Brazuca in NOLA: A Cultural Analysis of Brazilian Immigration to New Orleans Post-Katrina

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Since Ray Nagin’s electoral speech on January 16th 2006 New Orleans has been deemed “The Chocolate City”. In these words Ray Nagin paid tribute to the large African American population that made up 67% of the city prior to Katrina. As is clear with the controversy that followed Nagin’s statement, the city’s identity has always been a contested one. But post-Katrina New Orleans poses new difficulties in the city’s identity claims as the demographics are changing and issues of race are becoming more convoluted with the influx of immigrant laborers. Immigrant groups who were never part of New Orleans’ demographics have flocked to the city with the huge increase in construction jobs. Whether this immigration will be permanent or not is going to change the face of New Orleans for the future.

Brazilian immigrants make up part of this new immigrant community that has adopted New Orleans, often referred to as the “Latin America of the North”, as their own. This paper is about Brazilian immigration to New Orleans post-Katrina analyzed through a cultural lens. Brazilian immigrants to New Orleans, most arriving less than a year ago, are consciously and unconsciously using the cultural sphere to create unity within their enclave community. New Orleans is a city that has never experienced the mass migration of immigrant populations that it has experienced post-Katrina. The city’s infrastructure is failing to provide for its previous citizens, much less this new group of citizens who largely do not speak English and who have questionable citizenship status. In fact, because of the heated debate on immigration nationally, it is hard to know if these
arrivals’ needs will ever be fully addressed. However, in the cultural outlets of New Orleans both created by immigrants and already existing prior to the immigrants arrival, Brazilians are finding channels of integration into the city.

Placing Myself

Research for this paper has been predominantly ethnographic and my analysis draws from several realms of intellectual thought including cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, and political science. Since January 2006, I have been involved with the Brazilian community performing cultural Brazilian dances, studying capoeira, teaching English classes, and translating for the Brazilian community as it deals with housing, law enforcement, and daily life. My interactions with Brazilian “cultural ambassadors” of the city and newly arrived immigrants have greatly influenced the research for this paper.

Besides my own participant observation, the research presented is an accumulation of both formal and informal interviews conducted over the past two months. Because I found that discussing culture is often a slippery topic to reach in interview style, much of my findings about the meaning of culture came out of informal discussions that were not guided by a set of questions. What the interviews and the discussions revealed to me was that most of the networking and community building that is currently taking place in the Brazilian community occurs in cultural spheres rather than government, economics, or institutions. By cultural spheres, I am referring to the wide range of human activities and institutions (artistic, intellectual, familial, and literary) that are fundamental in understanding the social environment and transmitting ways of living from one person to another. In this work I will try to problematize culture as a process

3
rather than as a final goal that continuously defines and redefines Brazilian imaginings of society and their place within it.

I have tried to keep in mind that while I consider myself very involved on a grassroots level with the cultural strides of the Brazilian community, I myself may not have the same cultural concerns as the immigrants themselves. Even though I am “engaged” in culture this does not give me full reign to speak for the “Other” and there is always a danger in “writing cultures” to the specifications of our own personal and social needs and according to our own cultural dispositions. (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Turino 1993) Before beginning this project, I was a friend and confidant for many of the Brazilians that I interviewed, making me a sort of “insider-outsider” and giving me access to some particularly sensitive information that could possibly have been denied another researcher. On the other hand, this could also be a revelation of my own possible bias.

Because of my role as an anthropologist, my access to knowledge and connections to the “privileged” society, I run the risk of dominating within the social field that I am hoping to study. But the most central aspect of my ability to access information among the Brazilian immigrant community has been my gender. The majority of Brazilian immigrants currently in New Orleans are men. A few women have arrived within the last several months, but most come following a husband or boyfriend. I found that many immigrants were willing and eager to speak with me simply because I am a woman and they are longing for female interaction. This is not to say that they were necessarily interested in a romantic relationship. Most of them just wanted a female voice to listen to them. I cannot tell you the number of times I was shown a small cut or injury
from a job in an attempt to gain a bit of sympathy and loving words from me. I have seen countless photographs of children left at home in Brazil and I have been put on the phone to comfort the mother’s of these young men who would still be living under their mother’s loving care had they not immigrated to the United States. I was easily allowed access into their homes and family life in a way that I do not think I would necessarily have received so quickly if I were a man. I have tried to recognize these uneven power dynamics and see that while I may provide powerful resources for the Brazilian community through my involvement, as an academic I must be conscious of my personal privilege and my betwixt and between position in discussing Brazilian culture in New Orleans.

**Assimilation versus Retention**

In past frameworks for studying immigration, mostly derived from sociology, demography, political science, or political economy there has been a failure to cope with the complexities of culture, even though it is a concept that is often evoked. What these different frameworks do hold in common, however, is an analysis of social power relationships and how these relationships are both perpetuated and changed through time. Discussions of subaltern and hegemonic influences are particularly applicable to the immigrant experience of parlaying culture into politics or social justice.

In the twentieth century, there have been two main theories for the study of culture and immigration: retention theory and assimilation theory. Retention theory advanced by theorists such as Melville Herskovits and Alejandro Portes, states that immigrant cultures, in spite of their apparent differences to the local country of residence, preserve many of the deeply rooted commonalities of their ethnic enclave that facilitate
their retention of ethnic identity in a “generalized form” in the new social environment (Herskovits 1958, Portes 1996; Portes and Manning 1986). On the other end of the spectrum, assimilation theory states that immigrants will slowly move away from their characteristic ethnic traits in order to incorporate and assimilate into the cultural environment of the host country (Gans 1997, Zhou 1999).

It is interesting to note in the case of Brazilians in New Orleans how easily the community has been able to be both retentionist and assimilationist in its formation even though retention and assimilation seem to be in opposition to each other. At first glance, there seems to be a strong argument for the retentionist theory in Brazilian cultural activity. Although New Orleanian Brazilians are a recent community, most having arrived within the last six months, there are already numerous cultural and social environments that allow an increase in networking and preservation of Brazilian traditions.

The first emergences of traditional cultural Brazilian environments were private churrascos held in Brazilian homes. Churrascos, informal parties revolving around the familiar cultural tradition of roasting meat, playing familiar music, and dancing, served to unite this community and create a network for finding employment, housing, and other necessary resources. As the community grew in strength and size, and it is continuing to grow at a surprising rate for the short amount of time that this population has been in the city, there have been other entrepreneurial endeavors that have more formally and officially created enclaves of Brazilian culture that aid in the retention model of culture. Venues such as a local pizzeria that hosts Brazilian home-cooked meals along with a local band playing hits of sertanejo, forró, and baio music and a night club that features
pagode, axé, and forró are examples of new venues created by the enclave “entrepreneurs of culture” that aid in the retention of cultural values, traditions, and imaginings of Brazil.

