Black Canadian Self-Employed Women

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L'auteure avance que les études futures sur les travailleuses autonomes noires de la diaspora canadienne devraient utiliser un cadre relationnel et un discours féministe et anti-raciste sur la diaspora sans perdre de vue la manière dont les écrits sur le travail et la race structurent cet espace.

Black Canadian women's history as self-employed workers, both past and present, has received little scholarly attention. Much of the research looking at Black women's participation in the informal economy, as self-employed workers, has been examined within two fields of research: ethnic entrepreneurship and women's entrepreneurship. Writings on ethnic entrepreneurship have predominantly looked at particular immigrant groups' predispositions towards self-employment and the barriers they face when becoming self-employed. This literature is often gendered, in that, it assumes that entrepreneurs are males and that women are simply social capital (Mirchandani). Meanwhile, the literature on women's entrepreneurship often essentializes the "female entrepreneur" as being white and middle-class and neglects to address issues of race (Mirchandani). Black business activity has predominantly been examined through the lens of the "ethnic enclave" theory that is defined as immigrant groups who are concentrated in a distinct spatial location have organized a variety of enterprises serving their own ethnic market and/or the general market (Portes).

Although much work needs to be done to make Black self-employed women's participation in the labour market visible, this paper argues that studies need to historicize Black women's participation in the informal economy, not to delineate an "authentic Black self-employed female worker," but to do so in order to understand how Black women were negotiating the labour market under colonialism, slavery and pre-industrialization. It is important to understand Black women's work, as Sharon Harley observes of Black women in the underground economy, as not being easily divisible, but as functioning through several economical infrastructures and spaces. Finally, this paper argues that scholars also need to examine the relationship between different discourses of entrepreneurship, such as ethnic entrepreneurship and liberal feminist notions of entrepreneurship, and Black self-employed women.

Studies looking at Black women's business activity, not only need to make Black women's participation more visible but also need to re-conceptualize the notion of the "ethnic enclave."

I briefly examine the limitations of how Black self-employed women's participation in the labour market has been understood and provide some preliminary ideas for re-thinking about their participation in the informal economy as self-employed workers.

The Black Self-Employed in the Twenty-First Century

According to the 2001 Census there are 662,200 Blacks in Canada, 411,090 in Ontario where 310,500 are in Toronto. Today, the Black population in Canada is extremely heterogeneous with a large majority of the population consisting of immigrants from the Caribbean, as well as immigrants from Africa, UK, South America and descendants from Black slaves, Loyalists and refugees (Diversity Watch). About 45 per cent of Blacks were born in Canada and one in five Blacks is an immigrant who came to Canada in the last ten years. Combined, Blacks are the third largest visible minority group in Canada (Diversity Watch). Although Blacks' overall labour force participation rate in 1996 was approximately 67 per cent, their unemployment rate was almost twice as high as it was for all Canadian and five percentage points higher than that for all visible minorities (Mensah 143-144). The unemployment rate for Black women, at approximately 19.8 per cent was nearly twice as high as the rate for the average Canadian woman, which is ten per cent. Joseph Mensah also notes the average annual income for Black women was $2,249 below the $19,208 national average for women. The average income for Black women who worked full-time was $27,561, ver-

sus $30,130 for the average Canadian woman. According to Joseph Mensah "Black women have higher labour force participation rate and a higher unemployment rate, and they derive a higher percentage of their income from government transfer payments" (153). The self-employment rates among African and Caribbean men in 1996 at approximately ten per cent, was more than twice as high as that among Black women, 3.2 per cent (Lo, Preston, Wang, Reil, Harvey and Siu). A large proportion of Blacks were found to be in semi-skilled occupations and in manufacturing, health and social service sectors.

