Discursive Practices of Territorial Stigmatization: How Newspapers Frame Violence and Crime in a Chicago Community

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Abstract

This article deciphers the discursive practices through which Chicago's two major newspapers, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, stigmatize the South Shore community on Chicago's South Side. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this article provides an in-depth linguistic analysis of the causation of territorial stigmatization through press coverage. It demonstrates that the two newspapers not only stigmatize South Shore through practices of hyperbolic naming, but that territorial stigmatization also flows from the transitivity of newspaper articles itself. By focusing on the transitivity of newspaper articles and their role in the production of territorial stigma, this article broadens our understanding of how territorial stigma is produced through symbolic defamation and denigration of spaces. It is argued that the two newspapers normalize and naturalize violence and crime as commonsense characteristics of everyday life in South Shore, thereby producing an image of South Shore as a space determined and indelibly shaped by violence and crime.

Introduction

Over the last three decades, the stigmatization of spaces has become a central focus of geographical and sociological research (Wacquant, Slater, and Borges Pereira, 2014; Sisson, 2020; Kirkness and Tijé-Dra, 2017; Slater, 2017). Since Loïc Wacquant (1993) first coined the term 'territorial stigmatization', scholars have examined how symbolic defamation of space form part of neoliberal urbanity (Schultz Larsen and Nagel Delica, 2019). The role of the news media in the symbolic production of stigma has received particular attention in research (Jensen and Christensen, 2012; Nayak, 2019; Wassenberg, 2004; Watt, 2020). Most of these studies focuses on how press coverage attaches specific names and symbolic denominators to particular urban spaces and their residents. Such categorizations as "dangerous" (Stjernborg, Tesfahuney, and Wretstrand, 2015), "notorious" (Watt, 2020) and "troubled" (Devereux, Haynes, and Power, 2011), to name a few, characterize naming practices employed in newspaper reporting on urban communities.

This article deciphers discursive practices of territorial stigmatization in newspaper coverage on Chicago's South Side. 'Discursive practices' of journalism denote "the processes through which journalists produce texts, and readers use and understand them" (Richardson, 2007, p. 75). Yet, discursive practices denote more than text-linguistic features. They also concern the social situatedness of discourse within specific historical and socio-cultural contexts. On Chicago's South Side, this context is characterized by decades of racist

segregation and discrimination, underscored by the erection of architectural and material borders, marginalizing and discriminating urban planning decisions, such as public housing transformation, and the policing and the criminalization of black communities (Shabazz, 2015; Rothstein, 2017; Chaskin and Joseph, 2015; Massey and Denton, 1993). In media representations, Chicago's South Side constitutes an economic Badlands in which street gangs are drivers of urban violence and insecurity (Wacquant, 2008; Aspholm, 2020; Stuart, 2020). It is in this historical and socio-cultural context in which newspapers' discursive practices of territorial stigmatization operate, and which they also reproduce and reinforce.

In an attempt to transcend the well-known finding that newspapers and journalists are specialists in the symbolic defamation and stigmatization of spaces (Wassenberg, 2004; Devereaux et al., 2011), this article examines *how* – that is, through which discursive practices – newspapers and journalists exert territorial stigmatization. Drawing on a five-year discourse analysis of press coverage on the South Shore community by Chicago's two major newspapers, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, this article demonstrates that both papers stigmatize the community as a space determined and indelibly shaped by violence and crime. Both papers normalize violence and crime as quotidian to communal space in South Shore. I argue that this normalization of violence and crime in South Shore takes place via three discursive practices. First, both newspapers stigmatize South Shore through various naming practices, such as calling the community 'crime-infested', 'ailing', or 'a warzone'. Second, both papers sensationalize violence and crime in South Shore through hyperbolic descriptions of violence. Third, territorial stigmatization is produced by journalists' transitive choices when reporting on shootings in the South Shore community. Instead of informing about the circumstances and participants involved in the shootings, newspaper articles merely inform about the territoriality of the shootings by providing detailed information about where the shooting took place in South Shore. I argue that this transitive choice to only foreground the spatiality of the shootings produces an image of South Shore as a community in which the occurrence of violence and crime are mundane, recurring and quotidian phenomena. Community voices, which could refute the image of their community as a violent space, are almost completely absent in newspaper articles which, in turn, amplifies the image of South Shore as a hotspot of violent crime.

Mirroring the critical approaches of Doreen Massey (2005) and Ed Soja (1985), this article views space as a social product of interrelations and plurality which is constantly produced and reproduced through social relations and structures. As argued by Soja (1985), "spatiality cannot be appropriately understood and theorised apart from society and social

relationships and, conversely, that social theory must contain a central and encompassing spatial dimension" (p. 92). Lefebvre's (1991) representations of space, which denote a conceived space produced by such experts as city planners, bureaucrats, and journalists, will inform my analysis of discursive practices of territorial stigmatization because it points to the role of power and hegemony in the production of spatial knowledge. Territorial stigmatization, it is argued, produces an ongoing spatiality in South Shore where language and discourse determine how space is publicly conceived.

This article contributes to literature on how stigma is deeply ingrained in everyday discursive practices of spatial representations. It demonstrates that stigma not only works through the bodily marking of people (Tyler, 2020), othering and labelling practices, and the defamation of place through negative categorizations, but that it is also produced through the normalization of specific properties and qualities of spaces through discourse (Power, Neville, Devereux, Haynes, and Barnes, 2012). This article is therefore particularly concerned with the *causation* of territorial stigmatization (Slater, 2017, p. 116), and it critically discusses how the normalization of violence as intrinsic to community space reproduces socio-economic marginality and social hierarchies.

The article first sets out the theoretical framework, focusing on the concept of territorial stigmatization. This is followed by overviews of the research context and methodology. The next two sections discuss the role of naming practices and hyperboles in the production of territorial stigma. This is followed by a discussion of how the transitive choice to foreground the territoriality of shootings also contributes to the blemishing of South Shore as a violent community. A final section examines the political economy of territorial stigma on Chicago's South Side. It is argued here that territorial stigma is instrumental in producing fear of black communities which, in turn, justifies their transformation through redevelopment efforts. The article concludes with some general observations on the role of journalism in the production of territorial stigma.

