore occur relative to changes in the political climate and the overall level of socio-economic development. Although post-materialism can be viewed as being guilty of economic determinism with regards to identifying the level of socio-economic development as being the dominant force shaping the type of values that societies espouse, later studies have acknowledged and affirmed the role played by cultural and ideological factors in determining societal needs. Inglehart's (1981: 881) two-fold hypothesis can be used to understand factors that influence value changes such as the scarcity hypothesis and the socialisation hypothesis which shows the interplay between socio-economic development, socio-political contexts and value change.

The scarcity hypothesis is based on the *law of diminishing marginal utility*¹¹ where individual priorities reflect one's socio-economic environment. Hence individuals would express a greater demand for those things that are in short supply (Inglehart, 1981: 881). This hypothesis is especially applicable to the predominantly Indian residents of Merebank, since the vast majority of them that fall between the economically active ages of eighteen and sixty-four are not economically active.¹² Therefore most of the residents should express a greater degree of concern for scarce basic material needs such as better employment, better housing, and instrumental needs including education rather than being concerned about pollution issues. However the problem with such an assumption, argues Inglehart, is that it is unable to account for the role that political contexts and cultural heritage play in affecting post-material value concern for immediate environmental quality concerns. In such instances argues Inglehart (1981) the level of economic development is inadequate in explaining the cause of value changes.

The socialisation hypothesis addresses this problem by placing greater emphasis on the role that cultural settings play in determining value changes. This hypothesis indicates that there is a time lag between socio-economic change and value changes (Inglehart &

¹¹ This is an economic principle indicating that the more a person consumes of a desired good the less the degree of satisfaction they derive from it.

¹² Research shows that 59.92 per cent of the population that should be economically active in Merebank is actually economically inactive. See Table 5. (in) Scott, D and Ridsdale, G. *Social Assessment of Southern Durban. Draft Report no. 2*, June 1997: 23.

Welzel, 2005: 98). This is due to cultural heritage which conditions what concerns are perceived as being of value, which means subjective value change is resistant to broader structural changes, which takes much longer to enter the consciousness of people. This approach has been used to understand intergenerational value differences amongst people of different age groups who have had very different experiences relative to different socio-political contexts (Inglehart & Abramson, 1999: 672). These factors affect what issues are considered of value. From this hypothesis it would be expected that older residents of Merebank would be preoccupied with material value concerns because they were victims of racial oppression. This is significant because under apartheid the majority of them were confined to the lower echelons of the class ladder. Research in more developed societies reveals a very different set of results, for example, during the 1960s-1970s environmental awareness and activism was at its height especially in the U.S and in other developed countries. The majority of these radical environmental activists were predominantly white middle-upper class college students who were part of the post-war era, which was defined by rapid industrial and economic growth (Inglehart, 1981: 895). However older people who lived through the great depression and the economic hardships that it brought were less concerned with environmental issues and resisted 'jumping' onto the countercultural revolutionary 'bandwagon' of the time. These older individuals were more concerned with material needs, despite their relatively comfortable socio-economic status (Inglehart, 1981: 889).

The motivation behind their preoccupation with material needs was an outcome of their previous experiences, which lingered in their conscience preventing them from shifting their concerns towards post-material needs, like the younger post-war generation. The research carried out by Malkis and Grasmick (cited in Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980: 183) provided alternative reasons accounting for the difference in the level of environmental concern shown by the different age groups. The findings of this study revealed that there is a negative relationship between age and environmental concern. Consequently with age a person becomes less concerned with environmental issues. Hence, as people, get older they fear that adopting a radical position on moral issues, such as environmental quality will hinder an individual's chances of securing sustainable employment, since that person will be seen as a threat to the interests of potential employers. Furthermore, with age comes the added responsibility and pressure to maintain a family. This requires energy, time and resources which limits the ability of individuals to becoming committed activists (Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980: 192).¹³

Younger people, especially students find themselves in an ideal situation, which is relatively sheltered compared to older people who are part of the working world dominated by corporate and elite interests. It is argued that college students have the means in the form of education to engage matters of self actualisation. Therefore they are able to realise their intellectual potential and have the freedom to challenge authority without the fear of punishment (Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980: 192). In the case of Merebank this means that younger residents from Merebank who have access to tertiary education and have lesser responsibilities should in theory express more concern for environmental quality. However, these preoccupations also affect the ability of people to

¹³ See Chapter four: Analysis of findings

aspire to ranked values beyond survival needs, irrespective of their socio-economic status, cultural heritage and broader changes in the level of socio-economic development. Although the latter claim lacks adequate support it does allude to forces which are more deeply entrenched within social, economic and political existence. In essence, the forces that may affect value changes extend beyond both the scarcity and the socialisation hypothesis, which expound on post-materialism to include a number of other forces which themselves are products of specific socio-political contexts, such as racism.

The exclusion of more politicised social categories such as race from the post-materialist analysis is a contradiction of sorts, since it ignores the role that historical socio-political contexts play in determining what values are seen as being *a priori*. This became evident with the establishment of a racially oppressive system of governance in South Africa. This meant that black people such as Indians were forced into the lower class categories and were denied the opportunity to experience class mobility. Confinement to cheap unskilled labour led to lower wages, which in turn led to lower standards of living in Merebank. As a result the values espoused by Indians were oriented towards material needs. Although it can be argued that anti-apartheid resistance in Merebank represented a desire for satisfying higher ranked self expression needs, related to attaining rights, freedom and education, this was to ensure that they would be able to secure their basic material needs and aspire to self-esteem and self-actualisation needs.

The conflation of race and class in relation to the division of labour and the distribution of costs and benefits determine where in the hierarchy of needs certain groups of people and not just individuals find themselves. Using post-materialist theory it would make sense to claim that once residents in the predominantly Indian community of Merebank have been emancipated and are able to move up the class ladder they would aspire to post-materialist values. However, whilst this may guarantee aspirations to build self-esteem and achieve self actualisation this does not mean that the vast majority of individuals within the community would necessarily assume concern for environmental quality as part of their post-material value concerns. Perhaps the ignorance or apathy shown towards environmental concerns could be a result of past experiences such as the lack of exposure to clean and healthy surroundings and alienation from environmental decision-making or the preoccupation of people with satisfying their basic needs. These are possible reasons as to why residents are perceivably ignorant or apathetic towards environmental concerns.

Spatial Reality

The configuration of 'space' is a reflection of the ideologies and perceptions that were espoused by dominant forces through the course of history (Bourdieu, 1989). For example, if one were to observe patterns of land use in South Africa it is quite evident that hazardous waste and industrial facilities are sited in close proximity to black residential areas. This was a result of racially segregationist policy implemented during apartheid such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Chari in Padayachee, 2006: 427). The environment in which the predominantly Indian community of Merebank came to live, work and play in is therefore a product of racist ideology which assumed hegemonic

status during apartheid. Although apartheid has ended, the arrangement of physical spaces created during apartheid, still remain and reflect an epoch in South African history when racist ideology determined societal relations and the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens (Brett, 2005: 14). The continued existence and occupation of these polluted spaces has however meant that the effects of racism are not contingent or era-specific, but constant.

We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology (Soja cited in Keith & Pile, 1993: 4).

Even though new generations born into such spaces are largely unaware of the political context in which polluting industries came to be located in their communities they have similar experiences to older generations in that they too are exposed to health and livelihood risks posed by living in close proximity to hazardous industries that were established during apartheid. The psychosocial impact of living in such environments which influences how these communities come to perceive and act on their immediate environmental concerns is felt by all generations. According to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of '*habitus*', individual propensity to act on a specific issue is a product of present experiences relative to the nature of broader social structures that shape these attitudes (Bourdieu, 2000: 138).

If the social world tends to be perceived as evident and to be grasped, to use Husserl's (1983) expression, in a doxic modality, this is because the dispositions of agents, their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world, are essentially the product of the internalisation of the structures of that world. As perceptive dispositions tend to be adjusted to position, agents, even the most disadvantaged ones, tend to perceive the world as natural and to accept it much more readily than one might imagine-especially when you look at the situation of the dominated through the social eyes of a dominant (Bourdieu, 1989: 18).

The extent to which individuals who belong to the predominantly Indian community of Merebank come to assume environment quality concerns as part of their broader consciousness and participation in mass action against the disproportionate exposure to polluting industries is influenced by their experiences of their immediate surroundings. This is especially pertinent since their surroundings are a manifestation of racial discrimination. Therefore the spaces that they occupy are both produced and are products off perceptions, beliefs, ideologies and prejudices (Bourdieu cited in Bourdieu, 1989: 14). This notion of the relationship between space, identity and ideology and the impact this has on human consciousness and behaviour vindicates the position taken by postmodernist thinkers such as Soja, Foucault and especially Lefebvre who argue that objective reality and subjectivism share in a dialectical relationship (McCann, 1999: 168).

The impact that spatial reality has on influencing environmental consciousness and activism is two-fold. Firstly, disenfranchised individuals who live in a polluted environment for a significant amount of time, especially during their formative years of social development may grow up being very sensitive to the risks that pollution poses to their health and livelihoods. As result they would express a proclivity to assume environmental quality concerns into their broader consciousness and therefore, will mobilise against immediate environmental concerns. Secondly living in polluted spaces may have the opposite effect. Contrary to the earlier assumption individuals may become less sensitive or completely insensitive to environmental quality concerns resulting in their lack of participation in terms of mobilising around pollution issues. These opposing perspectives can be understood within the context of two newly emergent and quite dominant theories namely; environmental deprivation and, its antithetic, relative deprivation theory, respectively. Substantial research has been conducted attempting to prove the validity of both opposing positions through the application of these theories.

Environmental deprivation theory takes the position that environmental concern is directly proportional to the level of exposure to environmental hazards thus indicating that people who live in more polluted areas are more concerned about immediate environmental issues (Lowe & Pinhey in Whittakker *et al*, 2005: 437; Tremblay & Dunlap in Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980: 184). It can be argued that since residents of Merebank are predominantly the victims of unequal exposure to environmental hazards as a result of environmental racism they would be more aware of the dangers that pollution poses to their health and livelihoods and will be more likely to translate their concerns into activism. On the other hand, environmental deprivation theory posits that whites who live in more pristine environments and are concerned about more general issues that would affect them further down the line and are less concerned about localised environmental issues (Whittakker *et al*, 2005: 435). However this position indicates that blacks are more concerned with immediate environmental concerns that affect their very survival, whilst whites may be more concerned about generalised environmental issues, such as global warming.

Relative deprivation theory provides the antithesis to environmental deprivation theory by arguing that people who are constantly exposed to pollution grow accustomed to living under such appalling conditions and become ignorant to immediate environmental concerns. Objections will only arise from people who lived in cleaner environments and who later find themselves exposed to dirtier surroundings (Morrison *et al* in Whittakker *et al*, 2005: 437). The environment in which a person grows up in determines how that person perceives the value of living in a clean environment and the extent to which he or she will engage in collective action in order to secure a better quality of life (Milbrath in Hermann, 1986: 116).

For example, whilst individuals who had the benefit of living in a pristine environment would be able to understand the value of living in a clean and healthy environment the same may not be true for a person who grew up in Merebank which has always been highly polluted and who continues to live under such conditions. In such instances individuals who are exposed to poor living conditions may become psychologically numb to the negative effects that pollution has on their health and livelihoods (Morrison *et al* in Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980; Morrison *et al* in Whitakker *et al*, 2005). The ignorance that black people who live in polluted environments like Merebank may have towards environmental quality concerns is a product of spatial conditioning. Although the source of the lack of interest toward immediate environmental concerns is a result of institutionalised racism which has led to residents from Merebank being forced to live in polluted spaces it is also their attachment to these spaces that may prevent them from fighting for a common cause.

