

Somerville's Beauty Salons: Unique Spaces of Linguistic Development



Elegant Salon Façade, 18 Union Sq, Somerville, MA, October 18th 2010



Odilio's Hair Design 358 Somerville Ave, Somerville, MA, November 15th 2010

Urban Borderlands Final Project
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Somerville's Beauty Salons: Unique Spaces of Linguistic Development

I: Introduction

"You open your business. You open your heart. You open literally everything."

Chelle Salcedo, Owner of Sophia's Beauty Salon



"Stained Glass Window". From the corner of Pearl and Hadley Street, Somerville, Ma. Taken by Caroline Kokulis 2010.

Immigration – the act of moving across the world – leaves you vulnerable. The picture of your old life gets shattered on the journey to America; its broken pieces lay in piles waiting to be re-arranged into a new picture, a new work of art. Once in America, the pieces of your family, occupation, education, friends, finances, and hobbies do not make sense unless rearranged to fit this new picture frame, this new life. But how do you glue the pieces of your life back into a coherent, though different, picture? How do you rebuild? The data collected for this investigation has shown that (as challenging an obstacle as it can be for many people) the answer is often in

language. Being able to learn and then speak English in the United States or find a space where you may speak your native language allows you to glue the pieces of your old life into the picture of a new life; making it possible to utilize your old life in the new country. If mastering a new language is an important component of success, then how are people learning it? Where are they speaking it and where are they speaking their native language? What are the obstacles which significantly prevent new immigrants and potential business owners from learning English? How does this all relate to beauty salons?

In the early stages of our investigation, we sought to shed light on socializing which occurs in immigrant-owned beauty parlors in the Somerville area as well as local business owners' impressions of the impending extension of the Greenline, as per the guidelines of our course project. By asking questions which sought to illuminate customers' familiarity with one another, we hoped to prove that the salon is a place where people come together to socialize: to catch up, articulate the experiences of their everyday lives, and to forge the ties which bind social networks. But how and why did we choose salons in the first place? To put it simply, we chose them because we ourselves often go to local salons. We understand the customers' perspective well.

Given our own personal experience as young women who frequent salons in and around our university campus, we were curious about how Somerville locals take advantage of the salons in their own neighborhoods. And, given our experience from the customer standpoint, we

were curious about the salon-owner standpoint. In light of the diverse community of immigrants in Somerville, we therefore concentrated our examination on immigrant-owned salons. Targeting salons in and around Union Sq in particular, we approached business owners of a variety of backgrounds: primarily Brazilian, but also Venezuelan, Portuguese, Korean, Spanish, Chinese and others. Ultimately, we spoke to individuals at eight salons whose owners' country of origin was primarily Brazil. As the later sections of this investigation indicate, the data we collected was varied while it also contained many common threads.

In addition to addressing salons as social space as well as business-owners' opinions of the Greenline extension, initially, our intent was to examine culturally situated notions of beauty. By inquiring after the sorts of services customer sought out when they came to the salon, we hoped to showcase different groups' varying ideals of beauty. In short, our hypothesis was that the salon is a space where members of pre-existing and self-perpetuating social networks come together to converse and to meet. Ultimately however our investigation took a turn. Based on narrators' feedback, our examination became slightly redirected to focus on the role of language, its acquisition, and the extent to which social networks do not meet in the salon so much as they drive traffic into the salon. We came to see how, given its role as a space where notions of beauty, social networks and culture collide, the salon is a unique space which allows for unexpected developments in language.

II: Objective

Though as students of anthropology our goal was to illuminate the multi-faceted nature of salons, as members of the community and members of this project in partnership with the Somerville Community Corporation, our main goal was to illuminate the vibrant individuals behind local businesses. Our purpose for engaging in this research and in submitting this report is to put a face on the immigrant community of Somerville and how it intertwines with the beauty salon landscape. Thus we have chosen to showcase extensive details of our narrators' stories.

III: Methodology

The process of reaching out to potential narrators began with walking around the Union Square and Ball Square areas as well as Broadway Ave and Cobble Hill. Once we'd gained a grasp on the clustering of salons, we walked into the salons and inquired after the owner or manager. After leaving a flyer with the salon employees we then returned to each salon at a time the owner was said to be there. From there we began scheduling interviews. In general we found that reaching out to salon owners over the phone was ineffective. The best method was to approach them face-to-face in the salon. While there were occasionally language barriers which prevented us from reaching the owners of some salons, in general the salon owners were very receptive to speaking with us, provided we accommodated their schedules.

Our collection of interview questions evolved throughout our interview process. The first selection of questions we used in the early stages of the process evolved as we sensed the focus

of our investigation shifting. During the interviews that followed we asked questions which included but were not limited to for following:

What brought you to the United States?

Why did you choose Somerville?

Why did you decide to open a salon?

Did you have a salon before? If so, was it similar or different? How?

How did you select this particular location for your salon?

What language is most often spoken in your salon?

Where are your customers from?

Do your customers know each other?

Do your customers come here for a specific service?

What are your ideas about the future?

How do you feel about the arrival of the Greenline?

Initially we focused on asking questions about the salon as social space – questions such as, “Are your customers friends with each other?” As time passed, however, we began to see the theme of language appearing in more and more interviews. The discussion then became centered on how learning English helped business owners in establishing their business, a new life here, or how it was hard to find time to fit in language classes after a full work day. We subsequently added to our interviews questions regarding language acquisition: successes, logistics and difficulties. In addition, based on the details volunteered by narrators which expanded upon the questions we’d already asked, we also crafted our question selection as time went on. For example, when Eunice Castro of Elegant Salon mentioned that she advertises the salon at church events we then incorporated a question about advertising into our following interviews.

IV: Interviews: Language as a Key to Success

1. Marcia Capano, Fashion Way Hair Salon, 21 Union Sq, Somerville, MA 02143

“...I am here you know. You never know about tomorrow. Tomorrow is another day. Another dollar...” **Marcia Capano**, Owner of Fashion Way Hair Salon.



Fashion Way Hair Salon 21 Union Square, Somerville, MA 02143, November 15th 2010

Marcia Capano, the owner of Fashion Way Hair Salon located right in the center of Union Square, radiates optimism. This was possible to detect simply upon opening the front door to her salon and stepping inside. She shared some of that energy, that light, as she shook your hand, smiled a smile that was reflected in her eyes, and welcomed you into her salon. Marcia, in her thirties, moved with enthusiasm around her salon while speaking with palpable pride about all she created. Her salon is a very open and bright space. The main color inside the salon and on the window advertisements outside is a bold orange – very indicative of the happy, successful, and vivid tone of the salon. There is a long wall of salon chairs in front of a wall length mirror. Plants and coffee and tea tables punctuated the chaired waiting area. The front desk is centered

below diplomas of licensing of the employees, Marcia's included. American contemporary pop music was playing through the radio in speakers scattered around the salon; sending vibes of intended trendiness.

Marcia Capano's salon is one of the more populated areas of the square – there is a lot of vehicle and foot traffic right by her door. Capano said during the interview that she came to Massachusetts from Brazil for an academic year abroad. During this time, she lived with an Italian family in Woburn, Massachusetts that served as her American host family. She ended up staying in the United States from then on. While in school, it was important to her to learn English as well as she could and to travel extensively. She said she particularly enjoyed traveling to Disneyworld, Miami, Las Vegas, New York, and Chicago. She stated that it was important for her to learn English because she was in America after all. Capano then met her husband, a Boston native. Her husband helps her with the marketing of her business, in addition to his technology job. They had a daughter, Katerina, six years ago. Capano and her family live now in Burlington, Massachusetts.

Even though Capano's husband is not Brazilian, she said she went back to visit Brazil many times, but since owning the shop she has gone back less. Her daughter and husband both love it there. They have talked about moving back to Brazil. Her husband thinks he could be successful since he knows a lot about technology and could bring new and unique knowledge to Brazil. She is worried about her daughter moving schools and changing friends. She was very

concerned with interrupting her child's education. She thinks it would be a lot to prepare for, but she would love to be back and closer to her family. Capano said that she knew the previous owner of the Fashion Way salon and eventually, after she stayed home with her new daughter for some time, she took over the job. She had a clothing store business back in Brazil before coming to the United States, so she had to learn all her salon skills in the United States.

Points of Interest

Interesting discussion occurred when I asked about the other beauty salons in the area; whether they competed or collaborated. In Union Square especially, but actually in all of East Somerville, there are multiple beauty salons in each city block. This makes for a very interesting environment to work in. Capano thought that since every salon owner knows that there are so many competitors around, no one really cares about the happenings in the other salon, but just focuses on their own salon. She says that the salons are very separate, but the fact that other salons are so close to each other is "always in her mind". She says everyone is really independent with their own salons. She also said that she rarely leaves the salon during the day, so even if the opportunity presented itself to socialize with other salon owners, there is just no time.

