

Colonial legacies and the prison system in British Guiana: Historical and contemporary perspectives

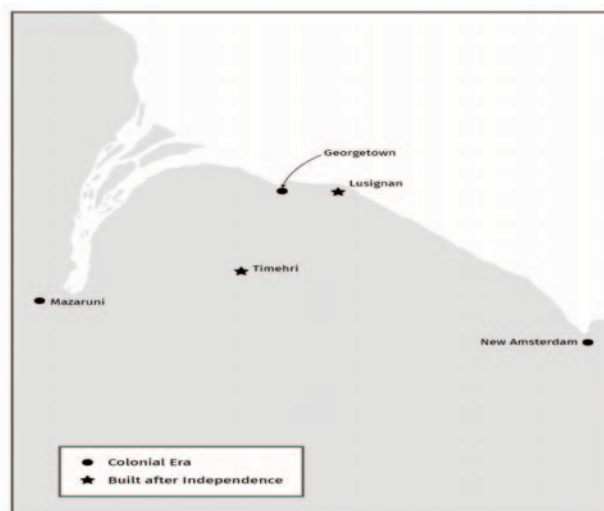
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The penal system in Guyana (formerly British Guiana) remains profoundly influenced by its colonial history.¹ Situated on the north-eastern coast of South America, Guyana was under British governance for a significant portion of the 19th and 20th centuries, resulting in the establishment and preservation of a penal framework that has left a lasting impact on its prison system. Following independence in 1966, three colonial-era prisons remain in operation today (2025): Georgetown (capital of Guyana), New Amsterdam, with a separate wing for women, and Mazaruni, which includes the Sibley Hall facility for first-time and minor infractions and a small facility for high-risk prisoners.² These were further augmented by the establishment of the Lusignan and Timehri prisons in the post-independence era (see Figure 1). More recently, the prison service embarked on the construction

of new facilities at Lusignan and Mazaruni. Despite these advancements, the prison system's infrastructure, protocols, and the experiences of both prisoners and personnel are still heavily influenced by colonial-era operations. Prisons are also overcrowded. As of January 2024, Guyana's overall prison population, encompassing pre-trial detainees, reached 2,300 (288 per 100,000), far exceeding the prison system's official capacity of 1,373.³

This article presents findings from a collaborative project funded in 2018 by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)'s Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). Academics from the University of Leicester and University of Guyana worked in partnership with the Guyana Prison Service to investigate the extent and treatment of mental, neurological and substance abuse disorders in Guyana's prisons from 1825 to the present day.⁴

Figure 1. Prison locations in Guyana (2025)



1. Anderson, C., Ifill, M., Adams, E., & Moss, K. (2020). Guyana's Prisons: Colonial Histories of Post-Colonial Challenges. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 59, 335-349.
2. Moss, K., Anderson, C., Ifill, M. & Adams, E. (2020). Historical Overviews of Guyana's Prisons, 1814–1966. Available at: https://leicester.figshare.com/articles/Historical_Overviews_of_Guyana_s_Prisons_1814-1966/11591337
3. World Prison Brief, Guyana: <https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/guyana>. [Accessed 10 April 2025].
4. Economic and Social Research Council (award no. ES/S000569/1). Earlier work on the history of the nation's jails was funded by the British Academy (award no. IC2100030).

The article is organised into three sections. First, we analyse the enduring colonial legacies within the prison system, highlighting how historical practices and policies persist in influencing contemporary operations. Second, we explore the firsthand experiences of prisoners and staff, illustrating how these legacies shape daily life in prison now. Third, we examine how collaborative participant action research can drive meaningful reform within Guyana's penal system, addressing and mitigating the lingering aftermaths of colonial governance. Through this multifaceted approach, our aim is to support the decolonisation of the prison system and to foster a more just and equitable prison environment.

Colonial legacies in Guyana's prison system

The prison system in Guyana, as in other former colonies of enslavement, was established as an instrument of control, following emancipation, under British rule. Prisons and wider criminal justice systems were a means to manage the labouring population, namely Indigenous people, the formerly enslaved, indentured immigrants, and their descendants.⁵ In the post-emancipation era, physical punishment carried out on plantations during enslavement was replaced by laws to control the mobility of the formerly enslaved alongside the construction of new prisons where violent regimes were replicated. The arrival of indentured labourers in the decades that followed saw the extension of laws to control movement with the use of a contract that tied them to an employer for a

specified period.⁶ As a result of these interactions, concepts of law and justice became intertwined with practices of plantation labour control. To enforce these regulatory frameworks and oversee the labourers, penal institutions were established in strategic locations to confine and utilise individuals sentenced to hard labour.⁷ Following a three-month probationary period, male prisoners would be employed to maintain agricultural production or contribute to public works initiatives throughout the colony. The use of men and women's labour outside the walls of the prison reveals that prisons were not simply sites of punishment but were augmenting an easily exploitable labour force.⁸ This period marked a significant transformation in the role of the colonial state, which increasingly appropriated the judicial and social governance functions previously exercised by plantation owners.⁹