Much of the literature analyzing Black business activity in Canada often describes it as being very low where Caribbeans and Africans are said to be among the least entrepreneurial immigrant groups in Canada (Lo, Teixeira and Truelove). Scholars have often attributed Black entrepreneurs' lack of entrepreneurial activity with their difficulties in getting bank financing (Lo et al.), or their lack of experience in family businesses (Uneke 1996) or discrimination (Hodge and Feagin). Very often, as was stated above, Black women are invisible in this literature. When attempting to explain the "under-representation" of Black women in business, Lucia Lo, Carlos Teixeira and Marie Truelove note that

> many immigrant women work in the "informal economy" at home. For example, in the Caribbean group many women migrated alone and they may be more independent working at home in their "family" business. (68)

Lo, Teixeira and Truelove contend that the "under-representation" may also be due to "cultural factors, such as who in a family-owned business will answer a questionnaire" (68) or could be due to the fact that female-owned businesses are probably too small to advertise in the business directories they used to create their sample.

Understanding Black women's business activity in Canada rests on examining how blackness operates/ is complicated within business practices in the twenty-first century.

Studies on ethnic entrepreneurship, as Mirchandani notes, predominantly seek to determine why certain groups are "more successful" than others and look to map why particular groups came to be doing such work. Blacks' "low" levels of entrepreneurship, is often attributed to Blacks not having a "unified market" (Lo et al.). The Black community is seen as being "separated by different cultural origins and historical experiences, has a fragmented social structure and no coherent community (Head; Uneke 1994). Black entrepreneurship is hence constrained by both class and ethnic resources" (9-10). The ethnic enclave framework measures success based on a groups' performance and rests on the assumption that there is a "unified community." Since this population is heterogeneous and structured by different legacies of colonialism, slavery and immigration, utilizing this framework is problematic for researching Blacks in Canada. This paper argues that studies looking at Black women's business activity, not only need to make Black women's participation more visible but also need to reconceptualize the notion of the "ethnic enclave" since this discourse dictates how immigrant business activity is understood. Howard Aldrich and Roger Waldinger contend that "the emergence of ethnic communities and networks may generate an infrastructure and resources for ethnic businesses before a sense of group awareness develops. In turn an ethnic business niche may give rise to, or strengthen, group consciousness. Ethnic boundaries, as social constructions, are inherently fluid" (132). Ivan Light and Stavros Karageorgis, meanwhile, make the distinction between ethnic enclave and ethnic economy where the latter is defined as "whenever any immigrant or ethnic minority maintains a private economic sector in which it has a controlling ownership stake" (648). These frameworks often serve to examine *how* particular groups become structured in these economies or enclaves and *how* they survive. What remains very often untouched, is *why* groups/clusters emerge in particular ways. As Pnina Webner (2001) notes, the ethnic enclave needs to be theo-

rized beyond the spatial metaphor and that we have to "interrogate how and why such enclaves may emerge" and need to "uncover the invisible social processes that produce spatial clusters" (689). Studies need to ask *why* the Black business community is structured the way it is, and what this structure reflects about Canadian nationalism, the labour market and Black women's roles within it. Scholars superficially try to understand why Blacks are 'under-represented' as entrepreneurs, but fail to theorize why Black Canada it is organized as such. In looking at Black cultural practices, Rinaldo Walcott asserts that it becomes important to read Black Canadian works within the context of Black diasporic discourses, since as he notes, "those who are descendants of Africans (New World Blacks) dispersed by TransAtlantic slavery continue to engage in a complex process of cultural exchange, invention and (re)invention, and the result is cultural creolization"(25). Blackness in Canada, according to Walcott, is "situated on a continuum that runs from the invisible to the hyper-visible" (44). What is at issue, then, for Walcott, "is how to theorize diaspora and account for its crucial transnational and outer-national political identifications, when those very practices can be used against specific black communities to render them powerless"(38).