I was surprised at Capano's elaborate way of advertising. In other salons we had visited, word of mouth and the yellow pages seemed to be in the dominant manner, but here at Fashion Way Salon, Capano used Google Advertising to advertise as well as other online agents. She

even had a text messaging system to remind clients about their appointments. She said that she used both English and Portuguese to advertise.

Capano had interesting information about change in Somerville over the time she has been working here (the past four years). She said that recent construction on the streets has changed some things, but actually not in a detrimental way for her yet. She said “ This is a really good business, been here for over ten years”. It seems to be pretty stable despite the recession and construction. Capano also said a few minutes later that “Somerville is getting better all the time”. When I asked her what she meant by that, she said, “Well, I can tell likethat more people are coming in here, you know that’s what I see”. She gave an example of the popularity of the Farmers Markets in Union Square that attracts more people to the area. She says she can see that it attracts new customers every day.

Capano has a positive view on Somerville as a city. I asked if the city was helpful in running a small business, or an obstacle. She said that the city came to her at one point and did some studies about her business and invited her to meetings at the city hall. She also said she received a letter saying that the city would help if she had any needs and would even reimburse her for 2,000 dollars worth of salon related expenses. She said that it was very nice of them, but she has not started to send them receipts yet. She said it was a great idea.

When I asked about her typical client base and their nationality, she said, “To be very honest with you, by the time I got the salon, my customers [were] pretty much just Brazilians,

but nowadays I have every thing mixed up all over the world. People from India, Nepal, Thailand, Americans, Brazilians, the Spanish. I have all kinds of customers here.” She even said that she loved the different languages being spoken in her shop at any given moment. She said that if you can speak their language, you could join their culture better. Comments like this made Marcia such an unique narrator. She had such a motivated and clear view on integrating into the new culture and appreciating, and not penalizing, it for the differences. Maybe this inspired her to learn English so well and so fast when she first came over to the United States. She observed that the Spanish speaking people knew English, but the Brazilians did not know much English. When asked why does she think that the Brazilian customers are not learning English very fast, she said that not everyone thinks like she did about learning English right away. It is just not their goal. While Capano thought that while she was in America, she would learn the language and explore the culture, not every Brazilian has that as an important priority.

2. Bela Mendonca, Continental Hair Design, 391 Somerville Ave, Somerville, MA 02143

“I was a kid, for me, I grew up here. It is my home. It is not like I have one foot here, one foot there. Yeah I was born there, but this is where I grew up.” **Bela Mendonca**, Owner of Continental Hair Salon



Continental Hair Design Business Card 391 Somerville Ave, Somerville, MA 02143

I arrived at the salon just in the time for a transformation. The owner of Continental Hair Salon, Bela Mendonca, was in the middle of applying make up to a closed-eye woman in her twenties. Bela noticed us and told us to wait in the waiting area for her to finish with her client. I picked up a magazine to flip through, but became much more interested in Bela and their conversation. Bela applied make up casually while they discussed this week's Grey's Anatomy TV show and whether or not someone's wedding pictures were up on Facebook yet. When Bela finished, the young woman opened her eyes and looked into the mirror. She smiled at the mirror, looking like herself just a bit different; ready for what was coming up.

The owner of the salon, Bela Mendonca, appeared to be a smaller, middle-aged woman, who took pride in her appearance and wardrobe. She is originally from a small town near Lisbon, Portugal. She and her family moved from Portugal to the United States when Bela was only ten years old. She said that her parents moved here for a "new life". They had family in Massachusetts already. Bela has been back to Portugal, but does not want to ever move back. Bela and her family lived in Arlington and Cambridge before moving to Somerville. Bela however only has the business in Somerville now. She and her immediate family live in Stoughton, Massachusetts. Bela's salon was a salon before she owned it. Her sister, in fact, worked at the pre-existing salon and informed Bela of the opportunity to buy the salon from the

previous owner. Now Bela's sister works in the salon during the week, while Bela comes in on weekends. On the weekdays, Bela stays home with her children.

The salon is slightly outside of the center of Union Square, but still in a good location by the bus stops and Market Basket grocery store. The atmosphere, inside the salon, is a very comfortable one. There is a soft light in the smaller, but organized salon. The décor is a little old fashioned, but well maintained. There are a few salon chairs in front of the mirror and a little wash and laundry room in the back. There is a nice waiting room area with chairs and magazines near shelves of products for sale. The radio plays recent hit songs in a quiet volume across the salon.

Points of Interest

Bela discussed her interesting client base. She said that there was a huge mix of people; diverse background and vast age differences. She said there are mainly customers from Portugal, India, Italy, Brazil, and Spanish-speaking people. Bela said that because of this diversity she speaks English most of the time in her salon, but she will adjust to her Portuguese or Spanish speaking customers. She said that it is easy to switch back and forth between Spanish and Portuguese. She said there were no major differences between the different nationalities in terms of salon services rendered. She said that it depends more of the type of hair the person has.

Surprisingly Bela said that her salon does very little advertising. She said the only advertising she does, and wants, is by word of mouth. She spoke with pride about her system. She said that one person will come into the salon via a walk-in then their whole family comes in. Bela acknowledged the fact there were so many salons in close proximity. She said that this made business hard sometimes, but other salons respected their own space.

Bela had been working in the salon business for over twenty years. She worked previously in salons in Boston and Cleveland Circle before coming to work in Somerville. She said that the Boston salon, in Kenmore Square, was very formal and professional. People would come in for a blow dry to be ready for their work day. In Cleveland Circle, she said it was mostly students. Here it was a quick and simple haircut. In Somerville, the need is different. She described the salon here as more of a neighborhood salon. Clients are friends, staying for a cup of coffee and chat. Bela likes getting to know the person of her client, not just the hair.

She did not speak optimistically about her business's finances. She said that no business was happy right now, especially not small businesses. She does not feel like anything could be done to help the situation. She knew Somerville had programs to help financially, but she did not take advantage of them yet. She is just too busy. She had heard about the Greenline project from emails. She is happy that it will increase traffic in front of her salon. It will also help clients get to her salon; she has lost clients before because they could never park or got too many tickets. She did specifically speak about the constant construction that had been common in most

interviews. Time and time again their water has been shut off due to construction. Even with warning, it disrupts business. Her sister, once, had to run across the street to the Market Basket to get buckets of water to wash the color out of a customer's hair.

One of the more important points Bela made was when we asked if Somerville had changed in the time she had been there. She said that the residents changed drastically. She thinks that the area used to have more immigrants living there. Now, according to Bela, there are more professionals. She got quite passionate when asked about learning English. It was very important for her to learn English when she was a child. She thinks that all immigrants in the United States should learn English and use it. Her children speak English and little Portuguese. She sounded distraught that younger immigrants in Somerville are not learning English very well and are apathetic about it. She seems to think that upon moving here, people need to transform to be successful here; just transform just bit, just be able to use the tool that is necessary for success, language.

3. Chelle Salcedo, Sophia's Beauty Salon, 98 Washington St, Somerville, MA 02143

"If I wanna learn the English, I must learn the English..." Chelle Salcedo, Owner of Sophia's Beauty Salon



Façade of Sophia's Beauty Salon, October 21st, 2010 4:00pm at 98 Washington St, Somerville, MA 02143

A passionate and friendly woman, Chelle came from Venezuela in 1985 to study business in Boston. After living with an Italian family and completing her studies at Boston University, Chelle married an American man from whom she is now divorced. Eager to learn English by immersing herself in the culture of Boston as a college student, Chelle immediately (and perhaps without realizing it) conveys her determination to challenge herself and to accomplish her dreams. Chelle is and has always been a woman who is committed to her goals. Interestingly, unlike other salon owners, Chelle had not owned a salon back home nor did she have plans to open one after she arrived. This situation of owning a salon, in a way, came upon her unexpectedly. After seeing an ad for salon space opening in Somerville, Chelle decided to help out her Aunt Marina who was working as a stylist in the area but longed to take greater ownership of a salon. Thus, Chelle placed an offer on the space and began the necessary process

of preparing to open. In spite of her busy schedule also working in the Special Education Department of the Cambridge Public School system, Chelle manages to run a successful salon. She now lives in Porter Square and has two children from her previous marriage: a daughter and a son.