Theoretical groundwork

The concept of territorial stigmatization was coined by French sociologist Loïc Wacquant in the early 1990s in the context of his research in the black ghetto on Chicago's South Side and in the housing estate in La Courneuve, France (Wacquant, 1993, 2007, 2008; Wacquant et al., 2014). Building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his concept of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991), as well as Erving Goffman's (1963) analysis of stigma, Wacquant developed a theoretical framework that allows for examinations of how and why certain urban places are

portrayed as "leprous Badlands at the heart of the postindustrial metropolis" (Wacquant, 2007, p. 67). For Wacquant, territorial stigmatization works through the evocation of overwhelmingly negative emotions, revulsion and condemnation towards certain neighborhoods with the consequence that "the stigmatized neighbourhoods of the postindustrial metropolis are pictured as vortexes and vectors of social *disintegration*" (Wacquant et al., 2014, p. 1274, original emphasis). Such symbolic devaluation (August, 2014) and demonization (Wacquant, 2004) can be triggered by the media, the state, as well as academic discourses.

Bourdieu and Goffman provided Wacquant with the groundwork to develop a theory of how symbolic defamation and stigma not only work in everyday interactions, but also spatially from above and below:

> Bourdieu works from above, following the flow of efficient representations from symbolic authorities such as state, science, church, the law, and journalism, down to their repercussions upon institutional operations, social practices, and the self; Goffman works from below, tracing the effects of procedures of sense-making and techniques of 'management of spoiled identity' across encounters and their aggregations into organizations (Wacquant et al., 2014, pp. 1272–1273)

The study of territorial stigma is therefore not only about identifying the structural and symbolic processes of how stigma is produced through different authorities, but also how stigma impacts and is perceived by people in their everyday lives. According to Wacquant, the corrosion of people's sense of self, the deprivation of their social relations and of their ability and capacity for collective action are direct results of the symbolic defamation of spaces (Wacquant et al., 2014; Kipfer and Petrunia, 2009; Kirkness, 2014; Schultz Larsen, 2014). At the same time, however, research has also demonstrated that those stigmatized also respond to, challenge, and resist symbolic degradation and defamation of those spaces they call home, thereby directly challenging Wacquant's thesis of the internalization of stigma (Sisson, 2020; Leaney, 2020; Cuny, 2019; Queirós and Pereira, 2018; Kirkness, 2014; Pinkster, 2014).

Much attention has also been paid to the relationship between stigma, dispossession, gentrification and displacement as a result of redevelopment efforts of urban spaces (August, 2014; Kipfer and Petrunia, 2009; Slater, 2018; Kallin and Slater, 2014; Gray and Mooney, 2011; Tyler and Slater, 2018). In this repsect, Tyler (2020) argues that stigma needs to be conceptualized as part of capitalist structures of expropriation which reproduces social hierarchies in society.

The study of territorial stigma has established itself as a major pillar in the study of advanced marginality under neoliberal capitalism (Slater, 2017, p. 115). As such, it provides a

theoretical-analytical perspective in deciphering the power dynamics of socio-spatial exclusion, peripherialization and advanced marginality.

Research context

The South Shore community is a predominantly black community on Chicago's South Side, home to a mostly middle-to-lower income population of approximately 50,000 people. Historically, "South Shore has [...] long been known as one of the most physically attractive parts of the South Side, blessed with good housing stock, lovely parks and beaches, convenient public transportation, and a long-established reputation for respectability" (Rotella, 2019, p. 6). Being a white middle-class community up until the 1950s, South Shore started to become a predominantly black community in the early 1960s. Gentrification in its surrounding communities and blockbusting led to a major demographic shift in South Shore's population, and by the mid-1970s, South Shore had become a predominantly African American community (Molotch, 1972).

Located at the heart of Chicago's South Side, the South Shore community has also experienced the 'ghetto' stigma attached to Chicago's African American communities. As Wilson (2018) details, the African American 'ghettos' on the South Side have historically been portrayed as "unapologetically mobile, city-destroying spaces which […] threaten the safety and civility in other neighborhoods" (p. 14). Race and racism have been at the heart of Chicago's history and development (Shabazz, 2015), so much so that racial segregation is considered one of the distinguishing features of the city's urban landscape (Massey and Denton, 1993, Rothstein, 2017; Logan, Weiwei, and Chunyu, 2015). Racial segregation on Chicago's South Side dates back as early as 1880. But it was particularly during the 1940s where the 'ghettoization' of Chicago's South Side began (Logan et al., 2015), further exacerbated by the 40-year-long political dynasty of Mayor Richard J. Daley and his son Richard M. Daley from 1955 to 2011 (Diamond, 2017). Thus, territorial stigmatization in newspaper coverage of South Shore needs to be contextualized within the history of racial segregation.

Methodology

As part of a broader research project on the social production of space in South Shore, I conducted a discourse analysis of how Chicago's two major newspapers, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, report on South Shore. Between 2013 to 2018, I filtered the online archives of both papers, which are available via the Chicago Public Library, and analyzed all articles which were published online and contained the name 'South Shore'. I wanted to know

what specific representations of space (Lefebvre, 1991) are produced by journalistic discourses over a longer period of time. In total, I identified 1,428 articles (291 articles in the *Chicago Tribune* and 1,137 articles in the *Chicago Sun-Times*) which included the word 'South Shore'. Of these articles, the great majority, namely, 1,035 articles, only reported on violence and crime. Table 1 presents a more detailed breakdown of the thematic focuses and numerical distribution by the two papers in reporting on South Shore. In this table, I included topics on which at least ten articles in one of the two papers reported on.

Table 1: Thematic focuses on press coverage on South Shore

	Chicago Tribune	Chicago Sun-Times
Closure of grocery store	15	14
Obama Presidential Center	38	43
Tiger Woods Golf Course	23	20
Violence and crime	153	882
Fires	2	17
Car and other accidents	1	23
Missing person reports	-	69
Others	59	69
Total	291	1,137

This thematic breakdown already underlines the dominance of violence and crime in reporting on South Shore.

