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Spatializing Kinship: A Socio-Spatial Analysis of West African Kinship Networks in Affordable Housing Cooperatives

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ABSTRACT

Scholarship has shown that immigrants form mutual support networks based on the foundations of a shared cultural background, trust, and obligation. Though these immigrant networks can help circulate important resources, they can also be extremely insular, preventing its actors from accessing new forms of social capital. Research also shows that how immigrants are spatially embedded, namely, the way they engage with urban infrastructure, can create avenues of social and economic integration into the receiving country. However, less is known about how these two processes interact. How do the features of an immigrant kinship network shape how immigrants experience urban spaces? In this paper, I examine this question using interviews and fieldwork with West African immigrants who currently or formerly lived in affordable housing cooperatives on Chicago's north side. Beyond engaging in a socio-spatial dialectic, I argue that West African immigrants engage in a kinship-spatial dialectic with their built environment. Just as the physical features of the building impact tenants' spatial patterns and social interactions, the features of an immigrant kinship network impact the buildings' symbolic and systemic characteristics. As a result, immigrants transform buildings in Chicago's skyline into representations of family, solidarity, and at times, social and spatial immobility.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early days of September 2019, I walked west down Belle Plaine Avenue looking out for my research site. Tucked in between a brick three flat and a plain residence with minimal masonry detailing is 820 W Belle Plaine, a looming 20-story apartment building that can't help but stand out. I was there to meet my informant Dayo, a middle-aged woman born in Burkina Faso; she had only been living in Belle Plaine, an affordable housing cooperative in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood, for about eight years. I planned to spend the whole day with Dayo, but when I called up to her unit, I was surprised to hear another woman's voice. She buzzed me, but I was concerned that I had made a mistake—was this the day we agreed upon? Before taking the elevator up to her home, I was greeted by a security officer who told me to sign-in at the desk. To a stranger, 820 W Belle Plaine has an imposing presence. Though common areas like the lobby and community room are brightly lit, its hallways are dark and long, filled with the noises from muffled televisions and children's' voices.

When I arrived at Dayo's unit, I was greeted by the woman on the phone. She told me that Dayo worked late last night and needed to catch up on her sleep. I took a seat and admired how much sunlight poured into Dayo's modest one-bedroom apartment; from her South facing window she had a clear view of the Willis Tower. Large suitcases and a wood dining table occupied the most space in her living room, but there was still room for a weathered futon. As I waited, Dayo's friend, who I had been referring to as "Aunty" out of respect, laid back on the futon and drifted into sleep. When Dayo finally woke up, she thanked me for my patience and introduced me to her "sister", Fade. Fade, another Burkinese immigrant, had a unit in the building but was just spending some time with Dayo. Not long after, Dayo's daughter, Danielle, emerged from the room she shared with her mother to say hello. Throughout the day, I watched

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children freely come and go from Dayo's unit. Typically, they were looking to spend a few hours playing with Danielle, but on occasion, they served as couriers, returning items their mothers borrowed from one another, or making a quick trip to the corner store for one of their aunties. I was pleasantly surprised by how comfortable they felt moving throughout the buildings' hallways and stairwells; they had a command of the space that could only be earned through years of practice.

In the few hours I was there, Dayo had about five "visitors" —a term I use lightly— because Dayo's friends were not strictly guests in her home. Sometimes, they stopped by to keep her company, other times they came looking for help. At one time, an older African woman, who Dayo referred to as "Ma", came to get assistance in translating the directions on a medicine bottle. While in Dayo's apartment, they exhibited a familiarity and knowledge of the space that is typically reserved for one's own home. This was demonstrated in Fade's ability to prepare cups of tea without disrupting the delicate arrangement of pots, pans, and leftover meals that consumed Dayo's small cooking area. Fade's level of comfort in Dayo's home was not only a testament to how well she knows the physical structure of Dayo's unit, but it suggests a level of closeness with Dayo herself. In this way, Dayo's kitchen, and unit as a whole, is simply an extension of Fade's own home. Of course, Dayo's friends are more than just her neighbors; their spatial patterns, use of kinship terms, and behaviors reveal how deeply intertwined they are in each other's daily lives.

When I asked Dayo what it's like to live in such close proximity to the closest friends she has made in America, she replied, "It's nice—it's not like Africa—but we've found a way." In 820 W Belle Plaine, and two other Uptown housing cooperatives, the hyperlocal immigrant enclave is collapsed into the form of high-rises. This group of buildings is connected by the

extensive kinship network of West African immigrants that span across the three apartments. Together, they constitute a central component to the migration experience of Chicago's West African immigrants. As one participant shared with me, "we used to call these buildings the Nigerian embassy, because this [was] where everyone came through."

Studies on immigrants emphasize that kinship networks, and the ways immigrants are spatially located within cities, are important for their experiences and social outcomes (see Brown 2004, Menjívar 2000, Mazumdar et al. 2000). The literature shows that immigrants use dense mutual networks and urban infrastructure, respectively, to create pathways for social and economic advancement where regular institutions fail. However, less is known about how these two processes interact. The patterns of movement and interactions I observed at Belle Plaine were not only motivated by these kinship relations, but they were structured by Belle Plaine's built environment. The vignette above suggests that dimensions of space and kinship relations work together to produce an experience of urban space that is not-quite-like Africa, but as close as it can be.

In this paper, I explore how the features of a West African immigrant practical kinship configuration spatially co-produce apartment buildings in Chicago. Grounding my findings in the literature on immigrant kinship networks, ethnic enclaves and the co-production of space (Low 2009), I argue that West African immigrants not only engage in a socio-spatial dialectic (Soja 1980) but a k*inship*-spatial dialectic with their built environment. The processes that constitute this dialectic, such as the buildings'-built environment, acts of solidarity, and the circulation of resources, create and sustain a sense of family, solidarity, and at times stagnation, for West African tenants.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

      Increasingly, there has been more attention to address the gap bridging kinship studies and the study of space/place, specifically within urban contexts. This research is situated within an emerging field known as urban kinship, which has taken a renewed investment in deconstructing and interrogating terms like "space", "family" and "household". New academic concepts such as "family residential systems" (Dureau 2002) or "family residential configuration" (Araos 2016, Pfirsch 2008) aim to move beyond the individual or household as unit of study. Though family configuration scholars' gesture at the spatiality of kinship, (see Widmer & Jallinoja 2008, Motta 2014) they do not examine how existing within a kinship configuration impacts one's experiences of urban space. In the following section, I justify reconciling the practical and configurational approaches to the study of kinship for my specific case. This is followed by a review of research on how kinship networks are important for immigrants' outcomes. Next, I review scholarship on ethnic enclaves and their impact on how immigrants experience and use urban space. Finally, I extend Low's (2009) revised theory on the co-production of space to identify the processes that make up the buildings' kinship-spatial dialectic.

Practical Kinship & the Configurational Approach

      In the 1970s, anthropologists asserted that the "analytical domain" occupied by kinship was inadequate, marked by models developed from Western culture. Schneider's *A Critique of Kinship* showcased that present kinship theory focused too much on sexual procreation, and thus failed to apply cross culturally. By problematizing the relationship between what was biological and what was cultural about kinship, Schneider disrupted the present analytical paradigm. This

theoretical shift resulted in the development of constructivism, which remains the dominant

theoretical framework in kinship studies. A constructivist approach to kinship emphasizes that

"any relationship constituted in terms of procreation, filiation, or descent can also be made

postnatally or performatively by culturally appropriate action" (Sahlins 2012:2). The sociology

of kinship has now moved beyond the normative constructions of the nuclear family, and two

popular approaches to emerge are the family practices (Carsten 2004) and the configurational

approach (Widmer & Jallinoja 2008). However, I do not want to suggest that the family practices

approach and configurational approach are diametrically opposed to one another. In many ways

the two overlap, and in my case, I want to consider how daily family practices reinforce and

produce kinship configuration ties.

Family practices encompasses the everyday practices and social actions "intended to have

some effect on another family member" (Cheal 2002:12). Carsten (2004), a leading scholar of

the practices approach, made the case for this approach after conducting ethnographic research

on the Malay people in Southeast Asia. In her studies, she found that the density of experiences

within a household was how kinship is made, through the sharing of food, time and space. The

Malay people, who regularly foster children, do not rely on a distinction between "biological"

and "social" ties. For the Malay, it is through regular acts of food-sharing and co-residence that

two unrelated people become kin. I engage with the family practices approach because I am

interested in identifying the daily practices tenants adopt as they *do* family and create kinship ties

within a specific built environment, regardless if individuals are blood-related or not.