This attachment that communities have to the spaces that they occupy is referred to as a '*sense of place*'. It is often seen to be a major agent in stimulating communities to fight for a common cause, whether it is against unfair displacement, the right to basic amenities and the right to live in a clean and healthy environment (Bohlin in Lovell, 1998: 167). Ironically it is this very belonging that communities have to locality that can hinder their chances of attaining justice. Black communities like Merebank developed new cultures and built kinships across ethnic, religious and class divisions within these 'spaces' (Bohlin in Lovell, 1998: 168).

The personal identities of community members are determined by their affiliation to these spaces. Upon reflecting on their past, community members are able to relate their very own experiences with specific features within these spaces. However, it is the belonging and shared identity that people have in relation to these localities that enable communities to mobilise against political injustice (Harvey in Keith and Pile, 1993: 55). For example market gardeners in Merebank in the mid 1930s collectively resisted¹⁴ the expropriation of their farmlands and homes, as a result of the 1934 Slums Act implemented by the burgeoning Afrikaner nationalist government in order to transform Merebank into a mixed industrial area to suit the broader modernisation plans of the future apartheid state (Chari, 2006: 122). The commitment of community members to physically build their community as well as to build new socio-cultural relations expresses the dynamic of

¹⁴ Resistance to state policy and the lobbying for amenities such as clean drinking water and roads was a portfolio that was later assumed by what was then called the Merebank Ratepayers Association (MRA), which was lobby group that was formed in 1933 to represent community interests (Chari, 2006: 122). However it must be noted that the MRA served a dual function as both a community based organisation and as a covert anti-apartheid movement (Chari, 2004). (Note: The MRA was one of the listed members of UDF Press Conference held on August 1st 1983.

locality as an indicator of identity and political behaviour. A case in point was the effort made by the residents of Merebank to build their own schools and religious institutions (Chari, 2006: 120). However this strong community bond in relation to place has perceivably not translated into overt activism on the part of residents of Merebank to mobilise against past injustices such as the unequal exposure to environmental risks in their community.

Since the transition to democracy a number of grassroots environmental organisations have emerged attempting to fight for social redress for the unequal distribution of environmental hazards in black communities. The South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) established in 1997 is an example of a grassroots environmental organisation that emerged in the post-apartheid context to articulate and take up the struggle against polluting industries in the South Durban Basin, of which the predominantly Indian community of Merebank is a part of. However, despite the effort made by SDCEA to mobilise community members to take up the struggle many of them remain reluctant to challenge industries.

Political Alienation: Powerlessness, Normlessness and Social Isolation

The apathy that black people in South Africa express towards environmental concerns is a result of their lack of participation in environmental decision-making during apartheid. Blacks had no jurisdiction over where their living spaces or polluting industries would be located. However, concerns over living spaces and the location of polluting industries were a part of the broader struggle to attain equal rights and freedoms. The estrangement from political processes such as voting meant that blacks were not citizens of the country but political outcasts. This estrangement from political processes, involving decision-making, voting or engaging in collective action is understood by scholars as alienation (Koff in Johnson, 1973: 273). However the concept of alienation can have a variety of meanings. Therefore sociologist, Melvin Seeman (cited in Dean, 1969: 142) classified alienation under three subtypes namely powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation. All three categories can be applied to understand possible reasons for the perceived apathy that Indian residents may have towards actively pursuing environmental quality in the highly polluted spaces in which they live, work and play.

Powerlessness focuses on the limitations or the total lack of influence and control people may have on social forces that impact upon the goals that people pursue and the means that are used in pursuit of these goals (Dean, 1960). The commitment of the apartheid government to modernisation meant that multinational corporations were encouraged to establish industries in South Africa. Residential areas for disenfranchised black communities like Merebank were the ideal location for the siting of toxic industries because residents were already disempowered, since they did not have rights and could

not contest decisions taken by the state. Furthermore industries were not just symbols of apartheid but were state assets. Repressive state policies implemented during apartheid such as the National Key Points Act of 1980 identified industries as strategic points due to the financial contributions that they made and continue to make to the South African economy (Wiley *et al.* in Freund & Padayachee, 2002: 238). As a result any threat, including social protests was perceived as acts of terrorism against the state and therefore was severely punishable by law.¹⁵ Ironically this policy implemented during apartheid continues to be part of the legislative framework of the current democratic government. Such policies prevented and may continue to detract community members within a disenfranchised black community like Merebank from mobilising against polluting industries. Residents may feel that efforts to fight against indiscriminate pollution are futile. The influence of significant industrial and political powers suppresses the ability of people to stand up to injustices perpetuated by these actors. As Rosenberg (cited in Dean, 1960: 186) illustrated,

...great economic and power blocs, typified by giant corporations and unions, thrust the individual about with pressure too great to resist. As a consequence, the individual is likely to feel overwhelmed and powerless. Given this feeling, the idea that his puny strength can match the giants is absurd and feels that a lonely individual can do nothing to change the way the world is run.

The transition from apartheid to democracy has not meant that multinationals have lost their power, in fact with the onset of the more recent phase of globalisation their degree of power in influencing government legislation in terms of environmental protectionist policy has strengthened (Goulder *et al* cited in Pellow, 1999: 666). South Africa's subscription to a neoliberal democratic paradigm has created greater dependency on foreign capital as the engine for further development. This has given multinationals greater bargaining power with regards to environmental and labour laws. As Ruiters (in McDonald, 2002: 115) succinctly explains, once multinationals face strong opposition they simply shift the location of industries to another powerless community elsewhere in the world. The South African economy cannot afford any overt acts of societal discontent that may compromise development. The description of South African democracy simply being a smokescreen to elite interests that perpetuates the injustices of the past was captured in the words of the then deputy president Thabo Mbeki (1994);

¹⁵See Section 1(2e) of the *National Key Points Act of 1980*. Industrial complexes are classified as a 'place'. Section 2 follows, 'It appears to the Minister at any time that any place or area is so important that its loss, damage, disruption or immobilisation may prejudice the Republic, or whenever he considers it necessary or expedient for the safety of the Republic or in the public interest, he may declare that place or area a National Key Point'. During apartheid any overt form of action carried out against the state and which was in defiance of its authority was seen as an act of terrorism. The blurry divide between peaceful social protest and 'terrorism' meant that any form of perceived rebellion had to be squashed. see Response of MRA member in chapter four.

We must understand that the new democracy cannot allow for hostile surveillance of the democratic process and the participants in this process (McKinley in Padayachee, 2006: 418).

Political transformation in South Africa did not bring about significant change in the actual distribution of environmental hazards, since the health and livelihoods of black communities continues to be threatened by the disproportionate exposure to toxic industries. The lack of social redress in terms of the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens within the new democratic dispensation can create disillusionment amongst formerly disenfranchised citizens that political change has culminated in a reduction of pollution and a better quality of life, when in fact it has not. Subsequently the powerlessness felt during apartheid may persist, fuelling apathy within these communities towards environmental issues. This position was illustrated quite clearly by Koff (cited in Johnson, 1973: 284):

Alienated persons who momentarily overcome their alienation are prone to revert to their original attitudes, especially when new found rewards are not lasting or of the nature which was anticipated.

Another factor that renders people powerless in terms of achieving justice against polluting industries is the issue of scientific knowledge. The use of specialised or scientific knowledge in determining the level of contamination and the amount of pollutants in the atmosphere and the health risks posed by these effluents to surrounding communities provide communities with the necessary ammunition to challenge the production and waste disposal activities of industry (Tesh & Williams, 1996: 288-289). The use of scientific knowledge to validate claims of toxic exposure by surrounding communities is very often beyond the grasp of the layperson. The actual details in the reports illustrating research findings are too complex and cannot be accessed and internalised by the interested and affected parties (Tesh & Williams, 1996: 291). As a result, community experiences are undermined or are simply swept aside since they have no scientific justification. Furthermore scientists who are called to conduct these tests and procedures are either employed by the state or the accused industry. Hence there is no guarantee as to the validity of their findings as they may be distorted to preserve clientelist relations (Tesh & Williams, 1996: 292; Hamilton, 1995). Communities are powerless to contest these technical matters and therefore express disinterest towards environmental concerns.

There are two approaches to understanding normlessness. The first approach argues that there is a lack of clear norms in society, which prevents individuals from participating in environmental protests and decision-making processes (Dean, 1969). The discrepancy with regards to whose duty it is to address immediate environmental quality concerns points to the possible lack of clear norms. Civic duty is predicated on participation of

citizens in environmental decision-making processes, especially within a democratic milieu.

Democracy is tightly bound with the idea of citizenship. Citizens within a democracy should have a duty and an obligation to themselves to participate in civil society, whether voting or engaging in collective action to address environmental injustice. However, whilst this may be the case in theory the practical realisation of these moral objectives or norms is more difficult to achieve without having the necessary means at one's disposal. This holds true for people who are the victims of environmental racism and are fighting for the right to live in a clean and healthy environment. Therefore access to rights enables citizens to influence policy decisions. However, merely having rights does not necessarily mean that people would be able to participate. For example, the argument made by Marshall that "people can be full members and participants in the common life of society if their basic needs are met", alludes to the fact that people need to have basic education and legal resources if they are to participate effectively in maintaining a healthy democracy (Ignatieff in Kymlicka & Norman, 1994: 357). However there is no guarantee that people would in fact participate in collective action against unequal exposure to toxics. The ideal of good citizenship with civic participation being the premise upon which a democratic society is built and sustains itself is under threat due to the dependence on representative structures. Individuals within a community may become complacent as they assume that the fight for environmental justice is a function reserved for relevant state institutions and not a matter of civic duty (Ruiters in McDonald, 2002). This has severe implications for the ability for grassroots environmental organisations like the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) to mobilise residents in Merebank around environmental concerns.

The second type of normlessness involves a conflict of values. This form of alienation is especially complex as it involves self induced alienation, whereby an "individual may incorporate into his personality conflicting norms" (Dean, 1960: 186). A good analogy of a conflict of value that hinders mobilisation is 'self interest versus collective interest'. For example, a person may be concerned about pollution in his/her community; however he/she may choose not to act on this concern as it may jeopardise their personal interests. Let's assume that a person is unemployed or has a family member that is currently employed in the industry- if he/she chooses to act in the interest of the community by fighting against industry and mobilising others to also join the struggle he/she may compromise their chances of getting a job or their family members may be threatened with job-loss as a result of their actions. Such a conflict of interests often leads to apathy, where the individual simply chooses not to act.

When people desire and shun a course of action in about equal degree, they often do not decide for or against it but rather change the subject or avoid the matter altogether. For many clashes of interest, the easy way out of the uncomfortable

situation is simply to discount the importance and give up the conflict as not worth the bother (Lazarsfeld cited in Dean, 1960: 187).

According to Mancur Olson's (1967: 53) theory of '*Collective Action*' an individual would not compromise his/her self-interest by participating in collective action in order to achieve a common goal. Instead the individual would 'free ride'. That is the said individual would choose to transfer the cost of participation onto other members in the group, whilst reaping the benefits of collective action. Self-interest serves as a major obstacle to addressing environmental issues, which are inherently altruistic in nature considering the fact that they deal primarily with issues surrounding access to 'public goods' namely clean air, water and other social amenities. Olson indicates that one method of encouraging members of a community to participate in environmental activism is to provide economic incentives. If members of a community were to be guaranteed that collective action would result in some form of economic compensation for internalising the cost of pollution, individuals would express a greater desire to engage in collective action. However Olson (1967: 60) also argues that social incentives are just as important. Social incentives, such as social status elements, notably prestige, power, acceptance, common identity and history should also be key motivating factors that encourage individuals to contribute to attaining a collective good. For example in a group some members may belong to the same association or community. Therefore if any individual were to transfer the burden of providing a collective good onto others, whilst accepting the economic benefit, the social loss may far outweigh the economic benefit. The individual may lose his/her friendship, status, and trust. As a result the threat of such a loss may be a greater incentive to engage in collective action. In the case of the predominantly Indian community of Merebank, which was the hub of political mobilisation during apartheid, it can easily be assumed that these social incentives would serve as powerful agents stimulating community members to take up the struggle to achieve environmental justice within the current neoliberal climate.

