

STORIES OF SOMERVILLE: AN ANALYSIS OF AGENCY, STRUCTURE, AND  
CULTURE AMONGST IMMIGRANT-OWNED FOOD BUSINESSES IN UNION SQUARE

By  
Emily Wyner

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Prof. Deborah Pacini-Hernandez

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## PREFACE

There are certain aspects of this research that I feel obliged to comment on, so as to better place my findings. First and foremost, it is important to highlight my identity and role in this research: I am a young white female who is English-speaking (but with some proficiency in Spanish). My narrators, by contrast, are immigrants whose first language was not English, though that was the language we opted to conduct our interviews in. While it is difficult—impossible even—to understand how this dynamic affected our interactions and the information I received, it is not unreasonable to say that it did. Additionally, as someone who has never owned her own business, I cannot shed much light on what information I would want to keep private, and what I would feel comfortable sharing, let alone how I would make these choices were I a newcomer in the United States. Thus, I can only speculate on my narrators’ intentions and motivations during our interviews; while I can analyze body language and the breadth of their answers, I have to recognize that my research was incomplete at best.

Moreover, as hinted at in the Acknowledgements section, this was very much a group project. Collectively, my classmates and I conducted around fifty interviews. The interviews were not perfect, and we developed much of my methodology along the way, but we ultimately gathered some very valuable insights. I say this all to recognize that this paper’s scope is limited—but that was the intention. I, as an individual, do not pretend to have “all the answers”—especially since I have yet to stop asking questions. Rather, this paper is part of a body of research and ongoing discussion that is critical to the future of Somerville and (perhaps) other urban areas. Largely, this paper puts forth a *way* of thinking about immigrant

entrepreneurship, in the context of Union Square in Somerville, rather than concrete conclusions about it. I urge the reader to explore the other papers from Urban Borderlands 2011 for more insight and perspective on immigrant entrepreneurship in Somerville; they are angled differently, though serve complimentary purposes.

## INTRODUCTION

What do you hear when I say the word “immigrant?” It’s a loaded word, for sure, and highly political, at least today in the United States. Folks on the left, right, up, down, and what-have-you sides of the political spectrum often throw this word around like a pawn on a political chessboard. Behind this word, however, lies a person and a story. Countless people and stories, in fact. As an anthropology student, I’m prone to liking peoples’ stories, uncovering the meaning, value, and symbols behind them. This paper is just that: an analysis of stories and their significance. In this paper, I will be taking a close look at the stories of immigrant food business owners in Somerville, Massachusetts—a project that came out of an anthropology seminar entitled Urban Borderlands at Tufts University.

Much of the available literature on immigrant entrepreneurship points to either cultural or structural reasons for *why* immigrants turn to self-employment (Brettell). On the cultural side, many authors claim that the values these immigrants bring with them urge them to restore and maintain their ethnicity via business. On the structural side, some emphasize the

constraints and opportunities available to immigrants. This model suggests on the one hand that immigrants are pushed to self-employment as a result of discrimination that blocks other alternatives, or as a result of limited language skills that make it more difficult to enter the mainstream labor market ... On the other hand, opportunities are to be found in the structure of the local economy and the ethnic composition of urban areas. (Brettell 383-4)

In this paper, I will forward the idea that *both* of these frameworks—cultural and structural—are important in analyzing how and why immigrants turn to self-employment. I will focus heavily on the structural framework, which is particularly relevant in the city of Somerville.

Recognizing that neither the cultural nor structural model pays much attention to the roles of agency and individual decision-making, I will elect to analyze the stories of my four narrators through the lens of “mixed-embeddedness,” an idea put forth by anthropologists Robert Kloosterman and Jan Rath:

The mixed-embeddedness approach is intended to take into account the characteristics of the supply of immigrant entrepreneurs, the shape of the opportunity structure, and the institutions mediating between aspiring entrepreneurs and concrete openings to start a business in order to analyse immigrant entrepreneurship in different national contexts. (Kloosterman 9)

This approach is appropriate not only for different national contexts, as posited by the authors, but also for more local environments. Somerville, as explained in the section *Setting the Stage*, has its own structural characteristics (and, for that matter, cultural, too) that should be considered in evaluating the stories of immigrant entrepreneurs within its borders.

In sum, this paper will analyze the stories of four immigrant entrepreneurs in Somerville through the lens of mixed-embeddedness in an attempt to braid the influences of agency, structure, and culture. Through the stories and discussion that follow, I will place particular emphasis on the role of individual agency and decision-making by highlighting the reasons these immigrants opted for self-employment. Moreover, I will posit that while plenty of current literature on immigrant entrepreneurship focuses on the home cultures of the immigrants themselves, the culture of the *place* in which they now reside and work is also wildly relevant to their story. In doing so, I will explain how the complexities of Somerville and the dynamics of individual biography make these stories so profound.

## METHODOLOGY

Urban Borderlands was designed to give its students experience doing anthropological fieldwork. For each food establishment we explored, we were tasked with first doing an “informational visit,” in which we tasted some food, chatted with some employees, and generally gauged the atmosphere. (Think of this as a snapshot of participant observation). Then, we scheduled interviews with the establishments’ owners—or tried to. This proved to be no easy task. The establishments we were frequenting were, for the most part, small businesses; they did not always have the time or desire to spend thirty minutes talking to curious college students. Sometimes, language proved to be a tricky barrier in getting interviews. (It should also be noted that sometimes, even when the nature of the interview was explained, it seemed as though the owners did not understand why we would want to learn about them and perhaps write a blog post for them. This suggests a lack of familiarity with community organizations). Nonetheless, we ultimately had our interviews—some with Somerville community organizations and leaders, too.

I personally interviewed four food establishments owners: Nora Cabrera of La Internacional, Rosy Cerna of Machu Picchu, José Barbosa of J&J Restaurant, and Karina Rendón of Cantina La Mexicana (who is actually the owner’s daughter).<sup>1</sup> Prior to each interview, I wrote up a list of questions and topics I wanted to discuss, catering specifically to that business. I tried to leave room for my narrators to chime in and talk about whatever was on their mind, too. After each interview, I transcribed the conversation and wrote an analytical report on it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At the start of the semester, we (the students in Urban Borderlands) received our CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) certification, allowing us to do research with “human subjects.”

<sup>2</sup> These interview reports are available on Tufts Digital Collections and Archives.



Beyond this interviewing process, as the class went on, each of us began the process of reviewing some literature on our particular topics of interest. We reviewed former Urban Borderlands reports, one another's interviews, and published literature on immigrant entrepreneurship. Both components—the interviews and the literature review—happened somewhat simultaneously. That is, we would interview business owners while reading further and deciding how we wanted to cater or direct our interviews.