A second approach to the study of kinship is the configurational approach (Widmer &

Jallinoja 2008), which aims to "preserve a relational approach to social life in the post-modern

world" (Morgan 2011:4). Though the configurational approach is typically applied to the study of kinship, it can be used to understand any chain of interdependencies or relationships. In turn, this perspective "insists upon the fact that families are not closed entities, as friends, neighbors, or acquaintances may intervene in their daily functioning" (Widmer & Jallinoja 2008:7). Such a fluid definition allows me to define an immigrant kinship configuration that spans beyond one household and connects seemingly unconnected units within a building. I am particularly invested in taking up the configurational approach because of its affinity for referring to social networks and social capital in analyzing kin networks. Influenced by Granovetter's (1973) insights on how the density and structure of social ties influence the flow of social capital, proponents of this approach focus on the importance of weak versus strong ties. The distinction between density of ties is important, because it has implications on how information flows between social networks, as well as how networks of solidarity and trust are formed between social actors (Granovetter 1973, 1988). The "family practices" approach alone is inadequate for my case because the literature on immigrant networks, and kinship networks broadly, have always considered how micro and macro-structural forces impact the formation and content of kinship networks. In order to acknowledge the practices and structural forces impacting kinship, I identify West African tenants as existing within a practical kinship configuration. In practice, kinship networks are influenced by structural factors such as economic disenfranchisement, cultural background, segregation and legal definitions of family.

The Immigrant Kinship Network

Carol Stack's (1974) landmark study on the strategies of survival present in The Flats, a black housing project, refuted the notion that black family life was inherently deviant. Stack

(1974) argued that economic disenfranchisement and years of co-habitation influenced residents to create dense mutual support networks which provided individuals with emotional, social and material support. As a result, she identified terms like "play mother/play sister", which were used by residents of The Flats to define close but non-blood related relationships. However, contributions to the literature on immigrant kinship networks suggest that poverty undermines these reciprocal exchange networks (Roschelle 1997, Menjívar 2000).

It follows that there are two theoretical camps present in the literature on immigrant social networks: the networks perspective and the adversity perspective. A networks perspective claims that immigrant networks "consist of dense, solidarity networks of co-ethnics" (Brown 2004: 45). Alternatively, an adversity perspective proposes that social factors (i.e. socioeconomic conditions) undermine the flow of social capital and solidarity practices

Studies on enclave solidarity (Massey et al. 1987) and job opportunities (Waldinger 1993, 1999) suggest the strength of these migrant networks are forged due to a shared cultural, ethnic or religious background. These networks provide migrants with information on housing, employment and education. Additionally, these scholars emphasize how the explicit experience of migration provides a shared experience with which to build socially supportive networks. As a new migrant's network grows, they establish social and economic ties in the receiving country, resulting in the exchange of money and information back home which engenders "chain migration" (Massey et al. 1987, 1998). However, critics of the networks model reject the assumption of ethnic solidarity and consider how poverty and economic competition pose a threat to these social ties (Roschelle 1997, Menjívar 2000, Mahler 1995). In her scholarship, Menjívar (2000) highlights how Salvadorian immigrants fleeing a war-torn country are hesitant to financially aid co-ethnic newcomers due to scarce eomic opportunity. In the face of adverse

immigration laws and economic disenfranchisement, these immigrant networks are destabilized and social capital flows halt (Brown 2004, Menjívar 2000). Though some may suggest the Salvadorian's traumatic migration does not make Menjívar's findings generalizable, other scholarship proves the adversity perspective holds weight. For example, Roschelle's (1997) account of Puerto Rican support networks revealed that the *most* supportive social ties came from middle-class and non-Hispanic whites. As Puerto Rican immigrants struggled in the face of poverty, they were unable to provide reciprocal support networks. Not only do these studies illustrate the benefits of immigrant networks in providing resources, but they also highlight how structural forces bind and constrain these network actors.

Informed by these theories, I consider how acts of solidarity, the flow of resources—or lack thereof–contribute to immigrants' experiences of urban spaces. To understand how immigrants are spatially embedded in cities, ethnic enclaves are powerful sites for observing how space, network and urban infrastructure impact immigrants' social, political and economic outcomes.

Immigrants & Urban Space

The primary analytical context in which immigrant enclaves have been examined are in the form of neighborhoods, but they have always been used to evaluate immigrants' experiences and outcomes. Originally, the Chicago school's ecological model of ethnic enclaves defined them as 'little worlds' with distinct spatial boundaries (Suttles 1968). Typically, the focus was on assessing spatial assimilation, wherein immigrants no longer live in a dense neighborhood of co-ethnics and are instead living alongside White people in the suburbs. The central question being, are ethnic enclaves good or bad for immigrants' socio-economic outcomes? Portes & Bach's (1985) fieldwork on the labor market experiences of Cuban immigrants found that immigrants in

the enclave had higher wages than those who worked in non-ethnic firms. Their groundbreaking work developed a new ethnic enclave hypothesis which identified the enclave as socially and economically advantageous. Current literature on ethnic enclaves challenges the idea of the enclave as monolithic (Krase 2002), simply a center for economic activity, or 'way station' on the way to socio-spatial assimilation. Regardless, immigrant enclave theorists maintain that these ethnic enclaves are powerful sites for immigrants to find information and solidarity, made easier with spatial concentrations (Mazumdar et al. 2000, Zhou 1992).

Not only have scholars shucked the pejorative association of ethnic enclave, they continue to redefine spatial assimilation in a way that does not center co-residence with wealthy Whites. For example, the term "ethnic community" is used to define segregated settlements that are a result of immigrants' preferences, i.e. the suburban enclave (Logan et al. 2000). Recently, scholars have become more interested in the influences that lead to the development of these enclaves. Amor's (2008) research on Arab Muslim immigrant settlements in Chicago, IL and Dearborn, Michigan identified that there are positive, neutral and negative influences driving the creation of these settlements. His findings suggest that factors like the proximity of a Mosque, community support (i.e. kinship), chain migration and fear of violence are behind these ethnic communities. Together, these religious, cultural and social forces allow Arab immigrants to develop a safe haven, even in the face of islamophobia and xenophobia. As opposed to identifying a single cause for the creation of this settlement, Amor develops a framework for grouping all of these influences. Ultimately, his scholarship suggests that multiple forces can be behind the creation of enclaves, and leaves room to explore how the dimensions of urban space fit into this model.

Place-Making, Right-Claiming & The Immigrant Enclave

A more dynamic analysis of immigrants' spatial embeddedness has incorporated the theoretical principles of urban design and the literature on immigrant enclaves. This theoretical intersection considers the importance of spatial-identity and placemaking, which addresses the historical, psychological and phenomenological significance of a place (Altman & Low 1992). A strong example of urban design's impact on place-making is Mazumdar et al. 's (2000) research on how Vietnamese Americans create a sense of place in the Little Saigon of Westminster, California.

Their research illuminates how architectural elementals, social interactions and public ritual all add to the enclave's social, symbolic and emotional significance. Distinctly Vietnamese architecture, native plants and familiar landscaping contribute to its ethnic character. For new immigrants, the enclave is a cultural bridge, minimizing the shock of migration. Little Saigon is where migrants can find non-profits, English language classes and opportunities for employment. Simply seeing and being around Vietnamese people and food gave residents the sense that they aren't a minority. But Little Saigon isn't just, "a community space with an active social life" (2000:326), it is also a setting for ceremonial ritual events. All of these elements work together to provide immigrants with a connection to the Vietnam they left, as well as center to create new place ties. Like the Hausa merchants who "Africanize" the streets of New York City (Stoller 2002) or the West African migrants who transform Paris's Garde du Nord (Kleinman 2014), socio-spatial relations have an impact on the way immigrants use urban space to establish themselves in a new country.

