

*“Not Made by Great Men:” The Negotiation of Space by  
Brazilian Immigrants in Post-Katrina New Orleans*

Paper

by Adam Frick  
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The following is an analysis and articulation of the relationship Brazilian immigrants are negotiating with post-Katrina New Orleans as a spatial urban environment. I argue that Brazilian immigrants find appeal in and affinity with this environment, and that Brazilians are taking advantage of this environment to negotiate their standard of living and position in the local economic and social system. The Brazilian dialectic with New Orleans is here broken down into two interrelated parts: one, the spatial architecture of the city; and two, the city's urban infrastructure, a product of both the city's longstanding local social design, and the deleterious effects of Hurricane Katrina upon organization and efficiency.

My argument is launched from the premise that Brazilian immigrants like New Orleans. This argument is based on qualitative data I have accumulated, in the form of forty semi-structured interviews with Brazilian immigrants, participant observation, and the theoretical arguments of several disciplines of scholarship. My research indicates that New Orleans is appreciated due to ecological, social, and legal characteristics which to varying degrees makes the city appear inhabitable to Brazilian immigrants. Finally, while New Orleans is in many ways an ideal locale for the Brazilian immigrant, I argue that many of the characteristics which make New Orleans immediately accessible may also problematize potentialities for the long-term establishment of a Brazilian community.

Before delving into the arguments, it is first necessary to contextualize Brazilians in New Orleans within historical and geographical patterns of immigration, and the current academic debates on immigration. Doing so will help clarify the relevance of

Brazilians in New Orleans as a case study. Following this, I establish the theoretical framework within which I construct my arguments, then move on to the arguments.

While perhaps more than any other city, New Orleans fits the American “land of immigrants” image, New Orleans has been a minor player in recent immigrant trends. The most well-known periods of immigration in New Orleans are rooted in the antebellum period, when New Orleans was the most cosmopolitan city in the United States, and the Reconstruction era. In 1850, seventy-four percent of adult white males were foreign<sup>1</sup>, while just prior to the Civil War, forty percent of the population, and two-thirds of all businessmen, were foreigners<sup>2</sup>. Richard Campanella muses in *Geographies of New Orleans* that the Crescent City of the 19<sup>th</sup> century might have been, as he puts it, “America’s first multicultural society”<sup>3</sup>.

As the century drew to a close, though, immigrants attracted to New Orleans’ shrinking economy slowed from a steady stream to a trickle, then ground to a near halt, just as migration and immigration (and new industrial jobs) peaked in other parts of the country. Indeed, the most consistent stream of immigration to the city in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the decades-long, highly differentiated influx of Latin Americans, some nineteen nationalities in all<sup>4</sup>, categorized as a “community” under the dubious and generic Hispanic/Latino rubric<sup>5</sup>. This immigration, though, was initiated a century ago via business enterprise due to New Orleans’ juxtaposition with Mexico, Central America,

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<sup>1</sup> Rousey, Dennis C. “‘Hibernian Leatherheads’ Irish Cops in New Orleans, 1830-1880.” *Journal of Urban History*. 10.1 Nov 1983 pp. 61-84.

<sup>2</sup> Lonn, Ella. *Foreigners in the Confederacy*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Campanella, Richard. *Geographies of New Orleans*. p138.

<sup>4</sup> “Hispanics in N.O. a blend of cultures.” *Times-Picayune* August 25 1991.

<sup>5</sup> “What’s the Problem with ‘Hispanic?’ Just ask a Latino.” By D. Gonzalez. *The New York Times*, vol. 15, 1992.

and the Caribbean basin<sup>6</sup>. Continued immigration to the city has been relatively minute in comparison to other cities along or near the Sunbelt. The Latinization of the U.S. largely bypassed New Orleans, as the official Hispanic population pre-Katrina was 3.1%, while the national percentage was 14.1%<sup>7</sup>. Even up to the days prior to Hurricane Katrina, one of the newest wrinkles in the face of the “New South,” that is, Latino immigration, had almost completely missed New Orleans. While surrounding states saw their Hispanic populations increase as much as three and even five-fold between 1990 and 2000, Louisiana’s increase was just 16%<sup>8</sup>.