But Brazilians have also been very assimilationist for their short time in the city by joining in on local cultural events such as zydeco, second lines, Mardi Gras, and street festivals. Because of the similarities in culture between Brazil and New Orleans, Brazilians can easily look at these cultural traditions through a Brazilian cultural lens, assimilating without compromising their own cultural heritage and tradition. While most people argue that all communities experience a slight amount of both retention and assimilation simultaneously, I would argue that New Orleans is the only setting in the United States where a Brazilian immigrant could so easily manage to be both assimilationist and retentionist because of the centrality of cultural practices in the nation of Brazil and the city of New Orleans that I will highlight below.

While the rest of the United States may find itself at a loss at how to participate in the sounds, the steps, and the culture of a New Orleans second line, for example, Brazilians can easily self-identify with the event because of the common practice of street parades, escolas de samba, and afoxés in Brazil that bare a resemblance in the fact that they are communal cultural groups who customarily perform in public space in a festive setting and help instill a sense of group identity. Because Mardi Gras in New Orleans is such a singular event in the United States, Brazilians who have experienced carnival season in other cities throughout the United States come to see striking similarities between the Carnaval season in Brazil and the Mardi Gras season in New Orleans because New Orleans is the only city in the United States with street festivals that take over the city ending normal city activity during the duration of Mardi Gras. In both
locales people celebrate the carnival season communally in the street with parties, revelry, and family.

Carnaval *Trio-eletricos* in Brazil come to bare striking resemblance to Mardi Gras floats for a Brazilian in the process of making cultural comparisons. The way that gumbo is served out of the back of pick up trucks in New Orleans is a familiar cultural phenomenon to Brazilians who are used to seeing *caruru* served from the carts of *baianas* on the street corners in Northeastern Brazil. While cultural traditions in Brazil and New Orleans differ from each other, the singularity of cultural practices in New Orleans that are structured with a similar aesthetic to cultural practices in Brazil makes many Brazilians comment that while living in New Orleans they have experienced a lifestyle at times very similar to their experiences in Brazil unlike they experienced in other cities in the United States.

Both New Orleans and Brazil are famous for their rich musical traditions that are derived from the African Diaspora. The Brazilian community in New Orleans on average has been able to “read” New Orleanian culture and understand New Orleanian traditions in a deeper way than many first-timers to the city. What rests at the intersection of retentionist and assimilationist theories in the context of Brazilian immigration to New Orleans is that assimilation into the host society does not require the abandonment of Brazilian cultural practices altogether, but simply an alteration.

It is problematic to compare the city of New Orleans to the whole nation of Brazil without taking into consideration regional variations within Brazil. I do think it is possible to take the broad idea of culture that is provoked in discussions of Brazilian national identity, however, and find sufficient parallels with the rhetoric of Brazilian
national identity and with the rhetoric surrounding the identity of the city of New Orleans. As superficial as this exercise of comparison may be (some may even claim it to be forced), it has been extremely useful for Brazilians to imagine their own place within the cultural makeup of New Orleans. Just as people from diverse regions of Brazil claim a common bond of nationality when they are in the exterior, these same people find common bonds with citizens of New Orleans by sharing with them the need to deal on a daily basis with poor urban infrastructure, a relatively similar physical environment, and a culture that is rich in public communal participation. Indeed, it could be argued that the landscape of New Orleans is much closer to Brazil than to Boston in terms of climate and cultural practice. Brazilian culture has historically dealt with syncretism in different forms and in different locales across the nation. Brazilians in New Orleans are able to synchronize their cultural interpretations within the framework of New Orleanian cultural systems. Brazil and New Orleans, a comparison of suggestive similarities, comes to have important cultural comparisons for the “imagined community” of Brazilians making their space in New Orleans.

Concept of Culture

To begin this analysis we must have a clear understanding of what is meant by culture. Culture is a fuzzy term representing a given society’s customs, languages, arts, laws, and religion. Stuart Hall describes culture as

Both the meanings and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they handle and respond to the conditions of existence; and the lived
traditions and practices through which those ‘understandings’ are expressed and in which they are embodied. (Hall 26)

I do not want to interpret cultural forms as static entities, but rather hope to view culture as a fluid process. Through the flow of culture, I think that I can reveal invaluable information about the social relations of Brazilian immigrants in the context of New Orleans.

Although the definition of culture seems to be rather neutral of politics, culture, from a Marxist point of view, is based on hegemonic arrangements that select some interests over others in the creation of the social order. Alvarez et al describes cultural politics as “the process enacted when sets of social actors shaped by, and embodying, different cultural meanings and practice come into conflict with each other” (Alvarez 7). The cultural process becomes inherently political as people define and redefine identity and belonging while they compete for cultural capital.

Thomas Turino argues that culture can only be located in relation to the lives of concrete individuals as articulated through action at specific moments in their lives (Turino 1993). Culture lies at the intersection of the individual and the social. This follows Bourdieu’s concept of habitus where each person carries a collective history of their group and their sense of themselves on their body as a flexible cultural disposition that both shapes structure and is structured by the conditions through which people live their lives (Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu argues that the conditions of culture are experienced through our bodies when we assimilate and engage with the world and others.
What better way to assimilate and engage in culture as Bourdieu describes through *habitus* than through the experience of performance. It has been widely studied that music making as a social behavior and action articulates broader social values and ideologies (McAllester 1954, Merriam 1963; Blacking 1967, Turino 1993). Other theorists have furthered this statement by showing that not only are the social practices and signs people use for self-representation through their cultural outlets indicative of a particular cultural worldview and disposition, but also are representative of a continuous dialogue (process) where culture is re-invented and operates dialectically with the constructions of new cultural identities (Bourdieu 1977, Turino 1993). This is particularly important in the immigrant experience when the individual negotiates his own cultural beliefs in the context of the host culture.

George Yúdice discusses how performativity can be used to eradicate problems and social tensions such as those caused by the colliding of different cultures. He considers the relationship between performativity and the deployment of culture as a solution to misunderstandings between actors in a given society (Yúdice 2003:43). He states that performative theory has been characterized predominantly as an act that “produces that which it names” (Yúdice 2003:47). Thus, performing, whether it be performing and celebrating a cultural heritage, performing and reenacting symbolic social ills of exclusion, or performing and parodying social existence, is the creation of culture and understanding among social actors. Art becomes an opportunity to perform practices of public participation or citizenship otherwise left unverbalized or marginalized (Yúdice 2003: 133).
These different types of performances all make up the fibers of the cultural contexts that Brazilians make and integrate into their New Orleans environment. For Brazilian immigrants musical performance allows people to interact with a *communitas* in a space where members can separate from the troubles of daily life. Musical culture can be interpreted as an act of what De Certeau has labeled “the politics of the everyday” where average people use artistic strategies that seem mundane to resist a world that tries to dominate them. For example, in Bahia, Brazil carnival developed from Afro Brazilian *afroxé* tradition. *Afroxés* were formed by groups of black men who occupied urban space and enacted secularized music and dance traditions that are rooted in Candomblé religious traditions. *Afroxés* emphatically expressed their kinship and cultural ties to Africa. Second lines in New Orleans developed as a similar act to take over public space using music and dance of an African aesthetic. In fact, second lines were banned from New Orlean’s French Quarter until the 1960s. The emergence of assertive black identities in activities that seemed at first glance mundane was a tool for people’s of the Afro Atlantic experience to participate actively in civil society on their own terms.

