

Capital, comunidad, y cultura

Understanding the creation, growth, and survival of Somerville's Latino
immigrant-owned restaurants

An honors thesis for the Program in American Studies
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Preface

The “Christmas City” of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania is divided by a swiftly moving river. On the Southside of the river, our trees and streetlights are decorated with strands of multicolored lights every holiday season. Crossing the bridge from one downtown to the other, the lights gradually change until they are completely white. Growing up on the side with the multicolored lights, I was aware that the holiday decorations were no accident but rather were reflective of the history and population of that side of town. The Southside of Bethlehem has historically been the place of residence of immigrants. Home to the industrial giant Bethlehem Steel, South Bethlehem was the home of the workers who lived under the looming shadows of the blast furnaces. The first immigrants were Irish and German, the second wave brought eastern Europeans to town, and the last wave beginning in the second half of the twentieth century welcomed a large Puerto Rican population. I grew up in the wake of the decline of American industry on a street home to elderly Hungarian wives of former steel workers, a Catholic church that still conducts services in German, and dozens of Latino families—not to mention our location blocks away from a nationally recognized research university. The tremendous diversity of my neighborhood fascinated me as a teenager, and I began to think extensively about what it means to be part of community and how neighborhoods are formed.

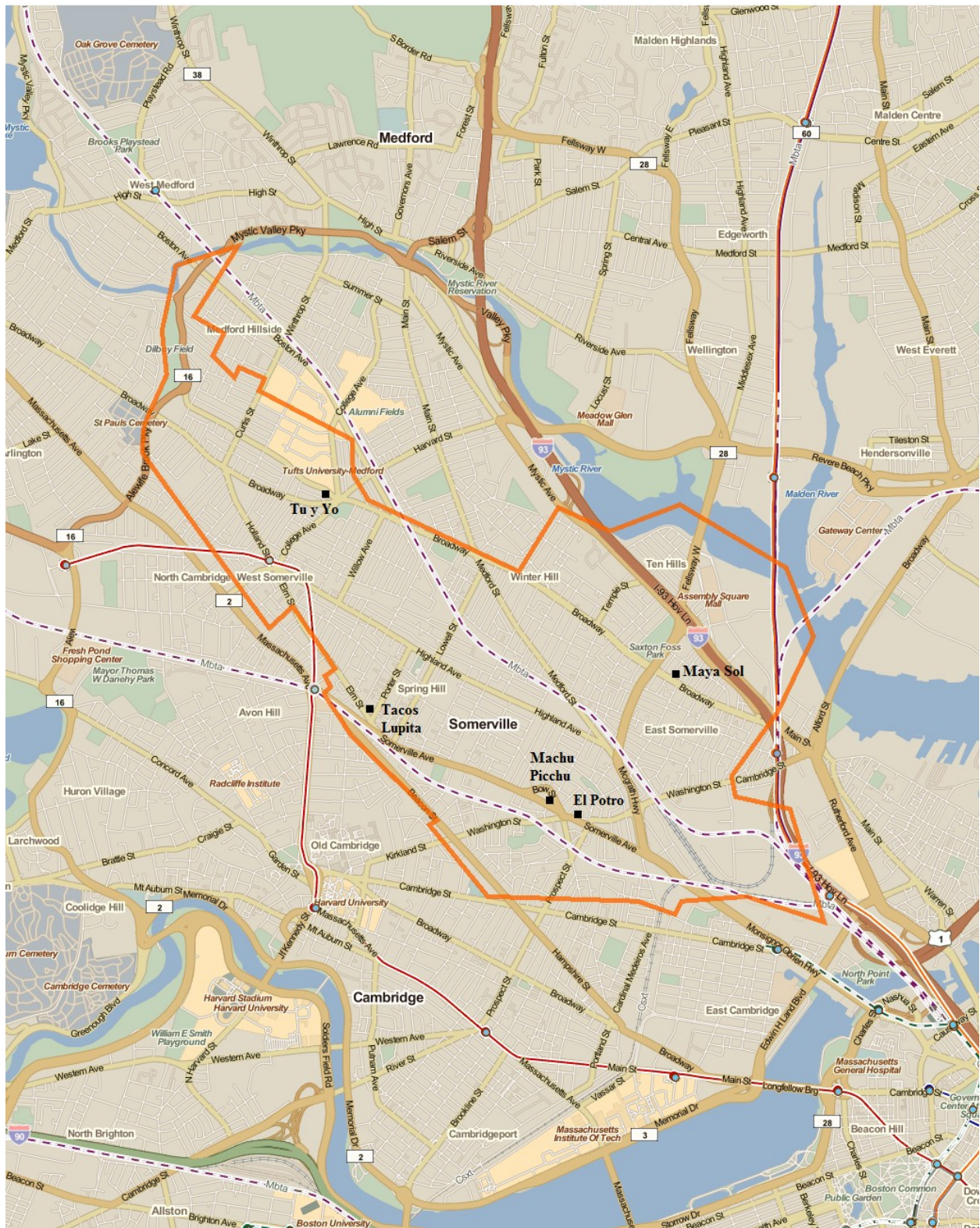
Arriving at Tufts University in the fall of 2007, I immediately noticed the diversity of businesses, architecture, and community feeling in Somerville’s many neighborhoods. Union Square felt the most interesting and the most like home—from the Indian, Thai, Mexican, and Italian restaurants to a Korean market, Brazilian tailor, and Haitian bakery, it was clear that Union Square was defined by its diversity and differences. The Market Basket supermarket reminded me of my neighborhood grocery store with an entire aisle of specialized Goya products and multiple languages spoken by shoppers and staff. As I became involved in community organizing and advocacy at both LIFT Somerville and the Somerville Community Corporation, I quickly learned that Somerville’s immigration patterns were strikingly similar to those of my hometown and are representative of regional trends. The nature of my community work and my

