

## Spatiality and Environmental Justice in Parkdale (Toronto)

Cheryl Teelucksingh

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### Article abstract

As part of the project to name environmental injustices in Canada, this article explores the significance of a critical analysis of social space to understand environmental justice problems in an urban Canadian community. Environmental injustices that impact on particular geographical locations have a readily apparent, fixed spatial aspect. However, I argue that a broader view to the politics of how space is produced and reproduced is necessary to explain the way in which the spatial manifestations of political economic transformations can create new and dynamic environmental injustices (Massey 1993). I at first outline some of the key components of the environmental justice perspective. Then, by drawing on critical work in the area of human geography, in particular Edward Soja's (1996) and Henri Lefebvre's (1991) work, I review the limitations of the dominant approach to spatiality in the American environmental justice literature. I then present my arguments in favour of a critical view to social space through a consideration of my field research findings in the Toronto community of Parkdale.

# **SPATIALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN PARKDALE (TORONTO)**

**Cheryl Teelucksingh**  
*Sociology Department*  
*Ryerson University, Toronto*

Starting in the 1980s in the United States, environmental justice was established as a broad-based social movement and research paradigm to recognize the combined environmental and social justice concerns that are disproportionately experienced by marginalized people. The strength of the linkages between grassroots initiatives, research in the academy, and legal and policy reforms has helped to make the environmental justice perspective attractive to researchers and progressive activists outside the American context. In Canada, environmental problems and environmental injustices have always existed, even though, until recently, they have not been named.

As part of the project of beginning to name environmental injustices in Canada, in this article, I explore the significance of a critical analysis of social space to understand environmental justice problems in an urban Canadian community. Environmental injustices that impact on particular geographical locations have a readily apparent, fixed spatial aspect. However, I argue that a broader view to the politics of how space is produced and reproduced is necessary to explain the way in which the spatial manifestations of political economic transformations can create new and dynamic environmental injustices (Massey 1993).

In the first part of the article, I briefly outline some of the key components of the environmental justice perspective. Then, by drawing on critical work in the area of human geography, in particular Edward Soja's (1996) and Henri Lefebvre's (1991) work, I review the limitations of the dominant approach to spatiality in the American environmental justice literature. For most of the article, I examine my arguments in

favour of a critical view to social space through a consideration of my field research findings in the Toronto community of Parkdale.

### **Environmental Justice Research and Spatiality**

In the United States during the 1980s, residents of racialized and low income communities began speaking out and demanding compensation for the environmental problems in their communities that were adversely affecting their health. Infamous incidents, such as Love Canal in upper New York State, received national and international attention. Grouping together new types of local activism, the term “environmental justice” emerged as a nexus social movement for a wide range of other American movements including: the anti-toxic movement; a growing critique of the mainstream environmental movement; and the civil rights movement. “Environmental justice”<sup>1</sup> arose as the broad term for the desired objective to gain and maintain healthy environments in communities, workplaces, and homes by eliminating a multitude of obstacles to marginalized people by improving their quality of life (Pellow 2000: 583). In 1982, prominent civil rights activist, Benjamin Chavis Jr. coined the more narrowly defined term “environmental racism” to describe the systemic and institutional racism experienced by communities of colour. While debates over the significance of class marginalization relative to race marginalization dominated the early American environmental justice literature, the overall goal of eradicating social and environmental injustices is the same.

American environmental research played a role in helping to create a broad set of themes, methodologies, and objectives to unite the range of local initiatives and grassroots conceptual approaches to environmental justice. American environmental justice research began with two main streams of thought: first, an emphasis on providing and identifying evidence of environmental injustices, and second, an emphasis on explaining how communities and organizations address both discursive struggles and hegemonic struggles for collective action. The first stream of research uses empirical and, often, quantitative statistical analyses and geographical information systems (GIS) to provide systematic information about the spatial distributions of

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1. Dorceta Taylor (2000b) provides an extensive review of the ideological foundations of the environmental justice movement.

environmental hazards (Mohai and Bryant 1992; United Church of Christ 1987). In the second stream of environmental justice research, theorists use historical and case study analyses of the movement's emergence (Bullard 1983, 1993).

In much of the environmental justice literature to date consideration of the spatiality of environmental justice problematics has tended to focus on the physical relationship between the marginalized community and the environmental problem as fixed spatial configurations. In fact, demonstrating the physical spatial interaction between the marginalized community and the environmental problem is an important component of quantitative research pointing to environmental injustices. Environmental justice concerns, in this sense, are place-bound configurations and limited to a fixed geographical location. A noteworthy example of environmental justice's place-bound politics are the particulars surrounding the PCB-laced landfill in the predominately African American community of Warren County, North Carolina, in 1982. As a turning point in the American environmental justice movement, Warren County, as a single location, signalled the racialization of environmental problems in the United States (Pulido, 1996:151). In Warren County, racial meanings and racial boundaries emerged when particular spatial configurations relating to racial residential concentration and the dumping of hazardous environmental waste physically converged.