In the decades following emancipation, efforts to extract labour and maintain social order increasingly influenced the expansion and placement of prisons in the colony.¹⁰ The British expanded New Amsterdam and Georgetown prisons, creating new wards and cells to increase capacity. Three new coastal prisons were constructed in Mahaica (1837-1855), Wakenaan (1837-1854), and Capoey (1838-1876) (see Figure 4).¹¹ The prisoners, primarily the formerly enslaved and their descendants, worked within the prisons and on agricultural estates. To further manage the labouring population, in 1842 the Governor of British Guiana, Henry Light, proposed the creation of Her Majesty's Penal Settlement (HMPS) in Mazaruni, a remote upriver location near Bartica (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2. Entrance to HMPS Mazaruni c. 1900, New York Library Collection



Figure 3. Mazaruni Prison 2019, Obrey James



5. See footnote 1: Anderson, Ifill, Adams, & Moss. (2020).

6. Roopnarine, L. (2011). Indian migration during indentured servitude in British Guiana and Trinidad, 1850–1920, *Labor History*, 52(2), 173–91; Adamson, A. H. (1984). The impact of indentured immigration on the political economy of British Guiana, in: K. Saunders (Ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire 1834–1920*, Croom Helm. Hay, D., & Craven, P. (2004). *Masters. Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562, 1955*. The University of North Carolina Press.

7. Anderson, C., Moss, K., & Jackson, S. J. (2022). Coloniality and the Criminal Justice System: Empire and its Legacies in Guyana. *Slavery & Abolition*, 43(4), 682–704.

8. Adams, E. (2023). "At Work, in Hospital, or in Gaol": Women in British Guiana's Jails, 1838–1917. *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*, 125, 85–108.

9. Moss, K., Adams, E., & Toner, D. (2022). Immigration, Intoxication, Insanity, and Incarceration in British Guiana. *Slavery & Abolition*, 43(4), 705–729; Browne, R.M. (2017). *Surviving Slavery in the British Caribbean*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

10. See footnote 1: Anderson, Ifill, Adams, & Moss. (2020).

11. See footnote 2: Moss, Anderson, Ifill, & Adams. (2020).

Light's aim was to engage the prisoners in tasks that would prove to be economically beneficial to the colony, such as quarrying granite, cutting timber and cultivating crops.¹² Following the arrival of indentured immigrants, district prisons, depots and lock-ups were established strategically throughout the colony to hold men and women in breach of the 1850 immigration ordinance. This included the construction of prisons in Fellowship (1868-1892), Mahaica (re-opened 1868-1883), Suddie (1875-1914), Best (1879-1881), No. 63 (1888-1909), and Morawhanna (1879-1914) (see Figure 4). Later, the system underwent a shift from labour extraction to creating harsh conditions as a means of deterrence, mimicking penal philosophies and practices in Britain that emerged in the third quarter of the 19th century.¹³ This included in frontier areas such as the mining regions of Annai (1925-1931), Kamakusa (1925-1958), Mabaruma (1925-1974) and Kurupuka (1931-1948). Closed in 1930, to relieve pressure from Georgetown Prison, HMPS Mazaruni reopened in 1939, whilst Lethum (1947-1980s) and Enachu (1960-1978) were constructed as replacements for Kurupukari and Kamakusa prisons.