Analyzing a social scene, especially a cultural performance, is similar to reading a text written by various social authors that gives great insight into the political and social environment in that specific historical setting. Music making, dancing, and the creation of “fun” are a meaningful dialogue. Bourdieu describes individuals as being “social agents” bound up by forces of culture, experience, history, and economics (Bourdieu 1977). As anthropologist Helena Simonett argues, culture is formed through discursive practices where the plurality of voices are orchestrated into common themes, idioms, and meanings (Simonett 11). Watching and engaging in a public performance is like listening and
dialoguing with someone’s “story”. A cultural performance is an entangled mass of stories of many individuals, some stories that will never be told with words. This research is an attempt to try to put gestures, sounds, and emotions into words in order to better understand the Brazilian cultural identity in the context of New Orleans and how these contexts can be parlayed into social justice. Thus, I am observing cultural performances as a place of both social “play” and social “work”.

The formation of a Brazilian Community

Culture is obviously important in the process of immigration because immigrants leave one set of cultural and historic norms and move to another, challenging their distinct way of life. Cultural forms are constructed, dismantled, and renegotiated in the struggle for access to valuable resources among the Brazilian immigrant community in New Orleans. The cultural forms that I will look at are both created by the immigrants themselves and are New Orleanian spaces where Brazilian immigrants can find enough cultural similarities to reinterpret those specific cultural practices using their own imaginings and symbols of their identity. Culture becomes what Bourdieu refers to as “symbolic and embodied” capital (Bourdieu 1977). By creating spaces where immigrants can understand and function using their own social norms, they increase their ability to access both social and economic capital. Similarly, by finding cultural spaces already in existence in New Orleans that can be “read” by Brazilian immigrants in the framework of their own cultural world, they can actually create a hybrid cultural experience where they have some social clout. I hypothesize that because of the particular Brazilian cultural composition New Orleans will become a new site of increased and permanent Brazilian immigration.
There has been an emergent body of sociological and demographic studies done since Katrina concerning New Orleans and the Gulf Coast following hurricanes Katrina and Rita (Russell 2006, Frick and Mast 2006). The media has also played a large part in covering the demographic changes occurring in New Orleans post-Katrina. Overall, the discussion of the new immigrant populations in the city tends to focus on the Spanish-speaking immigrants. Brazilians have been, as Maxine Margolis terms, an “invisible minority.”

Brazilian immigration to the United States has received less attention than its Hispanic counterparts. Recent border studies, however, have quoted Brazilians as being the fastest growing population trying to cross the Mexican border illegally (Millman 2005). The U.S. Bureau of Customs and Border Protection said that the arrests of Brazilians nabbed crossing from Mexico in 2005 had more than doubled the numbers of 2004 (Gaynor 2005). Immigration experts have said that the most common method for Brazilians to enter into the U.S. in the past had been by coming over on a tourist visa and then staying on illegally. When talking about methods of immigration for the Brazilian community one interviewee commented that the 1994 World Cup in the United States as being paramount. “Many Brazilians obtained visas and then they never left. These people then established connections and then helped other friends and families come over” (Fabio 25 Oct. 2006). In the last several years, due to a lagging Brazilian economy, it has been difficult for many Brazilians to convince U.S. officials that they have sufficient funds to vacation in the United States, thus tourist visas have been much harder to obtain causing an increase in illegal immigration across the Mexican border as well as through islands in the Caribbean (Moeller, Cape Cod Times).
The new wave of immigrants to New Orleans is made up mostly of this wave of Brazilian immigrants who have made the treacherous journey to the U.S. in the past five years, either illegally overstaying a tourist visa or coming through Mexico and going directly to established Brazilian communities in other sections of the country. While they were in other U.S. Brazilian communities like Boston, Florida, and New Jersey, they were not as fully established as previous immigrants so they had the mobility to make the move to New Orleans after the devastation of Katrina.

A large number of the immigrants coming to New Orleans have arrived via Boston. This history is important because of Boston’s already established and powerful Brazilian community. Boston is home to the only Brazilian Immigrant Center in the United States, one of over a dozen associations specifically targeted to bringing services to the Brazilian community in Boston (Martes 171). There are also many established entrepreneurial ventures (lanchonetes, padarias, stores, law clinics) in Boston run by Brazilians. While most interviewees have expressed their satisfaction with New Orleans overall, their complaints revolve around New Orleans not having social capital that they are used to in a place like Boston where they can access anything from Brazil that they could want and find services to help themselves if they get into trouble. In fact, respondents often claimed that they felt more at ease in places like Boston because they lived their daily existence without ever leaving the Brazilian community, all of their daily interactions were in Portuguese, and they had plenty of social options specifically marketed towards Brazilians. In New Orleans, creating a social life is much more of a challenge because they need to make new contacts and social ties and there are currently few purely Brazilian options for their day-to-day interactions. Whether these spaces such
as cultural centers, *lanchonetes*, and legal clinics are set up in the future will be key to whether the Brazilian community will actually stay.

This institutionalized social capital does not yet exist in New Orleans, but I hypothesize that this is going to change due to the networks that are being created through informal cultural outlets currently in the city. The majority of the immigrants interviewed here in New Orleans have been in the United States for fewer than 5 years. So, they are familiar with and have had the opportunity to participate in these community projects in other Brazilian enclave communities, and yet they are young and energetic enough to possibly start a similar venture of their own. One interviewee has already expressed interest in opening a Brazilian Immigrant Center in New Orleans, thus, institutionalizing and formalizing the way in which Brazilians can access needed resources (Rodrigo 3 Nov. 2006).

The fact that New Orleans’ urban infrastructure is poor has helped Brazilian immigrants feel as though they can immediately relate to the city of New Orleans, but may prove to be another obstacle to their permanent status in the city. A common New Orleans bumper sticker reads: “New Orleans: Third World and Proud”. For immigrants who had been used to living a sort of “third world” existence in first world cities in the United States, moving to New Orleans can feel slightly as though they have integrated into the “mainstream” population of New Orleans when the “mainstream” is living the third class lifestyle itself, especially in the months immediately following Katrina. However, the serious political and economic problems in New Orleans could mean serious political and economic marginalization for Brazilian immigrants in the future and
increased conflict with the native New Orleanian population who is resistant to cultural changes of their city.