To say that times have changed would be an understatement. Katrina’s destruction yielded a high demand for cheap labor to rebuild the city, and a massive wave of Latin American immigrants have come in search of wages which, by Latin American standards, are enormous. Less than a year after Katrina, the Latino population in metropolitan New Orleans was marked at 30,000<sup>9</sup>, most of whom are new residents. This number is almost certainly a conservative figure, though; a recent article in the *New York Times* cites a November 2006 release by the Louisiana Health and Population Survey which reveals that the number of Latinos living in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes has risen between 2004 and 2006, from 10,000 to 60,000, while local community workers estimate that tens of thousands of new Latino laborers have arrived since Katrina<sup>10</sup>.

The expansion of the Latino populace becomes even more dramatic when we consider a nationality which, while not officially included as Latino or Hispanic

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<sup>6</sup> United Fruit Company. Business directory of manufacturers, dealers, exporters, importers and banks and bankers of New Orleans, Louisiana, and British Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Spanish Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. New Orleans: United Fruit Company. 1908, 1912, 1916.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2000.

<sup>8</sup> *The New Latino South*, Pew Hispanic Center, p7, July 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Fletcher, Laurel E. Rebuilding after Katrina: A Population-Based Study of Labor and Human Rights in New Orleans. 2006.

<sup>10</sup> “Katrina Begets a Baby Boom by Immigrants,” by Eduardo Porter, *New York Times* 11 December 2006.

according to federal census methods, is often considered as such in the public mind: Brazilians. According to the 2000 U.S. census, the entire Brazilian population of Louisiana pre-Katrina was 689. Even considering undocumented immigrants, Brazilians who are longtime-residents of New Orleans estimate the pre-Katrina population to have been no more than a few hundred. Currently, though, the Brazilian population is as high as seven thousand, with expectations for a steep increase over the winter season. Brazilians have increasingly immigrated to the U.S., and are quietly becoming a sizeable immigrant group in several major cities<sup>11</sup>, but the Brazilian population explosion in the new Latino New Orleans is a phenomenon among phenomena.

This phenomenon has produced an unexpected dialectic between Brazilian immigrants and New Orleans. Brazilians are rapidly developing an empowered, diversified community whose practices are implicitly negotiating their status as immigrants. These practices are relatively simple to enumerate; however, it is their very simplicity as quotidian exercises which necessitates that, in order for them to be palpable to the reader, they be delineated and fortified by a theoretical framework which taps into the academic syncretism of the works of several key scholars of the city, space, immigration, and everyday life.

The apparatus is as follows. The Brazilian-New Orleans dialectic constitutes a multifaceted subject and a multifaceted hegemonic force. Here, the subject is the community of people who are at once Brazilians and immigrants, two separate roles which are performed coterminously. This community is subject to hegemonic forces; while these forces are numerous, for the purposes of this paper I am only interested in

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<sup>11</sup> Goza, Franklin. *Brazilian Immigration to North America* 1994.

how the quotidian is performed, according to the hegemonic organization of, and adjustment to, space.

What, then, is “space”? It is more than the measured distance between “here” and “there,” and more than a relationship between negative and positive material. It is anything and everything—owing to this, a thinker such as Lefebvre is driven to discuss space, not in terms of what it is, but how it is used. For Lefebvre, space is also action in the abstract, not in itself kinetic, but a stimulus and sustainment of behavior. Space is a vastly heterogeneous interrelation of representations of space, spatial practices, and representational spaces.