Figure 4. Prison locations in British Guiana



The continued use of colonial-era facilities today presents several problems regarding infrastructure, capacity and accessibility. The implementation of penal policies in British colonies like British Guiana was driven by innovations in Europe and North America. During this period, changes in punishment included the building of cellular prisons and penitentiaries.¹⁴ Though influenced by these new ideas, British administrators often tailored prisons and penal regimes to local circumstances, adapting prison architecture and regulations to align with labour needs. Ideally, prisoners would occupy individual cells, and they would be punished and rehabilitated through a programme of education, work, training and religious instruction. One notable feature of 19th-century punishment was the use of prisoners in colonial building projects.¹⁵ Prisoners built and repaired streets and pavements and even constructed parts of the sea wall. However, despite Britain's assertion of penal 'modernity', prisons could be violent places where prisoners faced isolation from their families, physical restraints, corporal punishment and harsh rations. Punitive forms of labour, such as the treadmill (1826-1857), shot drill (1867-1888), and crank (1881-1888) were also widely used until 1888.¹⁶ Situated on a limited 2.1-acre plot, the wooden structures in Georgetown were closely clustered together and located in close proximity to the surrounding streets.¹⁷ By the time Guyana attained its independence in 1966, it was evident that the site was not only overcrowded, due to the addition of numerous structures within the limited space, it also failed to meet the required security and safety standards.¹⁸ Consequently, cells and wards often housed three times the intended capacity, leading to severe overcrowding. The urban setting of the prison in Georgetown, the capital of British Guiana/Guyana, and the constricted space renders the prison no longer suitable for its intended purpose. Whilst historically prisoners were predominantly engaged in manual labour outdoors, nowadays the majority of prisoners who work, where possible, serve in positions such as orderlies.¹⁹ Prison officers supervise these orderlies, whose primary responsibilities entail assisting with the cleanliness and maintenance of the prisons. Additionally, whilst physical labour was a common

12. Anderson, C. (2022). *Convicts: A global history*. Cambridge University Press.

13. Johnston, H. (2008). Reclaiming the Criminal: The Role and Training of Prison Officers in England, 1877 to 1914. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 47, 297-312.

14. See footnote 1: Anderson, Ifill, Adams, & Moss. (2020).

15. Anderson, C. (2019). An historical perspective on Guyana's jails, *MNS Disorders in Guyana's Jails*: <https://mns.guyana.le.ac.uk/2019/09/30>. [Accessed 10 March 2025].

16. See footnote 2: Moss, Anderson, Ifill, & Adams. (2020).

17. TNA, CO111 (1882). Colonial Office Correspondence for Guyana: CO 111/425/275, Minutes by Lieutenant Governor enclosed within a despatch regarding increased prison accommodation, 19 September.

18. NAG AC8 (1960). AC8 Box Collection, Prison Service: British Guiana annual report of the director of prisons for the year 1960.

19. See footnote 1: Anderson, Ifill, Adams, & Moss. (2020).

experience for many in the past, contemporary prisoners are more likely to grapple with the monotony stemming from prolonged periods of confinement within dormitories or cells throughout the day.

Mazaruni Prison, in particular, presents considerable challenges due to its isolated location, necessitating that staff reside on-site for long periods.²⁰ While Mazaruni's remote location was initially intended to isolate prisoners from past influences and thus aid rehabilitation, it severely limited and still limits family visits, an essential component of reintegration. The financial burden on families and the isolation faced by officers living on-site further exacerbate the challenges. New Amsterdam Prison, though more accessible by road, presents similar barriers due to travel costs and distance. During the project (2018-2022), several prisoners told us that their relatives could either visit them or send money for essential items such as toiletries and food, but not both. Similarly, officers revealed that due to financial constraints and limitations on their time, they frequently found themselves unable to visit their family and friends for extended periods, often spanning several months.²¹ Moreover, despite varying levels of modernisation, many prisoners continue to be held in colonial structures with inadequate sanitation, poor ventilation, and compromised structural integrity.²² In 2024, the U.S. Department of State's report on human rights in Guyana highlighted the dangers of prisoner-on-prisoner violence exacerbated by lengthy confinement in cells with limited opportunities for exposure to sunlight.²³ Officers' on-site accommodation is often little better, with limited access to running water, electricity and the internet.

The experiences of prisoners and staff

Guyana's Prison Service (GPS) was established in 1957 by the Prison Act No. 26 and its current mission statement reads:

The Guyana Prison Service as an integral part of the Criminal Justice System utilizes International Standards and Practices to provide a secure environment for Staff and Offenders. Through these approaches, offenders are rehabilitated and reintegrated into society as law-abiding citizens, thus contributing to public safety, critical for national development (GPS, 2022).