The environmental justice literature has treated both marginalized communities and environmental problems, which are spatial components, as fixed, neutral, and physical spaces. In this sense, space is only regarded in as far as it *contains* the population and the environment problem. I suggest that this approach to space overlooks a more dynamic conception of space. Human geographers (Harvey 1996; Soja 1996; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1993) that advocate a relational view of space, encourage us to understand the reciprocal relationship between space and social relations. For Lefebvre (1991), social space is the result of the contradiction of the concrete, or perceived space, and the abstract, or conceived space. New, or lived spaces, reflect both perceived and conceived spaces. Table 1 outlines Lefebvre's (1991) and Soja's (1996) trialectics of space as approached in this paper.

Space, conceived as fixed and neutral in much of the environmental justice literature to date, is narrowly relegated to only a regard for space and environmental injustices as perceived space.

Space	Description	Examples	Operationalized in the Parkdale Field Work
Perceived	Concrete, physical (objective)	Measurable configurations	a) Archival maps b) Participatory maps c) Some interview comments
Conceived	Abstract, symbols (subjective)	Planning documents and newspaper representations	a) Archival historical research b) Some interview comments
Lived	Everyday experience (both objective and subjective)	Community activism and resistance	a) Some interview comments b) Participatory observations

Table 1. Lefebvre’s (1991) and Soja’s (1996) Trialectics of Space

A social analysis of space, as both a conceptual and methodological tool as I am proposing, allows environmental justice researchers to question the evolving history and politics of communities that are a component of environmental injustice outcomes. Examining how space becomes reproduced involves a consideration of both structural and political economic processes and the manner in which various stakeholders act as agents in the reproduction of space reflecting their particular interests. In the case study of the Toronto community of Parkdale, I explore the significance of a critical analysis of social space to understanding environmental justice problems.

Sources of Data and Methodological Issues

I selected the community of Parkdale in Toronto (Ontario, Canada) as a field research area because it exemplifies many of the trends emerging in Toronto’s inner city, low income communities. The two environmental justice organizations in the Toronto area are also not active in Parkdale. Field research methodologies used for my research consisted of intensive face-to-face recorded interviews, a participatory mapping component that accompanied each interview, participatory observation, and archival research. The field research design was

intended to allow for multiple perspectives regarding the community and for a broader context to be brought to interview participants' perspectives regarding everyday life in Parkdale.

As defined by a larger research project (Teelucksingh 2001), the objective of the field interviews was to examine the relationship between interview participants' own local knowledge of their urban environment and the development of spatial and environmental manifestations of racialization. I conducted a total of sixteen (16) interviews with members of the Parkdale community. The interview sample was selected using a snowball sampling method (Neuman 1994: 199-200). The confines of the Parkdale community (see Map 1 below), defined by geographical boundaries, was the main unit of analysis in the interviews.

I used an interview questionnaire as a guide, but not necessarily a script, to outline the relationships between the constructs that I wanted to explore with each participant. In particular, interview questions operationalized definitions of the constructs of environmental risks, racialization, and spatiality. From the perspective of environmental justice, environmental risks are health and safety concerns that disproportionately impact marginalized or racialized people. Field interviews in Parkdale revealed that notions of environmental risk incorporated into participants' everyday discourse reflected a broad understanding of what constituted an environmental risk, ranging from pollution emissions to abandoned lots. As Ulrich Beck (1992) notes, an individual's own perception of risk takes into account his or her own location and risk position. Racialization is the latent and systematic attachment of racial meaning to social, economic, and political processes. In this study, I defined racialized people as lower income people, visible minorities<sup>2</sup>, and recent immigrants. Spatiality was defined as the link between social relations and perceived spaces, conceived spaces, and lived spaces (Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1996).

Participatory mapping questions were a part of each interview. For this component, I asked each participant to draw or mark the locations of particular resources and land areas in their community on a street map of the study area. By observing the map, participants were able to make important connections between people and perceived spaces. In this sense, the maps pointed to important social and environmental

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2. In Canada, the term visible minority is used to refer to non-white groups.

relationships that added to and complemented the interview discussions about the perceived space, the conceived space and the lived space of Parkdale.