Understanding Black women's business activity in Canada rests on examining how blackness operates/is complicated within business practices in the twenty-first century. A critical approach to looking at Black women's self-employment in Canada also rests on problematizing how we understand trends. Literature looking at women's entrepreneurship primarily focuses on trying to explain women's increasing presence in the informal economy as self-employed workers but most often speak of women of colour struggling from similar but more pronounced issues than white women. This literature rarely speaks of how Black women's self-employment is reflective of their social locations in the labour market. Since Black women have higher unemployment rates and lower incomes, how do they compensate for such loses? These facts would seem to suggest that Black women would become self-employed at times when it is needed and may even do so when doing wage work in order to compensate for low incomes.

Also rarely examined are the transnational movements that happen within business activity for immigrant women. Alejandro Portes, Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and William Haller define a transnational entrepreneur as a firm owner/self-employed who travels abroad at least twice a year for business and who is either dependent on regular contact with foreign countries or with their country of origin. Transnational processes do change the way in which we need to conceptualize the ethnic enclave/economy.

Demonstrating that Black women worked within various economical infrastructures is not to suggest these practices were unique to Black women but to emphasize that in historicizing their labour activity, we see how they have had to survive.

Working in the informal economy has always been a necessity for Black women's survival but it has happened on different levels, at different time periods and across borders. The following section demonstrates how Black women have historically simultaneously worked in the formal and informal economy as a way of surviving and also show the conditions that contributed to Black women's existence under slavery to present day.

Black Women's Work in the Formal and Informal Economy

Although the plantation economy has often been thought of as solely extracting labour from Black slaves, Jacqueline Jones, provides a more detailed outlook of the different kinds of labour and economic infrastructures within southern U.S. plantations. Jones notes how even the largest staple-crop plantation "boasted complex local labour systems" (1998: 193). What Jones found interesting in her research were the false idealist ways in which slave owners described the plantation system, as ties binding a family together, both slave and master. Meanwhile, what existed was a "tangible 'organic' southern community at odds with the planters' mythical one" (194). She goes on to say that, plantations resembled "proto-industrial, self-contained villages" (195). What was evident on U.S. plantations, perhaps to a lesser extent than slave plantations in the West Indies, was a bartering and selling system. Slaves did have the opportunity to earn wages, for example, by working on Sundays, their resting day. They would then be able to purchase goods for their own families or would purchase products to make goods, which they would then sell at the market. Plantations also fostered trade systems where Black slaves took food and equipment from their masters and sold them to poor White men. These poor Whites were seen as undermining the system of bondage. The participation in various economical infrastructures, according to Jones, enabled slaves to "carve out a sphere of autonomous behavior for themselves" (1998: 198).

During the post-emancipation period in the U.S., struggling Black families were once again caught in a series of contradictions of

a cash-crop economy based upon

> a repressive labor system, Black households achieved neither consumer status nor total self-sufficiency... within individual Black households, this tension between commercial and subsistence agriculture helped to shape the sexual division of labor, as wives divided their time among domestic responsibilities, field work, and petty money-making activities. (Jones 1985: 80)

Black women took on additional work to supplement their family income, where some women

> picked and sold berries, or peanuts, while others marketed vegetables, eggs and butter from the family's garden, chickens, and cows. A "midder" (midwife) found that her services were frequently in demand. (Jones 1985: 89-90)

Although these activities brought small amounts of money, this form of work still served an important purpose in providing additional income since many Black families had to rely on credit. Also, in doing such work Black women had more opportunity to be with their children. What was produced, according to Jones, were dealings in two separate spheres of the economy. Black men being in crop production dealt with the larger economic sphere of the cotton market, while Black women worked in the household, "a localized foodstuff and domestic service economy" (1985: 90).