However, the ongoing use of colonial-era prisons has contributed to a penal system that often prioritises containment over rehabilitation. As in the colonial era, overcrowding, insufficient infrastructure and scarce resources have led to substandard living and working conditions for prisoners and officers. Meanwhile, security issues, staffing shortages and high recidivism rates exacerbate these hardships. It is these conditions that, until recently, led to increased levels of violence, both among prisoners and in interactions between prisoners and staff.²⁴

The experiences of incarcerated individuals reflect systemic inequities that date back to the colonial period. As in the post-emancipation period, individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds, specifically young Afro-Guyanese men, continue to experience a disproportionate rate of incarceration.²⁵ Inadequate healthcare and limited access to rehabilitative programmes compound the suffering of prisoners, many of whom come from underprivileged backgrounds. Described as 'more of a 19th century, Victorian heritage site than a national maximum-security penitentiary', Mazaruni Prison has been the location of several violent incidents.²⁶ The out-of-sight prison was overlooked for many years, despite the GSP's calls regarding the inadequacy of its security apparatus. On the 7th of August 1997, Mazaruni Prison was the scene of one of Guyana's most destructive prison riots, in which a prisoner died and three dormitories were destroyed.²⁷ Distraught by their treatment and the enforcement of curfew regulations,

20. The Prison is in Region 7, about forty-six miles up the Essequibo River, near the confluence of the Cuyuni and Mazaruni rivers. Guyana Prison Service, Mazaruni Prison
21. *Mental, Neurological, and Substance Abuse Disorders in Guyana's Jails, 1825-2022 (2023)*. [Data Collection]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Service. 10.5255/UKDA-SN-856077. Material taken from interviews with prisoners and GPS officers, Guyana, 2018 - 2022.
22. Ministry of Home Affairs, Republic of Guyana, November 2023: <https://moha.gov.gy/permanent-secretary-mr-andre-allys-inspection-unveils-progress-and-innovation-at-mazaruni-prison-complex/>. For information on prison conditions see 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Guyana, April 2024: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/guyana/>. [Accessed 10 February 2025].
23. 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Guyana, April 2024: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/guyana/>. [Accessed 10 February 2025].
24. Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), 2020; also see: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Guyana, 2016-2023: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/guyana/>. [Accessed 12 January 2025].
25. United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) (2018). Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its mission to Guyana. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1642011#record-files-collapse-header> [Accessed 28 February 2025].
26. 'The Mazaruni Menace', Stabroek News, January 2007: <https://www.stabroeknews.com/2007/01/16/opinion/editorial/the-mazaruni-menace/>. [Accessed 20 February 2025].
27. United States Department of State, Guyana Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997: https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human_rights/1997. [Accessed 5 March 2025].

prisoners armed themselves with implements from the prison workshop and set fire to various areas within the facility. Prisoner unrest has recently (2022) been recognised by the United Nations as one of the most significant contributors to deaths of persons in places of detention in Guyana.²⁸ The deadliest of these occurred in March 2016, when 17 prisoners perished at the Camp Street Prison (Georgetown) as a result of a fire that was started by a group of prisoners who were expressing their frustration at the length of time they were on remand while awaiting trial. The prisoners who perished were all males, most of whom were accused of serious offences including murder.²⁹

In addition to the loss of lives and structural damage, these incidents have led to increased understaffing and diminished morale as officers routinely operate in challenging conditions. Prison staff, many of whom are descendants of those historically oppressed by the system they now uphold, face various challenges.³⁰ Underfunding, long hours and the emotional strain of working in an outdated system contribute to significant workplace stress. Factors such as prison infrastructure, shift patterns and safety concerns all impact on the mental well-being of prison officers in Guyana today. Most officers informed us that they followed a schedule of two weeks on duty followed by three days off, which did not allow for sufficient rest and recovery, especially for those who live far away from their families. In interviews conducted in 2022, numerous officers assigned to Mazaruni Prison reported that they had not experienced a day off or any leave for several months. This lack of annual leave and extensive working hours restricted the time officers could devote to their families, adversely impacting their mental well-being and personal relationships.³¹ Despite these challenges, staff members play a vital role in shaping the prison environment and as we have learned possess

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the desire and capacity to instigate reforms from within.

As in the United Kingdom, inadequate space, insufficient staffing, and limited funding have also led to a scarcity of rehabilitation programmes for prisoners and substandard living conditions. The lack of comprehensive educational, vocational, and psychological support for people in prison diminishes their chances of successful reintegration into society, a situation exacerbated by the issue of overcrowding.³² Similarly, there persists a notable shortage of prison officers. While many of these challenges were prevalent during the colonial period, they have been aggravated in recent years due to the fires that destroyed parts of Mazaruni and Georgetown prisons. Consequently, areas originally designated for dining and training were repurposed into cells. The focus on security rather than rehabilitation has been widespread and cumulative, giving rise to riots, violence and recidivist trajectories.³³ Furthermore, a significant proportion of prisoners come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (with limited educational opportunities, precarious job prospects, exposure to familial violence and early departure from their family home) ensuring that many will encounter challenges

upon reintegration into society due to the limited availability of rehabilitation programmes and pre-release support services.³⁴ This predicament is further compounded by the societal stigma they encounter on release.