Participant observation was an unstructured component of my field research. I used a journal to document three different types of observations, namely: notes from community meetings which allowed me to examine the interplay between different stakeholders; notes regarding my personal field experiences; and notes about factors that may have impacted on the quality of each interview. The three types of journal observations added to the richness of the field experience and shed light on the social context of the study areas.

Archival research was used to provide historical-comparative data to contextualize my findings. Urban planning records containing provincial and municipal government documents were examined with an eye to settlement patterns and transformations to the perceived and conceived spaces of Parkdale. It is important to note that the archival research was focussed, rather than comprehensive. The archival research served as a supporting, as opposed to a historically and longitudinally integrative, component of my data analysis.

In my analysis of the field research findings, I looked for reoccurring thematic patterns between environmental risk and marginalized demographic groups across all participants' responses. Positive associations between environmental risks and marginal groups pointed to environmental injustices. From these patterns, I was able to make some supported generalizations in light of the environmental justice framework. Marked maps provided qualitative visual spatial data that was compared and contrasted with other interview data. I analyzed the marked maps, in a manner similar to the interview data analysis, by looking for common and different aspects in the visual representations in the participants' maps.

In the sections below, I summarize the findings from the Parkdale field research in two parts. In the first part, I outline the structural processes at play in Parkdale. The second part of the findings focuses on interview participants' perceptions of the various stakeholders and the connection between spatial and environmental manifestations of racialization.

## Parkdale

### *Context: Past and Present*

Using present day street designations, the community of Parkdale (see Map 1) is located west of downtown Toronto, just north of the shores of Lake Ontario, west of Dufferin Street, east of Roncesvalles Street, and south of Dundas Street. In the early years of the Village of Parkdale, starting in the 1870s, residents considered the natural environment surrounding the village to be very attractive because of its combination of farmlands, wooded regions, and the Lake Ontario shorefront. In the early 1900s, as an alternative to living in the city, families of moderate wealth moved to Parkdale as a residential suburb. Other more affluent Anglo-Saxon residents built large Victorian-style homes in the southern section of Parkdale<sup>3</sup>. However, due to the variety of housing stock, Parkdale always attracted a mix of incomes (Interview Keefer 1999). For early Parkdale residents, lower income housing was located in the northern part of Parkdale close to the location of the railway tracks and, later, industrial development in Parkdale. Therefore, early in Parkdale's history, a variety of incomes and land uses were readily established.

Early Parkdale included a mix of light and heavy industry, including a large rubber plant and some commercial development. Following the Village of Parkdale's amalgamation with the City of Toronto in 1889, more factories were erected along the northern and eastern boundary areas of Parkdale. In addition, because of Parkdale's close vicinity to both downtown Toronto and the lakefront, in the early 1900s, many of Toronto's early social and medical institutions were located in Parkdale next door to the more affluent residents of South Parkdale. These institutions included: the Mercer Reformatory, the Protestant's Orphan Home, the Home of the Incurable, and the Lunatic Asylum.

In the 1920s, a huge residential growth took place in Parkdale as the Lake Ontario waterfront area developed into a desirable recreational facility. This residential development boom increased the number of transients coming through Parkdale in the summer months (Interview

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3. Parkdale residents and Toronto municipal government officials currently refer to the southern section of Parkdale as South Parkdale and the north section as North Parkdale. These names reinforce the binary social and spatial distinctions that I discuss later in the article.





Source: Statistics Canada. Census 1996.

Keefer 1999). However, during the depression of the late 1920s and 1930s, many residents left the area in search of work and many of those large homeowners who remained in Parkdale turned part of their homes into boarding houses. During World War II, most of the residents of Parkdale found employment in factories and businesses in the community that had switched over to wartime production (Interview Keefer 1999). The war economy and changes in the immigration trends to Canada were instrumental in the initial structural reorganization and demographic shifts away from the predominately British only residential settlement in the community.

Following World War II, there were two phases of combined environmental and social transformation in Parkdale (Metropolitan Toronto Police Force 1987: 9). In the first phase, starting in the early 1950s, the rooming and boarding lodgings could have slowly disappeared, but did not. Instead, Parkdale became a staging ground for displaced Eastern European immigrants because, in comparison to other areas of Toronto, the houses were larger and better suited to housing entire extended families (Interview Keefer 1999). Immigrants of Polish descent, many of whom immigrated prior to 1961, today, still represent the largest non-English language and ethnolinguistic minority

group in Parkdale. A fair number of the remaining larger Victorian homes in the southern part of Parkdale were sold to developers who erected rental apartment buildings which, by 1962, had taken over areas that were originally occupied by single family dwellings (City of Toronto 1983). Following closely on the heels of these demographic changes in the 1950s and 1960s, the construction of the Gardiner Expressway, between 1955 and 1962, effectively ended the lakefront beach recreational area. In addition, the expressway had significant environmental consequences since it increased the amount of traffic and air pollution, while concurrently isolating the majority of Parkdale's residents from easy access to the lakefront. Today, aside from the obstructed lakefront, open spaces and natural areas accessible to Parkdale residents are limited to numerous small parks and the large park, High Park, in the neighbouring community.