The third component of alienation, social isolation posits that communities who lack significant contact with supporting groups would be less likely to engage in collective action (Dean, 1960: 186). Therefore grassroots environmental organisations as well as relevant political organisations need to reach out to their relevant constituencies, informing them as to the potential impacts of pollution on their quality of life and the need for them to engage in the actual decision-making process involving methods of pollution management and monitoring. If they do not reach out then the chances of stimulating environmental consciousness and activism would be considerably minimised. Within a democracy previously disenfranchised communities become complacent and are largely unaware of how inequalities can be perpetuated (Pellow, 1999: 660). Therefore there is a constant need for community-based and grassroots organisations to implement programs in communities to constantly raise awareness of environmental problems. The

words echoed by an environmentalist articulated the need to stimulate public participation in order to achieve environmental justice in black communities:

If there is any hope of revitalizing our urban communities, we have to begin with revitalizing the participation of the citizenry. We know that apathy is rampant, especially in economically disenfranchised communities. But for us to build sustainable communities, we must take the time to cut through apathy. It will take time because people of colour and low income communities are not just disenfranchised economically we are disenfranchised psychologically because we have a history of being locked out of the decision-making process (Pellow, 1999: 669).

Whilst individuals live in a particular community they may not necessarily feel that they belong to that community. As a result these individuals require greater coaxing from community and environmental organisations via community meetings to build personal relationships, trust and dependability among community members and leaders of relevant organisations in order to produce community awareness. There are a number of factors that contribute to social isolation within a community. Class and racial differentiation are some of the major factors (Sampson & Morenoff, 2002: 446). The community of Merebank is homogenous in terms of race as result of racially segregationist policy, with the vast majority of the population being Indian (Festenstein, 2001: 6; Horrell, 1956: 123). However, the community of Merebank is heterogeneous in terms of class. Whilst it can be argued that the majority of the residents fall into the lower echelons of the class ladder, the transition to democracy has enabled a number of residents to experience a certain level of class mobility. This differentiation in class can serve as a major contributor to social isolation. It is important to note that within racially homogenous urban communities there is still class inequality. Therefore expressing environmental justice issues as predominantly affecting the poor can be a deterrent in terms of encouraging greater community participation against pollution across the various classes, even though the health and livelihood impacts of pollution on the poor are more concentrated. It is therefore necessary for grassroots organisations to reach out to all members of the community with equal vigour. The common identity of race and a common history of environmental racism should be the major rallying point to stimulate environmental consciousness and activism and reduce social isolation.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a theoretical framework within which to understand how environmental racism conditions how disenfranchised communities come think about and act on immediate environmental justice concerns. This chapter therefore explored the various reasons for the presumed apathy that residents who live in close proximity to hazardous industries may express. In this regard the chapter attempted to illustrate how and the extent to which environmental consciousness and social mobilisation against

polluting industries is influenced by broad social forces. The chapter provided an analysis of the core assumptions of the relevant theories of post-materialism, environmental and relative deprivation theory and political alienation along with its various subsidiaries in the form of powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation. The relevance of each of these positions in relation to their impact on environmental consciousness and mobilisation was subsequently scrutinised. Although references were made to Merebank the appropriateness and significance of these different analytical tools in understanding environmental conscientisation and social mobilisation in Merebank would be explored further in chapter four.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Roots of Apathy in Merebank: Post-materialism, 'Sense of Place' and Political Alienation

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is two fold. Firstly, the relevant data acquired from interview schedules and a focus group discussion will be analysed. Secondly, and in more general terms, the merits of the hypothesis that residents of the highly polluted and predominantly Indian neighbourhood of Merebank are victims of structural apathy, which prevents them from actively participating in struggles against environmental injustice, will be tested. In order to test this hypothesis the relevant theoretical models namely; post-materialism, spatial reality and alienation will be used as instruments to assess the validity of the claim. The first section of this chapter will analyse the results from the data in terms of their compatibility with assumptions made by post-materialism. The chapter then explains whether environmental or relative deprivation theory best suits the Merebank community and the factors which prevent them from mobilising despite being conscious of environmental problems. Finally the chapter investigates how residents come to feel powerless due to repressive policies which favour industries at the expense of communities. It also focuses on how normlessness of residents is created through socio-economic adversity and how social isolation separates community interests and leads to disunity. It must be acknowledged though, that the core assumptions of some of these theoretical constructs would themselves, inadvertently, come under scrutiny when applied to this particular case study. However, these objectives will be addressed in an integrated manner and not separately. The reason for adopting such an approach is to achieve a more holistic and dynamic understanding of the many reasons as to why the vast majority of residents are perceptively apathetic to immediate pollution concerns.

Socio-economic status and Environmental Concern

Most research which attempts to measure the degree of environmental concern within a particular area often resorts to the use of socio-demographic factors as instruments to determine which group of individuals is most susceptible to environmental concern. Post-materialist theory advocates the use of indicators that depict levels of socio-economic development. Therefore socio-economic indicators such as occupational status, income and education are frequently used to determine levels of environmental concern (Jacobs, 2002: 63). Since post-materialist theory is based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs analysis, it argues that people of a lower socio-economic status would be less concerned about esoteric matters such as environmental quality and more concerned over issues such as not going hungry, less crime and less violence (Whittakker *et al*, 2005: 436). The findings from a significant amount of research has vindicated the post-

materialist hypothesis that individuals who have more skilled and specialised employment, who fall within the middle-upper income bracket and who have had access to higher education, generally express greater levels of environmental awareness.¹⁶

Using one of the three socio-economic indicators noted above, namely education, this research attempted to test the validity of the post-materialist hypothesis. Individuals were asked to respond to one of the questions, which required them to rank a set of six needs in order of the most important to the least important.¹⁷ Figure one (see below) illustrates that 42.5 per cent (17 of 40) of respondents selected 'an environment free of polluting industries' as the most important need. As indicated by figure two (see below) the vast majority of those who did so had higher levels of education.

Those individuals that had completed secondary education and had completed tertiary education constituted 70 per cent (28 of 40) of residents that selected an environment free of polluting industry as their most important need. As indicated by figure three (see below) the majority of these more educated respondents that selected an environment free of polluting industries as their most important need translated their concern into action, since they attend public meetings that address pollution concerns. This positive relationship between the level of education and environmental concern strongly affirms the post-materialist hypothesis. This finding also illustrates that there is unevenness in the level of environmental concern amongst residents in relation to their education levels. The problem with relying only on education levels to determine environmental concern is that it does not provide a clear reflection of how the socio-economic status of respondents affects how they come to perceive and act on environmental concerns.

¹⁶ See Inglehart, R. "The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies". *The American Political Science Review* 65 (1971): 991-1017.

-Inglehart, R. *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Style among Western Publics*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1977.

-Inglehart, R. "Post-Materialism in an Environment of Insecurity". *The American Political Science Review* 75, 4 (Dec 1981): 880-900.

-Inglehart, R & Abramson, P.R. "Measuring Post-materialism". *The American Political Science Review* 93, 3 (Sep 1999): 665-677.

¹⁷ See Annexure A: question 28.

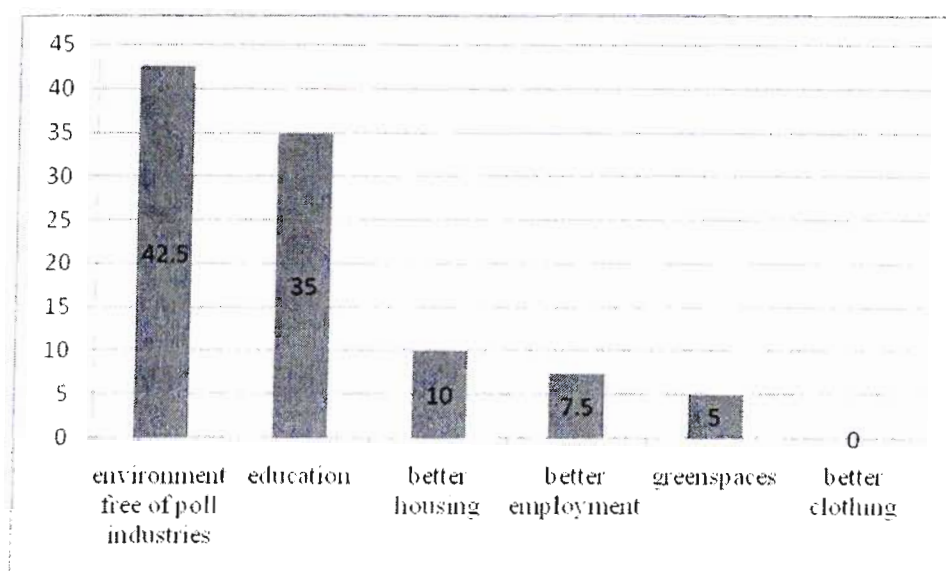


Figure 1 Percentage distribution of highest ranking need of residents in Merebank (n=40)

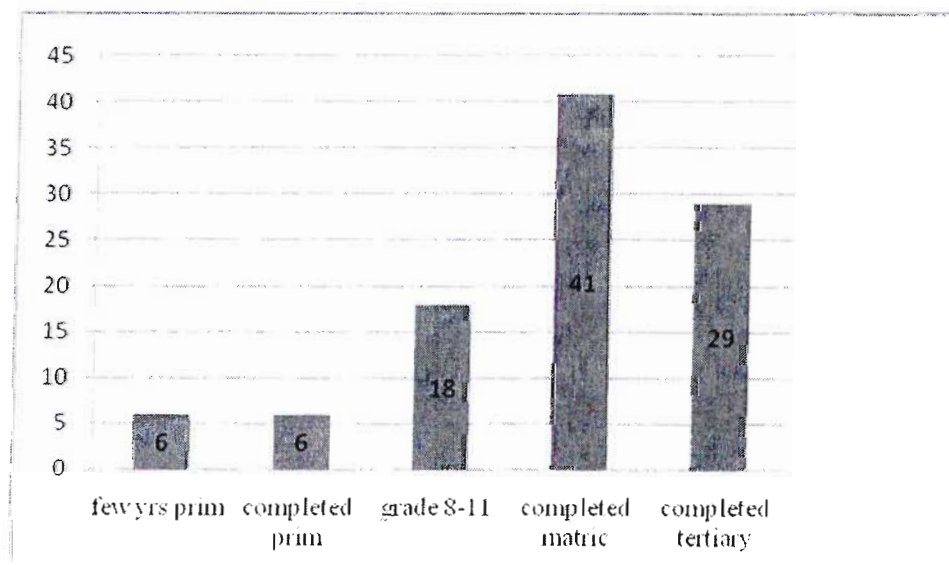


Figure 2 Percentage of environmental quality concern per education level (n=40)

