DETROIT’S INFORMAL ECONOMY: NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS & SPATIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Jenny Lendrum, PhD Candidate
Department of Sociology
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RECENT ECONOMIC ISSUES

NEW THIS MORNING

MAJOR CITY FILES BANKRUPTCY
DETROIT BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN DEBT

TIME
IS YOUR CITY NEXT?
Lessons from Detroit’s fight to survive

WEINERS & LOSERS/AL-QAEDA’S MAD SCIENTIST/BOY GEORGE
DETROIT’S URBAN FARMS
DETROIT'S RUIN PORN
OUTLINE/OVERVIEW

• Introduction & Background
• Research Questions (RQs)
• Literature
  • Gendering the Informal Economy
  • Gendered Space & Social Networks
• Methodology
  • Case Selection
• Preliminary Findings
• Conclusion/Discussion (Implications)
INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

• Hairwork
  • Informal vs. Formal Economies

• The Historical & Spatial Shift

• Public vs. Private Spaces
  • Gendered Spaces
DTOWN: BARBER SHOPS (7)
DTOWN: SHIFTING OF THE BEAUTY SALON
DTOWN: AFRICAN BRAIDING SALONS
RESEARCH QUESTIONS (RQ’S)

1. What does an informal economy in an urban area, such as Detroit, look like?

2. How has the haircare sector changed over time and what are the effects experienced by the women in the industry?

3. What are the economic challenges of the neighborhood and how are women negotiating these challenges?

4. How does space shape the networks that support informal work? In what ways are networks created by these spaces empowering or constraining?
LITERATURE

The Informal Economy (as a Central Institution)

- 85% conducted, friends/neighbors/family/fictive kin (Williams and Windebank, 2003)
- Strategy for financial survival (Hoyman, 1987)
- Connectivity (Venkatesh, 2006)
- Women in poverty (Edin and Lein, 1997)
- Ethnic enclave economy (Wilson and Portes, 1980)
- Racial enclave economy (Wingfield, 2009)
LITERATURE

Gendered Space & Social Networks

- Embedded in (both) private and public spaces
- Space & power are connected (Fenster, 1999)
- “Spatial expressions of patriarchy” (Valentine, 1989)
- Spatial & social structures = mutually constitutive (Spain, 1992, 2004)
- Spaces = liberate women (Wilson, 2012)
METHODS

• Ethnography
  • Participant observations
    • Informal talks
  • In-depth interviews

*Additionally, access to survey data (distributed to women/men in the neighborhood).
WHY THE HAIRCARE INDUSTRY?

• Black women (*forced*) into hairwork as entrepreneurs
• Historically, a successful sector

• 147% increase of (*all*) black women owned businesses [1997 – 2006]
  • Escape glass ceiling (Wingfield, 2009)
CASE SELECTION

Dtown *

Similar to Detroit & other mid-west, deindustrialized cities

- 4 sq. miles (6.4 sq. km)
- Working-class community
- Population decrease = 35.3%
  - 1990: 20,000/2000: 13,000 (City Connect Detroit report, 2006)
- Descriptive of urban landscape

* Pseudonym
*Scrapers will be shot!!*

*Stay away!!*

DTOWN: THE NEIGHBORHOOD
DTOWN: THE BUSINESS DISTRICT
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Public spaces = Highly Gendered

FOUR examples of women using space & networks within neighborhood

1. BLOCK CLUBS
2. CHURCHES
3. HAIRCARE MEET-UP GROUPS
4. FOOD DISTRIBUTION LINES
CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION (IMPLICATIONS)

• Public and private spaces = gendered & racialized
  • Constructed, produced & reproduced
  • Muddled
• Racialized and gendered macrostructures & forces impacting the informal economy
• Contradictory outcomes
  • Reinforcing oppression WHILST liberating
  • Challenges AND reproduces racial oppression & patriarchy

** Making women, their spaces, and their work visible**
CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

“Public space is increasingly commodified but is always in a process of being shaped, reshaped, and challenged by the spatial practices of various groups and individuals whose identities and actions undermine the homogeneity of contemporary cities (p. 168).”

(McCann, 1999 using Lefebvre’s earlier work)

Women entrepreneurs in Dtwn are:

- negotiating spaces
- creating networks
- reappropriating (public & private) spaces