According to Sylvia Hamilton, around 1813 a large migration of Black refugees arrived in Nova Scotia where they too were very resourceful in creating work for themselves. She goes on to say that

> refugees made brooms, baskets, barrels, firewood, and wreathes. Some of the earliest sketches and photographs of the Halifax city market show Black women selling baskets overflowing with mayflowers. Basket-weaving for them was not an activity used to fill idle time: it was work that brought in money vital to the survival of the family. (33)

Peggy Bristow, meanwhile, notes how Black women's labour force participation in Canada during the early nineteenth century was perhaps underestimated as she found discrepancies in census data. She goes on to say that "patterns revealed by the census data may underestimate Black women's work in earning income for the family. Census data, provided neither 'hard facts' nor 'raw data'" (98). The census often listed Black women only under one occupation, when they could in fact have been doing several. Advertisements in newspapers, meanwhile, revealed that some Black women had ads as seamstresses, but statistics leave many questions unanswered, like whether the women worked alone and how much money they made from such combined labour. According to Bristow, what was left out of census data was more than occupational titles but the ways in which Black women built networks and formed a culture (105).

Studies looking at Black entrepreneurship, negate Black women's long history as self-employed workers and fail to consider the ways in which the Black female worker moves in and out of the formal and informal economy.

In demonstrating that Black women often worked within various economical infrastructures is not to suggest that these practices were unique to Black women but to emphasize that in historicizing their labour activity, we are able to see how they have had to survive. In looking at contemporary forms of labour market negotiation, Carla Freeman, examines what she terms as contemporary higglers (or marketers) in the Caribbean. For Freeman feminists often fail to account for these complex engagements that are happening across space and time and therefore need to re-conceptualize globalization trends. The higgler is an age-old figure that has become a national symbol in the Caribbean. She was a "buyer and seller, traditionally of produce and good purchased from rural growers and sold in the town market" (1019). Today, Freeman describes higglering as being performed slightly differently. She focusses on women who work in offshore informatics industries in Barbados. The women she interviewed described their work as being very rigid, demanding and low waged and were very often forced to take on other informal income-generating activities to support their families, one being transnational higglering. As she describes it, women would fly to the United States or neighbouring islands with empty suitcases to purchase goods and fabric, which they then sell in Barbados, often from their own homes. These women's actions/practices contain many contradictions that challenge the traditional ways in which globalization trends have been conceptualized. For instance, "Third World" women have often been seen as producers and not consumers of goods at least in Western representations. On the other hand, the women's purchases could be seen as possibly reinforcing feminine norms (purchasing for kids, making clothes, etc.). Freeman's article not only enables us to think about transnational entrepreneurship but to think about how Black women are negotiating the formal and informal economy and how the two inform one another.

This paper argues that studies looking at Black entrepreneurship, not only negate Black women's long history as self-employed workers but fail to consider the ways in which the Black female worker moves in and out of the formal and informal economy and rarely examines the conditions that have produced these circumstances. The moving in and out of the informal economy requires that we conceptualize, self-employment "successes" and "enclave productivity" differently (Werbner).

Discourses of Entrepreneurship

The first section of this paper looked to complicate the ways in which Black women's self-employment has been theorized. What remains however is that much of the literature on ethnic entrepreneurship and women's entrepreneurship rarely theorize the relationship between discourses of entrepreneurship and the social identity of workers. How are particular entrepreneurial discourses constructed? When talking about discourse, Stuart Hall has quite succinctly captured Foucault's ideas of discourse and power. Hall goes on to say that,

> by discourse Foucault meant a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a historical moment ... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. (44)

It is important to note that "the concept of discourse in this usage is not purely a 'linguistic' concept. It is about a language and practice" (44). What kinds of statements are used to talk about ethnic entrepreneurship or women's entrepreneurship? How do such statements regulate or sanction particular practices. Discourse as Hall notes,

> governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out', limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it. (44)

Although not using a Foucauldian analysis, Chandra Mohanty examines capitalist scripts and immigrant women workers in the North and South. She examines how "Third-World" women factory workers in Silicon Valley and how the constructions of "job labels" are "closely allied with their sexual and racial identities" (15). She goes on to say that "it may be instructive to unpack these job labels in relation to the immigrant and Third-World (married) women who perform these jobs" (16). Mohanty is looking at the "relationship between this job typing and the social identity of workers concentrated in these low paying, segregated, often unsafe sectors of the labour market" (11). She demonstrates how "racialized ideologies of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality play a role in constructing the legitimate consumer, worker, and manager"(10). She looks at how descriptions of factory work in Silicon Valley, mainly performed by Asian immigrant wives and mothers, were closely linked to the women's sexual and racial identities. Factory work performed by the Asian women was described as being unskilled, requiring tolerance and as being supplementary/temporary to their mother/wife duties. Asian women were not only seen as more suited for such work, but were expected to think of this work as being secondary to their domestic responsibilities.