Tucked away in the Cobble Hill Center, the salon is a bit difficult to find. Located just by a Tedeschi's as well as a Laundromat and an Indian Food take-out restaurant, Sophia's is the only salon in the complex and indeed the area, as Chelle claimed. It is the only salon which is situated on Washington St in between Sullivan Square and Union Square, a largely residential area of the city. Once inside the salon, it is easy to notice the homey atmosphere. Sophia's is distinctly different from other salons in its use of pastel colors and wicker chairs in the sitting area yet similar in its playing Magic 106.7 continuously. Sophia's has the feel of a neighborhood salon and Chelle's warmth and happy demeanor only further reinforces that. In the sitting area, the walls have pastel colored paintings of local scenery one might see on Cape Cod. The several stations within the salon are neat and orderly and employees are warm and friendly.

Points of Interest

Chelle was an exceptional narrator providing new insight into the experience of immigrant business owners. She reinforced the notions of beauty highlighted by previous narrators: emphasizing Brazilian women's determination to have their hair styled as straight as possible. Indeed she claimed the straight hair was "a must." Likewise Chelle shed light on the

unique experience of juggling the responsibilities of a job in the Cambridge Public School Systems with those of a business owner. In so doing she illuminates the nature of language acquisition as well as the reality of running a salon in an area which is inundated with other salons. But first and foremost, Chelle shed light on language. In a funny anecdote she discussed the challenges of ordering food while still learning the new language. And then, she continued discussing current times. Evidently, to this day Chelle houses international students who attend college here as she did. She advises them to not listen to the radio of their native language and instead listen only to English as she believes that she benefitted so much from full immersion in the language. Note for example Chelle speaking to the importance of language in her own words.

Growing up in Venezuela, and I always heard about... I always heard about... you know, music in English, and I used to sing everything in English... and I was fascinating about the linguistic bit. To learn English as second language and one time one Sunday I remember clearly I was reading in newspaper and I... so, a big ad says, 'Learn English in Boston.' No, 'Learn English in the United States.' The ad, and I had a huge fight with my mother, picked up the phone and called to find out and it was very appealing... To learn English in Venezuela is like for you to learn German here or French because you have to be very dedicated. You go to school to learn French for instance but you go home you talk English with your mom, your brothers, sisters, your friends... You learn for one hour, it's not here. And so I felt I was wasting my money going to learn the language... I didn't know anything because whenever I ask the teacher, "Oh, I don't understand this." And the teacher will ask... she would tell the answer in Spanish. If I wanna learn the English I must learn the English, I have to be in an environment that everything is English.

She speaks to the necessity of dedication and determination, of immersing oneself in the language and culture in order to completely learn it and understand. But, as determined as she was to focus on English, Chelle did not focus exclusively on English during the course of her time in the United States.

In addition to learning English after she arrived, Chelle also learned Portuguese in order to communicate with her in-laws who were Portuguese. And it certainly has been of use to her since opening the salon. She argues that roughly 90% of her customers are Brazilian and she speaks Portuguese with them. Indeed, when she volunteered an approximate breakdown of the cultural composition of her clientele, Chelle determined that 90% of her customers are Brazilian, 2% are African American, and 5% are of the earlier waves of immigration. While she does agree that she speaks Portuguese the majority of the time, she admits to speaking more English on Saturdays because that is when the majority of Americans come to the salon. Language is a means of connecting with customers to an extent that will inspire them to continue returning to the salon. While attitude is certainly important, language is essential in expanding one's customer base.

One puzzling point Chelle made was regarding Brazilian women who had worked for her. As had been mentioned to us by some of the LIPS students, there is a practice by which Brazilian women will allow others into their homes to receive services such as manicures that they would have otherwise received in a salon. Chelle indeed spoke of this and its prevalence

within the community. In fact she argued that a previous employee of hers has worked at her salon in order to acquire clients and then left the salon to serve these clients in her home at a discounted price. But, Chelle was not entirely angered by this process, as she believed that certain services such as the hair treatments could not be replicated elsewhere. She is aware of the competition which is in the area but she is not frustrated by it as she has faith in what her salon offers. That said, we found it fascinating that she demonstrated how competition is not confined to the official salons which may be seen in storefronts such as those of the Cobble Hill Complex. Chelle was the only narrator who spoke to this reality.

Chelle presents a particularly interesting case because she also works as the office manager in the special needs department in the Cambridge Public School System. There she is able to use her Spanish skills to help students and families in need just as she is able to use these skills to connect with clients in the salon. Indeed, Chelle showcases the extent to which language is that which bridges the gap between established immigrants and those who have arrived more recently. Finally, when asked about the arrival of the Greenline, Chelle is optimistic. She believes it will improve the reputation of the community and that it will drive traffic into the salon.

4. **Viviane Brocenschi**, C&N Beauty Supply Salon and Services

285 Washington Street in Somerville Massachusetts

“Work, you have to work no matter what, here, there, you have to work otherwise you will not be anything, but the emotional part is hard.” Viviane Brocenschi, owner of C&N Beauty Supply Salon and Services.



C&N Beauty Supply Salon and Services Business Card 285 Washington Street, Somerville, MA 02143

The C&N Beauty Supply and Services salon had one of the most unique set ups. It is not what one would expect for a beauty salon. Much more a store than a salon, you walk into a maze of shelves stocked full with beauty products. There was more than just the basic shampoos, conditioner, and color treatments, but a fascinating array of Brazilian nail polishes, hair dryers, hair straighteners, Moroccan oil products, and much more. Along side there are a few salon chairs in front of a mirror. In the front there is a long cabinet serving as the place for the cash register. There is not a type of décor or a general atmosphere for this salon. The set up is very visually stimulating, yet practical, real; no space is left unused, everything has its purpose.

The owner of the C&N Beauty Supply and Services is Viviane Brocenschi, along with her husband. Viviane is a very busy middle-aged woman in her 40s. She juggles running her

business, multiple dogs, being a mother to two sons, and a wife. She and her husband were both born in Brazil, near San Paulo. She came over in March of 1990. She and her husband moved to Massachusetts right away from Brazil. Her husband had family in the area. They moved directly to Somerville, on School Street. Now she has her business in Somerville, but her family lives in Malden. She had to learn all of her business skills here through Internet resources. In Brazil, her mother was a teacher and her father was a lawyer. Viviane wanted to go to medical school, but ended up getting engaged and married and then moving here, where she found medical school too complicated to be the first thing she did here in the new country.

Her salon had an interesting origin. Her husband had a business sharpening salon scissors and clippers. Then their business expanded to repair blow driers and other salon electronics. People kept asking them if they sold any products. Viviane thought that would be a good idea. She learned that to sell most products they had to have a few salon chairs and services. They hired a hairdresser and now have a salon and supply store. Viviane knew mostly business and administrative skills at the beginning, but since she has to stock and help clients pick out supplies she knows the salon techniques as well.

Points of Interest

Viviane had a lot of interesting information on her client base. She said that her client group was mostly Brazilian (80%) and then rest were mostly a mix of Russian, Vietnamese, and American people. She said that she speaks Portuguese in the store primarily. She said that

business used to be a lot better. When asked why, she had three primary reasons. First, the recession. Obviously, the national recession will affect the small businesses and their clients. Secondly, she said that most of the Brazilian clients went back to Brazil or are in the process of going back home. She said that it is possible to make more money back in Brazil. She also said that people are going back because they are scared of being caught without legal citizenship papers. She said that people are driving around with no driver's license and being caught and put in jail. That is scaring people enough to go home. The third, and having the most impact, reason for the decline in business is the people who run salons from their home. Many Brazilian hairdressers, who used to work in salons, now operate from home. It is an advantage for them because they have the skills from the salon, they can buy products without having an actual salon business where they have to pay taxes or no additional rent to pay. Their prices of services thus go down and the salons cannot compete. This is a relatively new occurrence, of the last five to seven years. Viviane said that 10 years ago you would have to book your appointment at a Brazilian hair salon a month in advance and now you could just walk in.

Viviane's said her largest problem is a credit issue. They lost their house in 2007 to a foreclosure. She says they have no credit now and have to use only cash, so it is like "always being broke". She wants Somerville to do something to help this. She said that they help the big banks with their credit, but do nothing to help the smaller businesses with their credit. She thinks that if people stop working from their homes and work in salons that will help. Also, she said

that if the US passes an “immigration law”, Brazilians would no longer look at America as a place to come work, send money back, and then go home. She thinks that people will then stay and spend money on their new life here, thus stimulating the local small business community.