My analysis of discursive practices in how both newspapers normalize violence in South Shore was guided by the research tradition of *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995a, 1995b; Richardson, 2007). Broadly speaking, CDA comprises "a critical *perspective* or *attitude*" (van Dijk, 2015, p. 63, original emphasis) which is concerned with the role of language and discourse in the (re)production of specific social structures and practices. Language is considered to be important in the (re)production, maintenance of and resistance to ideology, hegemony and power relations. Fowler (1991) argues that the ideological capacity of newspapers stems from their ability to mediate ideas from particular perspectives. "The ideologies embedded in discursive practices are most effective when they become naturalized, and achieve the status of 'common sense'" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 87). In the following analysis of newspaper discourse on South Shore, I will demonstrate that the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* naturalize and normalize violence and crime as commonsense features of

everyday life in the community, thereby stigmatizing South Shore as a community in which violence and crime are mundane and quotidian.

Newspapers need to be positioned in a multi-scalar reality where their reporting is influenced by political practices and structures. In Chicago, political practices of racial segregation, such as redlining and gerrymandering, for example, have long excluded South Side communities from the social, economic, cultural and political life of the city (Rothstein, 2017; Massey and Denton, 1993). These racist practices also influence public perceptions of excluded South Side communities like South Shore, including how they are represented in newspaper discourse. Thus, when critically deciphering newspaper reporting, it is important to keep in mind that newspapers are not autonomous and independent from constraints and obstacles in their reporting, and that they always also respond to broader political forces that shape urban development at various scales. Throughout the subsequent analyses, the article will demonstrate that territorial stigmatization does not only work through the defamation and denigration of urban space through various discursive practices, but that this stigma needs to be conceptualized as an important and strategic element of community de- and revalorization and class transformation (Tyner, 2020). In this understanding, newspapers also correspond to broader political practices and trajectories of urban space production through various political actors (e.g., city planners, private developers, real-estate speculators) located at different spatial scales who, at times, reinforce territorial defamation and denigration, but who also adapt their outlook towards those spaces when opportunities of urban redevelopment, revaluation, and renewal present themselves. Below, the article discusses how the announcement by former President Barack Obama to build the Obama Presidential Center into a nearby park impacts the ways in which South Shore also becomes envisioned as a new investment opportunity for real-estate capital. Suddenly, territorial defamation and denigration become accompanied by a discourse of economic opportunity and community valorization, and newspapers, too, respond to such changing patterns of space production in their reporting. Understanding this complicated situatedness of newspapers is important in deciphering discursive practices of territorial stigmatization and locating these practices in the current political economy of cities. Thus, spatial tainting through newspaper discourse needs to be understood as open-ended and conceptually contested where spatial tainting becomes an evolving signifier responding to changing patterns of socio-economic and spatial developments.

Territorial Stigmatization through naming practices

Attaching specific names to people, objects or events impact the way an audience perceives them. For example, migrants can be 'named' as alien or as a security threat which, in turn, excludes them from society (Bourbeau, 2011). Similarly, by choosing a certain social category in naming a community in a specific way, naming always also (re)produces specific meanings attached to the community. For Bakhtin (1981), "all words and forms are populated by intentions. [...] The word forgets that its object has its own history of contradictory acts of verbal recognition" (p. 278). Naming as a discursive practice uses words to describe, portray and depict objects, phenomena or social groups, and naming practices can, and frequently do, falsify the image and representation of the specific object under consideration.

In the newspaper articles on South Shore, it was possible to identify several naming practices to portray South Shore as a space in which violence and crime seem to be recurring, everyday phenomena. In particular, naming the community as 'violence-plagued', 'gang-infested', 'ailing', or 'ills plaguing' were recurring categorizations:

> Neighborhoods such as Austin and South Shore that are plagued by violence (Chicago Tribune, 26 September 2014).

> South Shore is a high-crime community (Chicago Sun-Times, 17 July 2018).

> In the gang-infested South Shore neighborhood where Hoover was raised, guns are a part of everyday life (Chicago Tribune, 12 May 2013).

> Ailing neighborhoods like South Shore (Chicago Tribune, 20 March 2016).

> Gangs have been blamed for a lot of the ills plaguing communities like South Shore (Chicago Sun-Times, 21 December 2016).

These referential strategies possess specific linguistic connotations and functions. For example, the verb 'to plague' denotes that something causes *continual* difficulties, distress and illness. When used in combination with 'violence', it is suggested that violence comprises a permanent and continual problem. The *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times* portray South Shore as a community where it is part of commonsense to expect shootings or other forms of violent crime to happen daily. The problem with naming a community as 'infested' or 'ailing' is that this discourse "reframes the debate on violence by replacing the language of sociology and criminology with the language of health" (Riemann, 2019, p. 153). Instead of viewing violence predominantly resulting from socio-economic and structural factors within the community, it is solely explained by reference to the pathology of an entire urban community. Describing an African American community as 'ill' and 'infested' reinforces racist

criminalization and othering of black communities on Chicago's South Side, thereby contributing to a long and racist history of using epidemiological metaphors to pathologize and de-humanize minority and non-white populations (Bauman, 1989, pp. 102–104). The history of Chicago's South Side is closely associated with racial segregation and the stigma of being violent, poor, and undeserved, and racism and racial segregation find continuation in press coverage that portrays parts of the South Side as 'ailing', 'ill', or 'infested'. These naming practices are evolving, open-ended signifiers that operate within but also correspond to changes in existing socio-spatial and political configurations in Chicago.