Scholars have also examined how public and private reproductive work is talked about in relation to skill and duty in relation to who performs such work. Women struggle against the patriarchal ideology that views reproductive work as being "labour of love." Women who do such work are seen as not having a great deal of skill and are therefore very poorly compensated (Parrenas Salazar; Giles and Arat-Koç; Bakan and Stasiulis). Not only is such work poorly compensated but when women of colour perform such work it also decreases in moral value (Giles and Arat-Koç). What becomes interesting are the ways in which particular kinds of work become defined and talked about in relation to women's sexual and racial identities.

In looking at the immigration policies towards Caribbeans, Agnes Calliste notes how Canadian immigration officials justified restricting the entry of professional and skilled workers from the Caribbean on the grounds that Canadians were not accustomed to seeing Black people in "positions which would place them on the same economic and social levels with their White neighbours" (1993: 90). This attitude reflected the stereotypical perception that Blacks were better suited, even inherently suited, to service jobs and those which required heavy physical labour, rather than to positions of authority. In specifically looking at the nursing profession, Calliste notes that the images/stereotypes of Black women as being aggressive, less disciplined, within the nursing profession, were seen as being the

> antithesis of femininity and the opposite of the soft-spoken, compassionate, nurturing, rational and professional nurse. Thus, the black woman nurse becomes an "undesirable" identity in this context. (1996: 369)

This paper argues that much like factory work, reproductive labour and nursing, self-employment, as a form of labour, must be deconstructed and

must be examined in relation to the women who are doing this kind of labour.

Future Directions

Within this article I argued that studies looking at Black women's business activity must theorize their participation in the informal economy as being informed by different legacies of colonialism, slavery and immigration. This therefore requires us to rethink about the notion of the 'unified' ethnic enclave/ economy. What also becomes complex with the Black Canadian diaspora, is as Walcott notes, the production of a cultural creolization. Studies should then understand how blackness is performed for Black women entrepreneurs and examine what particular racial practices/performances as business owners reveal about Canadian nation- building. Also important are for studies to note how transnational movements are happening for Black Canadian women as well as how they negotiate the formal and informal economy. Finally, studies must examine how discourses of entrepreneurship work to regulate Black women in the twenty-first century and examine what material significance/impact these discourses have on their lives.

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MICHELINE MERCIER

Perles Noires

M'avez-vous vu les mains?
Regardez bien le tracé de leurs lignes.
Blessées, ulcérées à ramasser
Le coton de vos habits,
Hachurées par le tabac de vos plantations

M'avez-vous vu les pieds?
L'épaisseur des cicatrices
Laissées sur mes chevilles.
Par les combats de la chair
Contre les chaînes

Suivez la route des négriers
Venus cueillir leurs perles
Sur les rives tranquilles
D'un continent noir

Tournez votre regarsd vers mon cœur
Rouge!
Comme le nôtre

Ramez, franchissez les mers, soyez témoins,
La houle, le fouet, les hauts-le-cœur, les larmes
Et la douleur des enfants perdus.

N'accusez pas le rhum
Pour le viol de mes filles!

Le bétail n'a pas de droits.

Ne demandez pas à Dieu
D'enterrer mes racines en pays brûlé.

Il vous demandera pourquoi
Les avoir mises à nues,
Si ce n'est pour les laisser croître
Dans une terre nouvelle,
Les regarder grandir et s'affranchir.

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