Viviane said that upon opening this business, Somerville has been nothing but helpful. She did say, however, that they never formally informed her of the Green line project. She found out through talking to friends and looks at the Somerville Union Square website. She did not know a lot about the plans. She is excited that it will make people walk by her salon more and hopefully increase walk in business. She is worried that construction will impact her business, but does not know a lot about the construction. She said that rents are already going up in anticipation for the green line. She said it has been happening since three years ago. For instance, across the street used to be 1,300 dollars rent now it is 1,600 dollars. She said that people are moving because of this. They are moving to Malden, Revere, Everett, and Lynn.

Viviane also had interesting comments on coming to America in 1990 from Brazil. She said that it made sense to move to America. She said she had always been independent and liked to try new “stuff”. She wanted to go to medical school in Brazil, but ended up getting engaged and then married, and then she moved to Massachusetts. She had plans to look into medical school here, but found it much more difficult than she imagined. She said that reality in America was very different than most Brazilians thought while still in Brazil. They think that everything from making money to going to college is easy. Viviane has still not had the chance to go to

college. She says she no longer has the chance to go to medical school since she is in her 40s, but she would consider going to nursing school at some point in the future. She said the hardest thing about living in the United States is being without her family. She said it is ok if work is hard, but the emotional part of missing people is the hardest. Her mother and father come visit almost every year, but she misses some crucial events like her Grandmother's funeral. It is hard to get back to Brazil since she has two children in school, a store, dogs; a life here.

Viviane did not learn English in Somerville. She learned in school in Brazil. She was taught English in school since the 5th grade. Once in the United States, she worked on her accent. She said that Brazilian immigrants that live with other immigrants from the same countries, in neighborhood groups, learn English less. They feel no need to learn very well since they do have to speak it at home or around the city. There are always people who can speak Portuguese and/or Spanish. She also said that there are not a lot of "good" English classes, upon arriving in Somerville. There are long waiting lists for the free ones at the high school.

V: Interviews: The Struggle as an Immigrant Business Owner

1. Regina Nunes, Girl from Ipanema Salon, 8 Bow Street, Somerville, MA 02145

*"They really like the way we can give a blow dry or the hair cuts. That makes me happy since I have a lot of Americans (clients)". **Roger Rocha**, translating for Regina Nunes, Owner of Girl From Ipanema Salon*



The Girl from Ipanema Hair Design Business Card 8 Bow Street, Somerville, MA 02143

The Girl From Ipanema Salon was unique in many ways. It had a complicated, yet elegant, look of modern appliances surrounded with old-fashioned décor, as well as, combining new international hairstyles with the common American model posters. The salon had a two opposing walls of mirrors with salon chairs lined up alongside. The reception desk was centrally located. Behind the desk, products, both labeled in English and Portuguese, were for sale. A small T.V. half hidden by a vase of tall fresh flowers was on throughout our entire interview. The only program that was on during this 30-minute discussion was a religious program. A formally dressed priest was delivering his sermon and reciting many prayers for his T.V. audience. Interestingly, the priest was speaking in English; in a fast way that showed that this was his native language. From being in the salon before, to schedule interview appointments, I knew that most speech in this space was in Portuguese or heavily accented English, so this caught my attention. Was Regina Nunes using religious T.V. to learn English? Was its purpose to have the comfort of a familiar concept of religion? The salon plays on the premise that while time,

location, and cultures are changing, some universal components to humans, like the concept of beauty or religion hold true.

Even the name of this salon reflects this universal theme. The name, Girl from Ipanema, is a popular song from Brazil. This song is a type of Brazilian Jazz called “Boss Nova”. The lyrics were originally written in Portuguese, but were translated into English at another time. The song even won Record of the Year at the Grammy’s in 1965. This song, an international hit, was about a beautiful girl who walked by cafés on the way to the beach and caught the attention of all the men. I wish I had had the foresight to ask the owner, Regina Nunes, about the name of the salon and why she choose it, so now I can only hypothesis. It is a perfect name to have on the outside of a salon. It invokes the image of a woman, any kind of women, who is irresistible to men.

Regina Nunes, a put together women in her thirties, wanted to use an employee, Roger Rocha, as an interpreter for her during the interview. She did not feel like her English was good enough for this conversation. I got the impression that she could understand most of what I said, but had trouble communicating back to me in English. She kept saying she wishes she were better at English. She stated in the interview that she originally came from Brazil just six years ago or as Roger Rocha put it about just “74 months ago”, making the move seem very recent. Nunes used to live in Medford ,Massachusetts, but moved to Somerville to live , as well as to rent this salon from previous ownership, shortly after. She does her personal shopping in Union

Square and Somerville. She loves that so many shops are close by to her salon compared to the proximity in Medford. Nunes had a salon in Brazil before she came over to America. She said that there were not any major differences between her salon in Brazil and this one in Union Square. The only difference she could think of was money; salon services generate more money in America. The most common services her salon offers are a hair-cut and blow dry, but the salon does offer every other salon service like manicure and pedicure services.

Points of Interest

Nunes said that her clients were consistent over the past six years; mostly Brazilian. She has mostly Portuguese speaking employees, but some of those speak English which she said is helpful. She said there are some Americans who come in to the shop as walk-in clients. She spoke with pride about her word of mouth advertising system. She said she once in a while she will post an ad on the internet in Portuguese and English, but most of her clients hear about her salon from their friends who are clients as well. Roche said that Nunes had a very loyal client base who bring their friends. Brazilian and American clients all like the same services, according to Nunes. However, the Americas particularly like the Brazilian way to blow-dry hair; perfectly straight. Roche said that this makes him happy that the American women like this Brazilian “product” so much.

Nunes said that business has changed a little bit in the past few months because of the recession. Business has also slowed since many Brazilians have gone back to Brazil. This is a

major trend right now as it is possible to make more money in Brazil now than some jobs in Massachusetts. She said she felt the presence of the other salons so close by, but was confident in her loyal client base. Nunes spoke very passionately about someday improving her business someday in the future when the money constraints have been loosened bit. She said she wants to have more special promotions for services in the salon. She also wants to someday renovate the interior of the salon; some upkeep and updating.

Nunes said that she was very happy with Somerville right now. She liked living here and having a business here. She had a community here. When asked what she wanted to see in Somerville's future, she said something unique. She stated that she wanted more police presence on the streets monitoring drug use. She said that when there are drugs on the street, kids use them and buy them, and this creates gangs. Gangs are a security problem, especially with stealing. When Nunes' salon was owned by the previous owner, there was a incident with theft and it seems to be always on Nunes' mind. The other change she would want to see in Somerville is the parking issue. She said she has lost clients due to parking. They get a ticket while getting their hair done and do not come back to the salon.

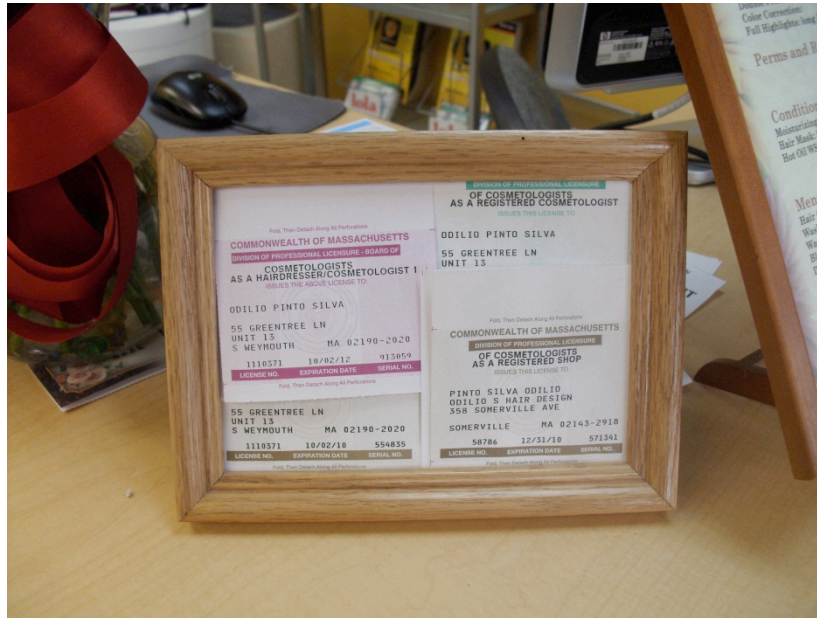
Nunes said that the city of Somerville had reached out and sent her information about health insurance and English classes. She thinks that the city had not been an obstacle, but did not really have an impact on her or her salon. She does not feel like she had time to take advantage of their programs or English classes while working. She regrets not being able to

partake in the English classes. She did not hear of the Green Line T plan from the city, but from neighborhood gossip instead. She said that everyone she knows is excited for the subway to come. She had not heard about construction fears or worries about changing her client base. She thinks it will help her client base from increasing the amount of foot traffic and helping her existing clients get here easier. She said that she thinks the transportation will be helpful to the whole city, but if rent goes up then “that would be bad”. She enjoyed looking at the map of the proposed subway station sites in respect to the half-mile radius aspect.