Though few studies are sensitive to the immigrant enclave in the form of apartment buildings, emerging French scholarship has started to analyze the role of vernacular architecture

in place-making for West African immigrants. Previously, studies only examined the urban networks of West African migrants (Timera 1996), or have only analyzed foyers, state-sponsored housing projects, as nodes for transnational networks (Daum 1998, Quiminal 1991). But in recent years, Mbodj-Pouye's (2016) research on foyers unpacks how immigrants shift from "place-making to right claiming", a process that she refers to as the "politics of belonging" (Yuval-Davis 2016). She submits that "migrants' attachment to the places where they live provides the basis for claims of belonging, claims with limited but effective bearing on the migrants' social and political place in France." (Mbodj-Pouye 2016:296). As a result, she considers how relaxed residential arrangements, housing policies and immigration laws cause friction for migrants' ability to make claims of belonging. Though Mbodj-Pouye explains the kinship obligations present in the buildings, her intent is not to acknowledge the ways in which kinship practices constitute the symbolic, phenomenological and systemic character of the housing projects. To attend to this, I utilize Low's (2009) revised theory on the co-production model of space, which incorporates the body, built environment and language's role in creating a sense of place.

Co-Production of Space, The Body & Language

Urban space theorists suggest that "all social activities are also about space", such an assertion allows us to consider the spatiality of practical kinship configurations (Gottendier & Budd 2016: 131). In my case, I explore how an immigrant kinship network engages in a socio-spatial dialectic with mixed-income housing units. As a result, I am interested in how spatial patterns, social interactions, architecture, memories and more constitute this dialectic. Previously, socio-spatial theory had not been able to fully incorporate these aspects into a coherent model of space. But Low's revised theory has found a coherent way to reconcile these

elements. Below, I outline the theoretical foundations of the co-production model of space, and Low's intervention.

Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* is cited as developing the initial theory on the social production of space. He conceives of space as engaging in a "synchronic dialectic" of the present. This temporal dialectic comprises of perceived, lived and conceived space (Lefebvre 1991, Eden 2004:36). In an effort to operationalize Lefebvre's production of space to urban contexts, Gottendier (1994) considers how the agency of structures and institutions are dependent on one another to produce the "uneven development" before us. The uneven flow of capital, prioritization of private property leads to a "a spatial effect of poverty adjacent to wealth" (Gottendier & Budd 2016:128). Accumulation and ownership are therefore experienced spatially with residential patterns. According to Lefebvre & Gottendier, stages in urban development coincide with changes to political economy. Though social production theorists indirectly reference the role of the individual in the production of space, other theorists have explicitly incorporated the role of social actions in making and re-making space. Berger & Luckman (1967) and Rodman (1992) use the term social construction of space to account for the body's role in theorizing space. The social construction of space is defined as "the actual transformation of space – through people's social exchanges, memories, images, and the daily use of the material setting – into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning" (Low 2009:24).

A co-production model of space fuses the production and construction models, allowing the political and economic forces (design, funding, global capital, labor) that shape the built environment, to encode space with intentions, aspirations and meanings that are (re)produced by

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its inhabitants (Low 2009). The material emphasis of the social production model is complemented by the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space emphasized in the social construction model. However, Low (2009) argues that the present co-production model would benefit from incorporating embodied space, language and the concept of transnational/translocal space into its analysis. And though there is an argument to be made that the apartment buildings serve as transnational spaces, I instead focus on the body and language. Pointing to anthropological fieldwork on embodied space and language, Low makes an argument for incorporating corporeal aspects into socio-spatial theory.

The concept of "embodied space" reconciles the notions of body as physical/biological entity, lived experience, as well as the center of agency to move through the world. Low uses Csordas (1994) definition of embodiment, an ''indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world'' (12). Low is not the first to consider the body's role in transforming spaces like the home or neighborhood (see Bourdieu 1977). Yet, these theorists conceptualized the body as metaphor, with no consideration of how cultural and social influences impact its operations. In Low's (2009) words, embodied space is a useful framework for observing "the creation of place through spatial orientation and movement" (28). Incorporating embodiment and the body's biological and social characteristics allows us to reconcile how "human consciousness takes on material and spatial form" (Low 2014:20, Csordas 1990). Embodied space incorporates the flow of capital, individuals' experiences, and a person's spatial patterns into the co-production model of space.

Previously, attention to how embodied space can be reinterpreted using a linguistic model had not been considered. But Duranti (1997) and Low (2000) have considered the way language, spatial orientation, and the body co-produce space. Low's (2001) fieldwork on gated communities makes a strong case for incorporating language into a co-production of space model. Within these gated communities, economic, social and political forces socially *produce* the community's-built environment. For example, resident's desire to have private developers provide local infrastructure etc. (Low 2001). While the social *construction* of space is based upon utopian visions of safety and community, where neighbors know everyone. The embodied space of the gated community is a collection of residents' daily movements as well as feelings about security measures. Low adds that residents' "terror talk" about outsiders cement this socio-spatial analysis. It is with residents' conversations that the justification for their embodied reality (living in a gated community) is fully realized.

Low's (2009) attention to the body and language in her co-production model of space provides me with a strong framework for understanding how West African immigrants experience urban space. Within these units, immigrants engage in specific spatial patterns that are not only a product of their built environment, but a result of their kinship ties, desires and needs. Where–and with whom–participants eat, sleep and celebrate with all contribute to the symbolic character of the building. Just as zoning laws, fire-safety codes and housing policies define the buildings' political and economic intentions, the language that kin and non-kin use to debate the building's uses tell me how their embodied realities differ. By bringing together the literature on immigrant kinship and space, I examine how the two constitute each other. As opposed to evaluating tenants as individual spatiotemporal units, I consider how immigrants that

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exist within a kinship configuration engage in a dialectic with their built environment. As a result, I can observe how immigrants' experiences with kinship relations and space produce one another. Whereas other studies take for granted the way that spatial concentrations of immigrant networks transform urban space, my study reconciles the literature on kinship and how urban space is experienced.

DATA & METHODS

As the center of many immigrant communities, the Northside of Chicago is a powerful location to investigate the condition of immigrant kinship networks. Specifically, the Uptown, neighborhood is known for being a cultural hub for the city's West African population. The chosen research sites for my study are three affordable housing cooperatives (820 W Belle Plaine, Gill Park Cooperative, Lakeview Towers) known for their predominantly African immigrant population. All three buildings are located within a 1.5-mile radius of one another. Additionally, there is a predominantly Nigerian mosque located within a 0.5 to 0.8-mile radius of the three buildings. This is important to note considering the role of religious communities in the formation of fictive kin.

I adopted a wide variety of recruitment efforts in order to access my target population. Though I began data collection with an informant at 820 W Belle Plaine, I also relied on flyers and in-person recruitment. With the approval of building management, I posted flyers in community areas, and developed a digital flyer/text message that could be circulated in community group chats. Along with posting flyers in the building, I placed posters in libraries, grocery stores, community centers, and places of worship. These areas were high traffic locations for my target population because they were sites of both formal and informal gatherings. I also established a familial rapport with well-connected tenants who would go on to serve as key informants. As a result, a majority of my participants were recruited through snowball sampling, allowing me to map out how a West African kinship network spanned across the three buildings. As mentioned, this collection of buildings is often to referred to as the "Nigerian embassy" because of how many Nigerians, and West Africans generally, live in the buildings. Because of this reputation, many participants had experience living in two out of the three of the building

cooperatives. When participants first moved to Chicago, they stayed with close family until they were able to find their own apartment. Sometimes this was within the same building, and other times it was in one of the other two cooperatives.

I adopted an exponential non-discriminative method of snowball sampling because I wanted as many perspectives as possible, and an understanding of how the kinship network spanned across the three buildings. The strength of this sampling method gave me access to participants with strong personal connections to one another. The major limitations to this form of sampling is that I had little control over the subjects I observed, and representativeness of the sample is threatened. These limitations are represented by the demographic composition of my participant sample.

This study draws on eighteen in-depth interviews, of which 16 were transcribed in full, with current and former tenants of the aforementioned affordable housing cooperatives. My participants' ages ranged from thirty years old to seventy-five years old. While all identified as West African, one was Burkinese, two were Ghanaian, and fifteen were Nigerian. Though the ethnic diversity of my participants does not fully represent the range of experiences of West African immigrants in Chicago, the homogeneity of my sample is a natural result of conducting research on kinship. Fifteen of the participants were cisgender women, and the remaining three participants were cisgender men. Additionally, seven of the participants identified as second-generation immigrants, while the remaining eleven participants identified as first-generation immigrants. All participants had at least some college, while the most advanced degree obtained among participants was a medical degree. Although all participants had some secondary education, many of them were obtained in their country of origin and were not recognized as an accredited degree. This study also draws on participant observation of lobbies, tenants' units and

apartment committee meetings at 820 W Belle Plaine. Attendees at the meeting included current tenants and staff from the building's management company. Observing building meetings allowed me to collect important data on how the general building community operates, and the relationships tenants have with security guards, management staff and tenants not in their immediate kinship network. IRB approval was granted in September 2019; data collection began in October of the same year and lasted through January of 2020.