The conversion of single family homes into multiunit dwellings and rooming houses continued into the second phase of Parkdale's environmental and social change starting in the 1970s. The emergence of high rise apartment buildings in concentrated clusters caused high density population in the southern areas of Parkdale that continues to the present day. The new residents of Parkdale reflected the successive waves of new immigrants to the City of Toronto. In contrast to new immigrant settlement in the southern sections of Parkdale, older residents continued to reside in the single family unit residential pocket in the northwestern part of Parkdale, while the residential land use around that pocket continued to change dramatically. More recently, in response to income needs, numerous social housing projects have also been established in the southern section of Parkdale, including those established for outpatient psychiatric care and/or operated by group home agencies. In the 1970s, the only remaining industrial areas in Parkdale were along the railway line in north and northwest Parkdale. During this time, residents in the north were vulnerable to pollution from neighbouring industrial facilities, whereas residents in the south were vulnerable to environmental risks arising from high population densities and their close vicinity to heavy automobile and railway traffic.

Circumstances in North Parkdale did not change until the deindustrialization of the community in the early 1980s. As other industries started to move out of the area, rising property values inevitably forced other local Parkdale businesses to move out to the more suburban areas of Toronto. Starting in the mid-1990s, developers

reconverted former factory land to meet the growing residential housing demand alongside the new surge of gentrification in the northern part of Parkdale. At present, in comparison to its southern sections, the northern parts of Parkdale have lower residential density and numerous single family dwellings. Today, major streets in Parkdale continue to serve as important transportation arteries through the community, consisting of a mix of commercial areas, some residential dwellings, and institutional use facilities. At present, there are only two small light industrial areas remaining in Parkdale; each area runs along the two CNR railway lines located in the top and lower ends of the community. Artists' cooperatives and some film production facilities are slowly beginning to occupy the eastern portion of former industrial area in the northern parts of Parkdale.

Today, Parkdale, as a total community, is relatively densely populated with a population of 27,978 within only 1.90 square kilometres (Statistics Canada 1996). As a low cost real estate area, indicated by its 13% lower than average Toronto dwelling values, and also due to Parkdale's close vicinity to downtown Toronto and public transportation, Parkdale is an attractive community for low income renters, homeowners, and landlords who seek an affordable housing market (Statistics Canada 1996). According to 1996 statistics, South Asians, followed by Blacks, Filipinos, and Chinese, are the dominant reported visible minority groups (Statistics Canada 1996). In comparison to the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area, Parkdale is also statistically characterized as having significantly higher representations of: total immigrant populations; recent (1991-1996) immigrant populations; visible minority populations; government transfer payments; and incidences of low income for individuals, families, and private households (Statistics Canada 1996).

Similar to many older inner city neighbourhoods, current homeowners in Parkdale broadly fall into three groups: (1) older residents who have occupied their homes for longer periods of time; (2) landlords who have purchased residential property only for investment purposes; and (3) young professional class individuals and families seeking single family dwellings in a hyperinflated Toronto real estate market. Community members' perspectives regarding their community's environment highlight the various and conflicting stakeholder interests and land use needs.