When I was leaving the salon after the interview, Nunes told me to come back soon and she would have better English skills. When I replied that it was fine and I learned a lot, she was till adamant on me coming back when she had better skills. She had no idea when she was going to have time to take a class though. She had not time, it seemed, to take the steps in the past six years. She was still very connected to Brazil and its people through the language.

2. Odilio Pinto Silva, Odilio’s Hair Design, 358 Somerville Ave, Somerville, MA 02143

“The business comes slower... I have to do something. I have to do something to help it... It’s very hard to find somebody else...” Odilio Pinto Silva, Owner of Odilio’s Hair Design



Odilio's Various Licenses, Taken November 2nd, 2010 3:00pm at Odilio's Hair Design, 358 Somerville Ave, Somerville, MA 02143

A soft-spoken and attentive business owner, Odilio came from San Paolo, Brazil in 1992 to start a new life after he'd been divorced at the age of 39. Similar to other salon owners, Odilio had owned a salon back home, but, unlike many of these others, he waited a long time to open one in America. He has only had this salon for four years. Beforehand he had spent time learning English at a school in Quincy, had worked preparing food in a restaurant and had also worked in a salon nearby. He has been living in Weymouth since he arrived in America 18 years ago and is now accompanied by his son who resides in Quincy. He takes great pride in his salon and would very much like to hire more employees to help him, were it not for the constraints imposed on him by the current economic climate. He loves his salon but believes that a crucial element to sustaining it is being able to hire more employees so that the salon may operate at full capacity.

Entitled Odilio's Hair Design, the salon is slightly difficult to find. Tucked down Somerville Ave, near Market Basket, Odilio's has a feeling of needing to be found by those who

are looking for it. As the photos show, the salon is lovely inside – Odilio demonstrates a genuine pride in keeping his salon neat and orderly. With flowers everywhere it has a comfortable feel. During my own stay there while I was filming the video interview, Odilio and I shared some coffee and Brazilian cake. He makes such an incredible effort to make everyone who enters his salon (even a student like me) feel completely at home. Interestingly, the TV he has playing for his customer is set to show a Brazilian channel while the magazines he carries are all in English: magazines such as Vogue. In addition, key to note are the certificates he posts prominently by the register. He is adamant about the fact that he is certified to offer the services he offers. Likewise, he prominently displays posters for local events in Somerville. Though he resides in Weymouth, Odilio tries to remain part of the community of Somerville by showcasing events taking place in the city.

Points of Interest

Though he demonstrated the ongoing process of acquiring complete fluency in English, Odilio also shed light on the struggles of being an immigrant business owner in the middle of a recession. Indeed, because other immigrants struggled to receive their licenses when they arrive in America, even if they were licensed back in their home country, Odilio struggle to find licensed hairdressers to hire. This is one of Odilio’s most pressing goals for the future: hiring more hairdressers. Unfortunately, although he once employed three to four extra hair dressers,

now he is the only one because of the recession and because of former employees leaving to start or work at other salons. His goal for the future is to hire more (which will in turn expand his client base) but this has proven difficult because he only hires hairdressers who are certified. Indeed, even Odilio himself had to be trained and certified once again upon travelling to America. The difficulty present in securing a license (whether it be due to a language barrier or due to an individual's lack of papers) does not just affect the individual unable to secure a license but also the business owners who may benefit from hiring this person.

When describing his initial experiences in America, Odilio mentions his three-month program in English. Indeed, he knew no English before coming to America and had to learn it once he'd arrived. After three months however he had to begin working and thus he took up food preparation at a local Italian-American restaurant where he worked in the kitchen and was able to practice his English a bit. As diligently as he has worked to acquire English skills, Portuguese is spoken the most in the salon. Yet, interestingly, when asked if he hires hair-dressers based on their language skills Odilio said he did not. Although he does not have any additional employees right now, if he were to start hiring he would not select them based on which languages they spoke.

As illuminating as Odilio's discussion of language and the difficulties of finding suitable employees, what interested me the most was his discussion of what he did before he opened his latest salon. From studying to food preparation, Odilio had a wide array of experience. And yet,

in the end, he returned to owning his very own salon. Indeed, he called it “less complicated” than working for someone else. This forced me to consider what it means to “make it” in America. Does making it in America require owning your own business? Or, rather, is it to have the power to do hold the same position you held before you left your home country? Or, instead, is it to have the power to decide what you wish to do? Notions of ideals and aspirations become flexible in these times of transition following migration. Perhaps “making it in America” is about having the power to decide what you wish to do, but I am eager to learn more.

In addition, I’d like to reiterate the fact that Odilio only hired certified employees which apparently are hard to find. Though we had mentioned the notion of certification during class, I had not felt comfortable discussing it as it can be a sensitive topic. Many local businesses do not necessarily employ certified hair dressers. Yet when walking inside them, these businesses appear well-maintained and perfectly legitimate. Indeed, it is Odilio who struggles to find employees because he holds them to this standard. While, as is customary, he should only employ certified hair dressers, his business is suffering because of the dearth of such people. Thus notions of legitimacy become flexible in the interest of survival; perhaps notions of custom shift under such circumstances.

Finally, Odilio did speak briefly to the arrival of the Greenline, claiming it will be good for business because it will bring more customers through the area. But, he also admitted to not knowing very much about the arrival of the Greenline. Once notified he was able to provide an

opinion about the impending extension of the Greenline. He thus illuminates the extent to which many local business-owners simply do not know about the extension of the Greenline.

3. Eunice Castro and Corena Vasquez, Elegant Salon, 18 Union Sq, Somerville, MA 02143

*“We work a lot. Long time ago we did better but... My mother... She a good person. People like her a lot around here...”Corena Vasquez, daughter of **Eunice Castro**, owner of **Elegant Salon***



Inside Elegant Salon. October 18th, 2010 11:00am, 18 Union Sq, Somerville, MA 02143,

Currently living in Revere, MA Eunice traveled alone from her home in Espiritu Santo, Brazil to Somerville, MA eleven years ago. Similar to other salon owners with whom we've spoken, Eunice did own a salon when she was back in before opening one in America. Unfortunately, due to the recession and the projected street work which will accompany the extension of the Greenline, Eunice is slightly concerned about being able to stay in business for much more than the next two years. Regardless, she takes great pride in the salon and is well-loved by her customers, as her daughter Corena asserted. Eunice's modesty is one of the first

characteristics a new acquaintance will observe. As she is quiet, accommodating and soft-spoken, she maintains a salon which is defined by these very qualities.

As she was only present to assist with translating, Corena did not provide extensive details about her personal story, but we were able to infer that she moved to America within the past 10 years. She currently lives with her husband and children, and, unlike many other Brazilians in the community plans to stay in America indefinitely. She loves it here and is happy to stay here in order to provide her children with a better life.

When walking into Elegant Salon, one is immediately struck by the calm, unassuming atmosphere. A soft-spoken woman in her own right, Eunice effortlessly cultivates an air of quiet and calm. Indeed, Elegant Salon is an oasis in the bustling hub of activity that is Union Square. Conveniently located right in the heart of Union Sq, Elegant Salon is situated across from SCAT and many major bus stops. It stands just next to a convenience store and close to several of the square's best restaurants. Yet, it has that air of quiet. Being located right by a parking lot that isn't fully taken advantage of, Elegant Salon has a calm feel in spite of its being so close to Somerville Ave and Washington St. Like other salons in the area it has also has a professional yet cozy aesthetic with printed posters and popular music playing continuously. Black and white are key colors shown in the salon while each station in the salon is well-kept and orderly.

Points of Interest

Among many other points, Eunice highlights the struggle of the immigrant business owner in communicating with the government as well as the importance of collaboration among business owners in order for their voices to be heard. In addition, there were several other key points touched upon by Eunice and Corena in the interview which may shed light on the experience of immigrant business owners in Somerville: chief among them were advertising practices, connectedness (or lack thereof) of the business owners in Union Sq and the overall logistics of running a salon in Somerville as well as language.