Finally, a fundamental part of our work in Urban Borderlands was our partnership with The Welcome Project, a community organization in Somerville that seeks to “[build] the collective power of Somerville immigrants to participate in and shape community decisions” (The Welcome Project). Each of us was tasked with writing at least two blog posts to be published on The Welcome Project's site. As such, in addition to whatever information we were seeking out for our research, we also tried to ask questions that would be relevant to a semi-promotional blog piece. I, for one, was always interested in asking about the owners' start-up stories; nonetheless, asking more detailed questions about the food and offerings helped round out my interviews and allowed me to form more personable relationships with my narrators. The whole experience of writing blog pieces—using casual, creative language and photography to tell a story—was yet another lens through which to analyze these establishments.

## SETTING THE STAGE: SOMERVILLE, AND UNION SQUARE

Somerville, Massachusetts is located in Middlesex County, just a couple miles north of Boston. It is the “most densely populated community in New England,” with 75,754 residents in just over four square miles (“About Somerville”). It has been popularly coined by our

community partner, The Welcome Project, as “Immigrant City.” This is no misnomer. First settled in 1630 and then incorporated as a town 1842, Somerville has long had a history of development, urbanization, and change; it was incorporated as a city in 1872 “due to its growing population and increasing industrialization” (“About Somerville”). Anna Smith, a recent graduate of the American Studies program at Tufts University, writes, “[t]he history of Somerville, Massachusetts reflects a common, northeastern urban narrative of industrialization, immigration, post-industrial decline, and urban revival through the parallel processes of gentrification and immigration” (Smith).

Following its 1842 incorporation, Somerville began developing roads and railroads, which attracted immigrant labor and other industries to the area, including meat-packing and brick-making (Smith). Smith describes the key immigration trends in Somerville’s history:

By the turn of the twentieth century, the population of Somerville had reached 61,643 residents, 28% of whom were foreign born and hailed primarily from English-speaking Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland ... The number of Western European and Canadian, foreign-born residents in Somerville remained fairly constant during the early twentieth century while a new wave of immigration saw large increases in Italian and Portuguese immigrants between the years 1900-1930 ... Somerville continued to grow as an urban manufacturing center, hitting its highest population in 1930 with 103,908 residents ... While Somerville’s immigrants were largely European into the early twentieth century, contemporary immigration patterns show significant numbers of Latin American, Asian, and African arrivals. The absence of these groups in early immigration likely reflects national policies that excluded and placed strict quotas on many nations until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which abolished restrictive quota systems privileging European immigrants. (Smith)

It should also be noted that during this time, many Latin American countries were experiencing significant political and economic strife, likely stimulating the desire to leave for many people in these countries. The passage of the 1965 Act certainly encouraged many of these conflict-ridden countries’ citizens to come to the United States. Somerville, being an urban environment in the metropolitan Boston area, was no doubt an attractive option. Today, more than a quarter of

Somerville's population is foreign-born, with large numbers of Latin American, Haitian, and Asian residents (U.S. Census Bureau).

This history of immigration and industry is closely tied to the more recent history of business in Somerville. In June 2009, the City of Somerville's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development released a report that describes the types of business activity that historically were and presently are common:

With the decline of manufacturing and the exodus of people from urban areas during the 60's and 70's, Somerville's economic character moved from one centered on major industry to that of a diverse mix of service sectors. While some niche heavy industry persisted (many companies dating back to the early 20th century can still be found in Boynton Yards), entertainment, food and drinking, banking, health care and personal services became the employers for the majority of Somerville residents. As population and local employment waned throughout the second half of the 20th century, Somerville's economy transitioned to its current state of almost exclusively small businesses with a large portion of its labor force (particularly the well-educated part) finding employment outside the city. (Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development)

David Guzman, a current economic development specialist in this department, recently confirmed these trends in an interview with one of my classmates. He said that Somerville is "comprised of eighty percent of businesses that are small, with ten or less employees" (Neff). Many of these businesses—particularly food-related businesses—are owned and/or staffed by immigrants. Later in this paper, I will explore the factors that may cause Somerville immigrants to turn to self-employment in the food industry.

Somerville gets a good deal of attention for much more than its high immigrant population. The city is an artistic hotspot, second only to New York in artists per capita in the country ("About Somerville"). With organizations such as ArtsUnion, Brickbottom Artists Association, Arts at the Armory, and Somerville Arts Council, as well as renowned festivals like ArtBeat and Honk!, Somerville as a community places tremendous emphasis on art culture. It is

rather incredible, too, that a city so geographically small is so highly programmed. Somerville is certainly jumping on the go-local-and-celebrate-it bandwagon. In addition to other news avenues, Somerville residents (and goers) can now get their community-oriented news through patch.com, a platform that claims to be “your source for local knowledge you can’t live without” (“Patch”). As a subscriber to their email newsletter, I can attest to how very “local” this news is: community events, volunteer opportunities, deals for Somerville businesses, even postings about missing dogs. You won’t find this stuff in the New York Times; it is 100% Somerville.

This sort of Somerville local pride seems to be working; its ripple effects can be felt far beyond its borders. In 2006, the Boston Globe reported that Somerville was the “best-run city in Massachusetts”—but perhaps more interesting was the author’s identification of Somerville as “decidedly cool” (Keane, Jr.). Innovations such as a data-driven management system for government services and the recent implementation of the Somerville-specific “311” help line have drawn attention to Somerville and its current mayor, Joseph Curatone, who relishes in the city’s ever-developing creative culture. I recently had the pleasure of attending the inaugural TEDxSomerville conference, at which Major Curatone delivered remarks relating Somerville to the day’s theme, “Creative Economy, Sustainable Community.” During his talk, he made a playful jab at rival city (and neighbor) Cambridge in saying, “Our freaks are better than your freaks.” Competition aside, Curatone’s remarks point to the city administration’s healthy, positive attitude about the creative, artsy, hipster, and just plain weird folks that have come to define Somerville in recent years.

Within this buzz-worthy city are a handful of neighborhoods, each with their own particular flavor. Perhaps the most well-known (at least for newcomers to the city) is Davis Square, which has an MBTA red line stop at its center. The addition of the red line stop in 1985,

“combined with the Internet boom in the late 1990s, attracted young people to this formerly aging area and started the gentrification process” (Goldberg 7). Davis Square is now a commercial and lively area, featuring several eateries, bars, and shops ranging from crafty second-hand stores to Family Dollar. It seems that the other neighborhoods—Union Square, Teele Square, Ball Square, Magoun Square, Winter Hill, East Somerville, the developing Assembly Square—have followed a similar, though ultimately distinct, pattern of development.