Both papers also named South Shore a 'warzone' which is 'under siege by gangs and which is the 'place for turf wars between gangs':

> South Shore slaying believed part of gang war" (Chicago Tribune, 06 April 2017)

> In just under 12 hours, seven people were killed by gun violence in South Shore, a grisly toll for a historic African American enclave that's home to many middle-class families but also entrenched street gangs that for years have waged a bloody turf war (Chicago Tribune, 01 April 2017, my emphasis)

The representation of South Shore as a 'warzone' follow a general tendency in popular culture to speak of 'Chiraq' as a metaphor for Chicago which combines the two words 'Chicago' and 'Iraq' (Aspholm, 2020). This metaphor has been used in order to suggest that levels of violence in Chicago – particularly numbers of homicides – have reached the same levels as in the war in Iraq in 2003. Generally, references to warfare have been widely applied to other contexts such as the 'war on poverty' and the 'war on drugs' (Hinton, 2016).

The problem of using the metaphor 'war' in describing urban communities lies in its inability to transfer patterns of warfare to non-warfare contexts. As argued by Elwood (1995), "the pattern of war includes soldiers and enemies, attacks and defenses, progressive victories, and ultimate victory that vanquishes the enemy" (p. 95). Such actors, processes and structures are absent in South Shore and newspaper discourses do not inform the reader about them: who is the enemy that needs to be vanquished, and what attack and defense strategies are deployed? Instead of using the terms 'war' and 'warfare' attentively in their discourse, acknowledging their origin and intended purpose and meaning, the two newspapers merely used the number of homicides and shootings as a sufficient qualifier for labelling South Shore a 'warzone'.

In this discursive labelling, language possesses an instrumental use, as Bourdieu (1991) remarks:

> it is rare in everyday life for language to function as a pure instrument of communication. The pursuit of maximum informative efficiency is only exceptionally the exclusive goal of linguistic

production and the distinctly instrumental use of language which it implies generally clashes with the often unconscious pursuit of symbolic profit (pp. 66–67).

Bourdieu underscores the performative and instrumental function of language in producing reality. Language is not always intended to provide a realistic account of what characterizes urban life in South Shore. It can also offer a sensationalized representation of the community that, in the case of press coverage on South Shore, uses metaphors of warfare to depict urban life. Yet, metaphors of war in the context of South Shore create a fallacy about urban life in the community. They reduce and simplify the complex socio-cultural and economic processes that underlie, for example, gang rivalries and shootings (Aspholm, 2020), to a set-piece argument about urban life that is easily accessible to an audience. 'War' is a catchy word in depicting and describing a community. By evoking immediate connotations and emotions related to war, reflections about deep-seated, structural forces of the political economy that contribute to the (re)production of urban violence and about question whether such naming practices adequately reflect everyday life in the community are avoided. The "discursive practice" (Fairclough, 1995b) of war metaphors as well as the other naming practices discussed employ a form of language that does *not* provide a sophisticated representation of community life (Tabbert, 2015).

Generalizing from single incidences of violent crime that the *entire* South Shore community is a warzone is the epistemological foundation of territorial stigmatization in South Shore. The consequences of such simplifying naming practices for the community are severe. Simplification paints all residents with the same delinquency brush even though only few individuals in the community are responsible for incidences of violent crime. War metaphors also function as a warning to outsiders to beware of entering a homogenized war-like community. Territorial stigmatization in South Shore thus works through the categorizations and naming the community as an "urban hellhole [...] in which violence, vice and dereliction are the order of things" (Wacquant, 2008, p. 238). The discursive practice of categorizations and naming "says something about a space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 132); it produces a mental image of South Shore as a space in which violence and crime seem to be quotidian phenomena.

Hyperbole and representation: the 'blood-drenched' community

Another discursive practice of territorial stigmatization that I identified in the newspaper corpus was hyperbolic representations of violence and crime. Although less frequent than naming practices, hyperboles reinforce the mental image of South Shore as a violent space. Hyperbole

can be defined as "excessive exaggeration[s] made for rhetorical effect" (Richardson, 2007: 65).

In an article on rising crime rates on Chicago's South and West Sides, in which the South Shore community was explicitly mentioned, the *Chicago Tribune* wrote the following abstract in order to introduce the text:

> Unless, that is, you live on the blood-drenched streets where violent crime rates have actually increased. We end that concentrated slaughter, this city again risks losing its foundation of working, middle-class families (*Chicago Tribune*, 27 October 2013).

The language in this excerpt suggests that South Shore is a place of 'concentrated slaughter' where concentrated killings of people take place. Although the *Chicago Tribune* did not explicitly correlate higher rates of violence with the fact that South Shore is a predominantly black community, this hyperbole, nevertheless, reproduces racist stereotypes about black communities (Anderson, 2012). Hyperboles that assign a black community "a distinct and homogeneous 'criminogenic' character is an act of racial stereotyping or essentializing" (Sampson, Wilson, and Katz, 2018, p. 15) even if no explicit racist labels are attached to black communities (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Labelling a community as "blood-drenched" and where "concentrated slaughter" happen attaches such a criminogenic character because the community cannot be thought of outside of references to violence and crime which, in turn, reproduces racist stereotypes about a black community as particularly prone to violent behavior. In this respect, Wilson (2005) argues that, since the early 1980s, black-on-black violence has dominated discourses on inner-city life in US metropoles like Chicago. The underlying assumption of black-on-black violence is that race, rather than socio-economic determinants, comprises the central explanatory factor for the increasing levels of violence in U.S. cities.

Pathologized labelling of African Americans as more prone to violent criminal behavior has historically comprised a central aspect of public representations of African Americans in the making of modern America (Muhammad, 2010). Although, as stated by Rotella (2019), "[t]he conditions compressed into South Shore's crime stories can also be metropolitan, national, or global in scale" (p. 72), I would still argue that the conditions of territorial stigmatization of South Shore are specific to Chicago's racism. Chicago is one of the most racially segregated cities in the United States where racial borders across all scales produce urban spaces: Chicago's communities are racially segregated with black residents particularly living on the city's South and West Sides, public housing segregation, redlining, gerrymandering, and changing economic structures and job opportunities in black communities (Diamond, 2017; Wilson, 1996). Shabazz (2015) has convincingly argued that Chicago's South

Side has particularly been characterized by a variety of "mechanisms of constraint built into architecture, urban planning, and systems of control" (p. 2) which erect literal and figurative racial borders across different spatial scales. Thus, racism and racial segregation are everywhere to be found in Chicago, and newspaper territorial stigmatization reinforces racial boundaries through discursively framing black communities as violent "no-go" zones. News discourse, in other words, "deepens an age-old mainstream Chicago fear: anxieties about the black poor's social and economic destructiveness" (Wilson, 2018, p. 14). Thus, spatial tainting of South Shore operates within a contested terrain where discursive practices of territorial stigma comprise evolving signifiers corresponding to existing socio-spatial and racist processes and structures of space production on the city's South Side.