Due to the nature of the research, which would discuss themes such as citizenship, immigration, housing security, and personal relationships, all participants have been assigned pseudonyms and some identifying information has been changed. My ambition is to investigate how the three buildings' environments act on this West African immigrant kinship configuration and vice-versa.

The interviews were structured by the central components of my research, which focused on the practices, arrangements and experiences that emerged from being a part of a practical kinship configuration. All interviews and observational data were transcribed and analyzed through coding for dominant themes related to kinship networks, acts of solidarity, childcare, and public space. As I completed interviews, I conducted an initial round of qualitative coding related to the dominant themes of interest. These first rounds of coding allowed me to tailor my interview questions so that participants could speak to emerging themes I wanted to elaborate on. During my secondary rounds of coding, I adopted an abductive approach (Timmermans & Tavory 2012) to analyzing my data. Adopting this methodology forced me to set aside my original assumptions, allowing for the discovery of a major theme related to the co-production space.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: Affordable Housing Cooperatives

Reflecting on the historical and economic forces behind housing cooperatives is essential to the co-production model of space. As mentioned, all three of the buildings in this study, Gill Park Cooperative, 820 Belle Plaine Coop, and Lake View Towers (a.k.a Twin Towers) are defined as such. In this section, I offer an overview of the structural organization and institutional intentions behind affordable housing cooperatives.

Under a cooperative housing model, the members own the property they live in through their ownership of shares. There are two types of housing cooperatives, affordable and market rate. The central difference being that the affordable housing cooperative is devised to promote long-term affordability. By design, affordable housing cooperatives, also known as "limited equity cooperatives", are meant to serve as vehicles for homeownership (Zelalem et. Al 2004). Unlike market cooperatives, the resale prices of shares are capped, and all buyers must not exceed certain income restrictions. These mandates are in place to ensure housing remains affordable for low to moderate income individuals. These cooperatives are subsidized by the Housing and Urban Development division (HUD), so some, if not all residents receive Section 8 Project-Based rental assistance. Of the cooperatives featured in this study, only Gill Park Cooperative operates as a 100 percent Section 8 Housing Project. While a majority of the units in Lake View Towers and 820 Belle Plaine Coop are Section 8, a small portion are dedicated to moderate income individuals. It follows that the intent of these housing cooperatives is to give members hope of home ownership, and that "stable and mixed-income neighborhoods can become more of a reality." (Zelalem et al. 2004: 2).

All cooperatives have a board of directors that are made up of current residents; board members must be elected into office by the cooperative membership. Typically, cooperatives

work alongside an outside property management firm that takes care of daily management. Currently, all three cooperatives have a board of directors made up of residents with reserved spots for leadership of property management company.

Historically, federal, state and local governments have been instrumental in providing cooperatives with the resources to survive. In the late 80s and 90s, many housing cooperative owners considered selling their buildings off to private investors. In response, the federal government implemented the Emergency Low Income Preservation and Homeownership Act (ELIPHA) of 1987 and the Low-Income Housing Preservation and Resident Homeownership Act (LIHPHRA) of 1990 (Gary 2000). In an effort to save their affordable housing cooperative, dedicated groups of residents utilized provisions within the LIHPHRA act. LIHPHRA gave residents associations the technical assistance and ability to apply for federal loans to purchase buildings.

During the 90s and early 2000s, all three buildings transitioned into resident-owned affordable housing cooperatives. The successful conversion of these buildings, spearheaded by residents, are central to the narratives of these apartment buildings. Often times, resident apartment boards frame this triumph as an example of tenants' ability to work together against a common threat and preserve their community. For example, the Lakeview Towers Residents Association sees this success as a major turning point for the housing cooperative to correct poor management by the owner, deferred maintenance, and security issues. Under this model, residents bare real responsibility and control over the buildings they live in, setting intentions and standards for the buildings' uses.

RESULTS

The results of this study are separated into specific sub-sections to examine how a West African kinship configuration engage in a socio-spatial dialectic with the buildings they reside in. First, I analyze how the built environment plays a role in facilitating and reinforcing kinship ties for West African immigrants. Next, I illuminate how movement throughout the building, motivated by family practices, give the apartment buildings a sense of familial copresence. Then, I examine how the new security protocols and the discourse around building safety from those outside the kinship network threaten the feeling of familial copresence. This is followed by an examination of how current tenants sometimes feel spatially and socially entrapped by their kinship configuration, shaping the way they view the building.

Built Environment, Public Space & Kinship Connections

Unlike the majority of affordable housing cooperatives located on the South and West sides, 820 Belle Plaine, Gill Park and Lake View Towers are walking distance from Lake Michigan. In contrast to the two and three brick flats that dot Chicago's Uptown neighborhood, each building is at least twenty stories tall. But there is no building more distinctive than Lake View Towers. Its 500 units are divided into two identical buildings, giving it its nickname "Twin Towers". Aside from a glass-protected security desk and two office chairs, there is nothing particularly unique about the lobby of the Twin Towers. But by 6:00 PM, when residents start returning from work and school, the lobby comes alive. More than just a fixture of the apartment's architecture, it is an arena ripe in potential for social interaction. While waiting for my participant, I observed tenants crack jokes with security personnel or reconnect with tenants that just returned from vacation. I also saw young children play with the automatic doors while their parents finished catching up with one another. The limited number of elevators and

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connecting hallways in Lake View towers make areas like the lobby important for social connections.

Perhaps it is not surprising that public spaces in the building allow for impromptu social contact, but these publics spaces played an integral role in facilitating new kinship ties. Throughout my data collection, respondents explained how informal contact that occurred in elevators, hallways and community rooms contributed to their budding relationships. Along with serving their functional purposes, these spaces facilitated and reinforced new relationships. In practice, they play an active role in expanding tenants' socio-emotional kinship networks.

As Moyin, a 53-year old Nigerian immigrant who lived in the Twin Towers for over ten years, shared with me, "Some people, you've met them in the elevator, some people you live on the same floor, and then you connect with them." But even if tenants weren't formally introduced to one another, just the sight of other West Africans going about their life made respondents feel safer. Moyin followed up with me, "You will run into Nigerians, so you feel comfortable." Often times, it was the assumption of a shared cultural background that would lead two tenants to form a connection in the building.

Though respondents did not emphasize the importance of such places, shared spaces in the building were regularly mentioned as sites for new kinship connections.

One respondent, Seyi, a 47-year old Nigerian woman who immigrated to the United States in the late 80s, explained how a space in 820 W Belle Plaine facilitated a new kin relation. She shared, "We had a common laundromat. So, the first friend that I actually made on my own without my Auntie's friends—my own personal friend. I met her on a Sunday morning in the laundromat and we were just talking. She just had a baby. She saw I was pregnant, and we

became friends." In her description of how she made new friends, Seyi details how the common space of the in-building laundromat became a place to casually meet people and make what she describes as her *own* friend. To this day, Seyi and her friend from the laundry room are still extremely close. In this way, Seyi is able to start building her own network without mediation from her aunt. Participants described how they would strike up conversation with other West African tenants that they sensed were new to the building, in the hope of being a familiar face for the newcomer. While spaces like lobbies, elevators were places of unintentional contact, when residents convened in community rooms it was intended to bring people in the building together.

Pemi, a current resident of Gill Park Coop, explained how the community rooms allowed for people to host celebrations that led to inter-cultural communication and contact. She explained, "If it was somebody's son's birthday party, or maybe during Christmas, Thanksgiving, Ileya [Eid al-Adha], Ramadan festival, all those things make us get together, we invite other people in the building, and you meet that way." Normally, when someone decided to host a small celebration in the community room it was an unspoken rule that friends of friends were always invited. As Pemi mentioned, children's birthdays were one of the most common uses of the community rooms. Typically, this meant that West African immigrants who lived at the nearby cooperatives were invited to celebrate. Birthday parties were not exclusive to tenants that had children, but they were important places for young mothers and new immigrants to meet others raising children in the building. Though building developers and architects anticipated the need for a multi-purpose room, they did not intend for these spaces to play a role in creating kinship ties. Even though most celebrations occurred in these common areas, at no time did hallways and elevators play a more integral role than on Halloween.