By this he means several things. Representations of space, in step with Marxian arguments, are an intended proletarianization of the denizens of a city, by longstanding hegemonic forces which codify space with intent that the interpretation of space leads to materialism and capitalist modes of production. Actual things are stages for the implementation of signs, themselves the representational spaces, often if not always attempts, however conscious or subconscious, to establish a quintessential character which attracts and compels a public, based on memory, nostalgia, and desire. In other words, when we think about space, we must think about the imposition of reality, by representation of space, as the hegemonic force in the dialectic of the totality of practices within space, among denizens of urban space.

It is crucial at this juncture to consider de Certeau’s arguments regarding the quotidian. Space, according to Lefebvre, is something ubiquitous and heterogeneous, and so can be manifested and controlled, but since it inhabits everyone, it is never owned by any singular body. As something infinitely pervasive, it can also be appropriated by that

which it affects—never mind who or what created it, it can be at least partially taken over by anyone and everyone in the present day. De Certeau argues that the revolt of the subject takes place to a large extent in the everyday, revolt consisting of subtle choices regular people make (he calls them “tactics”), which are made in an ad-hoc and unorganized practice in response to environmental context. Examples are multitudinous: the way we speak and converse, the way we cook, the food we shop for, where we spend free time, and so on. This context is largely driven by attempts to control it (“strategies”), in the form of politics, economics, the media, and, I would include, the constant spatial construction of the city.

I say this based on the resemblance of Lefebvre’s notion of spatial practices to everyday life, and because the implicit capital intent of city planning leads to spatial practices. De Certeau clearly states that the performers (“users”) of everyday life are not necessarily its makers, but by performing within its context, they negotiate how it is managed. He argues that the subject, once considered a group left to marginality, has actually become a majority, and that the “cultural activity of the non-producers of culture...is becoming universal”<sup>12</sup>. In other words, power is in the hands of the common man or woman, but because the features of this power are first embedded in the design of the very space in which one lives, power is wielded subtly and minutely, in an unconscious but all-encompassing capacity.

This can be linked to Lefebvre’s arguments if we consider that, if a sustained dissatisfaction among the proletariat is performed through quotidian resistance, the functionality of a city’s architecture must therefore be faulty. That is, if the inhabitants of space are implicitly dissatisfied with their surroundings, they will respond by just as

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<sup>12</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1983. pxvii.

implicitly revolting against the capital-minded space. This would thereby signify a loss of efficiency and capital growth, and necessitate that the spatial architecture be altered to conform to implicit proletarian demands.

A good example is as follows. The constructions in a city may have longstanding capital intentions, such as the jobs of the working classes being located in an area where this proletariat will not be visible to wealthier denizens, having the desired effect of appeasing the tastes of wealthier classes while necessitating that lower classes live “back of town.” However, we may postulate that production is often contingent upon the psychology, social health, and satisfaction or lack thereof, of the producer. So, if the lower classes are negatively affected by “back of town” life (pestilence, social status, inhospitable quarters, lack of access to public works or amenities, and so on), the long-term effects on production affect all urban denizens, calling for space surrounding the proletariat to be remanifested. This is, in effect, the negotiation of space. While the culture of the everyday is largely propelled by the production of space, the spatial dynamic must adhere to the implicit demands of the everyday discourse of the marginal.

The culture of the everyday is something which naturally occurs in the lives of anyone living in a community, and the management and negotiation of space makes all city denizens both subject and broker. Also, it should be clear by now that the means by which a denizen negotiates an urban space is contingent upon the particularities of both the denizen and the space—and the ways this relationship affects the everyday life of the denizen.

My interest in the relationship between New Orleans and Brazilian immigrants becomes salient with consideration of immigration theories. Immigration theories tend to

articulate positions at different points along a plane of discourse bookended by notions of “assimilation” or the development of self-sustaining economic, linguistic, or cultural enclaves. Less debated but more central to assimilation/enclave theories is their focus on people who make a deliberate choice to move from one locale to another, then stay there. While there are various push and pull factors which impell these choices, one of the most important points to consider in relation to my discussion of Lefebvre and de Certeau is that immigration is grounded in the deliberate choice to move or stay put. Choice as a concept must be considered here—albeit lightly for fear of falling into a philosophical tailspin. What is important to acknowledge is that, while all choices are tempered by demands and structures, the quotidian is very much a matter of everyday practices of choice, based on desire, demand, will, curiosity, and comfort. Space is not made by great men; nor is it managed by great acts. But it can be reformed through great patterns of movement. Space is converted via the sea change enacted by these patterns, and immigration is currently an especially provocative pattern.