By using hyperbolic language, newspapers generate mental images of the community in the readers' mind which work through graphic depictions of violence. These representations produce a violent spectacle of everyday life in South Shore. This spectacle is less concerned with a realistic representation of community life, but rather with attracting the largest audience possible which becomes fascinated by the sensationalist and graphic description of a world that is completely unfamiliar to them, and in which the members of this audience would not dare to step into, fearing they could be shot at any moment in a collective effort of concentrated slaughter.

Through hyperbolic representations, the everyday in South Shore – already named war-like, infested – is made *spectacular* (Debord, 1983). Here, "the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which simultaneously impose themselves as the tangible *par excellence*" (Debord, 1983, §36, original emphasis). The images of slaughter and blood-drenched streets are tangible because they generate vivid representations of how violence looks like in real-life. Yet, the reader does not receive any information about the circumstances and reasons for the violence in South Shore. What is merely achieved is to make South Shore a space of violent spectacle and to reproduce racist stereotypes and stigma about black communities.

A second, and paradoxical, form of territorial stigmatization through hyperbolic language – one that does not use 'blood-drench' or 'concentrated slaughter' – was leveraging the idea that it is 'commonsense' that South Shore is violent. The following *Chicago Tribune* article is illustrative of this framing of the community:

> For so many teens and young adults in Englewood and South Shore, Austin and Roseland, the decks appear to be stacked skyscraper-high against them. Broken families; gunfire as commonplace as honking horns; underfunded, underperforming schools; the toxic ubiquity of drugs and gangs – all factors that conspire against a youth's bid for a better life (Chicago Tribune, 01 May 2017).

Instead of heightening gun violence to a spectacle through graphic descriptions, this secondary form of hyperbolic representation *downplays* gun violence as commonplace, quotidian, where gun violence is so omnipresent that it is like honking car horns, just part of the banal urban everyday. In this example, hyperbole serves to "[n]ormalize modes of intelligibility and construct particular regimes of truth as legitimate" (McLaren, Leonardo, and Allen, 1999, p. 140). Think, too, of the function of the word 'ubiquity' in "the toxic ubiquity of drug and gangs": if drugs and gangs are *everywhere* toxic then they are nowhere toxic, because *there* (South Shore) they are not toxic but *unremarkable*.

It is important not to let hyperbole and the territorial stigmatization stemming from it elide into the passive voice. Hyperbolic representations have a source: the tone and vernacular of Chicago newspapers as the specialists in the symbolic production of stigma. Newspapers' decision to reduce South Shore to a violent space is going to stick to the minds of their readership as a 'true' characterization of the community. Yet, as Gramsci (1971) warns, "to refer to common sense as a confirmation of truth is a nonsense" (p. 423). Just because the two papers make violence and crime a commonsense characteristic of community everyday life does not *ipso facto* mean that this discourse conveys the truth.

This conclusion would ignore the institutional interests and role of newspapers as stigma producer as well as the broader political economy of stigma production (Tyler, 2020). Newspaper reporting are never neutral or free from certain belief systems and the broader political economy (Devereux et al., 2011), but "produced by an industry, shaped by the bureaucratic and economic structure of that industry, [and] […] by relations with government and with other political organizations" (Fowler, 1991, p. 222). Journalists produce *specific,* and *non-neutral* conceptions of space; and these conceptions do not have to be true in order to produce/construct reality. Rather, such "representations of space are shot through with a knowledge (*savoir*) – i.e. a mixture of understanding (*connaissance*) and ideology – which is always relative and in the process of change" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 41, original emphasis).

At the same time, newspapers do not have unlimited leeway to present whichever 'truths' about South Shore that they might desire to portray. Instead, newspapers have already pre-selected and pre-defined the boundaries in which social conceptualizations on South Shore can take place. In other words, newspapers are not autonomous and independent from influences within the socio-cultural and political environment in which they operate. They are situated in a multi-scalar reality where enablements and constraints of territorial stigma are imposed on and mediated by them. Newspapers respond to broader political forces which have

racially excluded, penalized and stigmatized black communities on Chicago's South Side for decades. Newspaper territorial stigmatization, therefore, needs to be contextualized within these broader forces as a continuation and reinforcement of such exclusion and penalization. Beyond the "mental frameworks" (Hall, 1986) of violence and crime, readers will have a difficult time conjuring a different South Shore because alternative framings are too rare, too unavailable.

In this sense, territorial stigmatization through newspaper discourse works through the *dis*information of their readers about what characterizes the community because the reader does not learn about the underlying drivers of urban violence such as economic deprivation, advanced marginality, systemic racism, and structural differences. For Debord (1998), "[u]nlike the straightforward lie, disinformation must inevitably contain a degree of truth but one deliberately manipulated by an artful enemy" (p. 45). I do not wish to use the term 'enemy' in order to designate newspapers, in some Trumpian fashion, as 'enemy of the people'. Rather, I intend that disinformation is a necessary function of hyperbolic territorial stigma because excessive and quotidian representations are two sides of the same coin of normalization: all that can be 'known' about violence in South Shore is that of course the violence is in South Shore. However, the exaggeration, sensationalism and use of hyperboles in such representations *disinform* the reader because they exaggerate and heighten violent crime to a spectacle that needs to be consumed like a scene from an action movie. It is an undifferentiated representation which is blind to any heterogeneity of everyday life in the community, and which, most importantly, silences South Shore's residents because their perceptions of everyday life do not play a role in these conceptions. Readers do not learn that spatial tainting through newspaper discourse operates in contested conceptual terrains where resistance to said tainting, too, exist in communities and comprise an important element of residents' lived everyday experiences (Sisson, 2020).