Despite the difficulties of Brazilians moving to a U.S. city that does not yet have an infrastructure set up for dealing with a Brazilian population, it is obvious that Brazilians in New Orleans have managed to find those needed resources somehow because immigrants keep coming and the majority of those already here say they will stay for as long as they live in the United States. As one interviewee said, “It is through giving that I receive,” discussing how he would never turn down helping a new Brazilian arrival because he himself may also be in need in the future (Fabio 1 Nov 2006). This statement speaks to the unity of the Brazilian community. In many ways, Brazilians have an easier time creating a sense of group identity to collectively find resources than Latinos since the term “Latino” spans several different countries and even continents. Lucy Bustamante, a reporter for WWL news New Orleans, claims that one of the most challenging aspects of the formation of a Latino identity group in New Orleans is bridging the internal tensions between country differences within the Hispanic community itself (Bustamante 3 Nov. 2006). While Brazilian immigrants deal with regional differences, they all have a common national identity behind which to unite. In fact, Brazil’s national identity, as proclaimed by Brazil’s influential intellectual and sociologist Gilberto Freyre in his book *Casa Grande e Senzala*, is considered to be a mestiço one. Thus, fitting well into New Orleans’ creole identity. Although regional differences in Brazil are diverse, their national character embraces African inspired cultural traditions as part of the philosophy for Brazil’s national culture.
The diasporic context, therefore, becomes part of the national context. Renato Ortiz claims that "authentic" Brazilian identity does not exist; identity lies in the liminal space at the intersection of the plurality of identities constructed by different social agents in different moments in history (Ortiz 1985). This statement is of particular interest for Brazilians in New Orleans who have left most of their regional differences behind and focused on national symbols of identity. Indeed, most of the households tend to be a mixture of occupants from different regions in Brazil. Interviewees claim that they have experienced a greater sense of regional unity in New Orleans than in other areas because of the smaller size of the New Orleans’ Brazilian community and the increased need for having allies. Also, they noted that because immigration of Brazilians to New Orleans has been so heterogeneous, relying less on networks created in Brazil and more on networks created from their secondary cities in the United States, there is less chance of people breaking off based on their city of origin in Brazil (Roberta 20 Oct. 2006).

As the Brazilian community grows, regional divisions may increase, but because of the current social relationships and networks that have now been set up in New Orleans that are already cross-regional, it is likely that the New Orleans Brazilian community will continue to be more heterogeneous than communities in other areas. However, I do not wish to portray the Brazilian community as a utopia. In my personal observation, there have been various ways that Brazilians have tried to divide themselves. For example, people often differentiate between people who grew up or were educated with some contact with the city and those who grew up in a very rural setting, known as people "da roça." There also seem to be divisions that develop between those that are "trabalhador" (hard-working) and those that are "malandro" (used to describe someone
who does not work honestly, often taking advantage of others). In fact, these same
divisions between workers and malandros are common in New Orleans. Obviously in a
city that has some of the highest rates of poverty and unemployment in the country, there
is a culture of hustling in New Orleans. By this I mean people who are using cunning and
street smarts in order to find ways to make enough money to survive. These divisions are
based heavily in social class distinctions and differences in class often change the way
that Brazilians interpret the same cultural event. In the context of cultural events,
however, different social agents all agree that the symbolic importance of having spaces
that are representative of Brazilian culture across regions and social class have been
paramount for the integration of the Brazilian community in New Orleans.

While Brazilians can understand the social makeup of the New Orleans’
community, in describing Brazilian cultural settings, Brazilians commented on the
importance of having a place specifically created for their own cultural norms in New
Orleans where they could let their guard down, relax, and speak Portuguese, all in a
familiar cultural setting. Brazilian cultural settings tend to be very communal. Even in
settings when there is an obvious performer, the audience is an integral part through
dance, accompaniment through song and chorus, or simply bringing “axé” (energy) to the
event. The liminality of the performance space that is separate in both place and time
from U.S culture is in fact a brief escape from alienation and oppression that many
Brazilians may face at times in U.S. culture because of language barriers or immigration
status.

Most of the Brazilians are working in construction, so as one interviewee said,
“The more people that I know in construction the better. I meet a lot of people at
churrascos” (Rodrigo 31 Oct. 2006). Most jobs are received through networks of friends. The majority of Brazilians do not join in at Day Labor sites, for example, preferring to use the network of the community to find jobs. Many work for sub-contractors that are themselves Brazilian.

Cultural environments such as churrascos have also been essential for the Brazilian women arriving. The majority of Brazilian women currently in the city have come accompanying a spouse. Most female interviewees talk about the difficulties of the female labor market for undocumented workers in New Orleans. Breaking into the restaurant market, for example, usually requires some English, and many restaurants require documentation. There was not a previous network of known restaurants that would hire people without documentation. Those who do have some English skills and have managed to break into the restaurant market, for example, now help those who have recently arrived (Roberta 20 Oct. 2006). Making connections at churrascos has been essential. There are also several women who freelance as cooks. Knowing where the job sites are located or what events may have a large number of Brazilians is essential to their job survival. Being social and engaged with the Brazilian community is actually a way of ensuring more job opportunities for both men and women.

Brazilian entrepreneurs have taken advantage of the importance of these cultural spaces for creating a tightly locked network of Brazilians and are now opening official locations marketed specifically for the Brazilian community. The first place to open was Rotolo’s pizzeria in Metairie. A pizzeria by day, it turns into a Brazilian hotspot on Saturday nights. According to the owner, Saturdays are usually his best business days. In fact, the numbers totally overwhelmed the normal wait staff, especially due to the
language barrier of the waitresses. The owner has since hired two new Brazilian waitresses to help serve just for Saturday night.

Live music is one of the major draws to Rotolo’s, yet the community is currently trying to deal with the fact that the majority of those attending are male. They tried a “first beer free for women” deal in October 2006 and advertised it among contacts at Tulane University in hopes of enticing female University students to attend. These endeavors, however, have been unsuccessful. Because of the inequality in gender numbers, many Brazilians often divide their Saturday night between Rotolo’s and other New Orleanian nightspots where there are more women present.

Gender is a particularly complicated dimension of Brazilian integration into New Orleans. The fact that there are unequal gender ratios within the Brazilian community has meant that Brazilians have been less willing to remain specifically within their Brazilian enclave setting socially. Even those who express contentment with New Orleans and do not wish to return to their previous cities of origin, there is nostalgia for being able to meet women in Brazilian social settings where they feel more comfortable and there is not a language barrier.

Most of the Brazilian immigrants are in their 20s and 30s, so socializing with people of the opposite sex is extremely important. This necessity to find companionship of the opposite sex has meant that Brazilians have been more involved with the New Orleanian social scene. What happens with gender ratios in the Brazilian community over the next few years will be very important to the trajectory of this particular community. The fact that there are few women has meant more integration into the New Orleanian community in these beginning months of immigration because of the necessity for
companionship, but it could potentially mean that fewer men will decide to immigrate in the future as work slows and if the gender ratios remain unequal. For now, Brazilian immigrants move back and forth between Brazilian and New Orleanian cultural settings.