Another important point is what immigrants do, and what they constitute, when they stay put in large quantities. We already know that Brazilians as immigrants have arrived almost entirely after Hurricane Katrina, and that they currently make up an unexpectedly large proportion of the city’s population. Now that they are here, we must see how, or rather whether, they compare to scholarship’s enclave models. Moreover, I contend that immigration models are typically constructed around specifications of the lives of immigrants on a quotidian basis. That is, immigrant enclave models are interested in how immigrants deal with daily challenges, a notion similar to what de Certeau calls “making do.” Much of these challenges, for immigrants, revolve around community-

building, attainment and sophistication of occupations, property ownership, and the establishment of place.

I argue that each of these issues are firmly rooted in immigrants' negotiation of space. For example, one of the most steadfast theories, the Immigrant Enclave model fashioned by Alejandro Portes, argues that an immigrant enclave is defined by interrelating factors in which immigrants are spatially concentrated, they do not culturally or linguistically assimilate, they are received with hostility from non-immigrants, and that they develop a diverse ethnic market<sup>13</sup>. This theory however was first published in 1986, a period separated today by technologies which have dramatically altered the means of space management. So, for example, how is the relevance of the spatial concentration of immigrant homes, workplaces, businesses, or meeting areas changed, in the advent of something as ubiquitous and constantly-used as the cellphone?

The immigrant problematic of the pre-digital age, the age with the most famous immigrant waves, and the age upon which most immigrant theory models have been based, has been superseded and exploded by technologies which alter the meaning and significance of space. This is not to say that immigrants are not cognizant of space: a Vietnamese mother in New Orleans East yearns for her child in Hanoi; a Senegalese exchange student lies open-eyed in bed, knowing that his wife is awake half a world away; a Haitian refugee meanders through a mall, wishing he could "be there" to personally give a birthday gift to his son. The cognizance of space can easily be scaled back, though, to a local, domestic level: a factory worker lives in a cubbyhole among ashheaps to make ends meet; countrymen who speak the same mother tongue may live in

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<sup>13</sup> Portes, A., and R.D. Manning . 1986. "The Immigrant Enclave: Theory and Empirical Examples." Pp. 47-66 in *Competitive Ethnic Relations*, edited by S. Olzak, and J. Nagel. Orlando, FL: Academic Press, Inc.

the same foreign city but are unable to initiate or sustain a community because they live miles apart and never meet; networks, groups, and movements are left unfostered as the distance between people spatializes them, separates them, and stymies consolidation.

There is a reason that enclaves have until recently necessitated geographic concentration: for ethnic groups faced with linguistic, cultural, political, and ideological marginalization, the very possibility of community has depended on close quarters.

This is no longer the case, as Brazilians in New Orleans demonstrate. While most immigrant communities' histories in U.S. cities stretch before the development of many technologies, Brazilians in New Orleans are entirely new. This fact should not be underestimated. As Mary Waters writes in a recent survey of the field of immigration studies, the increased presence of immigrants in non-traditional gateway cities mandates a refocus on empirical and theoretical study. At the same time, she notes that the lack of immigration history in new gateways yields a situation in which the place of immigrants in local social hierarchies is fresh and open to contention on the part of the immigrants<sup>14</sup>. While New Orleans certainly has a history of immigration, as shown above, this history is segmented, with a vast lacuna separating the immigration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that of today. Also, not only are Brazilians distinct from their urban predecessors in New Orleans, but they are distinct from most (all?) immigrant communities in the U.S., and their seizure, vanquishment, or conquering of different forms of space are an expedient to the achievement of place. All of this means that Brazilians in New Orleans are significantly and clearly problematizing preexisting immigration models which hinge upon the daily uses of space.