*Community Perspectives and Insights from the Interviews*

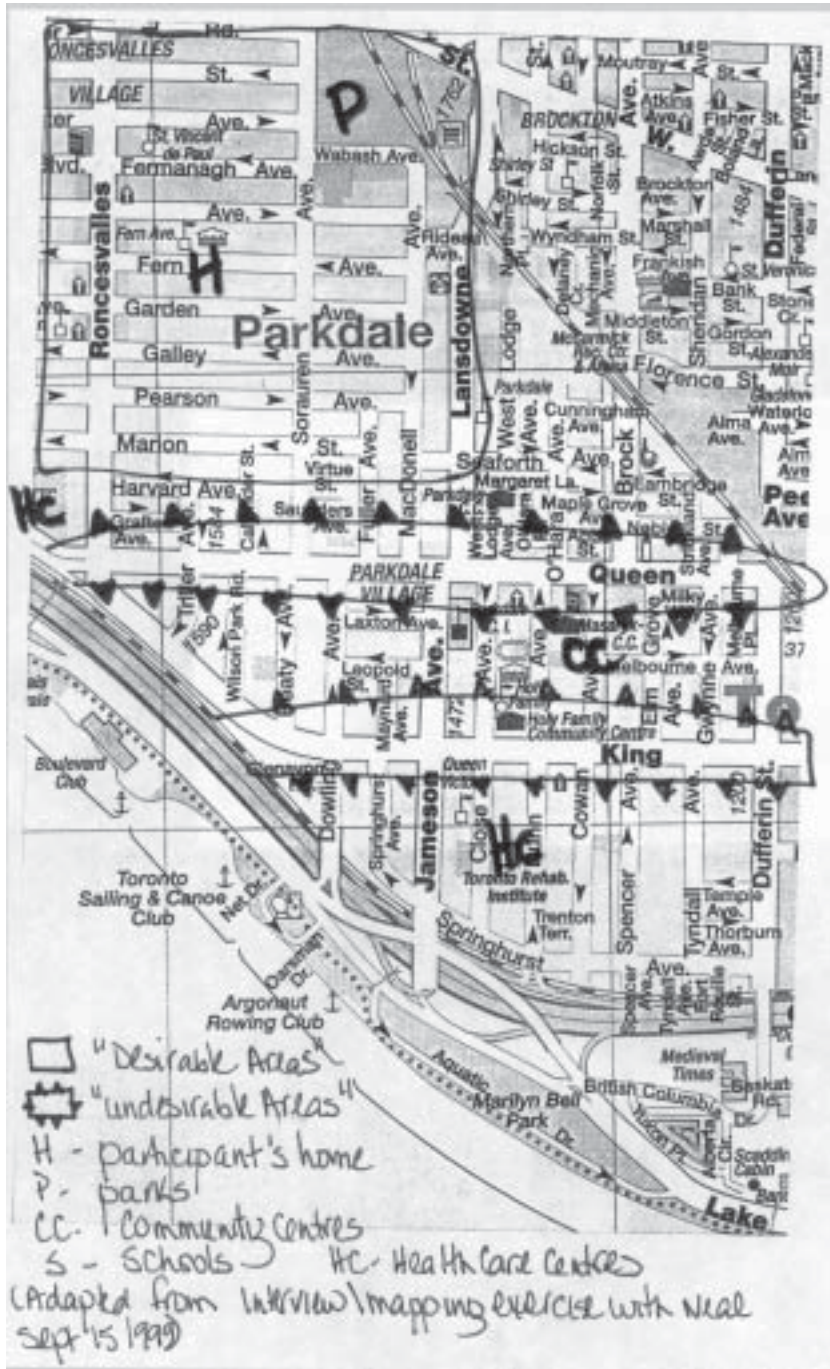
The notion of diversity was a reoccurring theme that I observed in the Parkdale interviews. Diversity summarized respondents' understanding of differences in Parkdale about income, immigrant status, race, housing-living conditions, and land uses. Seen as both a significant strength and a significant weakness of the Parkdale community, diversity was an important aspect of many competing tensions in the community. Tracey, an interview participant, responding to a question about the strengths and weaknesses of living in Parkdale observes:

You see real people in Parkdale, so you get a little bit of the rich and a little bit of the poor. And that's what life is really about. So, the diversity of it, in terms of who owns the stores in Parkdale and who lives in Parkdale is what really strengthens it and makes the community vibrant and what I have really learned to love... When people say to me that they would never live in Parkdale because of all the different kinds of people, [I think] how can you say that. Since that is precisely what I love about Parkdale, the diversity of Parkdale (Interview Tracey 1999).

Many other participants concurrently spoke about the positive aspects of multiculturalism and shared community spaces while also reflecting on the negative currents of racism and NIMBYism (or not-in-my-back-yard syndrome) that continue to divide the community. The diversity and the tension in the social dynamics of Parkdale are inherent to the politics of space in Parkdale, such as who has control over and access to the community's limited resources. This politic informs how interview participants who, themselves, are differentially situated conceive of the local environment. For example, reflecting on our interview discussion, Tracey notes:

The environment in Parkdale is not so much the air that we breathe or the lack of trees or that sort of thing. However, more in terms of how even the social conditions can affect your health... You could have a lot of green space, for example, but you could be afraid to use it and that too has something to do with the environment. Because you can have all of that [the green spaces], but if you don't feel safe in that area, especially now, that affects everything because you don't want to go out and enjoy the space (Interview Tracey 1999).

Tracey's last comment highlights how social relations and conditions become embedded in the urban environment.



Map 2: Neal's Parkdale Participatory Map.  
Source: Original base map reproduced with permission from MapArt Corporation  
(© Mapmedia Corp.)