Union Square, nestled in southeast Somerville and accessible by foot, car, or MBTA bus, has become renowned for its variety of ethnic eateries and funky shops. Indeed, Carrie Dancy, the Executive Director of East Somerville Main Streets comments, “Union Square is funky and up-and-coming and very international” (Kulig). But part of being so “up-and-coming” involves a potentially dangerous dance with gentrification, as Davis Square saw over the years. Rachel Strutt works for the Somerville Arts Council, which is located in the heart of Union Square, and she offers her insights into the area:

I think in terms of people who live there, I think it has become more gentrified, or more yuppified, whatever word you want to use. You can see that in the way that the houses look, and the way the houses have been fixed up, and the prices that these houses and condos are going for. Like the old police station, which is on Bow Street, was totally gutted and renovated, and now there are condos in there going for a million dollars, right in the heart of Union Square. So I think residentially, it [gentrification] has already happened—it has already tipped, so to speak. Interestingly, as far as retail goes, I don’t think it has gentrified yet, and you still have those small mom and pop stores, which I think is the beauty of the place. (Williams)

Rachel brings up several interesting points here. From a consumer or visitor’s perspective, she is spot on: Union Square is filled with mom-and-pop stores and restaurants that have come to define the area as a destination for food, fun, and funky retail. But it is necessary to consider, as Rachel has done, the other side of the coin.

Is Union Square becoming gentrified? Or, if it already has become gentrified—as Rachel suggested—how is the community working to maintain Union Square’s character (or are they)? This is a hot topic in Somerville today. The Somerville Community Corporation, dedicated to issues of neighborhood preservation and affordable housing, has proposed to transform the old Boys and Girls Club building into affordable housing units. According to Somerville Patch, debate on the issue got heated at a neighborhood meeting on Monday, March 12, 2012 (Orchard). Supporters of the housing project want to make Union Square accessible to all and “stav[e] off over gentrification,” while opponents fear putting a big housing project in an already condensed neighborhood and wonder if this project could be better fit in another location (Orchard). During the meeting, there were times when supporters of the housing project “suggested opponents were prejudiced against low-income residents” (Orchard). After further investigation about this debate, I discovered that both “sides” have developed websites; Everyonesomerville.org is a project of the Somerville Community Corporation that promotes “keeping housing within reach” (“Everyone’s Somerville”), and UnionSquareRising.com posits that “more subsidized housing is the WRONG move for Union Square” (“Union Square Rising”). As it stands, the issue remains unresolved, though the presence of debate itself demonstrates just how close to home the issues of gentrification and community identity are.

In the sections that follow, I will place my narrators’ stories carefully within the two-sided reality that faces Union Square (and Somerville) presently: on the one hand, Union Square is quaint and colorful, a magnificent blend of ethnicities and young people (hipsters and yuppies, most notably) celebrating Somerville’s quirkiness. But on the other, Union Square is facing what often follows urban development—gentrification—and the very real threat that it will take away some of the area’s mom-and-pop charm. As I place my narrators’ stories within this

setting, it is important to note that all of them have been in business for over eight years, with three out of four being around for about twenty. Union Square has continued to change dramatically—and at a rapid pace—since my narrators first opened up shop, so analyzing their start-up stories speaks to a different Union Square than that which exists today. That said, having been in the area for some time, these business owners were able to comment on their surroundings and how (or if) they have changed.

## NORA CABRERA, LA INTERNACIONAL

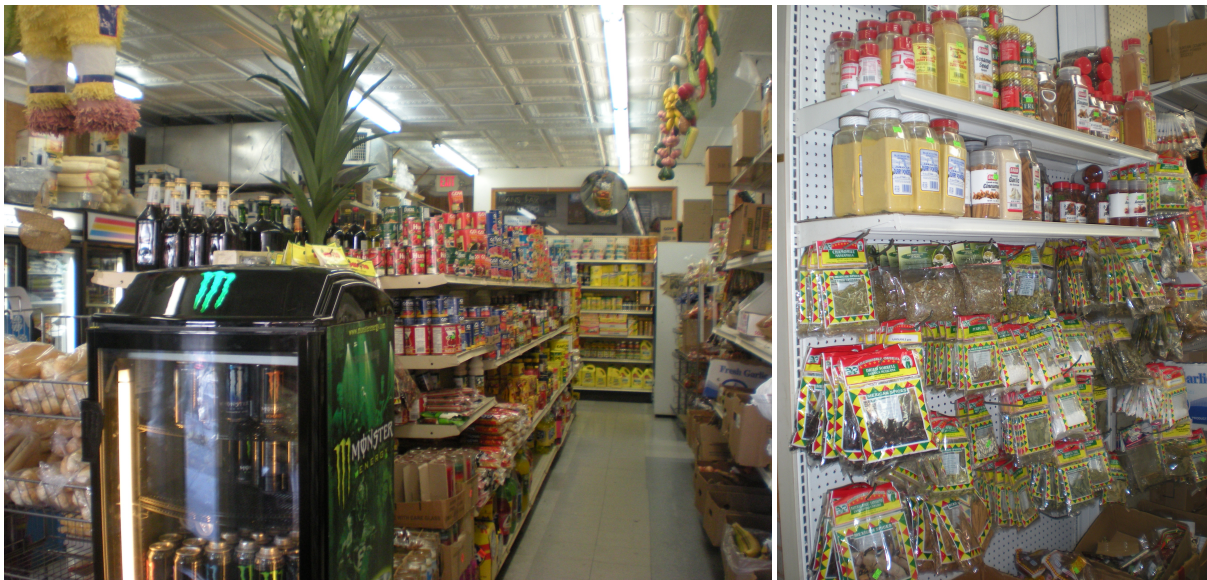
### *The Establishment*

La Internacional is a small market that sells alcohol and food, including many Goya products and exotic spices. It is located on Somerville Avenue in Union Square. Lining the top of the storefront is a blue overhang with the store's name on it:



Inside the store, there are two main rooms/areas. When you first walk in, you are in the room with all food, drink, and spice products. There is one main centre isle of products, around

which you can walk (effectively in two “lanes”). By the front windows lay piles of big bags of rice. On the ceiling, there are various decorations that speak to Nora’s Guatemalan heritage. The next room, which is accessible via a doorway-sized open entrance in the back right of the store (from when you walk in), houses the alcohol and kitchen supplies. The shelves in this room are not particularly full (at least in comparison to the main room). There is also a desk area in part of this room where Nora works; it is filled with pictures of her and her family.



La Internacional is fully stocked with a variety of ethnic foods, including an impressive collection of spices, depicted in the photograph on the right.



The above two pictures show part of the second room in which Nora has her workspace. Photos of her family (including her late husband Eduardo) can be seen in the picture on the left; pride for her home country is clear in the photo on the right.

### *Nora’s Story*



The owner of La Internacional is a delightful, warm woman named Nora Cabrera. Nora was born in Guatemala in 1960 and came to the United States in 1981 when she was 21, after studying in college to become a secretary but finding that there were hardly any jobs in her home country. At first, she was living in Allston and working two jobs. But she left those jobs after meeting her late husband Eduardo, who helped her get a job at Coldwater Seafood. She and Eduardo decided to open the store together about 22 years ago, at which time Nora's mother came from Guatemala to live with them and help take care of the kids while the business was just starting up. She has since returned to her home country.