García Canclini in his work “Modernity and Postmodernity” discusses the “multitemporal heterogeneity” of modern culture in which citizens must try to fit independent ideas of self identity formed during different points of personal development together into their personal understandings of self in the present context. The traditional, for example, is never fully replaced by the modern setting. For Brazilian immigrants, cultural traditions are not replaced by those traditions experienced in the new social setting; diverse ways of being coexist. Alejandro Portes refers to pieces of traditional or historical identity as “cultural baggage” that immigrants carry as they move and become incorporated into the new social space (Martes 151).

The space of Rotolo’s helps to create a hybrid form of social being for Brazilians where they can consume and circulate symbolic goods from Brazil (such as food, drink, music, or dance), ensuring that these goods continue to exist as part of their cultural production as they go through the experience of becoming more involved with their native land of origin. Everyday life as it may have been practiced in Brazil comes to have symbolic importance in the United States and recreating those cultural practices in New Orleans is an example of cultural politics.

The act of remembering culture is a powerful process. Memory is not only about truth, facts, and essentials, but also about the construction of the images, both recalled and forgotten, that make up the representation of history and cultural identity. Marilena Chauí refers to these imaginings as “semi-fictitious narrations of experience.” For Chauí,
the myths of Brazilian nationhood are often symbolic representations only partially based in truth and often based in symbolic imaginings of images created through Brazil’s relationship with its historical periods of colonization, agriculture, and slavery. Rituals are recreated and recontextualized for their new environment, but they are not simply recreated in general terms because of a shared sense of memory and definition of the sacred that each individual carried with him through the migration experience. The memories and myths of the past, whether they are real or imagined, become important “truths” for the construction of identity and place in the new cultural context. Cultural baggage is not forgotten, but continues to complicate an individual’s idea of self.

Brazilian cultural traditions are not all created through memory. Brazilians use a space like Rotolo’s to create an identity that is transnational and very present. Even those who are in the United States illegally and may not see themselves returning to Brazil in the near future reconstruct their identity in a transnational setting because ties with Brazil are strong through the advancements of modernization. They live between both worlds, perhaps not in physical space, but at least through Brazilian satellite TV in their homes or easy access to newspapers and information about Brazil through the Internet. The Brazilian identity is not simply a memory pre-immigration, but rather the reality of their current transnational situation. An environment like Rotolo’s speaks directly to the Diaspora experience, performing traditions that are specifically grounded in the traditions of Brazil in a cultural setting that is able to provide them with opportunities to support their families back at home.

This is why songs that speak for the immigrant experience of relationships held sacred even through distance and songs of nostalgia for those lost or left behind are of
paramount importance to the repertoire of the performer. On a grassroots level, these performances reterritorialize both their practices and identities. The cultural maintenance of ties with Brazil is an act of agency by those without political power to resist national hegemonies by preserving their subaltern traditions.

A second recently opened space that caters specifically to the Brazilian community is a nightclub located in a rough downtown area of New Orleans. The success of this nightclub is still to be determined, but its organization and location illustrate the fact that many Brazilians still do not feel completely comfortable approaching mainstream New Orleanian cultural locations. One interviewee said, “they [the organizers of the event] felt as though they couldn’t use a space that Americans use because they were afraid they would not be accepted” (Gilberto 13 Nov. 2006). Due to its location in a poor neighborhood that is still half boarded up due to the ravaging of Katrina, this club is not a place that will attract the attention of the greater New Orleans community; it markets itself as a place that caters specifically to Brazilians. In a conversation with the club opener, however, he is highly considering moving his club to a more prominent location in Uptown, even though the licenses are more expensive, because he has found that his clientele prefer to go to places where they will mix with New Orleanians and his club has not had as much success as he had hoped.

The nightclub space is much more problematic and less successful as a cultural endeavor for Brazilian unity than Rotolo’s pizzeria because the club atmosphere creates a dynamic that is not conducive to communication about issues related to work or socializing beyond communication through dance movements. A club atmosphere has a harder time creating a networking space. Also, the location of the club ensures that it will
not be a point of integration with those persons in the New Orleanian community who may take interest in Brazilian music.

The music played is mostly *samba pagode* and *axé* with sets of forró played in between. *Samba pagode* is a slightly slower derivative of the samba played by large *escolas de samba* during carnival and is a common cultural practice when groups of friends gather informally for a party. Almost any percussion-like instrument can be turned into an accompaniment. *Axé* is a high powered and popular dance music from Salvador, Bahia. These two music genres are an intelligent choice by the club organizers because both *samba pagode* and *axé* are music styles that do not require a partner of the opposite sex. It allows Brazilian men the space and opportunity to express themselves through movement even if there is an uneven ratio of men to women. Even men who customarily may not have been dancers in Brazil dance *Samba pagode* here because the steps embody their inclusion in a Brazilian cultural group here in unfamiliar territory.

Sometimes thoughts can best be communicated through the body rather than words. Connecting to cultural practices such as samba helps Brazilians perform the feelings of both nostalgia and new unions that often cannot be expressed adequately with words.

**Brazuca in NOLA**

The Afro-Atlantic performance experience has left its mark on Brazilian culture just as it has on New Orleans. Concepts of orality, performative competition, and masculinity in movement are all obvious characteristics of performance in these two cultural spheres. Competitive dancing among followers of second-lines, for example, greatly parallel what goes on in a male samba performance.
What is considered to be “fun” is culturally derived. “Fun” in Brazil and New Orleans parallel each other greatly, making it seem very possible that Brazilian musical ventures have the possibility for success in New Orleans among New Orleanian populations. Because of this, there are several Brazilian groups who are currently in the process of making contacts with various bars and restaurants in more attractive neighborhoods hoping to arrange a Brazilian night. As better bands form and increase in numbers, if the tendency for musical entrepreneurship continues as it has currently, I think that in the next year there will be more locations highlighting Brazilian rhythms in prominent New Orleanian locations, not simply marketed for the Brazilian enclave.

Also, two new capoeira schools have opened post-Katrina making a total of three schools in the city. For a city the size of New Orleans, three capoeira schools is a substantial number. This is especially the case since these schools specifically market themselves towards the American population who would probably be most willing to pay for classes. Based on the popularity that capoeira has seen among American communities in other parts of the country, these schools will also play an important role in forging positive relations between New Orleanians and Brazilians through the exchange of cultural traditions and highlighting the positive impacts of diversity within the community.