After highlighting briefly the surrounding area and improvements Eunice would like to see in the future, we discussed language. Both Eunice and Corena quickly agreed that most customers speak either Spanish, English or Portuguese. In fact, Eunice and Corena learned Spanish in order to converse with customers. Corena in particular began the process of learning the language with the help of a friend of hers that worked at the salon. Likewise, when touching upon notions of competition among surrounding salons, Corena emphatically agreed that language was the key to eliminating this competition. “For us we have our customers and they [the nearby salon] have the Chinese customs.... There: only Chinese people. So we don’t think it’s competition for us... I think that Chinese people may feel comfortable in their own language,” claims Corena. Language becomes a point of differentiation which allows a salon to distinguish itself from its competitors, but this differentiation is not a source of tension.

According to Corena, it's a matter of providing an environment where customers feel the most comfortable. In addition, it's a matter of providing customers with the array of services they seek. As Corena emphatically agreed, Brazilian women are very much focused on maintaining straight hair.

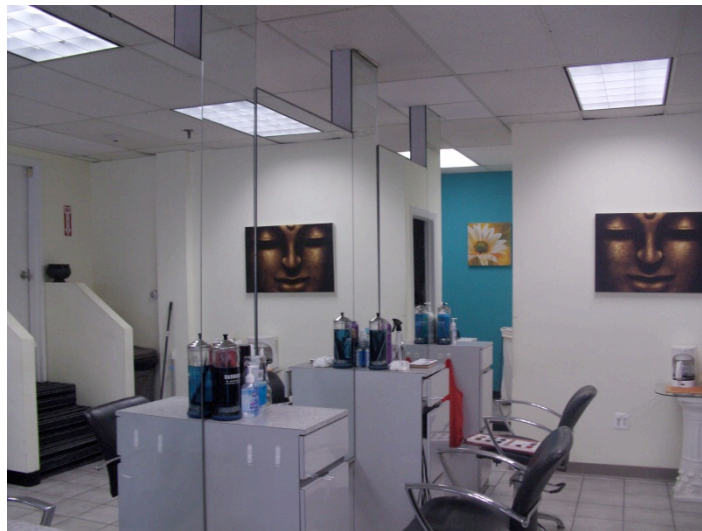
Key to note is also the advertising practices by which Eunice and Corena reach out to potential customers. While they do engage in traditional newspaper and Yellowpages advertising, they largely attract customers from their church. They hand out their business cards at the church they attend which is primarily attended by Brazilians. Social networks which are perpetuated through collective affiliation with a local church may be used to develop the clientele base of immigrant businesses. As helpful as this resource is however it cannot help in business-owner's struggle to have their voices heard by the city.

When I asked why she opened her salon in Somerville, Eunice mentioned that she thought the parking nearby would be very helpful but that upon opening the business she realized that it didn't help her customers as much as she thought it would. Open markets closing off parking and high fees for parking interfered with her customers' ability to partake of the parking and thus, we suspect, may contribute to traffic within the salon. Evidently, as Eunice and her daughter said, a petition had been brought around by another business owner nearby asking to lower the fees, but local officials were uncooperative and provided no sense of there being hope in the future for change. Aside from this petition, Eunice and Corena did not speak of a great

closeness between themselves and other business owners. Indeed, at one point in the interview they argued over whether their nearest neighbor was from Colombia or the Dominican Republic – a neighbor with whom they considered themselves to be friendly. Though competition is not, as they claim, fierce, communication is lacking between business owners themselves as well as between business owners and the state.

4. Maria Barroso, Josy's Hair Salon, 88 Broadway Ave, Somerville, MA 02143

“You need to do everything. Apply for license... You need to have a social security [number]. And, everything now. It's too hard now. Before, in my time, I don't need it. And now, they need it. It's too hard, now,” **Maria Barroso**, Employee at Josy's Hair Salon



Inside Josy's Hair Salon November 8th, 2010 12:00pm, 88 Broadway Ave, Somerville, MA 02143

A soft-spoken yet forthcoming woman, Maria moved to America from Mina Gerais, Brazil, seven years ago after she was divorced. She joined her three daughters who were already studying here at university and who have since left the country to live in Australia and Germany. Currently, Maria lives in Malden, the first place she moved to when she arrived. Back in Brazil,

Maria did work in a salon as she does now; but, she did not own a salon there and she does not own one here. She learned English upon arriving in America and continues her education still. Although she speaks primarily Portuguese in the salon, she is determined to learn English.

Unlike some of the other salons we investigated, Josy's Hair Salon is in a very bustling part of Somerville. Located on Broadway Ave, it is surrounded by competitors and other immigrant-owned businesses. The sidewalk is slightly busy, and more than anything else, one cannot help but notice the cars rushing by towards Sullivan Square. Josy's is unassuming on the outside; indeed, the sign is surprisingly obscured. Once they enter the salon, customers must walk up a ramp before entering the main area. The initial experience of the salon is quiet and subdued, but once one walks to the main area it is clearly busy. The aesthetic resembles other salons we've visited in its use of black and white and the presence of magazines but this salon was by far the busiest. Customers were coming in and out of the salon and all surrounding conversations were in Portuguese. The magazines showcasing the latest hair styles appeared to be in Portuguese, but the music being played was in English. Likewise, within the salon are displays of jewelry which may be purchased. Indeed, Josy's is "one-stop-shopping" for its customers.

Points of Interest

Though she does not own the salon, Maria assists quite heavily in its maintenance and may therefore shed great light on the reality of being an immigrant business owner. Particularly

interesting to note is how Maria mentioned that she does not drive. She, like many other local immigrants, depends on the train to get to work and get around the city. Thus, she is optimistic about the Greenline because it will allow people such as herself to get around more easily. She understands not only the experience of immigrants with the power that comes from owning a business but also those who lack that power during their early years in America. In addition, she knows firsthand the difficulties of language acquisition.

As mentioned previously, Maria began learning English after she arrived in America. She started her education at Brookline High School, continued at the Center for Adult Education in Cambridge and plans on taking additional classes at a school in Beacon Hill. Maria demonstrates the extent to which learning the language is an ongoing process that must be made a priority if complete fluency is the objective. In spite of the several classes she has already taken, Maria continues her studies, eager to learn more. That said, as determined as she is to learn the English she speaks almost exclusively Portuguese in the salon. The majority of her customers are Brazilian (and female), while a small percentage are Latin American and an even smaller percentage are American. When asked if there are any Spanish speakers in the salon to accommodate Spanish speaking customers, she said that there were not. But, often native Portuguese speakers are able to communicate with Spanish speakers due to the commonalities in the language.

But language is not the only salient aspect of Maria's interview. She also illuminates the relationship business owners have with the city of Somerville. When asked if the owner of the salon has had a good relationship with Somerville, Maria did not recognize any great help that the city provided in the process of securing a license. In addition, Maria spoke to it being more difficult now than ever before to open a salon. Random checks of the salon do occur: checks for certification of the hair dressers and checks for the proper upkeep of the workspace. The pressure is very high while communication is seemingly low.

In addition, interesting to note is the fact that Maria, like Odilio, came to America after she had been divorced – after a previous life path she'd been following took a turn in a different direction. In my opinion, given the nature of marriage and divorce, it might be argued that ties to the homeland must be severed before one leaves for America. A life event like a divorce must occur in order for a person to be inspired to leave. Thus I ask: Must one have nothing holding him or her back?

VI: Collective Analysis from the Interviews

Concept of Beauty

The infrastructure around hair, nail, spas, and other beauty related salons are the products of a universal human truth: beauty. Even though many different cultures are represented in the salons of Somerville, beauty is a common theme. While the specifics of beauty, the individual

modes of appearances, can vary across cultures, the concept of beauty holds true for any culture. Rebecca Popenoe, an anthropologist who studied different beauty ideals of people in the Sahara Desert, said, “Aesthetic ideals and the modification of the human body that achieve them thus appear to be human social universals that have been part of societies throughout history” (Popenoe 2). The information, verbal data, gathered from our eight interviews support this claim.

Hair, in particular, has a special role in the upkeep and performance of beauty, no matter what culture a person is currently embedded in. Hair, as well as skin, are the essential factors in showing systematic, whole body, health. Historically, lackluster or greasy hair was the sign of illness, especially in the medieval times (Etcoff: 2000). This was part of the reason for careful hair and skin grooming rituals and such specific occupations like hair, nail, and facial specialists (Etcoff: 2000). Since hair is a sign of health it makes sense that it is an essential component of the universal human theme of beauty.