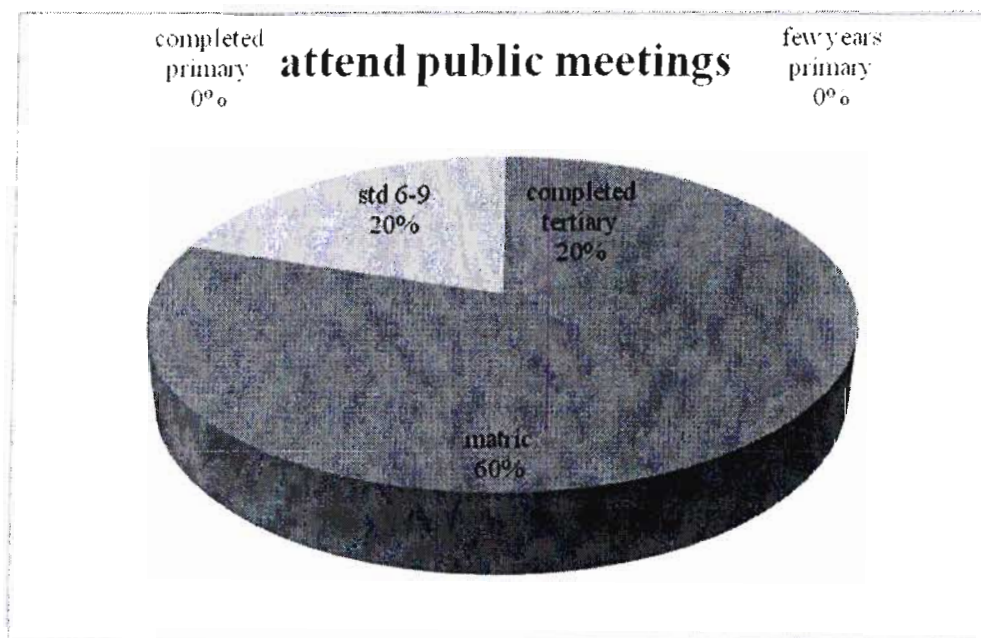


Figure 3 Percentage of residents per education level that attend public meetings on pollution (n=40)

For example figure four (see below) indicates that 60 per cent (6 of 10) of the respondents who live in the Mini-Town flats that selected 'an environment free of polluting industries' as the most important need had higher levels of education. However this does not take into account that this specific area in Merebank consists of the highest concentration of low-income residents within the broader community.¹⁸ It would be problematic to deduce that the more educated people living in the Mini-Town area even though they have selected an environment free of polluting industries are of a higher socio-economic status. For example one resident who is well educated and who selected an environment free of polluting industries as her most important concern did not have any formal employment, in fact she survived by doing general domestic work in peoples homes.¹⁹

¹⁸ **Note:** An earlier study determining quality concerns of residents in Merebank conducted by Nurick, R & Johnson, V (1998: 239) revealed that pollution ranks higher than other needs such as better housing and recreational facilities. These findings are contrary to the scarcity hypothesis especially for people who are on the fringes of poverty.

¹⁹ See Annexure A: question 5

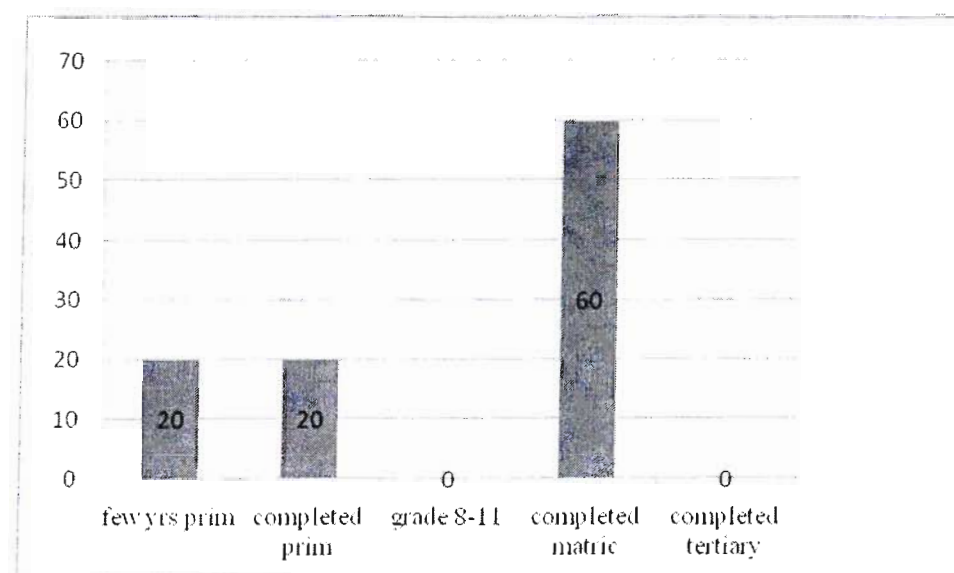


Figure 4 Percentage of residents per education level in Mini-Town region that are concerned about their environment (n=10)

Furthermore an analysis of the needs distribution of residents living in Mini-Town revealed results (see figure five below) that were contrary to the scarcity hypothesis, which postulates that an individual's socio-economic environment would determine the priority of his/her needs and that individuals would express greater demand for what they have less of.²⁰ This assumption was even articulated by a member of the Merebank Residents Association (MRA) in relation to why residents are not concerned and do not fight against pollution. He stated that:

The poverty levels are high in certain areas of Merebank. People got more important things to worry about like putting food on the table. They need to prioritise.²¹

Yet as figure five illustrates this is inconsistent with the needs distribution of residents living in Merebank. The Mini-Town flats resemble a forlorn barracks and consist primarily of poor residents. In the light of this reality it would be expected that respondents from this region would have a greater demand for material needs such as better housing, clothing and employment (see figure five below). However the most important need for residents living here is to live in an environment free of polluting industries. The reason for this heightened level of concern is probably due to the fact that pollution has become a matter of survival. Besides healthcare costs eating into income

²⁰ **Note:** Research in countries like Brazil has negated the post-materialist hypothesis by proving that individuals who have a lower socio-economic status express a greater degree of environmental. See Jacobs, J.E. "Community Participation, the Environment, and Democracy: Brazil in Comparative Perspective". *Latin American Politics and Society* 44, 4 (Winter 2002): pp. 59-88.

²¹ See Focus group interview (09 November 2008)

due to pollution the future costs associated with poor health also affects the ability of people to provide socio-economic security for their families in the long term. A significant number of people are not able to secure employment because of poor health.

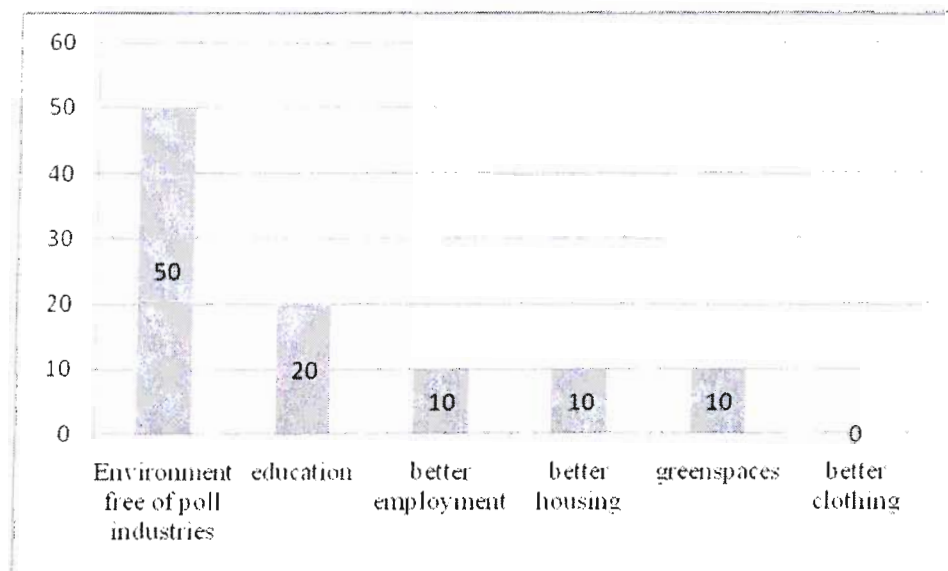


Figure 5 Percentage distribution of highest ranking needs of the residents of the Mini-Town area (n=10)

Many of the residents in the Mini-Town area suffer from chronic illnesses such as asthma, sinusitis and burning eyes as a result of the pollution (Peek in McDonald, 2002: 212).²² These illnesses require constant attention and adequate healthcare, which residents cannot afford. Healthcare costs eat into the little income that is needed to pay for rent, amenities such as water, electricity and food. This is worsened by the fact that people receive compensation *quid pro quo* from Engen only when a major incident has occurred, such as a fire at the refinery or when there are chemical leaks.²³ The healthcare compensation received is negligible and can only finance a single medical consultation and does not internalise the long term effects of pollution on both the health and livelihoods of people. One resident highlighted the fact that residents who are frustrated and who want to mobilise against the industry are seduced by the offer of small compensatory fees, and are in no position to refuse whatever little money they can get to alleviate the socio-economic crisis they are in:

²² Recent health studies confirm that the Settlers Primary school which is situated in the Mini-Town flats area has the highest concentrations of toxics such as sulphur di oxide (SO₂), xylene and tulene in the Merebank area. See Naidoo, R, Gqaleni, N, Batterman, S & Robins, T. "Final Project Report Multipoint Plan: Project 4 Health Study and Health Risk Assessment". *South Durban Health Study* (Feb 2007): 28. <<http://doeh.ukzn.ac.za/Uploads/d7aeceff-681c-4b91-a973-b09f7a34071f/South%20Durban%20Health%20Study%20-%20Final%20Report.pdf>

²³ See Annexure A: response to question 24

People are given cheques of five hundred rand to keep quiet. They take the money because for many of them it is more than what they earn in a month.²⁴

For these residents who are poor and for whom pollution becomes an issue of socio-economic survival, the 'language of uncompensated externalities' becomes an important rallying point to stimulate community mobilisation around pollution concerns. Although these findings point to a high degree of environmental consciousness amongst residents it does not necessarily mean that they would translate their awareness of pollution into activism. This was alluded to by the former member of SDCEA who indicated that whenever there are protests against industries there are only about fifteen to twenty people from the community that participate.²⁵

Age, Socialisation and Environmental Concern

Other studies identify age as a major factor affecting value changes. Malkis and Grasmick (cited in Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980: 183) argue that there is a negative correlation between the aging process and environmental concern. Younger people, it is argued, are more concerned about environmental quality issues. As a person gets older environmental concern deteriorates, as more immediate concerns such as a job and financial security become *a priori*. However the age hypothesis is fairly weak in terms of accounting for the role that different socio-political contexts play in determining concern within different generations. This has especially been the case for residents in Merebank. The research revealed that people who fell in the older age cohort of between 51-60 years expressed a greater concern for post-materialist values such as a need for an environment free of polluting industries and the need for more 'green spaces'. This was not the case of younger age cohorts like those between the ages of 31-40, who expressed a higher degree of materialism rather than non-materialism. These results portray a very different picture than the one espoused by the age hypothesis.

The socialisation hypothesis, which is the second of the two-fold hypothesis promulgated by pioneer post-materialist theorist, Ronald Inglehart, provides a more accurate reason for this variation in how different generations perceive the significance of environmental quality concerns in the community of Merebank. Using this hypothesis to understand why the older generation is more concerned than the younger generation points to their experience of living under apartheid. Many of the respondents when asked what the most important causes for concern were before 1994, identified pollution, but also made reference to the fact that they were forced to settle in Merebank next to toxic industries as a result of racially segregationist policies epitomised by legislation such as the Group Areas Act of 1950. Cohorts who fall between the ages of 51-60 would have been in their

²⁴ This resident expounded on the question in the survey that required the respondent to select one of two options testing for normlessness. See question number 27 in survey.