The most noteworthy, however, of the Brazilian traditions in New Orleans arrived 20 years before the mass immigration post-Katrina. Curtis Pierre began Casa Samba, a traditionally run Rio-style samba school, almost 20 years ago during the 1986 Mardi Gras season. As one Brazilian describes it, “Casa Samba is nothing more than a piece of Brazil here in the United States” (Gilberto 13 Nov. 2006). An African-American Louisiana
native who became fascinated with the rhythms of Brazil, Curtis prides himself on bringing “authentic Brazilian culture to the New Orleanian community” (Pierre 29 Oct. 2006).

Besides its focus on music, Casa Samba is a community center. Built off Brazilian models of *escolas de samba* which are often organized in conjunction with community service projects for certain low income neighborhoods in Brazil, Casa Samba attempts to be an uplifting space for New Orleanian children by introducing the music, costumes, songs, and traditions of Brazilian culture. Casa Samba has weekly open samba rehearsals that incorporate members of the community from all walks of life. And they hold Brazil Camps where they teach classes not only in music and dance, but also in capoeira, Brazilian history, and costume design.

When asked about how the Brazilian community has affected and been affected by Casa Samba Curtis replied that, “Having a large Brazilian contingent in the community is something that [he has] always wanted to happen” (Pierre Oct. 29 2006). Because of new Brazilian members of Casa Samba, he feels as if the school is being reborn. There is now a vocal section of the drumming performances, for example, led by a recent migrant who sings traditional Carnaval tunes over the drumming rhythms. Among New Orleanian members of Casa Samba, Brazilians are a welcome addition. In fact, levels of respect are based much more on drumming or dancing talent than on race, class, or documentation status, making Casa Samba another prime area of integration between the two communities.

When asked about the significance of Casa Samba to the newly arriving Brazilian community one recent Brazilian migrant said,
I think that the beginning of everything for the Brazilian community in New Orleans will be right here [Casa Samba]. As Brazilians start to discover this place, it is going to be the way in which Brazilian culture is shown to the rest of the New Orleanian community. The Brazilian and the New Orleanian musical culture have a lot in common, and this place is a place where everyone can communicate independently of language, color, or race. Here our culture is taken very seriously. I was really happy when the little girl [a 10 year old African-American dancer for Casa Samba] began to ask me questions in Portuguese. You could see how proud she was that she had learned those things, and she learned it here! People come to learn a little bit about other cultures, whether there are drinks here or not. My friends who I bring love coming to this place because of the leadership and because it’s a place where they really feel at home. I think that because it is intercultural its also a great place for Brazilians to practice their English. Going to school and learning English won’t do any good if you don’t have a place to practice. (Gilberto 13 Oct. 2006)

Language exchanges are not the only important cultural advantages of Casa Samba. Curtis Pierre commented on the fact that many Brazilians themselves are not fully educated about their own personal cultural heritage, even though the symbolic importance of their culture is enormously important for them here in the United States. The classes at Casa Samba are also educational for Brazilians who hope to learn about their own personal history and identity formation.
Having a space that promotes Brazil through its culture will be key in the acceptance and the creation of a positive Brazilian community in New Orleans. The presence of so many more Brazilians can only make it more powerful. Curtis hopes that Casa Samba will be a place that can be considered a family for his New Orleanian students and for Brazilians living in New Orleans.

Within the Spanish-speaking media there has been much debate over how the issue of race is going to play out as immigrant communities begin to settle. Katrina represents the first time in history when locals had to leave their homes and immigrant populations moved into the spaces they left behind. The Hispanic community has experienced rising tensions within the New Orleanian community regarding their presence, especially among the poorer African American segment of New Orleans who feel as though the new immigrants are taking jobs and housing that should be their own.

Brazilians, even though the majority expressed that they are better accepted into the New Orleans community than they were in previous US cities, also tell stories of discrimination experiences that they have experienced in isolated cases among American co-workers. Overall, however, Brazilians have experienced fewer racial tensions than Hispanics. This is interesting because Brazilians self-report that they are getting higher pay than their Hispanic counterparts, sometimes claiming jobs that could be argued as being more desirable for African-Americans and, thus, more likely to upset the local population. This may be because the relative social position of a Brazilian immigrant is slightly higher than their Hispanic counterpart simply due to the difficulty of immigrating to the United States all the way from Brazil. Those immigrants that were able to get a visa to the United States and then overstayed their tourist visa were obviously able to
convince immigration officials that they had enough money to be able to vacation in the United States. Those that came illegally through Mexico or the Caribbean still had to be able to fund a plane ticket to Mexico and at least a deposit for their coyote smuggling fee that is usually around $10,000. This means that the poorest people in Brazil are not able to immigrate to the United States, thus creating a social division among migrants from other poorer backgrounds in other Latin American countries.

The Brazilians also have two things that have been working in their favor to ease the tension of race. In a town hall discussion, a community member commented that one reason for New Orleanian resentment of the immigrant community is lack of education and fear of a group of people whose customs and habits are unfamiliar to them (Town Hall Meeting 3 Nov. 2006). By immigrant, most people talk specifically about the Hispanic community. This is exacerbated by the media culture’s portrayal of the negative sides of Hispanic immigration. Stories often go for “shock appeal” that concentrate on lootings, immigration conflicts, and job abuses. Few stories have appeared about the rich cultural additions that Hispanics can make to the New Orleanian community. David Meeks of the Times-Picayune said that when the paper did a bilingual cover story on the front page about the Spanish-speaking immigrant population he received complaints for two straight weeks from New Orleanians who were against immigration (Town Hall Meeting 3 Nov. 2006).

Although it may be problematic for Brazilians to be the invisible minority in terms of finding access to resources, their invisibility has benefited them in that most people are completely unaware of the size of Brazilian population currently working in the city, thus shielding Brazilians from the brunt of the anti-immigrant debate. There has
been hardly any media attention dealing with Brazilians, except when they are lumped with the term Hispanics, a term that Brazilians do not use to self-identify.

The second reason why Brazilians have experienced less resentment from New Orleanians is cultural. This is also the reason why it seems likely that Brazilian immigrants will continue to find ways to integrate in the city. Within musical circles there have always been parallels between New Orleanian and Brazilian culture. Brazilian jazz, for example, enjoyed a back and forth relationship with New Orleans jazz throughout its development. In 2002 Louisiana musician Ray Moore released two CDs, “Braziliance and “RiOrleans” blending jazz and Bossa Nova. In moments when Brazilians have not been invisible, their portrayal has been positive through the sharing of their culture. Casa Samba, for example, historically paraded in the Endymion parade in Mardi Gras, one of the biggest and most elaborate of the Mardi Gras krewes. Shaka Corbin, a Guyanese native who lived in New Orleans began a “Hot Brazil” concert series in 2005 prior to Katrina in which he brought in a Brazilian band from other areas of the country to play in hip nightclubs in downtown New Orleans for Brazilian music enthusiasts in the city. Shaka has since moved to New York City, and now the Brazilian community hopes to take up where he has left off, forming their own musical groups.

