

# From ‘Hood’ to Good – Dealing with Stigmatizing Spatial Representations in Everyday Life

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Media reports on everyday life in US-American under-resourced and racialized neighbourhoods predominantly cover one theme: violence and crime. The tragic occurrence of shootings, dead people, and gang crime are at the centre of news headlines. This singular perspective on such areas and their residents produces a stigma that affects people’s everyday lives and yet does not cover what it means to live in such an area. By using qualitative interviews with residents and representatives of community organizations, we spotlight the daily practices that illustrate the contested symbolic meaning of the ‘hood’ and the potential redevelopment discourses of the Chicago neighbourhood South Shore. The data provide insights into the heterogeneity of the social groups that live in the area and execute practices of social distinctions attached to spaces, as they become apparent with our examples of busy corners at commercial strips and the planned Obama Presidential Center.

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The South Shore community on Chicago’s South Side carries a reputation of being a postindustrial urban space ridden by gang violence, shootings, and severe poverty. The media jumps on any incident of violent crime in their daily reporting, thereby constantly reproducing the stigma of a derived urban community. However, everyday life in communities like South Shore, which are portrayed as ‘vortexes and vectors of social disintegration’ (Wacquant et al., 2014, p. 1274) is more complex and complicated than it is often suggested in public imaginaries and media discourses. Besides residents’ attempts to refute and resist such territorial stigma through everyday spatial practices (Sisson, 2021, for an overview), stigma and negative representations in news media are frequently internalized by residents and described as emotionally hurtful. Such diversity in dealing with and responding to the stigma often goes missing in media reporting and only becomes visible through conversations and interactions with locals. In other words, media discourses do not paint a picture of social heterogeneity and do not mirror what it means for the residents to live in an underresourced, defamed, and marginalized neighbourhood – an area to which residents refer to in the code of ‘out here’. South Shore’s residents are not a homogenous social group, as outsiders frequently imagine them in reference to ‘black urban poor’. In order to be able to relate the multiple space constituents of South Shore that correspond with the heterogeneity of the population, we use the theoretical approach of Löw’s Sociology of Space (2016). In her relational space concept, space is constituted by two analytically distinguishable processes: spacing and the operation of synthesis. ‘Spacing [...] means erecting, deploying, or positioning’ (Löw, 2016, p. 134) social goods and people to create symbolic meaning over these elements and their arrangements. The latter makes it possible to combine ensembles of goods and people into one element. The second process is the ‘operation of synthesis, [which] is required for the constitution of space, i. e., goods and

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people are amalgamated to spaces by way of processes of perception, imagination, and memory' (L w, 2016, p. 134). Operations of synthesis make connections of social goods and living beings to spaces. According to L w (2016), divergent milieus attach symbols to the locale and synthesize spatial entities in their narratives accordingly. Depending on the milieu, people produce spaces and give meaning to spaces regardless of their emotional attachment to or alienation from these spaces. In light of these theoretical considerations, we will explicate the complexity and multiplicity of residents' lived everyday experiences in South Shore, demonstrating that South Shore's socio-spatial order is highly heterogeneous and determined by people's socialization backgrounds.

It is important to clarify in this respect that Cosima Werner and Tilman Schwarze did not approach the community as part of the same research study. Instead, research in South Shore was done separately, and only at a later research colloquium, similarities and differences in the data were analysed and compared. While Cosima Werner mainly interviewed people from low-income households whom she met during her ethnographic research on convenience stores, Tilman Schwarze talked to community activists and residents with stable social structures and regular income. His research included discourse analyses of media reports about South Shore as well as interviews with representatives of community organizations. We understand media reports as well as the narratives of the interviewees as spatial information that we can use to analyse how these information are produced, shared, rejected, contested, and transformed. Our various interviewees have in common that they live in the same neighbourhood, interact in public spaces, and relate with one another in daily routines. They refer to similar social spaces in South Shore but constitute them differently – according to their lived realities. The differences are meaningful notions of social distinctions as they express invisible borders between one another. They distinguish between those who belong to the 'code of the street' and influence the image of the area as neighbourhood with high crime levels, and those who orient their lifestyle towards 'decency' (Anderson, 2000) and who have an interest in reframing the image of the neighbourhood from 'hood to good'.

It is this conflictual and complex configuration of different living conditions and socio-spatial associations and imaginaries with the South Shore community that we seek to untangle here. Our analysis focuses on different spatial locations and arrangements within South Shore to illustrate these configurational differences and conflicts. South Shore faces economic disinvestment alongside its major economic corridors, resulting in food deserts, a lack of employment opportunities, and higher crime levels. By the reference to 'out here', some residents view the neighbourhood as a socially neglected area beyond the influence of city authorities, their concerns, and services. In such an area, other rules apply that are deviant from general understandings and rules of society. One interviewee expressed: 'An accident will cover you in blood out here', referring to the high shooting rates that impact her practices of everyday life, perceived security, and general ability to trust.

What another interviewee mentioned as some would 'act like ghetto' included practices that correspond with living in an enclosed space where people face isolation, criminalization, and precarity they cannot escape from. Those people recode the stigmatizing image of 'ghetto' to what we code as 'South Shore as a hood', in reference to Richardson and Skott-Myhre (2012). 'Hood' addresses the sense of Black urban subculture with its symbols, legacies and realities with meaning for the individual identity. It is their lived reality as many are engaged in the street economy and as an accessible perspective. Living in the 'hood' is at the same time the result of the people's socio-economic precarity but also a way to reformulate the stigma into a more positive connotation with symbolic meaning. Therefore, references to 'life in the hood' become a discursive-symbolic strategy to mitigate and deal with the daily exposure to violence and crime. In contrast, others are exposed to their activities and gang-related crime.