I have demonstrated in this section that territorial stigmatization also works through hyperbolic newspaper coverage. Am I arguing that all newspaper discourse engages in and reifies naming and hyperbolic practices? No. Yet, as I will show in the following section, even in those articles that did not rely on naming practices and hyperboles, territorial stigmatization through the homogenization of South Shore as a violent community is still very much foregrounded. The only difference is about degrees of subtlety. In these articles, territorial stigmatization is produced more through a constant and iterative reporting on incidences of violent crime that took place in the community. What characterized these articles was that they

only informed about the territoriality of violence, thereby disregarding the actors and circumstances of violent incidences.

Transitive choices, repetitiveness and representation: the inescapability of violence and crime in newspaper discourse

When reporting about an event, journalists have different options in how to describe what happened, who were involved, and report about the circumstances of the event. In the context of a shooting, for example, information about the actors (who was involved?), the places (where did it happen?), and the circumstances (what and why did it happen?) are important to inform readers about the event. In discourse analysis, describing the relationship between participants and their role in the event is called 'transitivity'. According to Richardson (2007), "transitivity forms the very heart of representation, describing the relationships between participants and the roles they play in the processes described in reporting" (p. 54). For Halliday (2004), transitivity distinguishes between three semantic processes that can be expressed by a clause and which inform about the transitive choices made. The *process* dimension expressed by the verb phrase in a clause. The *participants* involved in the process, and the *circumstances* associated with the process.

In this section, I focus on the *Chicago Sun-Times's* reporting on shootings in South Shore by arguing that the paper made transitive choices which almost always exclusively foregrounded the territoriality of the shooting and less the participants involved and the circumstances of the event. The reason I only focus on the *Chicago Sun-Times* is that the *Chicago Tribune* itself has not published articles which only highlighted the territoriality of shootings. That said, the *Chicago Tribune*, via its tabloid *RedEye* – a paper intended to reach a younger audience between the age of 18 to 34 years – did publish a so-called "Homicide Tracker" online until June 2015 where the latest citywide, gunshot homicides were logged in and listed and which, too, only reported on the territoriality of gunshot homicides. Yet, since *RedEye* is its own tabloid newspaper owned by the umbrella company *Tribune Publishing*, I do not analyze it here as my sampling has so far only focused on the flagship newspapers *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times*.

Take the following example from the *Chicago Sun-Times*:

A man was shot early Monday in the South Shore neighborhood. The man, 48, was shot in the eye about 3:30 a.m. in the 7500 block of South Shore Drive, according to preliminary information from Chicago Police. Additional details were not immediately available. (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 30 November 2015).

This example represents the entire report in the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Richardson (2007) provides a useful framework for examining the transitive choices of this report. In the first part

of this report – *"A man was shot early Monday in the South Shore neighborhood"* – the *process* dimension "is expressed as a passive construction without an agent" (Richardson, 2007: 58). The focus here is on "was shot". As Richardson (2007) states, "such a transitive choice always involves a degree of ambiguity, but in this case, it results in a degree of imprecision so acute that the clause is almost useless. This clause fails as adequate journalism because [...] we are only told about the affective [subject], not the active agent, of the reported event" (p. 58), although the shooting of a person inevitably requires two people involved. In other words, a *passive* over an *active* voice is the preferred transitive choice where subjects go missing. With respect to the *circumstances* of this shooting, the reader receives inadequate information about what happened: the only information conveyed is that someone was shot in South Shore on Monday. Who committed the shooting? How are the two people involved related to each other? The reporting does not say. Moreover, nothing is said about the motifs and intentions which could help in understanding *why* this shooting happened.

Meanwhile, the second sequence of the example – "*in the 7500 block of South Shore Drive*" – also exhibits transitive choices. This sequence informs the reader where exactly in the community the shooting took place. It provides precise geographical data on this incidence which, in turn, attaches a concrete spatiality to the event. Knowing that this particular street corner has experienced a fatal shooting, someone from outside of the community, who only knows the community from newspaper discourse, might approach this particular location with caution and suspicion, knowing that this particular area has been the scenery of a violent crime.

However, it is also important to state that journalists often do not have detailed information about the circumstances of a shooting. Shortly after a shooting happened, journalists do not know more than what the police can tell them at this early stage in the investigation, as expressed by the statement "*Additional details were not immediately available*". Oftentimes, only the location and territoriality of the shooting are immediately known. Yet, the *Chicago Sun-Times* barely followed up on shootings in South Shore after their initial reporting. In other words, readers did not receive more detailed information about the circumstances of the shooting at a later point in time when the police investigation had advanced. Instead, the paper left the reader with this one initial report which merely informed about the territoriality of the shooting.

It is at this point where the frequency of newspaper reporting on fatal and non-fatal shootings becomes important for the production of territorial stigmatization. Of the 882 articles on violence and crime by the *Chicago Sun-Times*, 608 (68.93%) were written in this way. These numbers underline that articles which predominantly report on the territoriality of shootings

were by far the most common discursive practice in representing South Shore in its press coverage:

> A man was wounded Wednesday evening in a South Shore shooting. The 25-year-old was shot in the knee about 7:35 while he was leaving an address in the *6700 block of South East End*, Chicago Police said (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 17 May 2018, my emphasis).

> A man was wounded in a shooting Wednesday afternoon in the South Shore neighborhood on the South Side. The 19-year-old was shot in the abdomen about 1:20 p.m. in the *7000 block of South Chappel*, according to Chicago Police (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 11 July 2018, my emphasis).