Brazilians in the New Orleans Cultural Sphere

But perhaps the most interesting Brazilian cultural settings are not Brazilian at all, but are the New Orleanian specific cultural settings where Brazilians have assimilated or have the potential to integrate such as second lines, Mardi Gras, brass bands, and street festivals. What is truly indicative of Brazilians’ integration into the New Orleans culture are the spaces where Brazilians find themselves fitting into the local culture. Brazilian
immigration to New Orleans began almost simultaneously when contractors were allowed back into the city after the hurricane. The destruction from Katrina was extensive, leaving many neighborhoods of the city uninhabitable.

Almost a year later there are still neighborhoods in New Orleans where citizens are unable to move back. One of the areas least affected by the flooding of Katrina due to its higher elevation and distance from the worst sections of the levy breaches was the rather affluent area known as Uptown which, prior to Katrina, was predominantly inhabited by white middle to upper class families and students. With the housing shortage in other areas of the city, Uptown experienced a large demographic shift. Brazilians were one of these immigrant populations who moved in to help in the rebuilding process.

If immigration to New Orleans had happened under different circumstances, Uptown would not have been a likely area for immigrants to settle because it is one of the more expensive areas in which to live. However, following the hurricane, immigrants had little choice. Because of the architectural style of New Orleanian Uptown homes which tend to be very spacious, Brazilian immigrants were able to pack many people comfortably into a two or three bedroom home and at a much more economic price than they would have found in areas of the country such as Massachusetts or New Jersey.

In describing how he ended up staying in Uptown one Brazilian interviewee said, Right after the hurricane, Catarina’s husband brought about 100 or more people down from Boston. He had come down right after Katrina to put tarps on roofs. He speaks English well, so he knew that there was a lot of work to do. So Catarina put an announcement in the Brazilian stores in Boston saying that her husband needed workers down in New Orleans.
She charged $500 a person to come down in the car. She had places set up for them to stay. The house was $1,600 and the other $1,200 to split between those who came down. There were eight of us when I first arrived so it was really cheap. Once you were organized in New Orleans you were expected to find your own place so that new people could come, but there was no pressure to leave. I wanted to get out soon because no one else in the house knew how to find banks, stores, and things, so I ended up having to do everything. I called up my brother who was still in Boston and told him to come down. He came down with a car full of people that he charged $500 a person as well and we got a house together on Broadway [A few blocks away, still in Uptown] with some other friends. (Glauber 13 Nov. 2006)

The fact that Brazilian immigrants moved into Uptown has actually had a positive effect on their access to resources and to New Orleanian cultural outlets. As New Orleans began to repopulate, students, affiliates of the universities, and even some activists began moving into the rentable space in Uptown. Because of proximity, Brazilians have had many more opportunities to make connections with Americans than if they had settled in a less connected neighborhood, allowing them access to culturally active and more affluent Americans. One of the attractions that many immigrants expressed about New Orleans was that they had met a number of Americans in New Orleans who speak Portuguese, and several more who speak Spanish and are able to communicate with them.
Tulane University has been key to New Orleans revitalization post-Katrina. Tulane generates a huge portion of the economic sector of the city, has implemented a mandatory community service portion of the undergraduate curriculum to help rebuild the city, and has been a breeding ground to the creation of several different projects geared at helping New Orleans rebuild. Large portions of the rebuilding projects have focused on immigrant populations because of Tulane’s historic commitment to Latin America.

Tulane is home to the Stone Center for Latin American Studies, one of four continuously funded Latin American National Resource Centers in the country, and has long occupied a critical position as the only Latin American National Resource Center in the Deep South (AL, AR, LA, MS, and TN). Nationally, few institutions of Tulane’s size compare in the number of faculty, students, library resources, and research support for Latin American studies as available at Tulane.

In the period 2000-2005, Tulane also awarded 88 Ph.D.s with Latin American foci in Spanish and Portuguese (25), Anthropology (19), Latin American Studies (15), History (6), Business Administration (5), Political Science (4), Sociology (3), French (2), Economics (1), EEB (1), Geology (1), Parasitology (1), Public Health (1), and Social Work (1). Along with these impressive numbers, Tulane has currently the second highest rated Latin American Studies Undergraduate program in the country.

Besides having a strong Latin American Studies Program, Tulane has a particularly strong Brazilian focus. In fact, in 2008 Tulane will be the host of the Brazilian Studies Association International Conference, one of the most respected conferences in the world dealing with studies on Brazil. Last year the University honored
Gilberto Gil, Brazilian Culture Minister as well as one of the most important singers and composers of Brazil, with an honorary PhD presented during Tulane’s first graduation post-Katrina.

Many students, including myself, have come to New Orleans aware of the cultural interest for Brazil in New Orleans. Until Katrina, however, these interests were theorized by comparing the two separate worlds of Brazil and New Orleans. Now, these worlds are starting to converge and students have taken advantage of the opportunities to be involved with the Brazilian community as it develops in New Orleans. Proximity to Tulane has helped the Brazilian community forge bonds with intellectuals and has greatly increased Brazilians access to social and cultural capital.

One outcome of the shift in demographics in New Orleans neighborhoods caused by Brazilian immigration is that Brazilians frequent New Orleanian Uptown nightspots that pre-Katrina were mostly frequented by white patrons, helping to break the barriers of race that have historically divided the city. That Brazilians experience New Orleanian social life without the prior knowledge of racial or class segregation has been a positive development for a city that has in the past battled serious racial and class inequality issues.

Among Brazilian immigrants who first came to settle in Uptown one of the favorite nightspots is “The Boot,” a bar running on a street parallel to Tulane University and frequented mostly by young University students. Before students even returned post-Katrina, this became a frequent nightspot for Brazilians because of its proximity to their homes. Once students did come back, it became a space that allowed Brazilians contact with American culture. The majority of the Brazilian interviewees did not speak English,
but many immigrants who frequent The Boot say that they manage to communicate because many people they meet there speak at least a little Spanish, which would make sense because the majority of the clientele are students.

Another one of the first sites of contact with New Orleanian culture, probably the most famous and infamous area of the city, was Bourbon Street. A journalist from Rio de Janeiro doing a project on New Orleanian culture interviewed a Brazilian immigrant hanging out on Bourbon Street who said, “I arrived 7 years ago in Boston, but now that I’ve come to New Orleans I don’t see myself ever leaving. In the 7 years that I have been in the States I had never “hooked up” with any American women. Here in New Orleans I have had plenty of opportunities! (He says with laughter)” (Miguel 16) Although most local New Orleanians would argue that Bourbon Street is not representative of New Orleans culture, it is a place that creates ample opportunity for contact with Americans, has relaxed rules about socializing and alcohol that are more similar to Brazil than the rest of the United States, and highlights musical culture and performance as paramount for identity formation similarly to Brazil.