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<sup>14</sup> Waters, M. C., and T. R. Jimenez . 2005. "Assessing Immigrant Assimilation: New Empirical and Theoretical Challenges." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 105-125.

This goes for not just technology, but the physical terrain of a city. Lefebvre argues that the original purposes of a constructed space can be reappropriated and put to a different use; so too are the technologies for the negotiation of space susceptible to seizure by a public which played no direct part in their creation. This is echoed by de Certeau, who argues that the consumption of products is a form of manifesting power. De Certeau also writes, though, that “everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others”<sup>15</sup>. While the term “poaching” may be unintentionally hostile when brought into the context of Hurricane Katrina, there is no doubt that immigrants have suddenly taken on an active role in both the resettlement of New Orleans, and in the reappropriation of the city’s preexisting urban space. After all, they now live in this space, and their occupations revolve around the construction of and within this space.

All of this brings us back to my original, seemingly facile point, that Brazilians like New Orleans. I return to this affection for New Orleans, not out disregard for the complexities of the situation of Brazilian immigrants, but as a point of reference to the complex reasons behind their arrival, and the equally complex result of their residence in the city. Obviously, Brazilians did not and do not come to New Orleans because they like it—they have never been to the city prior to arrival, and familiarity with the city is almost exclusively based on exposure to news of Hurricane Katrina and the demand for construction work.

That being said, we must return to the notion of space, for in the context of immigration, this notion has ramifications beyond the city, and into regional, national, and international significance. To begin with, news of Katrina and labor demands has

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<sup>15</sup> de Certeau, p xii.

travelled to Brazilians by print, television, and internet media, three signs of widespread communities, as well as potentialities for emerging communities in new locales. We might include also word of mouth, often transmitted by phone conversations. Indeed, the extent of immigration to New Orleans is largely based on the pronouncement of labor demand via media technologies, as many Brazilians have stated in interviews that they first heard of New Orleans while already living in other U.S. cities, or were recruited and contracted from afar by both organized companies and Brazilians themselves.

The decision to come to New Orleans, and later the sustained decision to remain in the city, has largely been based on the ecological differences between different locales. Nearly all interviewees arrived in New Orleans between the months of October 2005 and April 2006, and among these, about 75% arrived in January. The reason for this is due at least in part to both a lack of labor opportunities during the winter months, and the pure discomfort of cold weather. Whether in a formal interview or in daily conversation, for instance, every Brazilian immigrant who came to New Orleans from Massachusetts (the preeminent sending locale) states that their two main reasons for migrating anew were the cessation of construction work in the North, and the heat of the South. This sentiment is echoed even in cases of Brazilians coming from more southern locations like Atlanta, another major sending city. Moreover, every Brazilian, regardless of previous locale of residence, has stated that they find New Orleans to be more amenable to daily life and labor due to a climate which more closely matches the climate of Brazil.

This may become a chief factor in long-term retention. The year-round heat, humidity, and available construction work is allowing Brazilians to live in an American city whose climate matches their own in Brazil, while making as much as \$800 a week.

This seems prescient to arguments about spatial management on a grand scale, as Brazilians choose to change their geographical location, and command their environment, on a daily basis. The argument can be made that, at this point in time, Brazilian immigrants are not as deeply attached to an urban space, in the sense that most are single men without families embedded in the New Orleans economy or school system, and whose work, while consistent, is not relegated to long-term contracts. If desired, Brazilians could leave of their own accord, with far fewer restraints, than many New Orleanians. The fact that they continue to stay may be read as a daily or at least consistent management of interurban (not to be confused with intraurban) space.