²⁵ Focus group interview (09 November 2008)

youth during apartheid. Many of them therefore suffered directly as a result of discriminatory apartheid legislation. One particular resident expressed dismay and anger at such policies, which forced him to settle in Merebank, despite knowing the many risks associated with such a move:

We had our own property in Clairwood but we were not allowed to develop the property. Instead the government forced us to live in Merebank. Like my dad said, it was like 'jumping from the frying pan into the fire'. He said that there were industries all around and worse still the place they gave us to build on used to be called Beach Road and was a riverbed and prone to flooding.²⁶

However there were more practical reasons as to why the older cohorts expressed heightened environmental awareness. Some of them were concerned about the health and well-being of their children and grandchildren. Furthermore those that have lived in the neighbourhood for much of their lives have acquired pollution related illnesses such as asthma and sinusitis, which has been a major hindrance to them. For example, one respondent indicated that due to his pollution-induced asthma he had to retire much earlier from work, which led to a lot of financial strife.²⁷ Although respondents that were fifty-one years and above are more concerned about pollution issues only 10 per cent of them knew about the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA). SDCEA is an umbrella body, which has been given a mandate by various CBOs including the MRA in the South Durban Basin, to assume the responsibility of addressing environmental concerns. Despite the efforts of SDCEA in raising environmental awareness a vast number of respondents across the different age groups who are concerned about environmental quality and reflect a level of awareness of pollution concerns have not translated their consciousness into environmental activism. This is confirmed by the fact that only 5 per cent (2 of 40) of residents interviewed claim to be active members of SDCEA. The lack of active participation of Merebank residents within SDCEA represents a sense of apathy amongst residents, since they are concerned about pollution but do not channel those concerns productively via the relevant community representative structure, namely, SDCEA.

Space, identity and environmental consciousness

In order to test the environmental deprivation hypothesis residents were asked to identify what they thought are the three most important causes for concern in Merebank, out of a choice of five options, with pollution being one of them. A majority of 80 per cent (32 of 40) of residents, selected pollution as one of the three major causes for concern in the community. The findings revealed that 87.5 per cent (28 of 32) of

²⁶ See Annexure A: response to question 9

²⁷ This was said off the record by one of the respondents from the Ridge area, whilst he was in the process of answering the questionnaire.

residents that selected pollution as one of the major causes for concern had been living in Merebank for more than twenty years. The remaining 12.5 per cent (4 of 32) that selected pollution as one of the major causes for concern in the community lived in Merebank for less than twenty years. However in order to test the claim of environmental deprivation theory it was necessary that only the responses of those residents that have been living in Merebank for more than twenty years be reviewed. This is the case because environmental deprivation theory argues that people that have been exposed to hazardous industries for a significant period of time are generally very aware of pollution.

This hypothesis was supported by the fact that 50 per cent (16 of 32) of residents that have been living in Merebank for more than twenty years, when posed with the question of whether they would leave Merebank if they had an opportunity to live where there are no polluting industries, indicated that they would leave. These respondents provided a variety of reasons for leaving Merebank with the most frequent response involving the protection of their own health and that of their family:

I will live a longer life and it will be a better environment for my children.

Because there will be no more sickness.

Better environment, no pollution and no stress. I am sure crime will even be less.²⁸

Whilst these responses strongly advocate environmental deprivation, which uses spatial reality as a measure of environmental concern it does not account for the remaining 20 per cent (8 of 40) of residents that did not identify pollution as a major cause for concern. All of these residents have been living in the area for more than twenty years. Half said that they would leave Merebank while the other half said they would not leave to settle in less polluted environments. Those residents that were consistent in terms of not selecting pollution as a major concern and not wanting to leave Merebank fit the profile depicted by relative deprivation theory.

Residents who were not concerned about pollution issues and who would not leave Merebank express a degree of 'psychological numbness' to immediate pollution concerns (Morrison *et al* in Whittakker *et al*, 2005: 437). In response to not wanting to leave, a few of the respondents made reference to the fact that living in Merebank is convenient, since it is located close to amenities, such as schools, transport networks and shopping centres. This point was vindicated by a former SDCEA member when he was asked why residents are not willing to mobilise against polluting industries. His answer alluded to the fact that many residents' have grown accustomed to their surroundings and are generally comfortable with living under such appalling environmental conditions:

When I use to go around telling people about the pollution and asking them to join us

²⁸ See Annexure A: responses to question 31.

they use to say: I got the sea as my background. To be living here is first class. I can live with the pollution, we are close to the shopping centre and my children go to school across the road.²⁹

Some residents point out that they would not leave until they are fully compensated for their homes, as their families have spent generations building up their homes from its rather humble beginnings. Indian patriarchs saw their houses as symbolic structures involving years of financial and social hardships to build a home for their families. According to the descendant of such a patriarch,

“... it was for a house that he planned, worked and saved. For him, the house was the foremost symbol of security and prestige” and had, containing as it would a family shrine, a sacral character (cited in Freund, 1995: 35).

This was strongly supported by the one of the activists who pointed out that many residents do not want to mobilise against polluting industries out of fear that they will be relocated and given “one of those small houses worth seventy thousand rand”.³⁰

It was also the ‘*sense of place*’, which probably also influenced the decision of the 50 per cent (16 of 32) of residents that lived in Merebank for much of their lives not to leave Merebank. Many of these residents said that despite the affects that pollution has on their lives and the lives of their family they could not possibly live elsewhere even if they had the opportunity to do so. This was made clear when residents were asked to explain why they would stay in Merebank. One resident responded:

Beside pollution Merebank is one of the safest places to live in. We formed a bond. My grandfathers and my mother lived here.³¹

This response was especially interesting when one considers that the very same resident selected crime and drug abuse along with pollution as one of the major causes for concern in the community. Within this paradox lies the idea of how a ‘*sense of place*’, can deflect the focus away from the seriousness of pollution in the community. However the kinship bonds that people have forged with one another over generations through the many challenges of the past is the glue that binds many residents to this particular space.³² Ironically this sentimental attachment to ‘place’ is both an agent of environmental awareness, and an obstacle to mobilisation. For example residents know the risks associated with living next to hazardous industries, but are prevented from mobilising against industries out of fear that this may result in them being relocated and

²⁹ See Focus group interview (09 November 2008)

³⁰ Focus group interview (09 November 2008)

³¹ See Annexure A: response to question 31

³² Scott, D & Ridsdale, G. “South Durban Strategic Environmental Assessment: Social Assessment of Southern Durban”. *Draft Report no. 2*, (June 1997): 14.

losing these social and cultural bonds (Freund, 1995).³³ This is a point of departure away from the conventional understanding that a community that has a shared identity and who have a sense of place would normally act in unison against any threat to their collective well-being (Harvey in Keith & Pile, 1993). However in the case of Merebank the residents have shared the same space with polluting industries for much of their combined existence.

Although this reality may pose a threat to widescale social mobilisation against polluting industries as many residents view the community's relationship with industries in this light, a few residents have been able to move beyond this structural apathy towards immediate environmental concern to translate their concern to activism. In an attempt to explore the possible factors as to why some residents have become spirited activists in the struggle against pollution the member from the MRA and two environmental activists were asked to account for what influenced their decision to fight pollution. Their responses were varied and intriguing. Most pertinently, though, they indicate that individuals only choose to become actively involved in pollution struggles when somebody that they are close to is directly affected by pollution. The MRA member reflected on his rather tragic experiences of losing family members to asthma and cancer caused by pollution. But he also pointed to the fact that his most vivid memory was of his early childhood:

When I was a little boy when the lights went out the only light you could see was the flare from the refinery. We used to use this light to reflect figures on the wall like a projector. We use to call this game bioscope. As I got older I realised that these people were polluting like no man's business and I realised that I needed to change things by becoming actively involved in the MRA.³⁴

The one activist, an ex-SDCEA member, who lives in Wentworth bordering the Engen fenceline and the Ridge, remembered how his perception of this being a beautiful place that resembled a lit up ship with the sea in the background was soon changed after being repeatedly exposed to bad smells and after his wife contracted cancer and his son stopped having milk with his coffee:

My son's first job was at the refinery in 1979. One day he came from work and I wondered why this youngster doesn't take any milk in his coffee, so I asked him. He said that they make us drink milk all the time. It was at that point that I realised that something was wrong and decided to act.³⁵

³³Freund (1995: 37) alluded to this sense of Indianness that was so dynamic during more trying political and socio-economic times, '... the social networks that reinforced Indianness, partially through religion and through language, were very powerful.

³⁴ See Focus group interview (09 November 2008)

³⁵ See Focus group interview (09 November 2008)

The other activist joined the fray of environmental activism fairly recently. Her involvement was sparked by the attention that was brought to the recent crisis involving Bayer Lanxess when it was found to have discharged highly toxic chrome 6, a by-product of the leather tanning process, directly underground since the 1950s in the Navy region of Merebank.³⁶ She had been living opposite Bayer for much of her life but had not heard anything. She claims that she had only come to hear and understand the gravity of the problem after reading the newspaper and after being approached by a fellow resident. It was only then that she started thinking about the possible connections between this problem and health problems that her son had been having:

My little boy had nose bleeds, which a specialist diagnosed as a common allergy. After hearing of this problem I began wondering whether he was having this problem because of pollution.³⁷

A large number of the residents interviewed also express concern over the affects of pollution on their own health and that of their families, but have not translated their personal experiences into activism. Although the vast majority of residents are conscious of their polluted surroundings and in that regard fit the environmental deprivation assumption that people who live in polluted surroundings are more aware of immediate and environmental concerns, it does not clearly account for why the vast majority of them have not become active participants in challenging polluting industries. This raises the question of why residents who are aware don't join local bodies like SDCEA and the MRA or take up the fight against polluting industries independently along with other interested and affected residents. Environmental deprivation theory does not offer answers to this question and neither does relative deprivation theory, although a '*sense of place*' does to a certain degree point to the dilemma that the long-standing residents face when it comes to getting directly involved in environmental justice struggles.

Creating Powerlessness: Fear, procedural exclusion and dependency

In order to determine whether residents feel powerless to affect any significant change regarding pollution in the community, respondents were asked whether they believed that an increase in the number of protests against polluting industries would actually lead to a reduction in pollution. A majority of 60 per cent (24 of 40) of residents believed that this form of persistent and overt pressure would force industries to make a more concerted effort to reduce pollution. When these residents were asked to account for why they thought an increase in protests would lead to a reduction in pollution some of them responded by saying:

³⁶ Barbeau, N. "Plan to clean up chrome 6 mess". *Sunday Tribune* (18 June 2006): 8.

In March-April 2004 the municipality detected hexavalent chromium or chrome 6 in the groundwater after replacing water pipes in the area. The only other known case of cancer causing chromium 6 contamination elsewhere in the world, was made famous by Erin Brockovich in the U.S.A.

³⁷ See Focus group interview (09 November 2008)

If we protest more, industries would get scared and they will put some plans into place to reduce pollution.

Lead to a slight reduction. If you do nothing they will continue in the same way but if you do something they will respond.