All of these examples provide territorial details on where exactly the shootings took place in South Shore. Foregrounding territorial details functions to create a "cognitive map" (Suttles, 1972) for the reader which is filled with dots every time a new shooting took place in the community. Yet, the sheer quantity of such newspaper reporting leaves the impression that there can be barely any spaces left in the community which have not yet experienced a shooting. Instead, it seems that the entire community is a homogenous space of violence and crime; a space that is not characterized by single incidences of violent crime scattered throughout the community, but rather by the spreading of violence over the entire community area comparable to a large conflagration. The area, therefore, can be known quite specifically through the spatial representative practice (Lefebvre, 1991) of giving neighborhood blocks, but the victims, perpetrators and circumstances of the shootings are not allowed to come to the fore with the same specificity (White, Stuart, and Morrissey, 2020).

The main reason for the large number of articles reporting on shootings is not because South Shore has experienced hundreds and hundreds of shootings, but because the *Chicago Sun-Times* published several reports on one individual shooting over the course of one or several day(s) without providing any further information about the circumstances and participants involved. Again, only the territoriality of the shooting is foregrounded. Take the following article:

> A 19-year-old man was hospitalized after being shot in the armpit early Saturday in South Shore. The man was taken to Stroger Hospital after being shot around 12:30 a.m. while he was outdoors in the 7800 block of South Bennett, according to the police (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 19 December 2015).

After this initial article, the *Chicago Sun-Times* published two more articles on the same day which summarized all shootings that had happened on that day across Chicago and which, again, covered the above-mentioned incident in South Shore and only added further territorial information about another shooting that could have been related to the shooting of the 19-year-old. The wording of the articles is identical, and I therefore only reproduce them here once:

> Two men were critically wounded in separate shootings on the same South Shore neighborhood block within an hour of each other. About 1:30 a.m., a 24-year-old man was in a vehicle in the 7800 block of South Bennett when a red vehicle pulled up and someone inside shot him several times, police said. He was taken to Northwestern Memorial Hospital in critical condition. About 12:30 a.m., a 19-year-old man was outside in the same block when he heard shots and realized he'd been hit in the armpit, police said. He was taken to Stroger Hospital in critical condition. Police did not say if the attacks were related (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 19 December 2015).

This repetitiveness in reporting on one single incidence confronts the readership with a constant, never-ending flow of information on violence and crime in South Shore, even though the actual number of shootings is not as high as the number of newspaper articles reporting on shootings would suggest. This hegemonic discourse reinforces the commonsense character of violence and crime to South Shore, thereby providing

> a form of 'everyday thinking' which offers us frameworks of meaning with which to make sense of the world. It is a form of popular, easily-available knowledge which contains no complicated ideas, requires no sophisticated argument and does not depend on deep thought or wide reading (Hall and O'Shea, 2013, p. 8).

In these repetitive newspaper discourses on South Shore, the readership does not have to delve into complex characterizations and representations of the community and they certainly do not have to invest deep thoughts or even question such discourse because it seems so blatantly obvious how everyday life must be in South Shore if it can be represented so superficially in a couple of few sentences informing the readers about the seemingly most common things in the community: violence and crime.

The production of territorial stigma and its political economy

By dedicating the majority of the news report to information about the territoriality of shootings, combined with the reiterative nature in how shootings make it into press coverage on South Shore, the community is blemished as a space in which violence and crime seem to be ever-present, quotidian phenomena. Slater (2018) makes an important point about the role of knowledge in territorial stigma by arguing that the more important question about knowledge production is less what people know, but rather what they do *not* know. This question, Slater (2018) remarks, is "as important, usually far more scandalous, and remarkably under-theorised" (p. 161). Readers of both newspapers know far more about violence and crime and their territoriality in South Shore than about their underlying circumstances or reasons.

Focusing on transitive choices in press coverage enables us to expands our understanding of the "journalistic tools and techniques" (Schultz Larsen and Nagel Delica, 2019, p. 554) of territorial stigmatization. By focusing on the transitive choices in press articles, it is possible to

"gain a more complete understanding of stigmatization" by expanding our analysis of "numerous techniques of stereotyping, labeling and 'othering'" (Slater, 2017. p. 115). The causation of territorial stigmatization therefore not always lies in the blatantly obvious defamation and denigration strategies of naming spaces as 'violence-plagued', 'crime-infested' and 'troubled', but also in those press coverages which, at first sight, seem 'harmless' since they do not employ such categorizations, but which are nevertheless part of the problem because they normalize and naturalize violence as intrinsic to communal spaces.

But newspaper coverage also comprises a political instrument to shape the production of space in accordance with corporate and state agendas of urban redevelopment. The production of space, Lefebvre (1991) contends, is a political process where institutionalized and corporate interests reproduce hegemonic relation of capitalist accumulation. I have already demonstrated throughout this article that spatial tainting of South Shore needs to be contextualized within a multi-scalar reality where constraints and enablements within the political economy of Chicago, such as the long history of racial segregation and exclusion, influence the production of stigma.

On Chicago's South Side, local government authorities and private businesses, particularly from real-estate, have recently also started to envision this part of the city as a new space of capital accumulation through real-estate speculation (Wilson, 2018; Sternberg and Anderson, 2014). In South Shore, the announcement by former President Barack Obama in 2016 to build his $500 million Presidential Center into a neighboring park has, too, initiated discussion in the media about future trajectories of urban redevelopment in the community (Bergen, Caputo, and Lee, 2017). South Shore is the last black community located on Lake Michigan; a lake that has traditionally been a lucrative area to live on in Chicago. However, years of economic disinvestment in South Shore, high foreclosure and eviction rates particularly after the 2007/08 financial crisis, paired with stigmatizing media coverage have deprived the community of economic opportunities and contributed to crumbling housing prices (Rotella, 2019).

In that light, the Obama Presidential Center (OPC) is celebrated as an opportunity to bring urgently needed economic investment into the community. At the same time, however, it has also raised fear among residents that real-estate capital will find in South Shore a lucrative investment opportunity where properties close to the lake are still affordable in comparison to other lakefront communities. In fact, large out-of-town property companies have already started to buy multi-flat apartments in South Shore in anticipation of the OPC (Gallun, 2020).