As the Brazilian community begins to further explore the local New Orleanian communities, more similarities arise. Zydeco, for example, is a popular dance among Brazilian immigrants because of the similarities with forró. The first time I brought a crew of Brazilians to “Rock and Bowl” for zydeco night the Brazilians quickly fell in line with the rest of the crowd, dancing and swinging their hips to the accordion and zydeco beat. The owner of the club, a friend of mine, came up and asked how I had managed to teach all of those Brazilians to dance zydeco, something that most tourists cannot grasp
the first time they come. Because of zydeco’s similarities with forró in rhythm, instrumentation, and dance style, most Brazilians had no difficulties.

They were, thus, interpreting their own traditions into the New Orleans’ zydeco. The Brazilians have been able to “read” zydeco music and the zydeco performance context in a deeper way than most beginning tourists by making connections and drawing parallels from their own cultural traditions at home. This is not only positive in helping Brazilians feel integrated into the community, but it also creates a common language and understanding through movement; through zydeco dancing, New Orleanians relate to Brazilians, increasing possibilities of acceptance. Many zydeco events tend to be followed by a relatively older crowd in terms of other New Orleanian musical traditions like brass bands or funk. Not being able to meet people their own age at zydeco events has been a drawback expressed by some Brazilians, but politically, this is probably a positive gain. Positive interactions with these New Orleanians in their 40s, a group who is on average more conservative and least likely to support immigration, creates favorable portrayals of Brazilian immigrants by an important and unlikely political group.

Conclusions and the Future

Brazilian immigration to New Orleans has not begun to slow. Most interviewees project that immigration will continue as Brazilians create more of a niche in the city. Two Brazilian stores have opened, there is a legal office that now caters specifically to the Brazilian community, and there are numerous options for nightlife that are appealing for Brazilians.
Interviewees also stated that they expected immigration to New Orleans to increase due to stricter immigration enforcement in Boston and New Jersey. An immigrant who arrived the first week in October 2006 from Riverside, New Jersey said,

I got married last year. Pretty soon we are going to want kids. In New Jersey I was always afraid. New Jersey doesn’t feel safe for me anymore. I came down to New Orleans and saw that there were a lot of possibilities for work. Plus, I have friends here. I went back to New Jersey, picked up my wife, and we moved down right away. I like it so far (Edimar 18 Nov. 2006).

Riverside, a small town in Southern New Jersey, has experienced a revival economically because of recent Brazilian immigration. While some see the revitalization as a positive turn around for a town that was once economically failing, a large percentage of locals from Riverside are unhappy that Brazilians mainly occupy the local businesses and housing market. There have been frequent protests since July of 2006.

Similar tensions in immigration have occurred in areas of Massachusetts. Framingham is estimated to be 25% Brazilian. While some claim that the immigrant population has helped revitalize the city, others with more nationalistic views argue that immigration is compromising to New England cultural traditions. Da Rocha, director to the Brazilian Immigrant Center in Boston, has also stated that he thinks it likely that many immigrants from the Boston area will migrate due to the departure of several key politicians sympathetic to immigrant needs. (Mast and Frick 2006: 3-4)

How politicians will choose to deal with the arriving immigrant populations in New Orleans has yet to be seen. Time and money are still being focused on the
immediate needs of providing for a destroyed city. However, Brazilians idealistically seemed to feel that because of their efforts in the reconstruction they are a group with possibilities for receiving better treatment than they received in other areas of the country where they previously lived. They feel more invested in the city. In respect to this one interviewee responded,

The government of Massachusetts does not act favorably towards the Brazilian community. There we went to the city governor with a list of over 10,000 names asking for help with certain problems within the Brazilian community and he didn’t even listen to us. Here in New Orleans we have not yet had the opportunity to ask for anything for Brazilians here, but I think because Brazilians have been so important in helping the city become functional again that they will listen to us. The majority of the Brazilians here are hard workers. We are working to help New Orleans become even better than it was pre-Katrina. I hope that the government in Louisiana will see this. I would like to have more freedom, at least be able to obtain a drivers license. (Fabio 1 Nov. 2006)

How political leaders will decide to deal with the large immigrant populations in the city after the need for able and skilled construction workers slows is yet to be seen. However, on their end, the Brazilian community is making ties with New Orleans through cultural outlets in such a profound way that I doubt Brazilians will be a community to leave easily. As an “invisible minority” for anti-immigration protests and a very visible minority in respects to cultural endeavors, Brazilians have undergone a process of integration at a surprising speed. The connections that they are making within
the New Orleans cultural sphere are sufficient enough to show that the community is creating roots in the city, and that this community will not simply be the next rapid responders for the next national crisis. Because of similar traditions of using public space to perform inclusion in both Brazilian and New Orleanian culture, Brazilians are able to make sense of their place in New Orleans in an effective way, finding their niche in the city.

On a Saturday night in Rotolo’s pizzeria in Metairie, a suburb neighborhood of New Orleans, Brazilians are eating dishes like *vaca tolada* and *feijoada*. The band begins playing Zezé di Camargo and Luciano “*O dia que sai de casa*” (The day I left home), which for many has come to be the anthem of the Brazilian immigrant. The music hits a chord deep in the heart of each listener present and with *caçacha* cups in hand (or *guaraná* for those who don’t drink alcohol) they begin to sing together, remembering with “*saudades*” (a desperate longing) all of those that they have left behind in a search for a better life in the United States. “*O dia que sai de casa minha mãe me disse: ‘Filho vem cá’*”… (The day that I left home my mother called me to her side…) Everyone seems to know every word. “*“Por onde você for eu sigo com meu pensamento sempre onde estiver. Em minhas orações eu vou pedir a Deus que ilumine os passos seus”* (Wherever you go, you will always be in my thoughts and in my prayers I will ask God to illuminate your path.) In the poor and arid *sertão* region of Northeastern Brazil, this sertanejo music spoke to the life of a migrant who finds himself far from his home in search of a better life. Although the migrants here in Rotolo’s did not necessarily leave the dry *sertão* of the Northeast, they can still relate to these feelings of nostalgia for loved ones far away.

Durval Miniz Albuquerque has theorized how migration and feelings of nostalgia
have characterized music from the Northeast of Brazil leading to the creation of a regional identity (Albuquerque 1999). As the singing increases in Rotolos, gaining strength and union, I can’t help but think that these same songs that hold such a powerful symbolic importance for the poor and desperate Northeastern Brazilian migrant now hold an even more symbolic role for those who carry stories of leaving the familiarity of their nation in search of a more livable existence in the United States. Everyone has a story to tell. All those present and singing have become part of the song. They are all “passarinhos que querem voar” (birds that want to fly) just as Zezé and Luciano sing, destiny has called them away from all that was familiar and all that they once loved. They share together for a moment the story sung in these sad verses of leaving those behind in search of a future. I think that it is fair to say that New Orleans just may well be the place where these Brazilian passarinhos find new nesting grounds.

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