Eduardo was not working when Nora met him, and he expressed interest in having his own business. Nora suggested a grocery store, and—simple as that—the process of opening up La Internacional began. Some of the logistical things went very smoothly. Nora and Eduardo saw a sign for available space hanging in the window of an empty store while walking home from shopping at Market Basket. They called the number on the sign, and, as Nora explained to me, the “lady” said they could have it. Similarly, the process of acquiring a business license was apparently very simple; Nora and her husband went to city hall, where they didn't “ask too many questions” save for what kind of business was being started, and they were awarded a business license.

The physical space needed a lot of work, since it had previously been vacant for a while. And, of course, there was the issue of stocking the store... Nora described how “in the beginning,” the companies supplying her with food would ask for references and require a bank check instead of simply a check from the store's account. Over time, though – or as Nora says, “once they know you” – they developed a more trusting relationship. Moreover, in the early days of the store, Nora and her husband did some advertising on Spanish radio and even a TV

commercial on Telemundo. Work was busy, since they didn't have much extra money to hire outside employers. (This was around the time Nora's mother came up from Guatemala to live with them and help take care of the kids). Over time, the store started picking up more business. Its adjacency to Market Basket, which is right down the street, has certainly helped.

Another huge piece of the store's growth and maintenance is its catering to Haitian clientele. Nora repeatedly brought up her Haitian customers in my interview with her. She mentioned that more Haitian people come to the store than Spanish people (by which, I assume, she means Spanish-speaking people); it seems it has always been that way. Whenever a question came up about the store's products, Nora mentioned that her Haitian customers would ask her to stock certain items, such as jonjo mushrooms or coconut milk.

The store has been around for almost 22 years now. Customers come from all over the Boston area – “from Allston, from Malden, from Chelsea,” as Nora said – for produce that is difficult to get elsewhere. Business seems to be going well. They have hired employees outside of the family, one of whom (as Nora pointed out) has been working there for fifteen years. Nora and her son Byron do not work on Sundays anymore, though the store is open – a sign that they have good helping hands.

### *Analysis*

Nora spoke of starting up La Internacional with grace and ease—though I imagine she feels far more settled and less nervous than she did twenty-two years ago. In our interview, Nora recalled what her husband used to say to her while he was looking for work, before they opened up the store: “I don't work for nobody. I wanna be my own boss.” (This would prove to be a similar theme throughout my interviews). The desire for self-employment is not unexpected.

After all, Nora and her husband already made a tremendous move toward their own socioeconomic mobility, by electing to migrate to the United States. Indeed, “[s]cholars have frequently noted that the rate of self-employment among immigrants is higher than that for the native-born” (Brettell 394). Self-employment is an extension of an already ambitious, proactive life trajectory. Nora and Eduardo wanted to work for themselves, so they paved their own path using the tools, skills, and resources they had. Of course, it was helpful, too, that they started up almost twenty-two years ago; there were several cheap, vacant storefronts available in Somerville back then. They probably would have had a much harder time starting up in the past few years!

Perhaps being immigrants themselves made them and La Internacional more open and inviting to a diverse, largely foreign-born audience. The symbiotic relationship between Nora and her Spanish-speaking and Haitian customers became very clear to me throughout our interview. In the early 1980s, there was an influx of Salvadorans and Haitians to Somerville due to war and chaos in their home countries, respectively. These populations provided a clientele for Nora to serve, for whose needs La Internacional still seeks to meet. Of course, there is a business incentive to this – but it has done much more than simply bringing in a profit. A few days before my interview with Nora, I went to La Interacional for a visit and noticed several Haitian customers there; many of them were chatting with Nora. One Haitian woman came in explicitly to wish Nora a happy birthday. Nora has even picked up some Creole over the years. These Haitian customers have transformed the nature of the business. Unable to get some of their culture-appropriate, specialty food items elsewhere, these Haitians sought out a relationship with Nora (and La Internacional) and asked her to stock certain things. Nora, responding in kind, did just that. This exchange is one of business, to be sure, but also of solidarity and trust.

Nora is using her experience as an immigrant—as someone who likely yearned for her home country’s food culture at times—to help others in a similar position, while simultaneously making a living. She is there as a cultural resource, as a familiar face, as a friend, for all the Spanish-speaking and Haitian immigrants that frequent La Internacional. These immigrants provide the store with customers, and the store provides them with ethnically specific products.

Often times, literature on immigrant entrepreneurship focuses on the “structural constraints” that these individuals face, such as language barriers and lack of access to financial capital (Brettell). Nora is a beaming example of how these supposed “constraints” can be transformed into opportunities. No, she did not speak English well when she first arrived in the United States. But this did not stop her from seeking self-employment. Instead, she and her husband found avenues appropriate to them and their business in order to succeed by advertising on Spanish radio and television stations. Of course, there are certain elements of her story and La Internacional’s success that likely bear some relation to Somerville’s welcoming nature as “Immigrant City”—and as a sanctuary city, which Somerville was back when Nora and her husband got started with the store. David Guzman pointed out that many people that work for the City of Somerville are “multi-lingual” (Neff), which could explain the ease with which Nora and Eduardo navigated the formalities of business licensing. Moreover, over time, I imagine that the “yuppie” and “hipster” populations around Union Square began adding a little more foot traffic at La Internacional; diners enjoy the area’s ethnic restaurants, and then want to buy specialty ingredients to make the recipes themselves. It makes sense.

Nora and Eduardo did not have a lot of money when they first opened up the store. Based on my interview with Nora, it does not seem that they got a bank loan, either. They started with what they had, and built from there. Some would call this lack of funds a “financial

constraint.” I prefer to simply call this scenario a *different* one, fiscally. If you look around the store, it is clear that Nora and her husband opted not to invest heavily in making an aesthetically beautiful market. Sometimes, there are a few flies hovering over the produce. The main grocery room is fairly cramped. But neither of these characteristics impedes the clientele Nora and her husband were trying to attract. There may be even be some connection between the layout of small stores back in the home countries of Nora’s immigrant customers and the layout of La Internacional. Perhaps the layout and small, market-type vibe of La Internacional feels more familiar. In any case, Nora’s customers that are looking for culturally-specific, specialty foods do not need a perfectly manicured shopping environment. They need whatever it is they are looking for, and it would be ideal if in the process they were welcomed and treated warmly (indeed, quite unlike a well-manicured supermarket). In this sense, the argument that a lack of financial capital is necessarily a constraint is rejected. One does not always need a large amount of funds to invest in better floors or bigger space or advanced store design. You need simply enough, to maintain a small store that is well-loved and appreciated for its other attributes. And, as in the case of Nora, being an open listener and a caring, hard-working business owner may very well enable your customers to ignore (or not even realize) the littlest “flaws” that other businesses may be quick to point out.