Beatrice, a 30-year old woman who grew up and still lives in the Twin Towers, reminisced about what is was like to celebrate Halloween in a 500-unit building. She shared with me, "it used to be we would see people's costumes and you're shouting at each other in the hallway….and yeah...it was just a family." In this way, places like hallways and elevators gave way to intra-building communication and impromptu contact. For Beatrice, running into other children trick-or-treating didn't necessarily help her forge kinship ties, but it did reinforce the connections that she already had in the building. As a young child, a day like Halloween made her feel especially connected to those in her building, reminding her that they were more than neighbors, they were *family*. Because of the building's role in strengthening and generating kin relations, participants regularly talked about the building having a familial character. However, simply seeing other West Africans is not enough for the building to have a sense of family. Once impromptu run-ins lead to budding relationships, it was through daily acts of solidarity that the buildings generated a familial co-presence.

Family Practices & Familial Co-Presence

Living in such close proximity to other West Africans meant that participants were constantly engaging in family practices with one another. The densely packed high-rises meant that tenants were only a few floors—or simply steps—away from the people that they relied on the most. Taking care of children, sharing a meal or helping one another run small errands were all part of the daily rhythms of the building. Beyond the occasional run-in at the lobby, tenants were intentional about the ways they interacted with one another. Gradually, solidarity practices built up a sense of kinship between two actors, subtly imbuing the building with a sense that tenants were always "with" family.

Saidi, a 52-year old Nigerian woman who lived in Belle Plaine, explained how the practice of sharing food, clothes and feeding supplies were embedded in her everyday practices. She remarked, "If I see stuff on sale, or if I'm going to the fish market or Old Market or whatever, I just tell people, 'I'm going there today would you guys be interested in anything from there?'" Living in the building meant that Saidi was in the habit of considering the needs of her kin within the building. Often times, when participants offered to help with groceries, they were referencing specific foods or spices that could only be found at African & Caribbean supermarkets. In a pinch, it was helpful to have so many people from the same cultural background living together. As Dayo, a 35-year old Burkinese immigrant living in the Belle Plaine coop explained, "Sometimes you come back from the grocery store and you forget to buy something. Instead of you having to go out again, I can just call one of them and say, 'Do you have this at home?'" Albeit simple acts, these daily practices reinforced the relationships that tenants had with one another. Through these solidarity practices, kin within the building were simultaneously cementing relationships and developing a sense of place where people took care of one another.

Even though most caretaking practices occurred between same ethnic groups, there was the occasional inter-racial caretaking scenario. Sola, a 57-year old Nigerian woman, explained the impact this had on her and her kids:

> When my kids were little, we had a Jewish lady [Mrs. Rebecca] in the compound. She was retired and she was taking care of her grandson Jason all the time. If she's home, I would take the kids and give them to her. In fact, those were the first people my kids thought were their grandparents.

Not only did Sola's neighbor provide much needed childcare, but her kids were able to identify grandparent figures that lived with them in the U.S. One again, the proximity dimension of space allows for tenants to help one another at the drop of a hat. Additionally, Mrs. Rebecca's

current role as a grandmother gave Sola the security to leave her kids with her and, later on, "adopt" Mrs. Rebecca and her family. This familial connection proved life-saving, as Sola shared, "We are still like family. When Ore had a crisis at one time, I called her son's wife and she went to my apartment to get Ore and then she took her to the hospital." Many of the participants had stories like these, where kin in the building were able to help in a moment of crisis. Moyin, a Nigerian immigrant who moved to the U.S. in the late 80s, expressed a similar sentiment when she detailed how helpful it was to have kin in the building that were concerned with her well-being:

> When I was pregnant with Jumo, I got really sick. I mean very, very sick. And you know I was just alone in my apartment, my family is back in Nigeria, my husband is at work. So, I was just alone, and then my friend [Ewa] had not heard from me for some time. So, she just came upstairs to check on me because she lived down [stairs]. You know, just like that she knocked on the door, and I opened the door and she saw me. She's like, 'Oh my goodness', because I was like a scarecrow. Then she took me down you know, tried to feed me, tried to take care of me, that kind of thing, you know?

For Moyin, this moment was a major turning point in her relationship with Ewa. It gave her a sense of security that people were looking out for her, especially because she was so far away from the only family she had known. As immigrants, the development of fictive kin is not simply a product of the migration experience, but at times a necessary strategy of survival. Living in such densely packed high-rises meant that family practices were both a cause and effect of spatial proximity.

It followed that sharing meals with others in the building was commonplace. Participants reflected how natural it was to have impromptu dinner guests or to pass around the same Tupperware filled with rice and stew. Oyinda, a second-generation Nigerian immigrant who grew up in the Twin Towers her entire life, reflected on how the sharing of meals was ingrained into daily life. She told me, "if my grandmother cooked, she cooked enough for our family,

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mom, my aunties, her close friends, the kids, just everyone." In this way, meals weren't prepared for a nuclear family unit, but it was implied that others in the building were always welcome to eat as well. Since food and groceries were meant to be shared, tenants felt comfortable going to one another's units when they were in need. Lara, a second-generation Nigerian woman who grew up in the Twin Towers, explained what it was like to live in a building where people were used to taking care of one another. She told me, "One good thing I remember is that you're always able to go from floor to floor because you knew someone on that floor. Like if you're hungry you can go to so and so's mom's house." Lara's comment showcases how daily mobility within the building is motivated by something as simple as wanting to have a meal with others. As a result, family practices can be understood as the "spatial dimension of a pattern of attachment" to kin in the building (Cosacov 2019).

And in order to make moving between units easier, kin in the building were used to keeping doors unlocked so anyone could visit if they needed to. Beatrice shared with me, "I remember just being able to go into their house and usually the doors will be open and there's just the kind of freedom that we all kind of have. It was not like anyone really locked their doors…I remember my auntie or my mom saying, 'leave the door open.'" Beatrice's account of being able to move freely throughout the building, as well as her home's literal open-door policy, meant that her home was not one unit, but encompassed the entire building. For immigrants living in the cooperatives, the closeness and connection allowed for a fluid living arrangement not restricted by a unit's square footage.

While conducting observations at 820 Belle Plaine Coop, I observed in real time how this freedom of movement also gave tenants a knowledge of their space. Throughout the day, I watched my informant Dayo's friends and children from the building come and go from her

apartment. Sometimes they stopped by for a cup of tea, to drop off their kid, or to simply hang out with Dayo. Though these visits were brief, I saw the same people come and go from her unit. No one visited more often than Dayo's close friend/"sister" Fade, another Burkinese immigrant who lived in 820 Belle Plaine. From the way she cooked meals for herself in Dayo's kitchen or lounged on her futon, it was clear Fade "knew" Dayo's apartment, and treated it as an extension of her own home. However, no group of people had a greater command or knowledge of 820 Belle Plaine than the children who lived there. Children were the building's default couriers, constantly moving from unit-to-unit. When they came to Dayo's apartment it was often to return an item their mother borrowed or spend time playing with Dayo's daughter Danielle. Their constant movement not only gave them a knowledge of their built environment but reinforced the relationships they had with kin in the building. As a result, the building gives those who are part of the kinship network a unique sense of security and reassurance. Ruki, a 31-year old Ghanaian woman who also grew up in 820 W Belle Plaine, reflected on what this was like. She told me, "You always have someone to play with, or study with. As a child, when you go to school down the street and all your cousins from the building go too, it's like you're never alone." It is important to note the flexibility with which Ruki used the term cousins. For Ruki, her "cousins" were simply other children in the building that she was used to playing and studying with. But most importantly, having so many cousins in the building gave her a sense of comfort. Other participants agreed that having family in the building meant that it was never isolating. As Beatrice explained to me, "We were always over at each other's places. You would never necessarily be home alone because you can always go to someone's house and wait for your parents. If you're home alone it's because your parents wanted, you to be home alone." In this quote, Beatrice points to how the freedom to move through different units and be with family

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meant that even when she was literally alone in the building she never experienced being figuratively alone. More importantly, this strong feeling of family meant that tenants could go to each other's' units just to spend time with one another. As Kenyo, a 52-year old Ghanaian woman living in the Gill Park Coop explained to me, "You can just go to someone's apartment and just be there. You don't have to have a real reason."