From the interviews, we learned that there did not seem to be any major differences in what hair services were requested by people of different cultures. In other words, immigrants requested the same services as established Americans. Interestingly, there did seem to be a general trend in having straight hair in Somerville right now across cultures. Salon owner, Chelle Salcedo, said that straight hair is a must for Brazilian women (Chelle Salcedo, 10/22). There is a Brazilian way to styling and blow-drying curly hair so that it is perfectly straight. Owner, Regina Nunes, said that she is proud of her Brazilian technique when the Americans come in for a blow

dry (Regina Nunes, 11/01). Beauty is a universal concept and right now it seems as if straight hair is a component to that. Owner, Bela Mendonca, said that it does not matter what ethnicity the person is, but what kind of hair they have (Bela Mendonca, 11/20).

Immigrant Entrepreneurship

While conducting our interviews, we also learned about the salon owners' transition into life in the United States and their experience dealing with the city of Somerville. In these discussions, the notion of immigrant entrepreneurship was directly and indirectly examined. Instances of marginalization but also empowerment have colored the stories we heard from these business owners. As one narrator, Maria Barroso, mentioned, an immigrant's lack of documents can prevent a perfectly determined and intelligent individual from running her own business. Such people, in response to this, turn to their friends who are documented to open the business under their name so that they (the original individuals) may run the business themselves. And thus, these documented immigrants put themselves at greater risk than they would have experienced otherwise (Maria Barroso 11/8).

In addition to documentation struggles, immigrant business owners face struggles with regards to the location of their salons. Sophia's for example is not accessible by public transportation. This decreases traffic to the salon because the potential customer base is restricted to members of the neighborhood (Chelle Salcedo 10/21). Likewise, in the case of Elegant Salon, parking is an issue. Eunice Castro, for example, selected her salon location based specifically on

its close proximity to parking. But unfortunately the city of Somerville frequently closes the parking lot for various events as well as demands a parking fee for those who are able to park there. When Eunice and her neighbors spoke out against this, even submitting a petition to the city of Somerville, their needs were not met and their businesses suffered (Eunice Castro 10/18). Others such as Bela Mendonca were subjected to their water being turned off temporarily because of road work and were forced to improvise in order to run a salon which demands the use of water. No warning was given before and minimal explanation was given afterward (Bela Mendonca 11/20). Communication needs to improve not only among business owners but also between this group of business owners and the city of Somerville.

As our fieldwork has demonstrated, immigrant business owners face unique struggles. But how do we combat these struggles? How do we begin to further study immigrant businesses in order to foster the communication which is currently lacking? We must return to the business owners and we must reexamine how we evaluate the immigrant-owned business landscape. Indeed such businesses play a major role in revitalizing communities and strengthening local economies. Thus they and their businesses must be examined further in thoughtful and unconventional ways. As Light argues, "... entrepreneurs not only emerge from groups, they function best in groups... entrepreneurship should be studied by examining clusters," (Light 15). Thus, while the individual stories of immigrant entrepreneurs must be investigated, their stories must then be further investigated within the broader context of the many stories of immigrant

business owners. Context is everything. Understanding one business assists in policy-makers' ability to understand those which surround it.

Likewise, care must be taken to provide for them. Indeed, when each of our narrators was asked if the city of Somerville helped them in opening the business, they all answered in the negative. But, these businesses need help, as our narrator Viviane, so adamantly claimed. Indeed, Light argues that "...public support should be based upon these realistic assumptions rather than on the faint possibility of getting rich quickly by means of a lucky strike," (Light 26). Though investment in these businesses may lead to more long-term results than short-term results, the immediate needs of these businesses must be understood and must be met. For such entrepreneurs benefit the community and the local economy. As Mayor Curtatone himself mentioned in a meeting at City Hall just last November, "'our local economy, the tax base ... absolutely relies' on immigrant business owners, employees and consumers. 'Our government needs to find ways to process the paperwork to keep them here,'" (Metzey 2010). Just as Maria spoke about the difficulty presented to the fully capable hair dressers who lack documents, so too does Mayor Curtatone express understanding of the need to accommodate all potentially successful business owners who just need their papers.

Likewise, take for example the work of Ivan Light and Stephen Gold. Though they use the term "ethnic" to refer to immigrant-owned businesses, the broad message of their argument speaks to the positive impact of immigrant-owned businesses in the community. "...ethnic

economies also contribute to the general welfare. Ethnic firms provide... access to jobs, goods, services, income, and wealth. Ethnic economies also help maintain neighborhoods, support communal institutions, assist the indigent, train recent arrivals... maintain cultural integrity,” (Light and Gold x). These salons as part of this broader network of clustered immigrant-owned businesses do so much more than just straighten local women’s hair. They contribute to the local economy and help the community.

Social Networking in Salons

Most of the salons had a much more rudimentary advertising system that we expected. Very few salons relied on the Internet and only some posted printed advertisements in magazines and the newspaper. The reason for this, as we discovered, is not a lack of interest or a lack of sophistication, but actually a testament to the complexity and strength of the social networks in place in Somerville.

Immigrants coming to a new country usually come over to an area where a friend or relative already resides. Even if this is not the case, the new immigrant becomes part of a group of people newly in America. This cohesion is a necessary part of making the change to a new culture a bit easier. Here in this group you can learn speak your native language, you can cook your native food, and follow the same traditions while exploring the new culture. The level of cohesion to a group varies across individuals, but it on some level does exist.

Grouping like this creates a network system; a line of communication that reaches maximum efficiently. Shops, classes, city and school information are able to be transported through many different people of that group; like in a neighborhood. Anthropologist, Nick Crossley, stated in addition to the general line of communication: “ Properties of networks themselves are also significant, however. For example many networks involve ‘hub nodes’ which are connected to a vast number of other nodes.” (Crossley 111). Information can also jump to other groups. If a Brazilian beauty technique jumps to a American group of salon-goers then salon client will change and business will improve. This interweaving of information and communication makes for a very interesting social fabric that reflects its specific location (Crossley 113).

Almost all of the beauty salon owners we spoke to rely on this “word of mouth” advertising systems. They all claim to have loyal client bases that will continue to frequent their salon, as well as refer friends and family members to that salon. Thus, a specific salon becomes in a network that serves that group of people; their family, their friends. The salon can jump networks into other culture groups by friend’s referrals. This seems to be a very effective way of advertising and an ideal way to combat the competition of so many salons. Everyone sticks to his or her network’s stylist, their network salon.

However, intense loyalty to the network’s salon and its stylist, can end up having a negative effects on the salon it self. In Brazilian groups especially, many trained and licensed

stylists are leaving their salon and setting up an informal one-chair salon in their own homes. This stems from economic hardship; with no structural salon there is no chair to rent, no taxes, etc. They can therefore charge decreased prices for their services than those who own or work in the salon. Owners, Chelle Salcedo and Viviane Brocenschi, spoke very passionately about this phenomenon (Chelle Salcedo 10/22) (Viviane Brocenschi 12/2). It ends up hurting their business. People will follow their stylist who they are loyal too, in relation to network theory. Of course the decreased prices do not hurt either in this recession shaped environment.

VII: Expert Opinions on the Role of Language

“[A second] language emerges through necessity... because I want it, urgently want it, and because I urgently attend to it.” ~Peter Buschel 1995 as quoted by Moyer.

What we have observed

As Moyer argues in *Age, Accent and Experience in Second Language Acquisition: An Integrated Approach to Critical Period Inquiry*, language is inextricably tied to one’s sense of self (Moyer 2). Likewise it is tied to one’s relationship within the community (Moyer 2). The acquisition of a second language is not only a complex process in and of itself, but so too is it complex in its far-reaching and diffuse ramifications. “Linguistic development... is a highly individualized phenomenon. It is not easily reduced to predictable patterns and outcomes, but depends on a myriad of social and psychological factors, played out in both the public and

private sphere,” (Moyer 7). Of all the points of analysis which have been spawned by our interviewing various immigrant business owners in Somerville, why have we thus chosen to focus on language in the latter stages of this examination? To put it quite simply, language was the thread which was interwoven into each and every interview. Whether it be Chelle speaking of her passion to learn English which brought her to the United States, or Maria who to this day is still grappling with mastering English, immigrants’ initial experiences and transition into American life are often defined by their ability to master the language. Based on our observations of Chelle and Marcia in particular, as juxtaposed against narrators such as Eunice and Odilio, we have determined that greater proficiency in English prior to arrival in the United States increases one’s ease of transition into the United States. That said, as scholars, we find it difficult to precisely quantify notions of “proficiency” and “great language acquisition.” These notions are slippery and thus must be understood as our interpretation of the data. But with that said, we have found that greater English proficiency translates into more stable and long-lasting success in business.