The link between social relations and the urban environment is an important analytic framework to bring to interview participants' dominant distinction between the northern portion of Parkdale (North Parkdale) and the southern portion of Parkdale. (South Parkdale). Map 2 is an example of one interview participant's participatory mapping exercise that divides the northern and southern parts of Parkdale into desirable and undesirable areas, respectively. For many interview participants, the distinction between North and South Parkdale was often regarded as a self-evident manifestation of differences in real estate and housing stock. This suggests that interview participants accepted the division between North Parkdale and South Parkdale as the only way to understand spatial differences in Parkdale. I observed several different layers of evidence that indicated that this accepted social organization of space is reproduced and documented. First, participants, during interview discussions and the mapping component of the interviews, tended to associate South Parkdale with what they perceived to be negative characteristics, such as: greater numbers of people of colour and new immigrants; lower incomes; poorer housing stock; higher residential densities; garbage; and other negative social problems, including prostitution, mental illness, and crime. Similarly, interview participants tended to describe North Parkdale as being: cleaner; safer; more European; and, as a result, more desirable. In a discussion about what area of Parkdale he would most prefer to live in if he had to move, Henry states while pointing to North Parkdale on a map:

These areas [in North Parkdale] seem to be kept cleaner and more... As a Caucasian male and from a well-off background in the past, I am more familiar with areas like this... I have a German background, so hey, it's very homogenous. I suppose this [North Parkdale] is my preference because it's more Caucasian. I don't like to think that I'm prejudiced against people, but coming from where I'm coming from, there is a comfort level there and I think this reflects that experience (Interview Henry 1999).

Characterizations of South and North Parkdale, illustrated in Henry's comments, were a common pattern across a majority of the interviews, regardless of the location of the participants' own residences in Parkdale and their own self-identified socioeconomic profiles. For example, one interview participant, who resides in North Parkdale, describes the strengths and weaknesses of living in a multicultural community as follows: "[I]f you go south of Queen [Street West], it's a little too multicultural; the balance is tipped the other way" (Interview Anna 1999).

The excerpts from the Henry and Anna interviews suggest links between space and race. It is possible to see that there are ongoing social processes that sustain the division between North Parkdale and South Parkdale. Spatial distinctions are part of the dominant social order that racializes “multicultural” people in South Parkdale, in contrast to the perceived whiteness of North Parkdale. Participants perceive multiculturalism, at a certain level, to be undesirable (Interview Mark 1999). I also found that participants’ views about multiculturalism and diversity in Parkdale tended to homogenize and essentialize the people residing in both North Parkdale and South Parkdale.

Secondly, other evidence of the reproduction of the North/South Parkdale distinction is reflected in the established social practices that operate in the Parkdale community to reinforce the spatial distinction. Established social practices would include the perception among interview participants that there is a correct and natural location for particular community resources and locally undesirable land uses (LULUs). This perception among participants highlights their unconditional acceptance of hegemonic processes of decision making by stakeholders with power, as well as some participants’ reluctance to question reoccurring social patterns. Thirdly, interview participants commented on the view that particular racial and immigrant groups are fearful to cross what minorities perceived to be racially defined boundaries. This perception of a racial boundary is illustrated in comments such as: “You don’t see Blacks around Roncesvalles [Street]” (Interview Clayton 1999). “My Black babysitter is afraid to cross Lansdowne Street” (Interview Anna 1999). These comments suggest that there are fixed views to racial spaces in Parkdale. Fourthly, the City of Toronto’s Planning Department also separates South Parkdale and North Parkdale, for planning and development purposes, thereby imposing different rules of governance and different accepted land use standards<sup>4</sup>. The assumption in all four above-noted sources of evidence is that there is a separation between North Parkdale and South Parkdale at Queen Street West and that Queen Street West is a fixed and natural boundary because North Parkdale and South Parkdale “contain”

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4. For example, the City of Toronto’s Planning Department has sought to limit the amount of heavy traffic in North Parkdale by creating networks of one-way streets. These same traffic control initiatives have not been imposed in South Parkdale to the same extent, although South Parkdale is closer to major highways.

different qualities. Before considering some of the social-spatial inconsistencies in this North/South orientation to Parkdale, it is important to consider some of the consequences of this dominant dichotomous distinction.