Also, while it has only been mentioned explicitly in a scant few interviews, we may also point to possible resemblances between the urban character of New Orleans with that of the original locales of Brazilians, in Brazil. None of the Brazilians interviewed lived in large metropolitan areas in Brazil, and most lived in cities of under 100,000 people, usually well below that figure. The significance of this fact is fortified by the early sociological writings of Georg Simmel. Simmel argues in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* that a human psychology is developed in the city which increases stress upon individuals, causing a “blasé” attitude, a dwindling sense of dearness for others, and a reserved demeanor. He writes:

the inside of this outer reserve is not only indifference, but more frequently than we realize, it is a quiet aversion and brings a mutual foreignness and repulsion, that would immediately sprout, in a moment of a somehow induced introduction, hates and fights. (35)

This is a reservedness propagated in the quotidian, “with every walk down the street, with the speed and variety of the economic, the vocational, and one’s social life” as

opposed to “a slower, more accustomed, more even-flowing rhythm” propagated in town and country life<sup>16</sup>.

I mention this, not to claim that Brazilians are easy-going countryfolk, but specifically because Simmel himself made reference in the German-language title of his essay to cities of a particular size. W. Allen Martin notes that the German word *grosstadt*, found in the title of the essay, should not be translated simply as “city” but as “bulk city,” a term which, according to Martin *per* Simmel, specifically designates cities of more than 100,000 people. So, a more precise title for Simmel’s essay, taken to a plebian level, would be “The Big City and Mental Life.”

With this we may also consider a term cited by Martin, “urbanicity.” Urbanicity is the *degree* to which a geographical space is urban, meaning the extent to which an area is populated, working and “feeling” urban. The technicalities of the term are not important for this paper—Martin goes as far as to suggest an “index” of urbanicity—so much as the notion that one city can be more urban than another, and can feel as such. Simmel appears to note a difference, often based on size, in the urbanicity of a city, while certainly the subjective feel of urbanicity can be measured on a popular level.

In this case, Brazilians find New Orleans’ urbanicity more approachable. Again, while Brazilians were hesitant to explicitly comment on just how urban New Orleans is in comparison to other locales, they almost unanimously described New Orleans in contrasting terms to the ones used by Simmel regarding cities, while other U.S. locales were described in wording highly reminiscent of his essay. This was most often channeled through descriptions of New Orleans as upbeat, friendly, welcoming, and

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<sup>16</sup> Simmel p32.

with fewer preconceptions against immigrants, while Americans in other cities were described as racist, strict, reserved, and noncommunicative.

The congeniality and relaxed social norms of one city versus the “chilliness” of another is a stereotypical image among Americans of the North-South divide; in this case, though, Brazilians were clear that, regardless of the U.S. city from which they arrived, New Orleans was particularly “carinhoso” (loosely translated, “tender”). One Brazilian, having lived in Atlanta for three years prior to moving to Metairie, noted that, unlike in Atlanta, his neighbors greet him in the morning, people smile at him on the street, and his employers make an extra effort to communicate with him.

This goes beyond mere friendliness. What is interesting about this interviewee is that, while he meets with a tutor every morning, he does not yet speak English. In fact, most Brazilians in New Orleans speak little or no English, yet their observations are consistent with this specific example. We can take from this, at the very least, that New Orleans conveys something which is at least partially transcending the obstacle of language, and which is more pervasive than human relations. Brazilians compliment New Orleans as a city with less traffic, less congestion, and a less rigid pace of life. It would be presumptuous to attempt to establish commonalities between New Orleans and Brazilians original place of residence.

Among the little scholarship which exists regarding small cities and towns in Latin America, the general consensus is that these areas are too diverse in make-up to reveal much in the form of common spatial characteristics<sup>17</sup>. At the same time, in terms of social structure, Latin American small cities do appear to have some similarities with

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<sup>17</sup> van Lindert, P., and O. Verkoren. 1997. *Small Towns and Beyond: Rural Transformation and Small Urban Centres in Latin America*. Thela Publishers.