In recent years, the system has undergone significant expansion following several high-profile incidents, such as Georgetown Prison fires in 2016 and 2017. This undertaking spans multiple phases and locations and is geared towards enhancing the overall infrastructure of the penal system and fostering a more modern environment for both prisoners and personnel.

28. United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, May 2022. Third Periodic report submitted by Guyana under article 40 of the Covenant pursuant to the optional reporting procedure.

29. See footnote 28. United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, May 2022.

30. Kerrigan, D., Ayres, T., & Moss, K. (2024). 'Prison officer pains': How and why coloniality shapes the job of a prison officer in Guyana today. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 63, 418–439; Ayres, T.C. (2021). Guyana's Prison Officers: A Stressful and Dangerous Job. Available: <https://mnsguyana.le.ac.uk/2021/05/03/guyanas-prison-officers-a-stressful-and-dangerous-job/>

31. Anderson, C., & Halliwell, M. (2024). Mental health care in Guyana's jails before and after Independence. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 63, 440–458.

32. Moss, K., & Warren, K. (2024). Resisting carceral confinement in Guyana: Legacies of a colonial state. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 63, 459–475.

33. See footnote 32: Moss & Warren (2024).

34. Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (2020) Regional comparative report: survey of individuals deprived of liberty: Caribbean (2016–2019). [Accessed 28 February 2025].

The first phase of work, to accommodate an additional 220 individuals at Mazaruni, was finalised in 2020, with the second phase set to be completed this year (2025). Other recent efforts to modernise the system include three newly constructed correction facilities at Lusignan. In March 2023, prison authorities transferred over 680 prisoners from the holding bay at Lusignan, a ‘temporary’ pen hastily erected in the wake of the Georgetown fire in 2017.³⁵ Guyana now also recognises that one of the primary contributing factors to prison overcrowding is the excessive use of remand—the detention of individuals in custody whilst awaiting trial—with unsentenced detainees accounting for 40 per cent of the prison population. This pattern of using prisons to hold people who had not been sentenced originated in the colonial period, with prisons also used to suppress potential unrest and control populations. Currently, the average duration of pre-trial detention is three years for individuals awaiting trial by either magistrates or the High Court, often exceeding the maximum potential sentence for their alleged offence. In July 2023, for example, Solomon George, a murder suspect, was discharged by the High Court after enduring over seven years in pre-trial detention.³⁶ While efforts are underway to modernise and revamp Guyana’s prison service and facilities, similar to the United Kingdom, there is still a considerable distance to cover. Given that Guyana’s prisons were based on British systems, many of the issues raised by prisoners and personnel in Guyana mirror those encountered within the UK Prison Service.

The role of collaborative participant action research

Collaborative participant action research offers a unique opportunity to address these deeply rooted issues.³⁷ By involving prisoners, staff and external stakeholders in our research process, equitable and ethical partnerships were created, and our findings

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were not only academically robust but also practically relevant to the Guyanese context.³⁸ This approach was important to also amplify the voices of prisoners and our practitioner partners, primarily the GPS, and enabled all to understand rather than simply research lived experiences. The creation of joint learning opportunities, capacity building and knowledge exchange was particularly important for the team and the project. All prison personnel were encouraged to engage in discussions and share their experiences, thereby enriching the purpose and content of workshops, training sessions and surveys. As a result of this collaborative effort, the project team and officers co-created the ‘Being Blessed’ survey to evaluate and comprehend the experiences of GPS staff. Dialogues

with the officers guided the survey design, ensuring that the research was tailored to meet their specific requirements. The findings from this research have subsequently been used to revise policies and regulations, thereby enhancing the working conditions within Guyana’s correctional facilities. Senior officers have since revealed that there has been a heightened regard for the service owing to the discoveries and insights brought about by the project; and that, many now feel better equipped to advocate for the service’s requirements.³⁹ There

exists a prevailing sense that positive transformations are underway, especially as numerous changes, such as the overhaul of the GPS standard operating procedures, which had remained unchanged since 2012, are due to be published this year (2025).