Consistent with the dominant distinction between North and South Parkdale are interview participants' views that there are different environmental risks associated with each area. When asked to describe South Parkdale, many interview participants described what I label as subsistence environmental risks that arise from poorly maintained housing, including insect infestations, inadequate garbage collection facilities, and housing not conforming with fire and health standards. In contrast, participants' perceptions of the environmental risk in North Parkdale were less likely to be subsistence-oriented environmental concerns and more likely to be associated with land use concerns and environmental aesthetics. For example, an interview participant, who is a member of the executive of a North Parkdale residents' association, outlined his association's concerns about the sewage outflows into the western Lake Ontario beaches bordering South Parkdale as stemming from the association's interests in making the beaches more accessible (Interview Neal 1999). In this example raised by interview participant Neal, it is possible to see how North Parkdale residents, through their association, function as active agents in addressing their environmental concerns.

Several participants reported that the allocation of locally undesirable land use in Parkdale tended to trigger not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) sentiments from North Parkdale residents. Most recently, locally undesirable land uses have included alternative forms of housing for psychiatric outpatient housing, halfway houses, and methadone clinics. Struggles over undesirable land uses led to community struggles amongst stakeholders. Interview participants responded to NIMBY allegations with the argument that improving the look of the community serves everyone's interests, not just their own, by bringing pride to the community, especially for marginalized residents. An interesting aspect of interview participants' representation of environmental concerns and people in Parkdale is that the interests of residents who are able to exercise power become packaged as collective interests, whereas the interests of the marginalized residents are localized to their own homes and limited spheres of interest. Marginalized residents, who represent the majority stakeholder in Parkdale, often do not have the resources



or opportunity to participate in advocating their interests. Commenting on the barriers to participation and problems in balancing all stakeholders' needs, Anna, who is a homeowner in North Parkdale, notes:

Like someone said to me once at a meeting, "Why don't these people, ... if it's so horrible down there, why don't they just stand up and do something" and I said, "Knock, knock, folks, when you're so busy just trying to put food on the plate and to keep a roof over your head, you don't have time to advocate for yourself..." It kind of seems odd that I [should be] standing up and talk[ing] for a group that I don't have any relationship with. But if someone doesn't do it... I'm dying for the day when someone stands up and says to me, "Who the hell do you think you are" (Interview Anna 1999).

Dichotomous divisions between North and South Parkdale, although well entrenched in the organization and politics of Parkdale, do not realize the dynamics and complexity of how different groups in Parkdale interact with the environment of Parkdale. A few interview participants, namely those who were not inclined to see naturalized divisions in Parkdale, offered alternative representations of Parkdale that were not as homogenized and as essentialized as the dichotomous distinctions noted earlier.

Alternative representations of space and people in Parkdale reflect some of the interview participants' awareness of the complexity of everyday life in Parkdale. For example, three of the sixteen participants' map markings of their desirable areas and undesirable areas in Parkdale, still revealed a binary division between North Parkdale and South Parkdale. However, using the maps, these three participants indicated a desire to live only in South Parkdale. Other participants highlighted in their comments that the negative stereotypes and racialization, that are often attached to new immigrants and people of colour in Parkdale, are fluid and also extend to lower income whites because of their living conditions. One participant, who describes herself as "a white educated poor person", said that she has encountered many challenges due to her white identity. For example, people often ask her "How can a white person have these problems?" (Interview Jessica 1999). During the mapping component of an interview (see Map 3), another participant, Katrina, who is a resident of South Parkdale and identifies herself as "middle-class, Jewish, but not white", explained her dislike for a section of her community in the excerpt below:

Katrina: Yah, I sort of have a prejudice about poor white people, white trash. I hate that I'm saying this, but I have to be honest about it, if I want to look at it in the face. I'm glad that I'm having this conversation and doing this. But around that neighbourhood [pointing on the map to King and Dowling], it is almost like, I guess that's the area that I don't want to go into... I think of myself as this liberal person, but I know that I have my stuff, lots of stuff.

Interviewer: Everyone does. Everyone does. What I think is particularly interesting about how you indicated this is that you have areas that you don't want to live in right next to areas that you do want to live in.

Katrina: But that's Parkdale. Don't you find that, it's got everything (Interview Katrina 1999).

In Parkdale, I found that perceptions of the urban environment and, correspondingly, what are considered to be environmental risks, and who/what is responsible for particular environmental risks, are tied in some respects to the relationship between diversity and community. That is, interview participants, who could not say enough about the importance of community and the strength of local activism in Parkdale, were often directly engaged with the process of creating a healthy environment in light of the diverse needs of their environment and of the people in their immediate community. For example, I attended and participated in many meetings held by the Parkdale Ward 19 Citizens' Assembly Group. The objective of this group was to make elected officials and government agencies in the electoral ward more immediately accountable to the diverse needs and voices of Parkdale stakeholders. This form of community resistance attempted to challenge dominant decision making processes and to address inequalities in the community.