New Orleans. Recent studies show that smaller cities yield a blurring of class distinctions, a prevalence of informal and casual relationships, and often the close juxtaposition of lower and middle classes in geographic space<sup>18</sup>.

The social heterogeneity and interdependence within the urban space of New Orleans is well-documented. Pierce Lewis points out that New Orleans has had close spatial relations between the wealthy and the poor since the antebellum period, due to the existence of slave quarters behind mansions, and the prevalence of “superblocks” ringed by white and creole elites with a slave interior<sup>19</sup>. Also, Craig Colten argues that, throughout the city’s history, varying social classes have been interdependent, since the public health concerns of constructing a city in a swamp have necessitated that public works in the form of plumbing and sanitation be spread out more evenly than they might be otherwise<sup>20</sup>.

More research is necessary to determine the extent to which one can connect the dots between Brazilian urban origins and the legacy of the construction of space in New Orleans, but it does appear clear that Brazilians are benefitting from New Orleans as a city which more closely matches their spatial interests. We must also remember that, since New Orleans parish is the locale with the highest demand for construction work, Brazilians often live within the same urban space which has produced elaborate and interconnected quotidian social relations. Bourbon street, for example, has become a locale for heightened social and ethnic mixing. Many Brazilians cite Bourbon street as

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<sup>18</sup> van Lindert, P., and O. Verkoren. 1997. *Small Towns and Beyond: Rural Transformation and Small Urban Centres in Latin America*. Thela Publishers.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, Peirce F. 2003. *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: The Center for American Places, Inc.

<sup>20</sup> Colten, C. E. 2005. *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature*. Louisiana State University Press.

place to socialize without fear of police intervention, since the prevailing concern is not where you are from or what language you speak, but whether you can contribute to the local tourist economy. Also, while the ownership of private property is a premium everywhere, some locations are co-opted depending on the time of day. A pizzeria in Metairie, owned and managed by a Brazilian, is a local eatery by day, but moonlights as a Brazilian meeting place on weekends, where hundreds flock to listen to live Brazilian music. Though New Orleans has achieved notoriety for its violence, poverty, and tenuous race relations, New Orleans is also well-known for having a largely family-gearred atmosphere, wide streets, and easy access to greenspace and public space. Rather than living in small flats, Brazilians often rent entire houses, with front porches, balconies, and yards. One Brazilian described New Orleans as having a wealth of “areas de lazer” (“leisure space”), while another described New Orleans as being much more *saidero* (“outgoing” or “social”) than citizens of other American cities.

This appropriation of space according to Brazilian intent to establish place is a trend which may increase, given the changing abilities for hegemonic forces to strategically manage the city. Private property is often rented by undocumented Brazilians, and converted into places of worship, dance, or business. Public spaces such as parks become sites for Brazilian social functions, such as cookouts or soccer matches. Also, the relevance of the legal status of immigrants has receded. Numerous articles in the *Times-Picayune* note the shortage of police officers in post-Katrina New Orleans, and their priorities are not centered on weeding out undocumented immigrants. Brazilians note that they feel less hassled by the police than in other U.S. cities, and are often able to work construction jobs without their legal status being analyzed scrupulously. Many

Brazilians purchase used cars in cash, then drive them based on international drivers licenses. If stopped while driving, police officers typically do not ask for legal documents.

Also, utilization of new technologies is creating a situation in which Brazilians are able to retain cultural practices, while continuing to establish a community, and to some degree an enclave. As already noted, cellphones are fast becoming a means of empowerment for the subject. This is a trend recognized by journalists, governments, and scholars alike, as one recent *Economist* article points out, going as far as to call it “liberation technology”<sup>21</sup>.