background growing up in majority Latino public schools drew my attention to the large Spanish-speaking population in Somerville, and I quickly discovered that Salvadorans form the largest Spanish-speaking, Latin American group in the city.

Walking the streets of Somerville, the easiest way to identify the diversity of the city's immigrant history is by simply looking at storefronts. Specialty supermarkets and bakeries, travel agencies, credit associations, variety stores, and most notably, restaurants identify Somerville as a true immigrant city and highlight a traditional method of immigrant incorporation into American society: entrepreneurship. In the spring of 2010, I took a class called Economic Anthropology in Action with Professor Jennifer Burtner and became involved in the YUM Somerville project and partnership with immigrant advocacy agency The Welcome Project. Focused on immigrant-owned restaurants in Somerville, the YUM project was designed to support immigrant-owned small businesses during a time of recession through advocacy-oriented research and marketing. I became involved as a student researcher and was fascinated by the economic, social, and cultural functions that restaurants play within immigrant communities.

My thesis has grown out of my interest in immigrant history and the latest wave of Latin American immigration to the northeastern United States. Living in Somerville, I have been able to explore this topic that has interested me since childhood and understand how these patterns and actions have been theoretically conceptualized in a variety of fields—from economics to anthropology to Latino studies. The stories told in this thesis are very local and individual, but they speak to larger trends in recent immigration, economic survival, and the creation of community in the post-industrial northeastern United States. These stories give faces and names to the people who are so often theorized by scholars and discussed in the formation of public policies, but whose voices and experiences are rarely heard. From South Bethlehem to Somerville, immigrants play an important role in shaping our communities and reviving urban commercial centers, and their stories are an indispensable part of our nation's history.

Figure 1: Map of Somerville, MA



Introduction

Walking the city of Somerville is an easy task. Occupying only 4.2 square miles, this community on the outskirts of Boston is tightly-packed with residents and several commercial areas, connected by several main streets that stretch from west to east. Any one of these main boulevards will take you through multiple squares, residential neighborhoods, and commercial districts, home to an older, European immigrant working class, young immigrant families from Latin American, Asia, Europe, and Africa, and a growing population of transplanted, White middle-class professionals. Somerville is an extremely diverse community given its geographical size. The cost of housing varies across the city which has led to neighborhoods grouped by class, but due to the small size of the city and numerous ethnic groups, exclusive ethnic neighborhoods have not developed. The latest census data reports that about one quarter of the city's residents are foreign born, and over thirty percent speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau 2008).