## Discussion

Historical findings revealed that Parkdale's role in relationship to the larger Toronto community and the political economic changes affecting Toronto were fundamental to reinforcing particular social and spatial relations within Parkdale. In this respect, at present, the location of locally undesirable land uses mainly in the southern portions of Parkdale is not a matter of mere coincidence, but rather, a component of how Parkdale became spatially and socially defined. In part, Parkdale was defined by the structural processes of industrialization/



Map 3: Katrina's Parkdale Participatory Map  
Source: Original base map reproduced with permission from MapArt Corporation  
(© Mapmedia Corp.)

deindustrialization and immigration, which are important and fundamental components of the historical development of the community.

Light and medium industrial activity in Parkdale peaked during the World War II era and declined starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a local pattern that corresponded to the global restructuring trend of capital. The spatial shift in Toronto's political economy has resulted in a move away from a reliance mainly on manufacturing to an economy that emphasizes the high tech industry and the service sector. This restructuring can be generalized to global trends, which theorists including Soja (1996), label as "post-Fordist industrial restructuring" (306). While Parkdale does experience a range of urban environmental risks, at present, the lack of industrial facilities as a potential pollution source with health and safety concerns separates the Parkdale situation from the dominant models of American environmental justice (see Taylor 2000a for a more detailed discussion of the various environmental justice models). Dominant models of environmental justice are based on the scenario of a polluting facility siting environmental risks in close vicinity to a concentrated marginalized community. Even with Parkdale's limited participation in industrial production, the community still plays a role in the movement and spatial dynamics of capitalism by housing a predominantly "Third World" racialized labour force. Parkdale residents often form the underclass in the Toronto economy. In addition, South Parkdale residents, in particular, are not only economically and racially marginalized, but unhealthy and poorly maintained housing and pollution from traffic are among the chief environmental injustices that they also experience. Arguably, in Parkdale, larger macro-level post-Fordist processes are linked to micro-level struggles between various residential, commercial, and government stakeholders.

Case study findings reveal that in Parkdale, power dynamics between stakeholders became inscribed in space. NIMBY ideologies put forward by affluent homeowners and business people regarding the location of social services housing, other undesirable land uses, and undesirable people, spatially conflicted with the needs of the marginalized majority. NIMBYism impacts on the material perceived space of Parkdale by reinforcing uneven development between areas identified as North Parkdale and those identified as South Parkdale. As such, uneven development in Parkdale is an outcome of the working of hegemonic power, rather than simply some residents' disregard for their community.

The hegemonic power exercised by affluent homeowners and business people creates dichotomized spaces, such as North Parkdale versus South Parkdale. Soja notes that “hegemonic power universalizes and *contains* difference in real and imaged spaces and places” (Soja 1996: 87). Moreover, the negative reputation associated with the conceived space of South Parkdale makes it easier for affluent Parkdale residents and Toronto municipal city planning departments to see South Parkdale as a natural location for locally undesirable land uses. Some residents’ efforts to aesthetically clean up Parkdale are but one attempt to challenge the dominant representation of South Parkdale.

The interviews highlighted that diversity is a significant component of the lived space of Parkdale. Housing, land uses, ethnoracial, and income diversity in Parkdale is indicative of both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Parkdale community. On the one hand, diversity together with the high residential density places dominant and subordinate groups in close vicinity which facilitates conflict. On the other hand, diversity is also what defines the Parkdale space. Map 3, which challenges dichotomous understandings of Parkdale space, in some senses illustrates the diversity of Parkdale by visually showing the complexity of the relationship between desirable and undesirable spaces in Parkdale. Difference is, then, both the basis for community and the basis for resistance to hegemonic politics (Soja 1996). In some forums, such as the Parkdale Ward 19 Citizens’ Assembly Group, marginalized residents together with other community stakeholders are voicing their opposition to the land use decisions that reproduce dominant social order and spatial distinctions. New spaces of resistance, reflecting diverse stakeholders’ interests, offer the greatest challenge to the environmental injustices suffered by marginalized residents in South Parkdale.

## Conclusion

In this article, I explored the significance of a critical analysis of social space to understanding environmental justice problems in the Toronto community of Parkdale. Parkdale illustrates that marginalized people and environmental problems are not place bound and fixed spatial configurations, in contrast to the dominant approach to spatiality in much of the American environmental justice. Transformations in industrial activity, urban development, demographic groups, and environmental risks pointed to the dynamic spatiality of environmental

justice problems in Parkdale. In addition, consideration of Parkdale's perceived space, conceived space, and lived space revealed how both macro-level political economic processes and micro-level stakeholder politics were, and continue to be, essential components of nameable and identifiable environmental injustice problems in Parkdale.



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