We might get industries to control emissions to meet international standards, although it wouldn't move industries away.³⁸

Whilst these responses indicated that residents believe that mobilisation will pressurise industries to affect necessary change it does not mean that individuals would be willing to participate in such activities. To test the consistency between whether residents would support their belief in the effectiveness of overt action with their commitment to engage in such action themselves, they were asked the question of whether they would participate if a mass protest were to be held against polluting industries. Fifty-five per cent (13 of 24) of the residents that believed that protests would lead to a reduction in pollution said that they would participate if a protest were to be called. The fact that just over half express a willingness to engage in protest action does not bode well for achieving a mass mobilisation against polluting industries. This highlights the fact that the community of Merebank is quiescent towards immediate pollution concerns (Chari, 2006). There are a number of reasons for this. Some of the reasons can be found with the remaining 40 per cent (16 of 40) of residents who indicated that they do not believe that an increase in the number of protests would change pollution levels with 75 per cent (12 of 16) of them following this up with refusing to engage in protests themselves. One of these respondents when asked why she thought that an increase in the number of protests would not lead to a reduction in pollution said:

We going to continue having these protests but nothing is going to get done.³⁹

When asked why she would not participate in protest action she responded by saying:

I am scared that I will lose my house and that they will put me in jail.⁴⁰

Her response to why she believed that protests would not lead to a reduction in pollution shows residents disillusionment with the fact that previous efforts have shown very little by way of positive results. This is vindicated by the fact that 75 per cent (30 of 40) of all the residents interviewed, when asked whether the number of pollution related incidents,

³⁸ See Annexure A: responses to question 25.

³⁹ See Annexure A: response to question 25. Note: This response is vindicated by the fact that as recently as 1995 President Mandela was welcomed by a large gathering of residents from Merebank and other South Durban Communities promising reprieve from health and livelihood risks posed by pollution (Peek in McDonald, 2002: 207). However since then, although there have arguably been minor improvements, the reality is that the number of pollution related incidents have escalated, worst still plans for Mondi to build an incinerator has been passed.

⁴⁰ See Annexure A: response to question 23.

such as fires and chemical leaks have increased or decreased over the last decade believe that they have increased. Her response to the second question alludes to the fact that the mindsets of people have not changed since apartheid. This seems especially true when one considers the fact that apartheid policies such as the National Key Points Act of 1980 continue to be enforced in the current democratic context (Wiley et al. in Freund & Padayachee, 2002: 238).⁴¹ As a member of Crisis Care-line, which is another community based organisation in Merebank, answered when asked why residents choose not to get actively involved in addressing pollution, stated:

Over the years people gave up hope, we have not seen one prosecution or litigation against industries where the law of the country has benefitted the community.⁴²

Such policies may hinder community efforts to mobilise against surrounding industries. Beyond having legislative barriers to community resistance there are also more imminent factors that affect social mobilisation. On the issue of the perceptions of residents towards industries and pollution, many people are afraid of industries. One elderly female resident when asked what needs to be done to reduce pollution in the area highlighted this:

They can tell us to go because they are big companies and we can't tell them to go because they won't hear us.⁴³

Another major obstacle to active community participation is the problem of scientific knowledge, which is exclusionary. Much of the information that industries disclose about the health impacts of pollution is quite technical and often requires scientific expertise (Tesh & Williams, 1996: 297). Although strides have been made in terms of allowing the community access to information, a large amount of this information is difficult to understand and analyse. This is a form of procedural and structural exclusion, as residents are unable to interpret this information and use it effectively to get the 'polluter to pay' (Farber, 1992: 72). Furthermore the steps that industries follow to determine the scale of pollution before taking remediation measures are often long and drawn out and require 'literature reviews' to determine whether a similar exposure to a certain toxic material occurred elsewhere and the health impacts of such an exposure and how it was addressed. This reliance on scientific knowledge undermines community experiences of the affects of pollution on health. Residents are therefore, due to their lack of expertise, disempowered to investigate for themselves the potential health risks posed by a particular chemical (Tesh & Williams, 1996: 287).

⁴¹ Holding on to racially discriminatory policies of the past, grossly undermines section 24(a) of the *South African Bill of Rights* which advocates that 'everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being'. See chapter one

⁴² Focus Group interview (09 November 2008).

⁴³ See Annexure A: response to question 26.

In terms of the Bayer incident in the Navy area of Merebank very few residents actually know about the effects of chromium contamination on their health or are able to make the connection between common illnesses felt by most residents and exposure to chrome 6. This is validated by the fact that only 30 per cent (3 of 10) of residents interviewed in the Navy area, where Bayer Lanxess is located identified chrome 6 as a pollutant when they were asked to list some pollutants that they know of. This was considered especially problematic by one of the activists from the area who indicated that there were a number of people complaining about kidney related problems and furthermore two women who live in her road had died from cancer in recent months.⁴⁴ Although she has approached people who have these problems to get further tests done to determine whether their illness could be the result of their exposure to chrome 6 many of them refuse, saying that it is too costly.⁴⁵ Besides the problem of the information being too technical the cost attached to employing independent researchers to carry out tests to prove that exposure has had major health and livelihood impacts is exceptionally high.⁴⁶ Other factors that affect active community participation are that of education and affordability, which are strongly linked to the problem of scientific knowledge. This was captured by the member from Crisis Care-line when he was confronted with the question of what stops residents from becoming actively involved in fighting pollution issues:

People feel that they are not educated enough, they therefore don't have the confidence and the money to take up these issues.⁴⁷

All of these factors are possible reasons why people express a feeling of powerlessness to remedy pollution in Merebank. However the research has revealed otherwise, that a small majority of 55 per cent (22 of 40) of residents do not in fact feel powerless to bring about positive changes in addressing pollution, since they were willing to engage in collective action. Unfortunately 45.5 per cent (10 of 22) of these residents indicated that they did not attend public meetings related to addressing pollution issues in the area. This number

⁴⁴ Focus Group interview (09 November 2008).

⁴⁵ **Note:** On February 7, 2007 blood tests of more than 150 primary school students from Alipore Road School were conducted for chrome 6 poisoning following them coming into contact with soil contaminated with chrome 6 on the school playgrounds. This occurred because Bayer pushed for remediation to occur within the school grounds despite residents call for tests to be conducted during the school holidays when children were not at school. Andrew, M. "School Closes after toxin scare". *Daily News* (Friday: 9 February 2007): 3. Infotox indicated that they would give the city the results when all the results were available. It was also indicated that the city had to decide if each student were to get their results or not. It must be added that up to this day many parents have still not received this information. Furthermore a health report confirmed that the children were actually suffering from 'mass hysteria' (*Bayer Lanxess Task Team Meeting Second Draft Minutes*. 27 March 2007: 4-5).

⁴⁶ Tesh and Williams (1996) argue that science is socially constructed. The experiences of residents are crucial in terms of informing epidemiological studies. Subscribing to a purely objective scientific approach to confirm toxic poisoning of people exposed to a particular toxin can produce inaccurate results. This is the case because there is a dormancy period before toxic poisoning fully establishes itself. The dependence on scientific knowledge is meaningless without active community participation and leads to disinterested politics.

⁴⁷ Focus Group interview (09 November 2008).

is particularly significant, especially when one considers that community organisations complain about the poor turnout of residents at community meetings when problems pertaining to pollution are raised. The Crisis-Care-line member highlighted the lack of action on the part of residents, even though they claim willingness to participate:

The Councilor and CBOs don't get the support of the people. We went to a meeting at Engen, when there were reports of some stuff that was being thrown, but only a handful of people complained. Engen were only willing to entertain the people who complained yet there were many more people that were affected. People that are affected are not standing up to make their voices heard.⁴⁸

Furthermore residents do not attend meetings even when the risk of exposure to potentially life threatening toxins like chromium 6 is high. The director of Bayer Lanxess, Michael Krancher said that, "the poor turn-out at public meetings led to this invitation to families in the community" (quote in *Sunday Tribune*, 18 June 2006: 8).

His response justifies the case for how apathy can be created by a feeling of powerlessness which compromises community mobilisation. This raises the question of why residents concern and willingness to participate in action to address pollution were not translating into action, which points to other reasons that probably rest within relevant community structures or the individuals themselves.

Normlessness: The challenge of balancing economic survival with health and well-being

To test whether residents in Merebank lacked clear norms, the residents interviewed were asked to select one option from a choice of two. The first option tested for normlessness as it stated that it is acceptable if industries were to give residents money to be hushed up and not fight against them, whilst the second option tested for moral value stating that, residents should refuse any form of compensation from industries until they disclose the full impact of pollution on their health and livelihoods.⁴⁹ Ninety-five per cent (38 of 40) of residents selected the second option indicating high levels of moral value within the community. Whilst this may overwhelmingly seem to be the case, it does not account for the large number of individuals who do accept money from industries. The acceptance of monies from industries can hardly qualify for an act of bribery and therefore be immoral, especially on behalf of residents, as these monies can be seen as compensation for damages to health and property.⁵⁰

Even if a few residents were to accept money from polluting industries, the broader community objective of achieving social redress for indiscriminate acts of pollution

⁴⁸ Focus Group interview (09 November 2008)

⁴⁹ See Annexure A: question 27

⁵⁰ Focus Group interview (09 November 2008)

would be undermined. The chances of stimulating active support amongst a substantial number of residents and getting them to agree on a common set of norms and objectives relating to addressing pollution in the area becomes highly improbable. An activist who is challenging Bayer Lanxess on the current problem of chromium 6 contamination responded in the following manner when asked, why she thought she receives little support from people directly affected:

From what I heard a lot of people are friendly with Bayer and they are frequently invited to teas at the company. Some people told me that Bayer approached them and gave them twenty thousand rand. When I asked one of them she said that she needed the money to do some renovations in her home.⁵¹

Although such responses may not constitute an act of immorality they do raise questions of how highly residents value their own health and that of their children, considering the fact that many of them suffer from illnesses caused by indiscriminate disposal of toxic waste material by industries. There are many reasons for people wanting to accept what are fairly meager amounts of money when taking into consideration the long-term cumulative cost of financing chronic illnesses caused by pollution or the future cost of not working through to retirement age because of poor health. Furthermore the depreciation of property values as a result of pollution also prevents a person from selling and leaving the area. Therefore, residents have no other option but to take whatever little money they can to offset some of these costs and make their lives as comfortable as possible. Residents find themselves in a precarious position. They either have to choose between taking the risk of contracting cancer and dying at a younger age so that their socio-economic survival is not compromised, or sell their property at a loss after investing so much of their time, money and energy in creating a stable future for their families. These are unfortunate circumstances as people found themselves living in such an area against their will as a result of racially segregationist policy. The problem though, is that by refusing these monies and working with other residents they would be able to receive adequate compensation as well as force industries to take more stringent measures to increase monitoring and maintenance of their industries.

The second strain of normlessness analyses a conflict of value or norms (De Grazia cited in Dean, 1960). This particular approach to alienation gives greater depth in understanding why residents are not able to translate environmental concern into social mobilisation. The different strategies advocated by the MRA and SDCEA to approaching polluting industries in Merebank is a primary example of a conflict of norms. The MRA subscribe to a consensus-based decision-making model, which views industries as stakeholders together with the community (Pellow, 1999). On this basis they believe that negotiation is a more apt and fruitful strategy to get industries to commit to better monitoring, management of toxic waste disposal and investing in newer, more safer and

⁵¹ Focus Group interview (09 November 2008).

innovative technology in order to minimise the risks of potential life threatening situations. This highlights the fact that the MRA endorses corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs as a way of getting industry to compensate the community for bearing the cost of pollution (Chari, 2006). These programs encourage surrounding industries to sponsor and fund community development initiatives in Merebank in order to provide social amenities, such as parks, green spaces and community halls. The MRA member justified this when he was asked whether the community supports MRA initiatives to protest against polluting industries:

Industries under the National Key Points Act can always get the police to squash marches. There are other avenues to addressing pollution not a matter of marching to the gates. We must appreciate the change. Industries on their own want to build a good relationship with people. Wentworth and Merebank have posed a lot of resistance. Now we have industries and communities understanding one another. We have people who say take the industry somewhere else. You can't move a refinery it's not financially viable and not practical.