Barriers to Language Acquisition

As may be expected, this notion of English proficiency leading to long-term success in business is echoed by experts in the field of linguistics. Miriam Burt in her piece entitled, “Issues with Outcomes in Workplace ESL Programs” argues that immigrants who are only

proficient in their first language are much more likely to have “non-continuous employment and to earn less than those literate in English (Greenberg, Macías, Rhodes, & Chan, 2001).” Indeed, as she goes on to discuss, 2000 census data on immigrant earnings demonstrates a positive relation between earnings and English language ability (Burt 2). In spite of this, she does acknowledge several barriers to language acquisition as discussed by Van Duzer et al in *Review of adult ESL education in the United States* – “barriers such as time, transportation, and childcare difficulties.” Although a great deal of census data and other sociological research points toward acquisition of the host country’s language being a key tool in long-term stability and success, there are various barriers to this process. People are busy and tired and unable to afford costly class expenses. Likewise, as Odilio discussed in his interview, many times even if one takes the time to enroll in an ESL course, one must stop taking the classes in order to start working to support himself. Odilio has had only three months of a formal English education because he had to start work (Odilio Pinto Silva 11/2/10). Lack of time, energy and money can prevent an immigrant from devoting his or her time to learning English which can then hinder his or her path to long-term stability in the new country. Structures must be put in place to combat this.

Furthermore, there is a biological barrier, in addition to the cultural deterrents of time and affordability, in relation to language acquisition. It has been proven that infants learn their native language through auditory stimuli very early in life. While learning, as a young child, parts of the brain are stimulated (whether it be by visual or auditory cues) electrical connections are made to

form synaptic networks. Neural pathways that are not used as a child are pruned away; a process called synaptic pruning. This pathway is now closed for easy learning. The skill related to that specific pathway can still be attained but just by using a more inefficient part of the brain that is not usually responsible for that skill. Therefore, in relation to language acquisition, a child forms the connections and can execute quickly the native language (through the process of electrical connection or myelination) (Su et al. 1751). This rapid speed of myelination happens up till about 18 months of age according to the study by Su et all in 2008. After that time, myelination slows and synaptic pruning increases in the unused neural connections. This shows that internalizing a language after being an infant is harder, possible, but harder.

While swift language acquisition is particularly important for business owners, customers' lack of proficiency in English may nevertheless be accommodated in spaces such as the salon. One of our narrators in particular, Corena Vasquez of Elegant Salon, argued that what made their salon competitive in an area of several salons was the fact that they spoke Portuguese and some Spanish. Indeed she claimed, "I think people feel comfortable in their own language," (Corena Vasquez 10/18) Therefore, Brazilian customers will go to a Brazilian salon while Korean customers will go to a Korean salon. Thus, it may be argued that the salon is an oasis in an area characterized by extensive diversity. It is a space where immigrants may go to regain the sense of normalcy they experienced in their homeland – a sense of returning to their roots.

Why Language in Salons is Unique

Thus it has been established that language is essential to being a part of a new culture although a second language is time-consuming and difficult to learn. While business-owners are made to master the language, customers are not. Indeed, customers quite often (though not always) select a salon based on whether or not their first language is spoken there. When taking these truths and looking at them through an anthropological lens, we must ask: What then makes language use in salons so unique? We believe it is because of the special spaces that salons represent in human society. If beauty is a universal human component, then salons – the spaces to create and maintain beauty – are universally human spaces. Good hygiene is important to humans, biologically, for it is a sign of reproductive health and fertility potential. Salons aid in this quest for hygiene (visibly healthy hair, nails, and skin) and looking reproductively attractive. The salon is theoretically helping to fulfill a primal, evolutionary, need for reproductive success. Spaces that are founded in these basic human needs are unique in that they represent their own category of social norms. They do not need to follow the same rules as for example a department store – that is just a space for a purpose, very impersonal. A department store, for instance, stocks beauty for all. The shirts and pants you may buy are not designed for you. They are not cut to your size or a color that best suits your skin tone. However, in a beauty salon, beauty is made for you. Your haircut fits your head with your hair. Your facial or pedicure is made for your body only. Discussion occurs the whole time between the stylist and the client. A beauty

salon breaks down those impersonal social norm barriers and makes a new category of reflexive space; a space filled with mirrors forcing people to look at themselves and each other. This freedom from strict categories of the outside impersonal non-reflexive world results in two possible actions. First, the freedom can make the outgoing person want to try new things, to fit into her new surroundings, to add a new language to herself. Or for most people, more introverted people, this new freedom causes anxiety. The freedom causes most people to revert back to what they know; their own people, their own language. Freedom in this space means different things for different people. However all people agree on the freedom that comes with a personal space. Beauty salons expose human nature.

VIII: Somerville Application

Language Opportunities Available

Though often costly and infeasible when accommodated into busy work schedules, there are still many opportunities in Boston to learn English. Below is just a selection of these opportunities taken from <http://www.boston-online.com/Education/EsL/index.html>. Of course there are other programs in the Greater Boston area such as the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, but this is just a selection. Ranging from special programs at universities to organizations geared specifically towards individuals looking to learn English, the opportunities span across Boston.

Adult Literacy Resource Institute
American Language Academy

Approach International Student Center
Boston Academy of English
Boston Academy of English
Boston English Institute
Boston ESL
Boston Home Language
Boston Intensive School of English
Boston Language Institute
Boston School of Modern Languages
Roslindale
bostOnline English
Career Services International
EF International School of English
ELS Language Center
Kaplan International Programs
Mass. Association of Teachers to Speakers of Other Languages
Northeastern University's English Language Center
OISE Boston
Olin Center
Salem State College
Second Language Services at Suffolk University
The English League
Thoreau Language Institute

Plans for the Future

We have established that the English language, in addition to one's first language, is crucial to new life in Somerville. There needs to be a plan to address the difficulties of language acquisition so that we can make the transition process better and more effective for new immigrants. This will benefit everyone involved because, as Moyer has argued, language is inherently interwoven into community formation (Moyer 2). By allowing immigrants coming to America to have more opportunity to learn English, we can provide them with an opportunity

such that they can be a better part of the work force that makes the city operate. A program needs to be implemented that can put English courses in more locations such as areas further from the city or places other than the places where immigrants may work. This program needs to find more ways to make the courses more affordable; whether it be through volunteer teachers or through ample non-profit funding. Courses also need to be in more creative time slots that fit in with a working parent – maybe a lunch time slot or a early morning slot. Addressing all of these barriers is complicated and hard to accomplish with limited funds as most city funded projects are, but we do think it is plausible with innovative thinking. Everyone, the city and the immigrants, will benefit from a realization of the importance of language in the success of immigrant businesses.

X: Conclusion – Green Line Project

As our investigation has shown, activity in immigrant-owned salons is diverse and unexpected at times. Shedding light on ideals of beauty, realities of immigrant entrepreneurship, complex social networks, and the multi-faceted process of language acquisition, the salon is a unique space indeed. And while painting a picture of the salon owners in Somerville, giving a voice to people who define this community, and illuminating the cultural character of the city has been the most pressing aim of this project, collecting local business owners' opinions about the Greenline extension is also a very important practical application. This change is coming to their area, right outside their salons and it will have an impact on their business in potentially

profound and unexpected ways. Whether the long term outcome is positive or negative for them is uncertain; but the short term changes will most certainly be disruptive and quite probably detrimental. Since we have had the invaluable opportunity to speak and get to know local business-owners, we know the potential impacts of the Greenline on these businesses. Disruption of these businesses will not only impact the local economy but also the cultural character of the community. Hopefully this project, and our classmate's projects, will enlighten those who hold the power in this issue and ensure the preservation of the city's cultural integrity.

Policy-making will need to account for the individual business-owners such as those with whom we've spoken. Solutions which allow people to keep their homes and businesses as well as survive gentrification must be sought out. Indeed, a policy must be developed and implemented to control rent prices, keep businesses that are set for demolition, make road ways more efficient for the increased traffic, and help those businesses that are and will be affected by the construction. The solution to the problems posed by the extension of the Greenline does not lie in forcing this vibrant community of business-owners elsewhere. These people who know the area and the population of Somerville better than anyone are essential in making the space what it is today and what it can be tomorrow. They must be taken into account for indeed they are the very threads which tie the fabric of this community together.

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Appendix

Research Material:

All of our research conducted in the field may be found digitally on our course's blog:

<http://sites.tufts.edu/urbanborderlands>

Our Research Materials in the form of:

- 8 Interview Audio Clips
- 8 Interview Reports
- 8 Interview Transcriptions
- 8 Release Forms
- Assorted Business Cards, Photographs, and Video Clips

It may also be seen catalogued in the Tufts Digital Archive.