ROSY CERNA, MACHU PICCHU

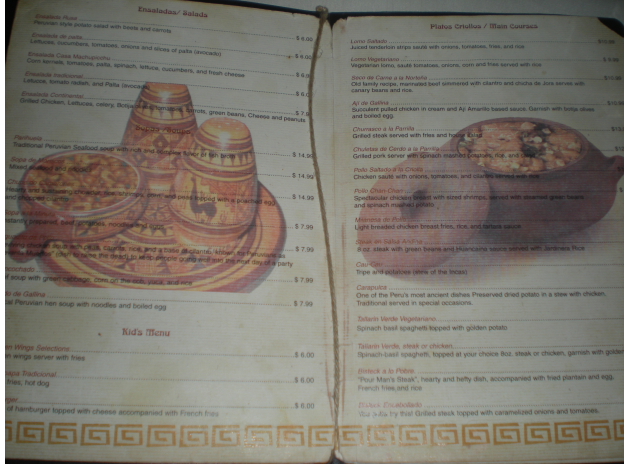
*The Establishment*

Machu Picchu “Restaurante Turístico” is a Peruvian restaurant that also does catering for special events and features live Andean music every Friday night. It is located on Somerville

Avenue, right across from La Internacional. A maroon overhang with gold embellishment and writing welcomes customers from the street:



The restaurant serves dishes native to all areas of Peru. Rosy explained to me that Peru consists of three main areas – the coast, Andean region, and jungle – and her restaurant tries to represent the culinary favorites of each through its diverse and elaborate menu (see below). When you walk in to the restaurant, you are in the main dining room, facing the “back” where the bar is located. Behind the bar is a large photograph of (the real) Machu Picchu, one of the wonders of the world. There are two other small dining areas off to the sides of this room, one on the right and one on the left. The whole restaurant is ornately decorated with Peruvian artifacts, pictures, and a hand-painted gold trim.



*The picture on the left shows part of the dining area, while the one on the right shows the ornate, Peruvian styling of Machu Picchu's menu.*



*Rosy smiles behind the bar in the photo on the left, while Andean musicians play on the right with a soccer match airing on the television behind them.*

*Rosy's Story*

Rosy Cerna is the cheerful, smiley owner of Machu Picchu. She was born in 1971, and came to the United States in 1995. (Her father had arrived from Peru back in 1986, and applied for his family to join him later on.) Once in the United States, she worked in the restaurant business for a while, and even ran her own Mexican restaurant back in 2000. Rosy bought that restaurant – located at 25 Union Square – from the previous owners, though kept the workers there and essentially continued serving what the restaurant was previously offering. In 2003, she transformed this restaurant and began serving Peruvian cuisine. After a few years of growth and

increasing incidences of “people making lines” outside that restaurant, Rosy began renting at 307 Somerville Ave (where Machu Picchu’s main restaurant is now) in 2006. Meanwhile, she closed the corner (25 Union Square) location for a year or so, and reopened there in 2008 with the specialized concept of charcoal chicken. That is, the main Machu Picchu restaurant offers a wide range of Peruvian cuisine, while the corner location offers only charcoal chicken.

Rosy expressed that it felt odd to run a Mexican restaurant as a Peruvian native: “but I was always thinking – what am I doing? Mexican restaurant – I’m Peruvian! I wanna do my ceviche!” Still, she waited until she felt confident there was a strong enough Peruvian community in Somerville and surrounding areas to help get her business going. Early on, she did some advertising on the T and Spanish radio and television stations. Since then, the growing Peruvian community and population of students have helped keep her business thriving. Machu Picchu is in close proximity to some major international universities, such as Tufts, Harvard, and MIT, among a slue of others in Boston proper.

During my interview with Rosy, it became clear that things have gotten easier over time. For one thing, in the earlier days, Rosy used to have to drive down to New Jersey twice a month to get her produce for specific Peruvian dishes (apparently New Jersey has a big Peruvian population). Now, she has a supplier in Rhode Island who ships directly to her. Moreover, it seems there were some hoops she had to jump through; Rosy explained that she had to “prove” what she was “doing,” take some courses, get site certification and a liquor license. She said the hardest part was getting her oven approved. She had imported it from Peru, but it did not meet certain safety standards, and she had to spend the time and money getting it up to health regulations. That said, throughout all of this, Rosy said the “city of Somerville was very helpful—they guide me with anything, they’re really nice.”



## *Analysis*

Rosy's emphasis on how important serving Peruvian food was to her truly stood out during our interview. She knows how to talk the talk about her food, and by the looks of it, she's walking the walk, too. While she had never worked in the restaurant industry in her home country, it was clear in our conversation that food has come to represent an important part of maintaining her Peruvian identity. Recipes from her mother and grandmother now serve as the basis for the menu; in many senses, Machu Picchu is home. And it's a home she has worked hard for; recall that she used to drive all the way to New Jersey twice per month just to get appropriate ingredients! No substituting involved.

Rosy seemed incredibly persistent in her pursuits over the years. She mentioned it herself, citing the importance of being "perseverant." I was impressed by how many significant steps forward she took—taking over the Mexican restaurant, transforming it to Peruvian, expanding into another space—and her ability to play to her advantages. That is, she utilized her experience in the restaurant industry to venture out on her own. She paid attention to the Peruvian community in Somerville and the Boston area; once she felt she had significant support and a likely clientele base, she went forward with her desire to open a Peruvian restaurant. She advertised through Spanish TV and radio and through word of mouth, relying on networks to whom she was connected. She seemed keenly attuned to her environment, and recognized opportunities for growth.

And it has worked. Machu Picchu and its catering business are very successful. Rosy has customers that come from all over the Boston area, even some from New Hampshire and one crazy-enthusiastic customer who comes three times a year from Canada. She has seen an

increase in non-Spanish-speaking clientele over the years, particularly citing more American, European, Indian, and Chinese customers. This seems consistent both with Machu Picchu's growth and trends in the Union Square area. Once word of mouth was spread through the Peruvian and Spanish-speaking communities, these people—especially students—helped spread the word even further. As Rosy put it, “Peruvian students help to spread the word. I remember when, at the beginning, if there was a group of 10, there were just one Peruvian in the group. And that’s how we grow up.”

It seems that her neighborhood has grown up, too, which presumably has helped fuel the fire of Machu Picchu's popularity. In our conversation, Rosy noted that Union Square was “so quiet” when she started working there back in 2000. It has since become more developed, which Rosy partially attests to the forthcoming Green Line station. (It should be noted that the project for extending the Green Line has been repeatedly pushed back; Union Square will not see a T stop for at least five years). She recognizes that her rent in Union Square is less expensive than “other areas,” like Davis Square, but that doesn't eliminate the obvious changes over the years, such as the greater difficulty her customers experience in finding parking due to more traffic in the area. Still, these changes seem to be outweighed, at least in Rosy's case, by thriving business. I recently had dinner at Machu Picchu on a Friday night, and the place was warm, lively, and filled with young people, families, couples, and groups of friends enjoying the food and music.