What all of my participants are highlighting is that being a part of a building kinship network fills the space with a *potential* for movement and family-like interaction throughout the building. For tenants, it is simply the knowledge that they could be with kin if they wanted to, in a space they know, that brings them comfort. In my respondent Lara's words, "you aren't really in it alone. Like you always have somewhere to go." Lara aptly captures this ever-present family feel. Not being "in it alone" references how tenants could rely on one another for things like childcare, meals and other family practices. This feeling of security—that they can always go to a familiar face/space—is what constitutes this familial co-presence.

Adverse Effects of Familial Copresence

A natural trade off of living in a building where family are either literally or figuratively present is that tenants didn't have a space to themselves. If people from the building weren't stopping by then it was relatives who were staying for extended periods of time. Some tenants were even kind enough to open their homes to complete strangers, knowing that the building community would give them a much-needed support network. As a result, cohabitation was also a pathway for strangers to become kin.

Lara, a second-generation Nigerian woman, was very familiar with alternative living arrangements. Her parents were known for taking in people who just immigrated from Nigeria. She shared with me:

> It'll be like one bedroom with a whole bunch of us. Let's say in this two-bedroom apartment. I remember in the earlier days, it was just my family members, but later days, different people will come, you know, and you just open your door for them. You don't ask them for anything, and they just contribute what they can so they get on their feet and they move on.

Often times, "moving on" simply meant getting a unit within the same building or in one of the cooperatives located nearby. But the buildings' reputation as an affordable housing cooperative meant that there was a months-long waiting list. As a result, children in the building were used to constantly mutating sleeping arrangements. Eniola, another second-generation Nigerian immigrant, explained how a revolving door of relatives and strangers meant that a space of her own often evaded her. She described her living situation as follows:

> It was me, my parents, and I have five older sisters. So, we're all in this three-bedroom [apartment] until people started moving out. My household was the household where everybody could come and stay in. I practically lived and slept in a living room on the floor for so many years. I think I finally moved into my own room like my first year of high school, because that's when people really started like officially like moving out. We always had like a full house, whether you were blood related or not.

Sometimes, it just *felt* like there was family around, but more often than not, participants were literally always with family. Though all of my participants were used to a familial copresence, respondents who were second-generation immigrants were the ones to mention the adverse effects of this atmosphere. I probed other participants to talk about more of the negative parts to feeling like you can "never be alone." Beatrice expressed how cohabitation practices conflicted with her desires for solitude. She told me, "I remember I used to get so annoyed, like

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damn, like, you know, we got to open our doors again? The days when I could just be by myself in an apartment, I would just be grateful but, you know, those were rare days." Beatrice was not alone, others felt that the practice of cohabitation infringed on their ability to have a more "normal" life. The first time Eniola was confronted with the fact that her living situation was "atypical" was at school. She explained to me, "When I was at school and I compared my living situation to my friends I wanted that like simple life. So, at the beginning, when I was younger, it was irritable…but after a while, you get used to having a full house, so something smaller seems abnormal." Comparing herself to friends at school, Eniola was ashamed that her apartment was inhabited by people beyond her nuclear family. In her mind, the "simple life" was one where spatial boundaries in the home were more clear, and each person had a space and bed of their own. But the nature of existing within the building's kinship network meant that spatial boundaries were blurred, and sometimes they didn't exist at all.
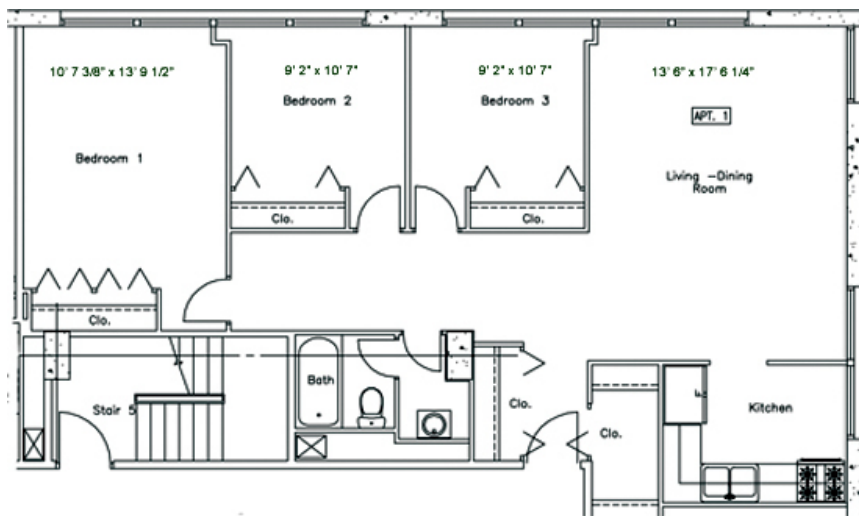
Figure 1. Three-Bedroom One-Bath Lake View Towers floor plan (Lake View Towers Residents Association Inc.)

I asked Eniola if there were ever moments or places that she could escape to and be alone. She replied, "I wouldn't say necessarily like alone, but just be in a smaller group. I had

like two places where I could escape to. Usually, I could just go down to my friend's house that lived a few floors lower and just stay the night." Though Eniola might not have had a room of her own until high school, her "home" was never restricted to her unit's square footage. In this instance, the building's familial copresence was still able to grant her moments of solace, albeit fleeting.

However, the greatest drawback from this familial atmosphere was the feeling of always being "watched". Tosin, a second-generation Nigerian man who grew up in Gill Park Coop, felt that in a family building rarely anything went unreported, "You could just never do anything without false accusations or misinterpretations of things. People feel that they have a right to you or your business, instead of focusing on their own child and what their own child is doing." The desire for more personal privacy was echoed by participants that had spent their early years in a building that felt more like one large family unit. As soon as participants neared the radius where the three buildings were located, anything was fair game. Beatrice explained to me, "Growing up there like everybody else's parents was literally my parents. Like, we were so afraid to do things and get in trouble because we knew about the aunties and uncles that lived in the neighborhood and would spy on us and call us out."

Naturally, the parents in the building thought they were just looking out for their kids, as opposed to being intrusive. Moyin, a mother of three, explained that adults in the building often referred to friends' kids as "omo mi", which means "my child" in Yoruba. These terms of endearment were not hollow, as she shared with me, "They will take that responsibility. They will not be like 'Oh, I don't know this child' but 'Oh, this is Moyin's child, it's my child. I'm responsible for her as well, you know." But what gave many parents security that people in the building were looking out for their children, often caused more trouble for kids trouble. Once

adults in the building started talking, it wasn't long until a misinterpreted recollection of events

go to your real parents. Lara told me about one instance of a very misinterpreted event, "Or like

for instance, there's a situation with my sister. People would come to my mom and be like 'oh

we thought your daughter was in a gang because she's hanging out with these people.' She

wasn't in a gang. She just had a lot of African American friends." Unfortunately, sometimes this

familial copresence meant that the apartments had eyes of their own, quietly looking out for all

its children, even when an adult wasn't in sight.

However, not everyone in the building experiences the familial co-presence that my

participants identify. In fact, those not part of the building kinship network often police the

behavior and practices that enable this feeling of connectedness.

Threats to Familial Copresence

Within recent years, 820 W Belle Plaine, Gill Park Cooperative and Lake View Towers

have all made drastic changes to improve building amenities and security protocols. Leading the

charge in implementing these changes are the cooperatives' board of directors. Many participants

referenced the power of the apartment board to establish protocols that ultimately change the

building's culture. Perhaps as anticipated, these changes can threaten the everyday practices that

imbue these buildings with a sense of family.

Recently, Lake View Towers implemented a variety of security measures meant to keep

its members safe. Of the three cooperatives in this study, Lake View had the strictest rules for

visitors. Upon entering, guests must present a valid photo I.D. and provide the name and

apartment number of the person they want to visit. Then, security personnel call up to the tenant

and confirms that they are expecting a guest. On the surface, Lake View Towers has improved

building safety, but Beatrice suggests that something more important has been lost.

As Beatrice shared, Halloween was one of the few Holidays that everyone in the building celebrated. But in recent years, Lake View Towers changed the rules about Halloween and children aren't encouraged to go from door-to-door. Beatrice shared the following, "when they stopped doing that and the kids just go downstairs and get candy it just wasn't same." Previously, Halloween allowed Beatrice to feel more connected to the building, but this minor change has altered the familial atmosphere she had come to rely on.

In order to get a better understanding of how the board of directors makes decisions, I observed apartment board meetings at 820 W Belle Plaine. Currently, Belle Plaine Cooperative is undergoing major building renovations, most notably to their lobby and security room. Though a large majority of the meetings were spent collecting feedback on the proposed renovations, they were powerful sites to observe how those outside of the building's kinship configuration talk about common kinship practices.