We must also consider the uses of inexpensive cars, satellite television, and access to personal computers and the internet in domestic homes. Most Brazilians drive to work, social meeting spots, private businesses and stores in their own cars, paid for in cash, drastically reducing the need to live in spatially-concentrated areas, or locations close to the workplace. Nearly all Brazilians purchase a cable package which includes two Brazilian TV networks, Teleglobo and Brasil-Record, for an amount which averages out to ten dollars a month for each person in a household. And, while computers and the internet are not ubiquitous, they are increasingly common. One household in Metarie divides rent, cable, and energy costs among seven roommates for under three hundred dollars a month; five of them have laptops, each with webcams to communicate with loved ones in Brazil. Everyone, of course, has a cellphone.

That people are able to live under the radar and appropriate space is nothing new. The legal leniency of the New Orleans has become a part of the American imaginary, while in antebellum times immigrants often chose New Orleans as a port of entry due to

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<sup>21</sup> “Mobiles, Protests and Pundits.” *The Economist* 28 October 2006, p71.

relaxed health requirements for entry<sup>22</sup>. The religious beliefs of slaves were trenchant enough that the early 19<sup>th</sup> century New Orleans *cabildo* eventually legitimized one particular space for its practices, in Congo Square. What is new is the speed of activity. Here, a single group is taking advantage of clandestine living, not just in terms of the purchase of goods but in the establishment of general stores, bars, a danceclub, and evangelical churches, all without any locally-organized media or official legislation of rights, but by renting or co-opting spaces with the cash earned performing local labor, and redefining the significance of space at, quite literally, the flip of a switch.

At this stage in the Brazilian settlement of New Orleans, more questions exist than answers. Future avenues of study might include, for instance, how Brazilians negotiate the construction of space as laborers who are actually and physically reconstructing the city, or how the Brazilian community compares to other Latino populations. However, it is still too early to do much more than pontificate upon the future of Brazilians in New Orleans. As mentioned above, Brazilians are still in a position in which their lives have a high potentiality for being transitory. True, it seems safe to say that the demand for construction labor will last for several years if not longer, thereby granting immigrants a considerably long stay before the diversification of occupation might become necessary.

This does not mean that Brazilians will continue to find the structural characteristics of New Orleans amenable for residence. Most Brazilians state that they would like to purchase homes in New Orleans for long-term settlement, but most consider it too risky: New Orleans may allow the purchase of a home, but federal laws

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<sup>22</sup> Spletstoser, Frederick Marcel. *Backdoor to the Land of Plenty: New Orleans as an Immigrant Port, 1820-1860*. 1978 Louisiana State University.

can take it away from an undocumented immigrant at any time. Also, the very structural holes in post-Katrina New Orleans may actually stymie community and enclave-building among Brazilians, for, just as they choose on a daily basis to live and work in New Orleans, they can choose to stop and leave. Waters notes that new gateway cities are often lacking in institutional preparation, services, and access to public works. A potentially bitter irony is that the very things which draw and keep Brazilians in New Orleans, may eventually flush them out. A meager police force is hardly an attractive quality in a city with a rampant crime problem, of which Brazilians are highly cognizant. An immigrant may break his leg on the job and have neither access to paid leave (due to not being an official citizen) or means of treatment (due to a poor health care system). A woman may seek birth control or a chance to visit a doctor, but there is no translator to help her. While Brazilians contend that they make more money and have higher quality of life in New Orleans, they also state they are much more likely to be stiffed in contracting jobs which provide no guarantee of payment from their employer.

In closing, I note that the use of the word “negotiation” must be unpacked for the double-edged sword that it is. Just as space is based on a relationship in which the power of the dominant hegemonic force is always conditioned and qualified by the subject, we must remember that negotiation is a combination of revolt as well as acquiescence, and that often, the negotiation of space is contingent upon participation. De Certeau argues that the tactics of the subject can be evaluated; in the case of Brazilian immigrants, their participation in the management of New Orleans space may increase or recede, based on future developments, and their own decision to remain in the city. While their retention appears likely, further study of their activities are subject to how New Orleans hegemonic

strategies address the implicit demands of immigrants. It is hoped that this paper outlines the ways in which New Orleanians can respond to the daily presence of a group which, while unexpected up to this point, can still be met with preparation and provision.

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