Another initiative involved two women staff members from HMPPS (His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service) participating in an exchange visit in 2022, with the aim of fostering culturally appropriate changes in both Guyana and Leicester. Prior to their visit, HMPPS staff had personal experiences of prisoner outcomes influenced by the availability of resources and financial means. However, their perspective underwent a significant shift after witnessing what can be achieved

35. Ministry of Home Affairs, Republic of Guyana, March 2023, ‘Monumental move: All holding bay prisoners transferred to new Lusignan correction facilities’: <https://moha.gov.gy/monumental-move-all-holding-bay-prisoners-transferred-to-new-lusignan-correction-facilities>. [Accessed 1 March 2025].

36. 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Guyana, April 2024: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/guyana/>. [Accessed 10 February 2025].

37. Collaborative participant action research is a research approach where those affected by a problem actively participate in identifying, understanding, and addressing it.

38. Ayres, T. C., Levine, D., Anderson, C., Moss, K., Kerrigan, D., Ifill, M., ... & Warren, K. (2024). Doing transdisciplinary research in Guyana’s prisons. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 63(4), 363–389.

39. See footnote 21: *Mental, Neurological, and Substance Abuse Disorders in Guyana’s Jails, 1825–2022 (2023)*.

with minimal resources. The concept of the 'orderly' role observed in Guyana provided inspiration for the development of the comparable role within the team's establishment, building a sense of community and prisoner engagement in the development of day-to-day operations. The act of delegating responsibilities to prisoners, monitoring their behaviour and advancements, constitutes a vital element of the rehabilitation process.⁴⁰ This visit was reciprocated when representatives from the GPS travelled to the UK in 2023, to explore the role of women frontline officers and their contribution to de-escalation efforts. Despite a significant portion of GPS personnel being women, the majority are typically assigned to prison receptions and administrative positions, rather than frontline duties (except for the women's prison in New Amsterdam).⁴¹ The exchange visit and workshops underscored the adeptness of women prison officers in employing effective communication and dialogue to manage prisoners, placing emphasis on persuasion and influence over physical coercion. Consequently, the GPS has made significant progress in advocating for the promotion of women officers in frontline roles.

The implementation of the collaborative participant approach yielded positive outcomes for all involved. The research served to raise the awareness of personnel who were previously unaware of the enduring impact of colonial practices on contemporary issues. Moreover, it played a crucial role in mitigating the social stigma experienced by prison officers through the increased visibility of the GPS among governmental authorities and the wider public. Deputy Director of the GPS, Kevin Pilgrim, noted 'We already knew certain aspects were dated (rules and regulations etc.) but had no idea how much stemmed from the colonial period. As a result, prison officers feel better prepared and happier to speak up about their own and the service's needs. There is a sense that things are finally changing for the better due, in part, to the attention the project provided.'

Addressing systemic harms and moving forward

The contemporary prison system in Guyana demonstrates considerable continuity from its

colonial past, manifesting in structural violence, inadequate living conditions, and challenges in rehabilitation and reintegration. Addressing these issues requires acknowledging the deep-seated legacies that continue to shape penal policies and practices. By integrating historical perspectives with contemporary research and adopting a collaborative approach, it is possible to create a prison system that not only recognises its past but also works towards a more equitable and rehabilitative future. Tangible impacts may be realised through sustained collaboration, policy reform, and culturally sensitive interventions addressing both systemic harm and the well-being of all within the prison system. Only by recognising how the past continues to impact the

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present and working collaboratively with our Guyanese partners can positive, enduring and culturally nuanced change be implemented. Guyana's prisons are spaces in distress — symbolic and material manifestations of colonial rule, decay and violence.⁴² The buildings, spaces, regimes, processes, sounds, laws and rationale contain ghosts of the past, haunted by colonialism.⁴³ The process of decolonising the prison system in Guyana requires a comprehensive

approach encompassing historical reflection, collaborative research, and policy reforms aligning with the needs and rights of all those impacted. Only through such measures can we aspire to deconstruct the frameworks of colonial subjugation and construct a fair and compassionate system for future generations.

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40. See footnote 21: Mental, Neurological, and Substance Abuse Disorders in Guyana's Jails, 1825-2022 (2023).

41. See footnote 30: Kerrigan, Ayres, & Moss. (2024).

42. Fiddler, M. (2019). Ghosts of Other Stories: A synthesis of hauntology, crime and space. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 15(3), 463-477.

43. Ayres, T. C., & Kerrigan, D. (2021). *The Gaols of Guyana: Hauntology and Trauma in the soundscape of Prison*. LIAS Working Paper Series.