The newest restaurant I researched, Machu Picchu has less of a “mom-and-pop” feel than the others. This is a full-blown, modern establishment that caters to the ethnic food tourist. Rosy even mentioned, when I asked her about the restaurant's full name, “Machu Picchu Restaurante Turístico,” that the name is all about making the customer feel welcome—like a

tourist. As she put it, if a tourist were to go to Peru, “we always welcome them, we give them our best, we take care of them.” It’s not a question of authenticity. Machu Picchu is not a restaurant geared toward the subdued palette of the tourist (although it does tend to tone down the spiciness for its unfamiliar customers). Rather, it is meant to welcome someone to Peru for the evening. This sort of ethnic culinary tourism is more in line with the feel of Union Square today. Whatever cultural or ethnic background the customer is from is irrelevant; all customers in Union Square are there to enjoy a particular cuisine or environment, whether it be one close to home (identity-wise) or far. In this sense, Rosy’s story—and the level of success her business is seeing nowadays—is a testament to how her individual motivation and agency were complemented by Union Square’s cultural and structural dynamics.

## JOSE BARBOSA, J&J RESTAURANT

### *The Establishment*

J&J Restaurant is located at 157 Washington Street, about a seven-minute walk from the central area of Union Square. From the outside, it looks like a convenience store—and the words on the storefront (see below) seem to match that—which would make the word “restaurant” contradictory. In fact, J&J has some convenience items and food, offers a take-out and dine-in menu, and does some catering.



*Photo credit: <http://www.hiddenboston.com/JandJRestaurantPhoto.html>*

Upon first walking into J&J, you are in the convenience store area. In this area, there is a refrigerator full of drinks, several bread and pastry items, chips, oils, cases of soda, and candy. Straight back and up from the entrance, there is a menu for take-out customers. J&J also clearly incorporates the lottery into their business; one of the pictures below shows a myriad of lottery tickets right under the menu that customers may purchase. There was another “lotto” machine, too, toward the left of this area, where a few stools line a counter. To the right of the convenience store area, there is an entranceway of about a door’s width that leads into the dining area, which is furnished with basic wooden tables and chairs. In the back corner of this room, toward the kitchen, there is a TV mounted on the wall.



*The left picture shows the convenience items area and two men ordering from the take-out menu. The picture on the right shows the sit-in dining area; Tony Asis, a regular customer, looks toward the camera.*



Both of these photographs show J&J's menu. On the left, the menu is simplified and interrupted with Coca-Cola advertisements in the middle. On the right is the one-fold menu for dine-in customers.

### José's Story

José Barbosa is one of two owners of J&J Restaurant. He was born on September 27, 1964 in Portugal. He came here in January 1985 to “get a different life” and “for money, like everybody else.” When he first came, he worked at Sunset, a Portuguese restaurant in Cambridge (that is still around) for four years. He tended bar in Somerville, too, until opening up J&J Restaurant in 1990. The other “J” in “J&J Restaurant” is actually another José, with whom Mr. Barbosa worked at Sunset and whose sister he married in 1991. The restaurant originally opened as just a take-out restaurant with the small convenience section (both of these pieces are still in place today). Ten years ago, J&J closed for a short time for renovations; they reopened with the new dining area and a license to serve beer and wine.

During my interview with José, we talked about some other changes J&J has seen over the years. For one, he noted that his restaurant is reaching a “wider audience” than in years past. They began serving almost exclusively Portuguese people, though now see other Spanish-speakers, Brazilians, and Americans. Moreover, in the beginning, José relied a lot on Portuguese suppliers that came directly to his restaurant to sell various things after seeing that J&J had opened up. As José put it, “they know you open, and they come, they ask you, ‘oh, you wanna

buy from me?’ ... you know, they start bringing stuff here.” He also now seems familiar with other methods of getting supplies, such as Restaurant Depot.

### *Analysis*

José was very laid-back in our interview, and offered simple answers. He did not seem to have wild ambitions in terms of his business; rather, he repeatedly demonstrated the desire and need for business to be good “enough.” When I asked him how business was going, he remarked that nothing has really changed, that “we are doing okay. Enough to survive.” This coincides with his tendency to do whatever satisfies the customer. José claims, “if you do everything the customer asks you do, you’ll be ok.” This statement does not scream of grand visions for the business, but rather gives off a practical, realistic picture of making a living. José played to his strengths at times, such as by choosing to expand into a full-on restaurant and catering business. But at other times, he seemed apathetic about business; the remark about making “enough to survive” came off as fairly uninterested and disengaged.

This seeming apathy made me wonder whether his business—and its status of “surviving” rather than “thriving”—suffers from its location. J&J is not in the main Union Square area; it’s about a 7-minute walk down Washington Street. Compared to the other food business I researched, J&J is much lesser-known. Machu Picchu has grown significantly over the years. La Internacional is now a Union Square staple. Cantina La Mexicana is a popular evening/weekend destination. But J&J? I would not have even known about it had I not wandered curiously around the McGrath highway area, which is not exactly the most beautiful spot in Somerville. J&J is in a literally gray area of Somerville—lots of pavement and a major intersection. I traveled there by foot, but I imagine that parking can be a nightmare around that

busy (and confusing, to boot) intersection. It seems, then, that the more central Union Square businesses have grown while those on the outskirts and in the McGrath area have remained stagnant.

As I said, though, José did play to his strengths at times. He made connections at Sunset, the Portuguese restaurant he worked at previously, and paid attention to patterns in the Portuguese community. He advertised solely through word of mouth—presumably to his Portuguese networks—in the area at first. And it shows. As José told me, when J&J first opened up, they served “only” Portuguese customers, then “Spanish,” Brazilian, and American customers—in that order. This increased diversity is one of the many ripple effects of the changing population and customers of the Union Square area. Moreover, while José did not speak with grand vision, his approach and story in many ways mirrored Nora’s. Like La Internacional, J&J does not appear to have invested tremendously in its appearance. But this works just fine. Why spend all that money in order to attract a different kind of audience that may not come to a further-away location anyhow? José and his brother-in-law did not need to do that; they needed to get a trustworthy clientele and they needed to show this clientele that they would serve their needs and wants well. That is exactly what they did, and it sounds as though it was a very conscious choice. J&J does not serve high-class Portuguese cuisine, nor does it offer a beautiful dining setting. Rather, he serves large portions of what I would interpret (with my limited knowledge of Portuguese cuisine) as Portuguese comfort food, with an emphasis on large portions at very fair prices that a working-class clientele would appreciate. Similarly, José was very firm in pointing out to me that he has done absolutely no formal advertising in the history of J&J. I did not press him on the subject, but either way, we see in José’s story yet another form of agency: making choices and sticking with them, whether or not they reap in massive profits.

## KARINA RENDÓN, CANTINA LA MEXICANA

### *The Establishment*

Cantina La Mexicana is a restaurant offering take-out, dine-in, bar, and catering services. It serves self-proclaimed “authentic” Mexican food, and is located at 247 Washington Street, right in the heart of Union Square. Cantina La Mexicana has a brick exterior and is on the corner of a plaza with a parking lot in front of it.