Most of the meeting attendees were approaching retirement age and were between 50 to 75 years of age. It was predominantly Black women at the meeting, two Black men and two White men. As tenants spoke to the board about their concerns, discussions about security measures and the use of public space were the most frequently discussed. Mr. Osineye is a Nigerian man in his mid-seventies and serves as the Board's President. As if anticipating future disagreements, he started the meeting with an appeal, "let's work together for the public good." Throughout the meeting, Mr.Osineye continued to make these appeals for collaboration, especially when tenants went head-to-head about building amenities or practices.

One tenant, Steven, an older White man who has lived in Belle Plaine for over twenty years, expressed his frustration with how lax building security is toward people who hang around the building but are not official residents. In the meeting he shared the following:

> There are people who are not living here, and they don't have a [key] fob. A lot of people are not on the lease. People are using the apartment and subletting. And I know they know [points to woman on board]. I know they know because people on the board know about it. These are the same people, it's a regular group of people.

Steve's accusation was directed to a Somalian woman serving on the board. His comment points to the tension present between those that are part of the building's kinship configuration and those who are not. He also assigns blame, suggesting that there is a "certain group" that is more culpable for eroding the building's security measures. After his comment, Mr. Osineye attempted to keep the peace and prevent people from assigning blame to one person or group.

Throughout the meeting, Steven, and another tenant Sheila, commented on how different security measures needed to be taken up in order to protect current residents. She told the board, "I went to my friend's building and everyone needs to bring an ID. Why can't that just happen here? If someone doesn't want to give their ID that's a problem. People know that they can get into 820 W Belle Plaine without an ID." These comments were all made in reference to co-habitation practices that are common in the building. Relaxed living arrangements means that people are not always officially recorded on the lease.

Another apartment board member, Renée, supported their claims and shared her annoyance with cohabitation habits. Since building security has become stricter, tenants are finding new ways to unofficially pass off their units. She explained to us, "This resident came to me with a key fob and asked me to turn it on and I checked the system and I told him, 'this fob isn't yours, this person doesn't live here anymore' I asked him why he had this fob and he

wouldn't answer me." Not only do Steve, Sheila and Renée's security recommendations put undocumented tenants at risk, but it threatens the solidarity practices which contribute to the kinship configuration's feelings of "family". Cohabitation is not simply breaking the rules for the sake of breaking them, they are an important way for new immigrants to integrate themselves into a new place. In this way, being outside of the building kinship network obfuscates the ways in which West African immigrants use urban infrastructure to create pathways for social and economic stability.

Comments about "certain groups" or "regular group of people" were a thinly veiled reference to immigrant kin that engaged in the aforementioned solidarity/kinship practices. Sheila expressed her frustration with another common practice:

> People need to keep their doors closed. I've visited people at 8, 9 and people just leave their doors open. It's only become an issue with certain groups. Certain people leave doors open and I can smell their food, hear their conversations. We should institute a fine for people that leave their doors open for an extended period of time, especially at night.

These open-door policies are an integral feature for the building's kinship configurations, as they allow for fluid spatial patterns while kin share meals, drop off kids or simply *be* together.

In contrast, kin in the building always returned to the claim that Belle Plaine has always been a family building, and that board members should take the appropriate steps to keep all its families safe. For example, Teni, a 48-year old Nigerian woman, came to the meeting to make her case about implementing a no smoking rule. She told the board, "I came here many times and told you my neighbor smoked. What you do in a multi-family building, you know we share vents, you're impacting others health." Teni's frustrations are emblematic of the struggle that comes with living in such close proximity to so many different people. Unfortunately, board membership maintained that there was little they could do about controlling a single tenant's

smoking habits. But throughout the meeting, Teni not only cited the effects on her health but of that of her children and neighbors. She said, "right now, it's very bad. My neighbor, 307, has cancer. The lady in 306 is the one who smokes…I have children growing up here, it's our health, it's serious." In this way, we see how kin advocate on behalf of one another, especially when they cannot be present. By being part of the building's kinship network, Teni shows a greater concern for those that she considers family in the building.

However, I do not want to suggest that tenants who are not part of the kinship network do not care at all for the well-being of their neighbors. The language that different tenants use to talk about the building points to which of the two embodied realities they are trying to protect. For Steven and Sheila, the building only feels safe when they know that everyone in the building is legally allowed to be there. The way they believe the building should be used aligns more closely with the institutional intentions of affordable housing cooperatives. But for those who are part of a building kinship configuration, these rules threaten kinship practices and therefore the familial atmosphere.

Outgrowing Familial Copresence

Even though West African immigrants benefit greatly from being a part of a building kinship configuration, they are not immune to the structural shortcomings of tight-knit networks. Tenants outgrowing the building kinship network—and realizing its limitations–often coincided with moving out of the cooperative.

While the building provides an essential network for financial, emotional and educational support, its members struggle with accessing *new* information that could promote social and

economic mobility. As daily acts of solidarity encode the building with a familial feel, tenants feel that the network, and to an extent the building, holds them back. However, this is not to discredit the buildings' role in helping immigrants navigate their new lives. Family in the building were typically more knowledgeable about information related to childcare and cooking. Seyi, a 47-year old Nigerian woman who lived in 820 W Belle Plaine for ten years, described how some of information she received from those in the building was very beneficial:

> Even when I became pregnant, the best doctor to go to, the best hospitals around, where to get prenatal care, where to get prenatal milk. I remember I had my first baby and I was away from home, normally you have your mom to help you, but I was so far away. I don't know how to take care of a baby but people in the building had, and they taught me how to feed my baby.

Like many respondents, Seyi moved to the United States to meet her husband and start a family. As a young mother and new immigrant, Seyi was eligible for subsidized housing and other welfare programs. The building's role as an affordable housing cooperative meant that other individuals in her network were seeking the same programs. She shared with me, "If you are low income, all the low-income needs were there. You have people who went through the same thing you went through. They will tell you, oh go apply for Section 8, go apply for daycare action. Everybody has gone through that so they will tell you."

Participants regularly mentioned how important Daycare Action, a program that provides reduced cost daycare vouchers, was to them while they were raising young children in the building. As Seyi illuminated, it was one of the pieces of information that regularly circulated throughout the network, notably because many tenants were new mothers. In this respect, the homogeneous demographic of the building was valuable, but this was not always the case. After moving out of the Twin Towers, Biola, a 52-year old Nigerian woman, remarked how rare it was

for her to find out about welfare resources that were not directly related to childcare. Biola articulated, "Nobody told me about food stamps and by the time I found out I was making too much. I guess it was just the people I was hanging out with at the time. Finding WIC was easy". WIC, a supplemental food assistance program for Women, Infants and Children, was often the first thing new mothers were told to apply for. Though participants were grateful to have so many people looking out for them, as their needs changed, so did their view of the building. When they were looking to start a different career or purchase a home, the building network proved less helpful. Seyi, who left the building over fifteen years ago, shared the following with me, "You will never hear about, especially things that were geared towards more affluence…like schools, or master's degrees. Everything just goes round and round, information just goes round and round. Cause the people there—that's not their focus at the time." The "focus" that she references are the specific issues and preoccupations that new immigrants have after migrating. In fact, some participants made a conscious effort to stay in the building to offset the challenges that come with migration. Wùmi, a 56-year old Nigerian woman, eventually left the building for more space, shared with me, "I told myself, I'm never going to leave this building as long as I'm still in the child-bearing stage in life." But once Wùmi's family stopped growing, she realized that she didn't need the community in the same way anymore.

For other participants, it was until they expanded their network beyond the building that they realized how often incorrect or misinterpreted advice circulated. Beatrice, a current resident of Twin Towers, reflected on this:

> People would just pass on information that just didn't make sense. I remember in those days, they'll be like, Oh, don't do this or don't work here or the government will arrest you, you know? Then I found my church community and a lot of my church members come from the building *and* come from the neighborhood, I got more valid information and more hopeful information.

Prior to joining her church community, Beatrice explained how she determined the reliability of information, "It was information that didn't always move you forward. But you think, they've been here longer, or she said it happened to her sister." Many other participants talked about "moving on" or "moving forward". If someone was moving on it meant that they would be starting their lives outside of the building. No other portion of my participants were more adamant about moving on than second-generation immigrants. After growing up in the building they quite literally out-grew the familial supervision.