On the other hand SDCEA, which is the designated grassroots environmental organisation is responsible for addressing pollution concerns in Merebank and advocates the use of both confrontational tactics as well as negotiation (Carter, 2001: 134). They believe that a lot can be achieved through protest in terms of getting industry to be accountable to the community and to address the various pollution related concerns that they have.

This clash of norms can have a major impact on the extent of how residents come to pursue pollution concerns and whether they would in fact translate their concerns into social mobilisation. An ex-SDCEA member when asked the question of what were the obstacles to mobilisation, said in recalling a particular event:

I remember at one meeting when the MRA and SDCEA had an argument about how to approach industry. The people there could see there was no unity.

Although the different strategies that grassroots organisations advocate pose a structural obstacle that creates confusion and disillusionment amongst residents as to the value of mobilisation, there are other more fundamental conflicts of norms that can prevent residents from translating their concern into action. The conflict of self-interest and collective action poses its own problems. Olsen's (1967) classic 'free rider' syndrome draws attention to the fact that within the current democratic context affected residents have the right and freedom to openly voice their discontents, but do not do so. Individuals are not willing to take the risks associated with mobilising against industries but are willing to reap the rewards of the action of others.

However, in the context of Merebank this debate raises other issues that add to the complexity of the problem. Most notably the fact that residents have become complacent

and believe that it is the responsibility of the government to address all their concerns including pollution, points to the fact that residents refuse to take responsibility for their health and that of their children (Ruiters in McDonald, 2002). This lack of civic duty and dependence on the government to express the common interests of the community is problematic (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). This point is vindicated by the fact that 62.5 per cent (20 of 32) of the 80 per cent (32 of 40) of residents that selected pollution as a major cause for concern in the community responded to the question of whose responsibility it is to address pollution, by stating that this is the task of local government or the councilor who they had elected. The local government official's response to the question of whether he thought the community is complacent, responded by saying:

It is a problem because as a councilor I am one person. As an organisation we may be fifty people. If you take the community and lump them all together it will create togetherness. There are so many people crying foul to what is happening. It is not about me being a councilor... we can only get justice if we have a mass mobilisation of forty thousand people compared to fifty people, then only will they respond.

The tendency of residents to free ride on the efforts of others, which compromises mobilisation was further validated by the statements made by two activists. When they were asked why they thought residents who know about pollution chose not to engage in protests, they said:

People believe in follow the leader.

They are so used to us. They know that we will go and fight.

Although the dependency of residents on government raises a bigger issue of representation within the context of a democracy, which in itself poses a threat to community mobilisation on a range of issues, the problem of the free rider in fighting pollution issues also constitutes a viable problem. Individuals are reluctant to shoulder the cost of protesting, but are willing to reap the rewards of the action of others in terms of achieving a reduction in pollution, a common goal that would benefit the entire community.

Social Isolation: Manufacturing disunity towards environmental justice concerns

The construct of social isolation is an analytical tool that places emphasis on the need for supporting organisations within the community to physically reach out to surrounding communities in order to stimulate collective action. Unfortunately in the context of Merebank there are many obstacles supporting groups face that limit the possibility of achieving wide-scale community activism. The nature of the spatial configuration of the area poses the first challenge. The creation of separate spaces within the community was intended to produce disharmony. Scott (2003: 240) alludes to this

fact by stating that the 'mechanism of zoning, was used in planning for achieving exclusivity in each realm and creating urban areas as a set of static, discrete spaces added together rather than being a fluid unity of transformations'.

As indicated in this research Merebank can be divided into four distinct sub-regions, which are separated from one another by a major highway and two main roads. The Navy area is on the inland side of the main highway, the first region on the opposite side of the highway moving towards the sea is the Shopping Centre region. The Tara Road intersection separates the Shopping Centre region from the next region where the Mini Town flats are located. The last region on the hill facing the sea is the Ridge area, which is separated from the Ridge by Travancore Road, which becomes Marine Drive, the main beach road going towards the Bluff.⁵² The most intriguing feature of this spatial planning is where the different industries are located relative to the settlement. The Navy region is sited next to Bayer Lanxess and Illovo; the southern part of the Shopping Centre region is closer to the airport and Mondi paper; the Mini town flat area is directly opposite Engen and the Ridge area is directly opposite Sapref on the south facing side. It is easy to understand why each sub-region in Merebank addresses pollution concerns in a piecemeal fashion. Each sub-region seems to be confronted with their own immediate pollution concerns, which can compromise the ability of support groups to mobilise the entire community to address pollution issues in a holistic manner. The MRA member when asked about the impact of the scattered development of various polluting industries throughout the region on achieving a community effort to combating pollution responded by saying:

Different segments are impacted by different industries. The masses are not going to worry about the impact that Engen has on the lives of people in the Basin. We need to find a common aspect to bring them all together.⁵³

The challenge of mobilising the entire community is made more difficult by class stratification both within each sub-region, but more especially between sub-regions themselves. For example the more affluent people in the community live in the Ridge area⁵⁴, whereas most of the poor in the community live in the Mini-Town flats area, with the Navy and Shopping Centre comprising of more middle class residents with a scattering of affluent and poor. With this class disparity the task of finding a common message to gain the support of the different class interests is difficult. How can one reconcile the interests of a more affluent group of residents living on the Ridge, with the interests of a poorer resident living in the Mini-Town flats? The responses of the two residents, when asked to indicate what were the three major issues currently affecting the

⁵² The Bluff was a designated white area during apartheid.

⁵³ Focus Group interview (09 November 2008).

⁵⁴ See South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA). *Merebank: History and Environmental Problems* <<http://www.h-net.org/~esati/sdcea/merebankshort.html>>

community and why these issues were important, elucidated the above claim. The resident living on the Ridge responded by first identifying the three major problems currently affecting the community as follows:

Pollution, there are no amenities for children. There is a lack of services and there is the problem of crime and drugs.⁵⁵

When he was asked to account for why these issues were important he did not identify the issue of pollution from industries:

Surroundings have become dumping sites and ablution facilities. There are parking problems. The councilor has a neighbor who deals in drugs but does nothing about it.⁵⁶

The resident living in the Mini-Town flats region on the other hand identified the following issues:

Pollution and the drain and sewage is blocked this made the flood worse. Also the noise pollution is bad.⁵⁷

When she was asked to indicate why she thought these issues were important she responded:

Pollution from the factory is causing a lot of damages. My father died of asthma because of this. My daughter has problems with her eyes because of the pollution.⁵⁸

These responses are in stark contrast to one another and express the difficulty of rallying the residents from different sub-regions who have different class interest to fight for a common cause of getting polluting industries to reduce their levels of pollution in the area at large.

As a result of this difference in sub-regional interests with regards to pollution, organisations such as the SDCEA and the MRA are forced to adopt a reactionary approach to mobilisation rather than a proactive one against all polluters. Although there have been minor successes, for example SDCEA was able to rally substantial support from the community in protest against Mondi for dumping toxic ash on a site close to people's homes, the people involved were those living closest to Mondi and not residents from the entire community (Peek in McDonald, 2002: 209).

Other factors which serve as obstacles to community mobilisation pertain to the fact that a significant number of people are not aware of the organisation responsible for

⁵⁵ See Annexure A: response to question 10.

⁵⁶ See Annexure A: response to question 11.

⁵⁷ See Annexure A: response to question 10

⁵⁸ See Annexure A: response to question 11

addressing environmental concerns in the area. It is interesting to note the percentage of residents in each sub-region that heard of SDCEA and knew their function. Eighty per cent (8 of 10) of respondents in the Navy area, 50 per cent (5 of 10) of respondents in the Shopping Center region, 60 per cent (6 of 10) of respondents in the Mini-Town area and 30 per cent (3 of 10) of respondents in the Ridge area, had in fact heard, and knew the function, of SDCEA. This is particularly interesting when one considers that an equal number of residents were surveyed in each of the four sub-regions.

These results highlight the point made earlier. The residents in the Navy area constituted the largest portion of residents that heard about and knew about SDCEA. This is due to the fact that this particular part of the community has only recently been made aware of the imminent threat of chromium 6 poisoning in the area. The struggles of residents in this section of Merebank have become the focus of attention for SDCEA in recent times. As a result of this more people living in the Navy area have been exposed to SDCEA and have subsequently engaged them on issues pertaining to this crisis.

It is important to have an equal distribution of residents in the different regions who know about the local grassroots environmental organisation which address pollution concerns. This awareness can possibly facilitate greater concern and initiative amongst all residents irrespective of their immediate pollution concerns to rally together to address pollution matters as a community.

A more generalised form of social isolation identified by this research poses an obstacle to building relationships between the different communities within the South Durban Basin as a whole so as to achieve a common vision to address the problem of industrial pollution that affects all of them. In this regard apartheid once again rears its ugly head, since these neighbouring communities are racially homogenous due to racially segregationist policy such as the Group Areas Act of 1950. This racial homogeneity bred 'racial stereotypes' and animosity between neighbouring communities, which can negatively influence the ability of all the different communities mobilising together against a common struggle of pollution (Festenstein, 2001: 6). This was emphasised by an ex-SDCEA activist who is a resident of the neighbouring predominantly Coloured community of Wentworth:

I moved to Wentworth in 1974....I was a supervisor for the housing schemes and I use to go to work there in the Mini Town flats and I remember the division between the Coloured community of Wentworth and the Indian community of Merebank. There was always a fight between them. We suppose to be one you know.⁵⁹

This lack of unity between affected communities in the South Durban Basin can be a major stumbling block to communities attempting to attain environmental justice. A

⁵⁹ Focus Group interview (09 November 2008).

unified effort can achieve far more for all disenfranchised communities in this area and not just the community of Merebank, which is the focal point of this particular research.

The role that social isolation plays in shaping how residents come to conscientise and act based on localised or 'not in my backyard' (NIMBY) concerns takes on a new dynamic in the context of Merebank. Localised pollution concerns have become too localised in the process posing major obstacles to achieving social mobilisation throughout the entire community. This is not aided by the lack of community awareness of the local environmental organisation and a subscription to a reactionary and fragmentary approach to community mobilisation. However the root cause of this problem rests within apartheid spatial planning, which continues to limit the ability of the racially homogenous community in Merebank from mobilising against pollution concerns, let alone compromising neighbouring black communities from rallying together against this common evil.