*Photo credit: [http://www.lataqueria.us/Cantina\\_La\\_Mexicana/Welcome.html](http://www.lataqueria.us/Cantina_La_Mexicana/Welcome.html)*

When you walk in the main entrance, you face the take-out area of the restaurant. The kitchen is straight ahead; you might see a few employees preparing food. To the right, there is a handicap-accessible ramp to go toward the main dining areas, which are furnished with dark wooden tables and chairs. The restaurant’s interior is colorful and decorative. The walls are purple, red, and yellow (in different places) and multi-colored lights line the bar. Various decorations speak to the owner’s Mexican heritage, such as the labels on the bathrooms (“damas” for women and “caballeros” for men) and a few religious pieces of art.





*The pictures above show how incredibly colorful Cantina La Mexicana is. The dining area (top left) is painted a rich purple and furnished with dark wood tables and chairs. Various art pieces and religious monuments can be found throughout the restaurant (top right). In addition, the bar boasts multicolored lights and a variety of bottles and knick-knacks (bottom).*

### *Karina's Story*

Karina is the daughter of Roberto and Carolina Rendón, the owners of Cantina La Mexicana. Roberto's father was an American citizen who fought in World War II. He went over to Mexico and met Roberto's mother there; since he was a soldier, all of his children (Roberto included) became American citizens. So Roberto moved from just south of the

US/Mexico border to Texas when he was 8 years old. Meanwhile, Carolina was born and raised in San Luis Potosí in Mexico. She crossed the border when she was 16 years old, and was hired by Roberto's mother to be the housemaid. That is how Karina's parents first met.

A few years later, Carolina left for Canada while she and Roberto were broken up for a while. Roberto went after her, and they decided to get married. After first living in New York, they decided they didn't like it and moved to Somerville in 1988, where they have lived since. (Karina was born in Malden in November 1989). Carolina was working in the kitchen at Boca Grande, a small chain of Mexican restaurants in the Boston area, for a while when they first got to Somerville, but Roberto felt she wasn't receiving enough credit for her culinary ideas. Accordingly, they opened up Cantina La Mexicana in April 1995. Originally just a small take-out place, it expanded to include a dine-in restaurant and bar about four years ago. This was not necessarily the best choice, according to Karina. She noted that her father "has thought it would have been better to stay as a taquería because it's less of a hassle." She mentioned the need for more staff—waiters, cooks, bartenders—and the greater responsibility that a bigger establishment entails.

Prior to Cantina La Mexicana's expansion, Karina informed me that a notorious bar, Irish Eyes, occupied the space. It was a "bad place," where fights broke out almost every night and drug use was common. Karina credited this reputation for the ease with which Cantina La Mexicana expanded. The landlord was happy to open up the space to Roberto, a "good tenant" and a man he trusted. Acquiring the liquor license – while normally "hard," as Karina noted – was a fairly simple process. Roberto apparently has also always been very well-liked by the city; he gets along with most of his neighbors, and the mayor even funded Cantina La Mexicana's

new awning. Still, the renovations and improvements to the space took a long time, and cost much more than Roberto had intended to spend.

I asked Karina several questions about starting up the business, what the process and the area were like back then. I asked if her parents were originally trying to “aim for” the Mexican population in Somerville as their clientele. She said “not really,” noting that back in the late 1980s, there weren’t a lot of minorities. She told me “[i]t was just starting ... because the Salvadorian immigrants were just coming from the Civil War, they just got their amnesty. Mexicans up here ... it’s almost non-existent compared to the Southwest.” Her dad has told her that the area has changed a lot; “there was a lot of racism back in the day,” but that has since dwindled.

### *Analysis*

The Rendóns knowledge of Union Square and Somerville, both culturally and professionally, was outstanding. This may point to some key biographical experiences, such as Roberto having lived in multiple cities throughout the United States, and thus being more familiar with urban American environments. Even Karina, though, seems to know a great deal about the other Mexican restaurants in the area, as well as various Union Square establishments. She knew intimate details about contracting work going on at Casa B, a new restaurant a few doors down, and about the fiscal viability of both Aguacate Verde and Ana’s Taquería. Whatever the root cause may be, I find it important to recognize the Rendóns for their familiarity with their surroundings and credit them for the relationships they have sought out and formed, such as with the mayor.

Roberto is a personable guy who definitely seeks out these relationships. He told me, “I hang around with all the neighbors here. All the neighbors like me. Except some people that think they better than us, but I don’t care. I’m the oldest in the area; I been here 17 years in March.” These remarks displayed a careful balance of pride and friendliness—traits that carried through the interview. Karina’s father makes an effort to stimulate Somerville businesses and arts, such as through the contracting work for the restaurant’s extension and encouraging local bands to come play at the restaurants. But he is also fiercely independent and proud; he noted that he opened up Cantina la Mexicana out of “pride,” since he felt his wife was not getting enough credit for the work she was doing in a previous restaurant. In fact, Roberto admitted to disliking being in the food industry; this was somewhat strange and comical, seeing as he and his family certainly make the best of it and enjoy “seeing new faces.” But it does go to show just how well the Rendóns have leveraged their resources—especially personal resources—despite some negative feelings toward the industry.

Karina told me that Cantina La Mexicana is truly an authentic Mexican restaurant—“It’s as authentic as you can get.” She compared Cantina La Mexicana to other so-called “Mexican” establishments throughout Somerville, and rattled off information about how this owner was actually Argentinean, that establishment was more TexMex than Mexican, and so on. She repeatedly expressed frustration with “having to serve the burro” (burrito), noting that an average American’s perception of a burrito is completely off from the real deal. Standing strong on the claim that Cantina La Mexicana is “100% authentic,” Karina also recognized that is not always what the customer is looking for. Sometimes, folks come in to their establishment and think, “this isn’t Mexican food!” Karina explained that, in fact, what these customers are probably looking for is TexMex cuisine, or burritos like Ana’s Taquería sells. The dinner menu at Cantina

La Mexicana does not currently have any burros or “anything quesadilla-related.” But they are in the process of reworking their menu to make it more “customer-friendly.” That is, as Karina puts it, they are going to “have to accept the fact that we have to put the burro in.” So there is a certain degree of satisfying the customer that is creeping in to the complete authenticity of Cantina La Mexicana (including having more “healthy” options and substitutes on the menu). But they are still doing it in a creative way, in a way that feels right to them. Karina told me that they are planning to start offering a buffet representative of their best dishes and allowing customers to vote on which ones they liked best; presumably, the top winners will be guaranteed a spot in the new menu. I found this to be an innovative harmony of the Rendóns “authentic” culinary creations and the need for healthy business.