Eniola, who finally moved out of the building at 30-years old, felt as though the building was holding her back. She confided in me, "It was my time to go. When I felt that it was like bondage living there, I just knew I needed to be the one who breaks that cycle. I wanted to move forward." For Eniola, the insularity and family like feeling of the building became too overwhelming. As opposed to helping her move on, she felt that she couldn't imagine life outside of the building and its community. She talked about how the cycle of overlapping housing served as a warning, "It's just a cycle. The mom and dad have an apartment, and then you have the kids and they get an apartment and now the grandkids have one." For new immigrants, semi-permanent cohabitation was an important way for them to start their new life in the U.S. Yet, second-generation immigrants felt that this family practice was a crutch. As a result, these participants expressed feeling socially and spatially entrapped by the building community. Lara, who was one of the first people in her family to leave, felt an immense amount of freedom once she left. She explained to me:

> When I made that move it kind of like opened up other people's eyes, like some of them even moved, but then they came back. And with me, I just didn't want to be that, like I just did not want to be that person. Once I left, I felt like I can never come back. I just

feel like it's just a form of stagnation. I was just adamant about not returning back. It was too safe.

Other participants continued to talk about how the safety and familial feel of the apartment buildings nearly prevented them from taking risks and moving forward. Abisola, another second-generation Nigerian immigrant, shared with me, "I almost didn't take this job because I was afraid to leave [the building]. But then I was like, this job will be enough for me to move into a much bigger space." Abisola's hesitation to leave showcases how a connection to a place is heavily influenced by the experiences and relationships we have in that space.

In some way or another, all of the participants reckoned with how the daily practices and familial atmosphere of the building could both help and hinder their goals of moving on. As time passed, and their needs evolved past needing help with children or relying on their parents, their attachment to the building changed.

POLICY RECCOMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Chicago-based non-profits should collaborate with affordable housing cooperatives to expand access and information to resources for West African immigrants.

      The North side of Chicago remains a home to many different ethnic groups, and West African immigrants represent a significant portion of this population. And for so many of Chicago's West African immigrants, these housing cooperatives are a central component of their migration experience. In many ways, the building community does the work that we might expect a non-profit to perform (i.e. childcare, employment help, health information, etc.). Currently, West African immigrants rely heavily on individuals that identify as community informants (see Appendix A), trusted individuals that bring attention to resources in the aforementioned areas. However, more can be done to give immigrants living in these buildings the proper resources to establish themselves in a new country. Though affordable housing cooperatives have a history of working with community-based non-profits, these organizations typically do not have a mission to directly serve immigrants. But within these affordable housing cooperatives, the ethnic enclave is collapsed into the form of a building, making it a perfect site for advocacy and non-profit groups to advertise targeted resources. For tenants in these buildings, information on the citizenship process and English language classes are just as valuable to them as having access to Women Infant & Children (WIC) and part-time master's programs. And considering how rapidly immigration policy changes, these buildings give non-profits and advocacy groups a chance to provide reliable and up-to-date information to its target population. Simply placing flyers about citizenship classes or free clinics in the neighborhood can play an immense role in guiding those who just arrive. If non-profits designated a liaison to

the Gill Park, 820 Belle Plaine and Lake View Towers cooperatives, they could become a trusted source of help for West African immigrants.

> **Recommendation 1.A**. Non-profit leaders and advocates should keep in mind that there is a cycle of needs for immigrants.

Along with the above recommendation, policymakers and advocates must be aware of how the immediate needs of immigrants change over time. When West African immigrants first come to the U.S., the building is an imperative resource for them to establish themselves. For young mothers especially, they provide valuable information about maternal health, daycare services and how to navigate the Chicago Public School system. However, as tenants' children grow up and their family expands, their financial needs begin to change. Because tenants exist in such a tight knit network, they often feel that their network, and therefore the building itself, isn't serving them the way it used to. Some first-generation immigrants in particular struggle with wanting to stay close to the community and not being able to afford a home in the neighborhood. In response, advocacy groups and affordable housing cooperatives could do more to provide current tenants on how to purchase a home while navigating the current market. Not only would this actually deliver on the stated goals of affordable housing cooperatives, but it would also open up units in the building for those who would better benefit from this kinship network.

Recommendation 2: Affordable housing cooperatives should continue making improvements to building architecture, amenities and rules while keeping the building community in mind.

Urban designers and architects maintain that the way individual engage with their built environment has real implications for their experiences and social outcomes. In this study, we observe the way that West African immigrants use this building to establish fictive kin, and therefore imbue the buildings they live in with a sense of family and connectedness. But

considering that they are not the only people that inhabit this building, more can be done to strike

a balance between the tenants' needs. For some in the apartment, security protocols and common

behaviors contribute to whether or not they feel safe in their home.

In an effort to find this balance, I suggest that cooperative leaders pay more attention to

the way that its resident uses the building–not in an effort to police them–but to understand how

space impacts tenants. Clearly, lobbies, elevators and community rooms don't just serve their

functional purposes, they play an integral role in tenants' ability to connect with one another. So,

when making improvements to these areas, cooperatives should work with architects that take a

human-centered approach to design. By taking these insights to heart, cooperatives boards can

find a way to satisfy the diverse building communities that they serve.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, I have explored how West African immigrants experience urban space as individuals who are part of a building kinship configuration. Drawing on the literature of kinship networks, ethnic enclaves and the co-production of space, I argued that West African immigrants not only engage in a socio-spatial dialectic with their built environment but a kinship-spatial dialectic. It is through my participants' unique relation to other tenants in the cooperative that a building of more than two-hundred units can be inscribed with feelings of family, security and solidarity. Not only does this study confirm the role of space in the production of kinship ties, but it evaluates how spatial patterns motivated by kinship relations slowly inscribes a space with meanings and attachments. Once acquaintances crossed the barrier from friend to *family*, the lines between tenants' units started to blur. In turn, there was a constant familial copresence, where tenants never felt they were truly alone in the daily struggles that constitute the migration experience. While this feeling of solidarity contributes to tenants' fluidity of movement and knowledge of the space, for those who grew up in the buildings, sometimes its familial feel can be just as binding as it is freeing.

Shaped by their actions, movement and language, immigrants who are part of the building kinship configuration both deliver on and go against the institutional intentions of affordable housing cooperatives. On one hand, family practices such as cohabitation makes non-kin cooperative members feel unsafe in the building. Yet, these acts of solidarity establish and fortify relationships within the building, motivating tenants to advocate on behalf of their fellow cooperative members. Ultimately, the building kinship network provides immigrants with a pathway to social and economic stability, evidenced by how they have outgrown the building network.

APPENDIX A

While conducting research, I observed that certain participants we key to bringing new information and resources to the attention of other West Africans immigrants. I thought of these respondents as "community informants". Though the building kinship network was insular, immigrants trusted these informants to navigate unchartered waters.

I identify Sola, a 57-year old second-generation Nigerian immigrant, as a community informant. Growing up in Chicago meant that she was more familiar with the city and had a greater insight on how to navigate its resources. As a community informant, she looked *outside* of her immediate network in order to discover and then disseminate new opportunities. Sola described this phenomenon when she found out about a charter school called Passages, "I found out about Passages through one of those parenting magazines. It was a brand-new school at the time, and we needed more people. I would recruit people because I was the President of the school back then, you know, of the parents." Sola's awareness of other places to gather useful information allowed her to find out about a new opportunity, and then continue to grow the school's size by spreading the information to her networks. Because Sola is positioned as a trusted source for information, other Nigerian immigrants enrolled in the school. She told me:

> I had a girlfriend whose son was a few months shy from being able to start kindergarten. I said to the lady, "Can I bring my girlfriend's son? He is just going to be six or five or whatever." I know his birthdays past whatever you need. She's like, we can test him, and if he does, well, we'll just put him in there.

Beyond schooling and childcare, some individuals in the building were known for having reliable information, especially in regard to healthcare. Another community informant was Moyin, a 53-year old doctor who lived in the Twin Towers. Because she was studying as a doctor, people in the building came to her for medical advice, "When I say I work at County

Hospital they ask medical questions like, somebody's sick what do I do, you know, how to navigate the hospital or you physically go with them and get them registered and get the care they need." Moyin's unique positionality within her network meant that she had access to information that was otherwise obfuscated. Her role in helping other Nigerians in the building access the care they needed cannot be understated.

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