Conclusion

The purpose of this analysis was to test the hypothesis that the majority of the predominantly Indian residents of the community of Merebank are apathetic to immediate pollution concerns. The findings revealed that higher levels of education did lead to increased levels of environmental awareness. However, this fact could not be reconciled with the reality that the vast majority of these supposedly educated individuals were living in the Mini-Town flats which is the poorest sub-region of Merebank. Therefore education and socio-economic status did not reflect the same result. Other factors such as the proximity to toxic industry and the increasing costs of healthcare due to exposure to pollution, especially amongst poor residents led to higher levels of awareness. The findings subverted the core assumption of the age hypothesis, since older residents were comparatively more concerned about immediate pollution concerns than their younger counterparts. Their heightened concern was due to their experiences and knowledge of being forced to live next to polluting industries as result of racially discriminatory policies implemented during apartheid. This result vindicated Inglehart's socialisation hypothesis. In terms of environmental and relative deprivation theory the findings revealed the following. The vast majority of residents that identified pollution as the most important concern had spent most of their lives living in Merebank, which negates the environmental deprivation hypothesis, which argues that residents should become 'psychologically numb' to pollution concerns. In fact this result affirmed the relative deprivation hypothesis that residents should express a greater level of awareness if they had spent most of their lives living in a polluted environment. However, both these positions fell short in explaining why residents did not translate their concerns into activism. A 'sense of place' was used to indicate why residents would not leave if they were given an opportunity to. Finally the results of political alienation indicated that residents choose not to translate their concerns into activism because they feel powerless

to fight polluting industries. Furthermore their poor socio-economic standing prompts them to accept piecemeal compensation from polluting industries in exchange for their disengagement with activism. A conflict between self and community interest in relation to residents that are employed by surrounding industries also hinders community mobilisation, as those that are employed by industry are in no position to jeopardise their livelihoods. Social isolation illustrates how apartheid spatial planning contributed to isolation of sub-regions of Merebank from one another and the impact this has on mobilising the broader community. It also explored how residents are strategically excluded from participating in environmental decision-making due to the highly technical and scientific nature of toxic contamination and remediation reports administered by industries, which are inaccessible to the ordinary resident affected by pollution.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to prove that the majority of the predominantly Indian residents of Merebank are apathetic towards their immediate pollution concerns. The study drew on a number of theories namely, post-materialism, environmental and relative deprivation theory and political alienation theory along with its three major subsidiaries; powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation. The core assumptions of each of these theories were used as a framework to explore the possible reasons as to why the residents of Merebank are apathetic towards pollution concerns. The findings of the research both affirmed some of the assumptions and negated others. For example, the findings negated the environmental deprivation hypothesis, which argues that residents who are exposed to pollution for a long period of time would become 'psychologically numb' to their surroundings. On the other hand the results affirmed the hypothesis of relative deprivation theory by indicating that residents who are exposed to pollution for a long period of time are actually conscious of their immediate environmental concerns. A 'sense of place' was used to understand why residents who are conscious of pollution choose not to act against polluting industries.

In light of this analogy the findings of the research served two functions. The first function is that it provided an adequate critique of the core assumptions made by the various theories. Its second function is that it raised more questions around what factors cause residents to become apathetic to immediate pollution concerns and more pertinently provided a wider range of answers as to why they may be apathetic. By situating the research within the theoretical discourse of environmental racism and environmental justice the thesis wished to explore an avenue of research, which is relatively new within the field. Focus has mainly been placed on the institutionalised nature of environmental racism and how it has to manifest itself in the spaces that we occupy, stimulating resistance amongst communities that have become deliberate targets for the location of toxic industrial and waste facilities. This thesis has added an extra dimension to understanding environmental racism and justice by analysing the psychological and social impacts of environmental racism and the extent to which it has shaped how we think about and more especially how we behave towards immediate environmental concerns. Although this research places much of the blame for the apathy shown by the predominantly Indian residents of Merebank on the institutional design of apartheid it also alludes to how a current subscription to a neoliberalist system of governance continues to fuel such apathy.

In the case of Merebank and other black communities, it was overt racial oppression that initially led to them being unjustly exposed to toxics. However the shift to a neoliberal democracy that lauds expanded industrial production as a source of economic

development means that environmental injustices are perpetuated, as previously disenfranchised black communities continue to bear the costs of development. More pertinently these communities do not challenge polluting industries and the state. The apathy they express is shaped by more covert structural forces endemic to capitalism. As neo-Marxian scholar Louis Althusser emphasised through his theory on Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) in order for capitalism to reproduce itself the social conditions must also be reproduced (Wolff, 2005: 225).

One of those conditions is a consumerist culture, which threatens not only the health and livelihoods of previously disenfranchised communities, but all life on earth. Since this research has not fully explored how a consumerist culture can create apathy towards any form of resistance to capitalist production, it lends itself to further research in this area. Furthermore it also allows for research into whether different races express different degrees of consumerism and how and therefore why some races are more likely to be conscious of how their consumption contributes to wide-scale environmental degradation. Therefore this research also allows for a more holistic approach to be taken to address environmental justice struggles that go beyond unjust exposure to toxics to embrace other forms of injustice, which includes broader legislative protection to be given to the natural green environment as well.

This research therefore opens new avenues for research in the realm of environmental justice, which calls for a more multi-disciplinary approach. Environmental justice must therefore move beyond sociological studies to incorporate the natural sciences, historical, developmental, psychological and geographical studies in order to gain a more holistic view of how environmental racism affects how certain groups of people who have been and who are oppressed come to think about and act on environmental justice concerns. This research also wishes to inform grassroots environmental organisations as to the possible reasons why previously disenfranchised people remain apathetic to environment justice struggle. Perhaps more comprehensive studies in the future will stimulate and inform the development of new strategies to encourage people to engage in collective action. According to Pippa Norris (2002:18) the problem of apathy is not unique to environmental organisations since it plagues most social movements. Despite acknowledging the all pervasive existence of apathy in human society, Norris goes on to argue that what we perceive as apathy towards social justice concerns, is in fact not apathy after all. She purports that as a result of globalisation new spaces have been created on the various media, especially the internet, where concerned individuals can make their voices heard. However these less conventional methods of mobilisation cannot substitute for overt mass protest action as a way of bringing about change and achieving justice. Norris's thesis does not consider that those individuals who have access to these more sophisticated forms of activism are not necessarily the ones suffering from overt injustices. For example, poor disenfranchised people who suffer

from unjust exposure to toxics don not have access to resources such as the internet or other media, but what they do have is a common voice of suffering and the unending support of one another and other concerned individuals who believe in the virtues of mass mobilisation.

Thomas de Luca (1995) in his work on the *Two Faces of Apathy*, alludes to the fact that apathy is produced through the various institutions of state and civil society in order to maintain the status quo, which inevitably means that injustices of the past continue to be perpetuated. He also argues that the other face of apathy points to the individual and the many personal experiences that make him/her apathetic to challenging injustice that inevitably has drastic consequences for large-scale mobilisation. The ultimate challenge to this generation which is to protect an environment that is in peril can only be solved once society can overcome her apathy. In the words of the famous French philosopher and father of the French revolution, Jean Jacques Rousseau, “unfortunately personal interest is always inversely proportional to duty, and increases in direct proportion as the association grows narrow and the commitment less sacred; invincible proof that the most general will is also the most just, and the voice of the people is indeed the voice of God” (Rousseau, 1997: 8). In the light of these words this research attempts to invoke exploration into the questions of when, why and how do people come to engage in environmental justice struggles.

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-Chairman of the Merebank Residents Association (MRA)

-Independent environmental activist (involved in addressing the Bayer Lanxess issue)

-Former SDCEA member

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Annexure: A

Interview Schedule**UNDERSTANDING ACTIVISM IN MEREBANK**

The following questionnaire adheres strictly to the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal's Research Ethics Policy. All information will remain strictly confidential.

1. Age

18-21 years	
21-30 years	
31-40 years	
41-50 years	
51-60 years	
65+ years	

2. Gender

Male	
Female	

3. Race

African	
Coloured	
Indian	
White	

4.

Never attended any school	
A few years primary education	
Completed Primary education	
Completed Std 6-9 (grade 8-11)	
Completed Matric	
Completed tertiary education	
Other (specify)	

5. What kind of work do you do?

6. How long have you lived in Merebank?

7. Are you an active member of a church, residents' association or any other community organization? If so, please indicate the name of the organization.

YES	
NO	

8. In your opinion what were *the three major issues* that affected the community prior to our transition to democracy in 1994?

9. Why were these issues important?

10. In your opinion what are the *three major issues* currently affecting the community?

11. Why are these issues important?

12. Explain why these major issues facing the community changed from apartheid to the present. (Answer only if there have been any changes)

13. Which of the following issues do you think are major causes for concern in the community? (Indicate the most important 3 from the following 5 options)

1. Unemployment	
2. Poverty	
3. Pollution	
4. Crime	
5. Drug abuse	

14. Whose responsibility is it to address these concerns?

15. What can residents do to help address these problems?

16. Who is responsible for addressing pollution in your community?

17. Do you think enough has been done to combat pollution in the area in recent years?

YES	
NO	

Explain why you think enough/not enough has been done

18. In your opinion have the number of incidents (explosions, leaks etc) related to polluting industries increased or decreased over the last decade?

Increased	
Decreased	

19. In your opinion has there been an increase in the number of public meetings and campaigns over the last decade that directly addresses pollution issues within your community?

YES	
NO	

20. Do you attend public meetings in your community?

YES	
NO	

Explain why you do/donot attend these meetings

21. Have you heard of SDCEA (South Durban Community Environmental Alliance)?

YES	
NO	

22. What is their function?

23. If a protest were to be held against polluting industries in this area would you be willing to participate?

YES	
NO	

Why?

24. What factors have motivated or prevented you from becoming actively involved in fighting against pollution in Merebank?

25. In your opinion would an increase in the number of protests against polluting industries in the area lead to a reduction in pollution levels?

YES	
NO	

Explain

26. What needs to be done to reduce pollution in your community?

27. Select *one* of the following *two* options.

It is okay if industries give residents money to be hush and not to fight against them	
Residents should refuse any form of compensation from industries until they disclose the full impact of pollution on their health and livelihoods	

28. How would you rate the following set of needs, from most important to least important, with the most important starting at 1.

Better Housing	
Education	
An environment free of polluting industries	
Better employment	
'Greenspaces'	
Better clothing	

29. List a few pollutants emitted by industries that may be harmful to your health?

30. What kinds of illnesses that you know of, are caused by pollution?

31. If you had the opportunity to live in an area where there are no polluting industries and where there are more green spaces would you leave Merebank?

YES	
NO	

Why?

32. Are you aware of communities in other parts of South Africa or the rest of the world that face similar environmental struggles to the community of Merebank?

YES	
NO	

If yes, please provide an example of such a community.

ANNEXURE: B

Focus Group Interview Questions (Duration: 90 minutes)

Masters Research 2008: R. Francis

1. Welcome & Introduction

2. Group introduction

3. General Questions

3.1 How long have you lived in Merebank? *{How did you/your family come to live here?}* (house)

3.2 What came first? The community or industry? (house)

3.3 What would you consider as the major strengths of this community?
(house)(briefly)

4. Specific (Focus questions-historical context)

4.1 Were any of you actively involved in the anti-apartheid struggle? (house)

4.2 In your opinion what were the major concerns facing the community during apartheid? (house)

4.3 In your opinion what are the major concerns currently affecting the community? (house)

4.4 Have there been any changes in these concerns? (house)

4.5 During apartheid, how did pollution compare with other concerns such as housing, water, better roads, maintenance etc. (Councillor & MRA-Chairman)(briefly)

4.6 Were residents actively involved in fighting pollution during apartheid?
(attending public meetings, protests)

5. Specific (Focus questions-Current)

5.1 How did you become an environmental activist? {probe: personal experience, contact with other people or an awareness of the effects of pollution on the health and livelihoods of family & friends} *(Independent activists)*

5.2 How do residents respond to calls to participate in public meetings and protests? Explain why *(Councillor, MRA Chairperson & ex-SDCEA member)*

5.3 Do you think that there is enough support from residents when it comes to addressing environmental concerns? *(Independent activists)*

5.4 In your opinion why do you think people choose to/ not to actively support the fight against pollution? (probe on the ffg issues: economic job blackmail, bribery, green-washing, preoccupation with daily concerns) *(Independent activists)*

5.5 Residents often look to local government and community based organisations (CBOs') to represent their interests. *(Councillor, MRA Chairman & ex-SDCEA member)*

5.5.1 Do you think that resident's rely too much on you to fight pollution?

5.5.2 In your opinion what are some of the obstacles that prevent residents from actively mobilising around environmental concerns?

6. What would be the way forward in terms of addressing pollution in Merebank? *(house)*

6.1 What strategies should we adopt to reduce pollution? *(probe: mass mobilisation or negotiation) (house)*

6.2 How important is active community participation in achieving justice against polluting industries? *(house)*

Thank You