Perhaps it is the very nature of Union Square and its changing environment that is stimulating these changes at Cantina La Mexicana. Karina broke down some of the history for me, from her point of view: back in the late 1980s, there was “a lot of racism,” and it was hard to find work for minority populations (of which there were few). As Union Square started to develop, a lot of “mom and pop shops” sprung up, and blue collar family types dominated the scene. Over time, though, Union Square started attracting the “hipster” and “yuppie” crowd, as Karina put it. Hot spots like café Bloc 11 and the adjacent yoga studio, along with nearby Hub Comics, attract a younger crowd. The mayor is taking notice, and, according to Karina, is “desperate” to help develop Union Square. Davis Square already gets all of the attention; it’s Union Square that needs a boost in foot traffic. According to Karina, people don’t simply walk around Union Square the way they do in Davis Square, which impacts the number of customers those restaurants and establishments see. This is probably why she feels the city will sue the state for its delay on expanding the Green Line to Union Square.

In sum, the story of Cantina La Mexicana demonstrates the unique confluence of active decision-making and the environmental factors of Union Square. Karina's father opted to expand the small taquería into a full dine-in restaurant with a bar—a huge and timely endeavor, no doubt. He began with utilizing the networks he had, by employing his wife and (eventually) his daughter and others he became acquainted with. As time went on, he sought out neighborly connections and ties with the city, which have paid off in the forms of a subsidized awning and a recently secured 25-year lease with his landlord, among other things. I have even seen deals for Cantina La Mexicana on the popular website Groupon.com, which indicates that the Rendóns are truly reaching out to their ever-changing constituents. Come yuppies, come families, come hipsters, come foodies, come all—Cantina La Mexicana is shaping their business around you.

## CONCLUSION

I began this journey wanting to know more about immigrant business owners in Somerville and their stories of starting up. What I found, however, was a series far more dynamic and complex than that. In this paper, I attempted to weave together the threads of agency, structure, and culture into the stories of Somerville that lie behind my narrators' words. I found the conscious decision-making and business mindset of these immigrant entrepreneurs to be the most interesting, especially in the ways that they varied and clearly influenced (and were influenced by) their surroundings in Union Square. On the whole, motivational resources, or “the strong inner drive to be one's own boss,” was a major factor for each of my four narrators (Brettell 388). This motivation also points to a keen understanding of mobility. That is, perhaps there was not room for upward socioeconomic mobility in my narrators' previous lines of work,

especially given the various structural barriers immigrants face, such as language issues. However, each of my narrators demonstrated tremendous ability in transforming this supposed “barrier” into an opportunity, by directing their business’s attention first to their own ethnic and cultural cohorts, and then expanding.

While agency is vital to the stories of immigrant entrepreneurship, the structural and cultural factors of Union Square and Somerville are not to be ignored. Union Square, as has been mentioned plenty of times now, is a gentrifying—or, perhaps, already gentrified—area within the “Immigrant City” of Somerville. The city seems to be actively promoting economic development in this area (and other neighborhoods), as are various community organizations such as Union Square Main Streets, The Welcome Project, Somerville Arts Council, and more. The city has a program that helps subsidize new awnings and storefronts for businesses in order to spur more activity and growth. East Somerville Main Streets put on a “foodie crawl” back in October to showcase various ethnic eateries along East Broadway in an attempt to promote the area as off the beaten path, cool, and hip. These promotions and development initiatives are happening everywhere, and all the time. They are the current structural and cultural status of Somerville.

Of course, the cultures of the consumer and producer are important, too. As cultural historian Marilyn Halter pointed out, “[s]ince the 1970s, coinciding with the booming ethnic revival and with the soaring increases in immigration from ever more diverse societies around the globe, interest in ethnic foodways has been steadily on the rise” (Halter 107). Somerville is no exception to this trend, and many businesses, including some I researched, are responding in kind. Machu Picchu openly welcomes “tourists” to experience Peru’s “culinary art,” and Cantina La Mexicana touts its authenticity in setting themselves apart from other faux-Mexican

eateries. Food business owners in Somerville, on the whole, are embracing the ethnic-hungry diners of the city.

As a student who proudly calls Somerville home, this project came to represent far more than simply an academic venture. While I chose to shed positive, agency-oriented light on the stories of my narrators, it is important to note that I could have done otherwise. As some of my classmates have pointed out, Somerville, while having become a destination in its own right, is dancing a dangerous dance of gentrification that, in some situations, causes certain businesses, geographic areas, or even sub-populations to be excluded from the benefits of economic development (Fedele, Chatterjee). After countless conversations with my classmates, I have remained unsure as to whether it is possible for Somerville to continue to develop economically and culturally in a way that is healthy, positive, and beneficial for all. As David Guzman so eloquently pointed out, “we want to foster economic development in certain areas but at the same time we want to protect the fabric of the neighborhood” (Neff).

In the Setting the Stage chapter, I painted a picture of Union Square as it exists today (and the history that led to it). This picture does raise the question: if we know what types of businesses are springing up in Union Square—which, roughly, we do—what will keep them there? Are businesses like J&J going to continue to get pushed to the fringes, both geographically and socially? What are some other changes going on in the Union Square area, and how will they impact business? In my interview with Karina, for instance, she mentioned one particular landlord who “forced out” the little Indian mart by Market Basket in order to start building condominiums. This is very similar to the affordable housing issue mentioned earlier, and is indicative of the tricky balance that Union Square faces: valuing its diversity of ethnicity and (primarily culinary) establishments, and developing into a prosperous area. Rachel Strutt



said, “Union Square has changed so much in the past decade” (Williams). Now it is important to ask: how will it change next?

I do not pretend to have the answer to this question. However, having met some of these entrepreneurs and hearing their stories of surviving and/or thriving, I feel strongly that it is important to hear their perceptions of the areas in which they live and work. This is not particular to Union Square, or to Somerville. Rather, it is directed at the whole study of immigrant entrepreneurship. This research has proven how vital it is to listen to the conscious business-related choices these immigrants have made, and gauge their level of familiarity with their community, both culturally and structurally, in order to understand how and why they got to where they are today. History is always important in deciding the future. As for Somerville, I do hope that David Guzman’s remarks represent the city’s forefront priority: develop, but do it with integrity and in celebration of the city’s uniquely woven cultural tapestry. If this research has taught me anything, it is that it is fully possible to embrace a community and move forward right along with it.

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APPENDIX 1: MAP OF SOMERVILLE



Photo credit: <http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/Somerville%20Map.pdf>

## APPENDIX 2: NARRATORS' CONTACT INFORMATION

Nora Cabrera  
La Internacional  
318 Somerville Ave.  
Somerville, MA 02143  
(617) 776-8855

Rosy Cerna  
Machu Picchu  
307 Somerville Ave.  
Somerville, MA 02143  
(617) 628-7070

José Barbosa  
J&J Restaurant  
157 Washington St.  
Somerville, MA 02143  
(617) 625-3978

Karina Rendón  
Cantina La Mexicana  
247 Washington St.  
Somerville, MA 02143  
(617) 776-5232