In this complex, multi-scalar entanglement of urban redevelopment, newspapers play an ominous role. Their stigmatization of the community is "enmeshed with wider capitalist

structures of expropriation, domination, discipline and social control" and where "stigma functions to devalue entire groups of people with the purpose of both fortifying existing social hierarchies and creating new opportunities for the redistribution of wealth upwards" (Tyler, 2020: pp. 17, 27). Responding to the OPC development, newspapers have also started to 'humanize' this 'ghetto space' again by foregrounding that South Shore has also a long history of black culture on Chicago's South Side. Direct references to former First Lady Michelle Obama, who grew up in South Shore, serve newspaper to emphasize that there are, in fact, "relatively stable blocks [in South Shore], like the one where Michelle Obama grew up" (Bergen et al., 2017). These 'humanizing' moments should not be understood as total relativizations of or reversions from newspapers' former hegemonic discourse on violence and crime. Violence and crime are still very much foregrounded in news reporting. But these moments, still rare overall, are instrumental and strategic insofar as they seek to 'familiarize' the area to outsiders who had so far only learned about South Shore through reporting on violence and crime and who now, suddenly, learn that the community will be close to one of Chicago's major infrastructural developments. Thus, newspapers and the media more generally need to be viewed as members of growth machines (Molotch, 1976) besides real-estate developers, the mayor, and government officials which operate across multiple spatial scales and which seek "to transform significant acres of this once no-go zone for middle-class investment, living, and recreation" (Wilson, 2018: 8). The OPC has started to steer media attention on South Shore also towards potential opportunities for economic growth and investment (Gallun, 2020).

Territorial stigmatization provides the groundwork and justification for urban redevelopment because it has created an image of South Shore as an urban 'no-go zone' that has become tangible to a large audience. In press coverage, "old bones of ghetto fear are not merely given a shake, they are updated. Now 'black ghettos' are unapologetically mobile, city-destroying spaces which need reengineering or isolation if Chicago is to properly redevelop and fruitfully engage new global realities" (Wilson, 2018, p. 14). The fear of black 'ghetto spaces' has become ingrained into the public image of South Shore so much so that the community needs to be transformed. One way to do this is to upgrade street blocks, properties, and economic corridors to make them attractive again to middle-class residents in anticipation of the OPC.

Such upgrading is not new to Chicago's South Side where crime discourse and urban renewal have gone hand-in-hand for decades. Williams (2020), for example, documents how the University of Chicago has mobilized crime narratives to prevent its students from going

into nearby community areas deemed unsafe and dangerous while simultaneously securitizing and redeveloping its home community of Hyde Park, which is only a few blocks away from South Shore, through its own police force and urban conservation policies.

Similarly, the OPC can attract a more affluent middle-class to the area which seeks to live in close proximity to the OPC and which also starts to see those amenities that South Shore has to offer: a solid housing stock of single and multi-family apartments including Chicago-style bungalows, close proximity to downtown Chicago, including a good public transport system, several beaches along Lake Michigan, to name a few. All these amenities are still affordable for a lakefront community in comparison to Chicago's North Side because, this article has shown, a media discourse of crime and violence has contributed to keeping the community deprived of economic investment. Thus, territorial stigma is more than community denigration, but also a strategy to reproduce socio-economic inequality, precarity, and marginality which, in turn, solidify existing social hierarchies.

After years of Federal approval and review processes, the construction of the OPC is anticipated to begin in summer 2021. Future research should critically accompany how the OPC will not only transform communities on Chicago's South Side, but also how media discourse on Chicago's South Side will change and adapt once the OPC has settled down in the area.

Conclusion

That journalists form part of a group of specialists in the symbolic defamation and stigmatization of urban places is neither a new nor surprising finding (Wassenberg, 2004). Yet, it is important to decipher the discursive practices which contribute to the production of territorial stigmatization through journalism. The aim of this article was to analyze the different discursive practices in the production of territorial stigmatization through newspapers and to embed these practices into the multi-scalar political and socio-economic realities of Chicago's South Side. This article demonstrates that the production of territorial stigma is not only the result of hyperboles and naming practices, but also of press coverage which seemingly provides a neutral reporting on incidences of violence and crime, but which nevertheless reproduces the commonsense characterization of marginalized communities as spaces dictated by violence and crime. This article suggests that focusing on the transitive choices made by newspaper articles reporting on marginalized communities also provides fruitful avenues in expanding our research approaches and methods in studying the discursive practices through which urban communities are denigrated, devalued and demonized as violent no-go territories (Wacquant, 2008).

My findings also prompt me to more generally criticize journalism's role in the reproduction of spatial taint of communities which are already marginalized, segregated and economically disadvantaged. Journalists need to ask themselves what they wish to achieve by foregrounding, sensationalizing, and normalizing violence and crime as commonsense characteristics of everyday life in poor, marginalized communities in post-industrial metropoles. Territorial stigmatization through journalism merely reproduces and contributes to the hegemonic order in how state authorities approach defamed communities as spaces which need to be controlled, policed, excluded, and subsequently transformed into new, allegedly safer and better integrated spaces. In this respect, I have suggested that journalists need to be conceptualized as parts of redevelopment machines (Wilson, 2018) which operate across spatial scales and which use fear of specific urban spaces as a political strategy for redevelopment, gentrification and displacement (Wacquant et al., 2014; Kallin and Slater, 2014). In the context of Chicago's South Side, the fear of black 'ghetto spaces' has historically served state-led reengineering and redevelopment initiatives to transform public housing and other black urban spaces into new investment opportunities and spaces of cultural consumption for a white, middle-class population (Wilson, 2018). By stigmatizing communities as violent, no-go territories, journalists also contribute to the ideological justification and groundwork for such gentrification-centered redevelopment. Thus, what is needed instead is a journalism that challenges existing power structures (Devereaux et al., 2011, p. 513) by providing a discourse which acknowledges the existence of violence and crime in certain spaces, but which also scrutinizes the socio-economic and structural reasons for violence, and which critically engages with its own role and positionality in the (re)production of territorial stigmatization.

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