The residents have an understanding for which localities relate to gang activities. People use them, engage there with others, watch carefully the activities, or avoid them according to their perceptions. By using the example of a street corner at one of South Shore's commercial strips will allow us to demonstrate how this corner functions as the local "agora" in the 'hood', where formal (such as retailing, bus services, etc.) and informal 'infrastructures' (supportive people, information, etc.) meet (Simone, 2004). In that agora, people in severe poverty search for resources – such as social contacts, money or food, of the goodwill of anybody – anything that helps a bit to make it from day to day. However, those residents, who are economically more stable, view those corners as lawless, dangerous, and locations where 'you got the gang bangers standin' on these corners', as an interviewee said. Several of these street corners exist in the community, and residents can clearly demarcate their spatial

boundaries and delineate their socio-symbolic meanings. We show how such corners frequently become the battleground for gangs about their gang territory and power over the local drug market, which, in turn, reproduces the territorial stigma of South Shore as 'ganginfested'.

Gang shootings make it to the newsrooms of broadcasters and newspaper publishers, but their underlying circumstances do not. Depending on their lifestyle orientations and socio-economic milieus, residents relate to this street culture by either being part of it or rejecting it. Being part of it is living the 'hood lifestyle', whereas rejection takes place through various spatial and political practices, from avoidance of those spaces in daily spatial routines to political mobilization against them by demanding from local authorities to close liquor stores, which are blamed for encouraging street loitering and violence. Thus, 'corner spaces' become the frontline for residents over defining what makes South Shore the community it is and what socio-symbolic meanings are attached to the community. We, therefore, aim to explicate the contested symbolic meanings of the spatial stigma, its effects on the residents, and their responses to them in their daily practices.

Yet and despite racist and discriminating practices in housing provision and other forms of state spatial strategies (Brenner, 2004) such as political gerrymandering to redlining in the past that turned South Shore into an under-resourced neighbourhood, South Shore today remains an area that, in comparison to other Black neighbourhoods in Chicago, still has a stable level of homeowners, decent schools, and church organizations. South Shore continues to have a solid and still affordable housing stock for a lakeside community, a great public transport system to downtown Chicago, and multiple beaches and parks along Lake Michigan. South Shore constitutes a livable neighbourhood with nice amenities and a strong sense of belonging for some residents. South Shore comprises a centre for African-American culture and arts whose legacy and history of African-American empowerment and political activism remains an important lieu de memoire. The label of a 'hood' becomes a burden for those people who experience negative consequences of living there and who need to leave behind the image for personal interest. The stigmatizing image attached to South Shore is resisted and opposed because it further contributes to the marginalization and peripheralization of the community as under-resourced. As stated by one community resident: 'We need something to dispel the myth that we have some type of cultural deficit, that we have some type of social deficit, that we are social'.

It is these amenities that have recently put South Shore into the spotlight of urban redevelopment efforts. In 2016, the Obama Foundation announced that it would build the Obama Presidential Center (OPC) into a nearby park, Jackson Park, which borders South Shore on its northern end. The OPC will be an \$830 million, 20-acre mega-infrastructure project, encompassing a 235 feet museum tower, a forum, several parks and gardens, and recreational facilities. There are plans to accompany the OPC with a Tiger Woods-designed golf course which would combine two existing golf courses in the area into one PGA-Championship course. While some residents hope the OPC will spotlight the area and turn it into a speculative investment hub, including new investments into vacant storefronts alongside its major economic corridors, others fear increasing property taxes, rents, and living costs, which would subsequently displace particularly low-income residents. The OPC development follows in the footsteps of a new wave of urban redevelopment and gentrification that is moving southwards in Chicago. This latest wave of redevelopment and gentrification has its own precursor with the goal to "bite the monstrosity" of the specter of ghettoization that masters the neglected areas for decades (Draus and Roddy, 2016). Sometimes the precursors are subtle as they appear in the upheaval of authentic blues bars (Wilson, 2018). Sometimes they generate massive media recognition, such as the opening of Whole Foods, a pricy organic supermarket, or the construction of the OPC. With them comes the discursive construction of legacies: commercial strips as striving areas in the past; Blues as an internationally rewarded music genre and its bars as little shacks where legacies once played; the Obamas – especially Michelle Obama – who made it from South Shore to the White House, like former mayors of Chicago who made it to the city hall without turning their back to their origin from the city's South Side.

Current redevelopment efforts near South Shore also speak to the conflict over the sociosymbolic meaning of space and place, which we explicate through our street corner example. The history and legacy of territorial stigmatization, advanced marginality, economic precarity, and racial segregation provide the groundwork for redevelopment efforts insofar as urban growth machines can build their growth narrative on the necessity for economic renewal of those spaces associated with danger, violence, and vice. Economic development is framed as the silver bullet for all problems in South Shore, from gangs, violence, loitering, unemployment, and vacant storefronts. Those residents for whom the street corner represents the 'ghetto' support the OPC to make the community safer and more prosperous.

However, the promise of the OPC growth machine to bring investment and renewal might not resonate with those for whom the street corner represents their 'hood' since, for them, everyday life in South Shore is less about the long-term economic and cultural development and opportunities but dealing with the daily struggles of violence and poverty in the here and now. Thus, we seek to explicate how social milieus determine spatial imaginaries and associations in the present, and how they inform people's expectations for the production of space in the future.

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