Somerville's diverse neighborhoods have their roots in a long history of immigration, industrial development and decline, and intentional transportation and economic development planning and policies. Demographic and physical changes in Somerville affect all those who live in, work in, and visit the community. This thesis explores the experience of Spanish-speaking Latino immigrant restaurant owners in Somerville who tell their own versions of the popular narrative of immigration and entrepreneurship that has long been a part of the city's history. Their story expands beyond business and economics; rather, it gives us an understanding of how community is created and defined economically, socially, and culturally, and how the outside forces of neighborhood change affect these communities. Like every city, Somerville is constantly in motion. The following stories and analysis offer a glimpse of Somerville's history, present and future as seen through the eyes of several small business owners in the local Latino community.

This introduction provides a background for the discussion of Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants, beginning with a brief history of immigration to Somerville

focusing primarily on Latin American immigrants, followed by a section defining the term Latino as it applies to the history and experiences of those who fall under its broad umbrella. This chapter continues by giving an overview of Somerville's neighborhoods, a review of relevant literature, and the theoretical framework and methodology used to develop this thesis. The Introduction ends with an outline of the following chapters and their main themes.

The Development of an Immigrant City

The 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. Incorporated in 1842 with a population of 1,013 (Elliot 1896), Somerville was founded by British settlers on territory deeded to them by a female tribal chief and member of the Massachuset federation whose people had been decimated by disease and war. The chief traded her land for peace, and the British began to develop their new territory as the rural, agricultural community of Charlestown beyond the Neck, as present day Somerville was known prior to 1842. Following its incorporation, Somerville began to develop roads and railroads that were quickly accompanied by a variety of industries. The railroads remained a significant employer and their presence attracted many immigrants and new industries to Somerville. In large part due to Somerville's location on several large railroads, Somerville and neighboring Cambridge had developed as important manufacturing centers by the time of the Civil War. Several brickyards occupied much of the city, and the large employer North Meat Packing was founded in 1855 (Johnston 1975).

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 (U.S. Census Bureau 1901). 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 (U.S. Census Bureau 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931).

Somerville continued to grow as an urban manufacturing center, hitting its highest population in 1930 with 103,908 residents. During this time period, many Italian immigrants found work in the meat-packing industry (Johnston 1975).

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. Latin American immigrants were affected differently by restrictive immigration policies depending on their country of origin and phenotypic characteristics; nevertheless, Latin American immigration as a whole showed a marked increase during the mid-part of the twentieth century. In addition, economic and political strife related to international conflicts and US intervention provoked the exodus of many Latin Americans to the United States in search of employment and/or security. The largest Latin American group in Somerville is Brazilian, but this thesis focuses primarily on Spanish-speaking Latino immigrants due to the differences in culture and language between Latino Spanish-speaking groups and the Portuguese-speaking Brazilian community.

It is necessary to contextualize the history of Latin American immigration beyond the city of Somerville for two reasons: to understand larger patterns of settlement in the Boston metropolitan area that were the result of specific recruitment and housing policies, and because the history of surrounding communities has been well researched and offers many conclusions that can be applied to Somerville's own history.

While Latin Americans have had a presence in the Boston area since the late 1890s (Uriarte 1992), significant numbers of Latin American immigrants did not begin to settle permanently in the area until the 1950s and 1960s (Pacini Hernandez 2006). The first wave of families to arrive in the Boston area came from the Caribbean. United States Good Neighbor

Policy-era economic interventions in Puerto Rico through “Operation Bootstrap” (*Operación Manos a la Obra*) promoted abrupt and temporary industrialization of the island, and resulted in the dislocation of large numbers of Puerto Rican workers. These workers, benefitting from American citizenship as residents of the Associated Free State of Puerto Rico (*Estado Libre Asociado*), arrived in the United States looking for employment and established a cycle of migration from San Juan to New York City and later other cities in the northeastern United States. In addition, during the 1960s agricultural companies directly recruited workers on the island who brought their families to the area. Many settled in Cambridge and later found work in Cambridge’s growing manufacturing sector (Pacini Hernandez 2006). Once a Puerto Rican community was established through direct recruitment, the connection between the Boston area and Puerto Rico was forged and families began to arrive following family members and friends (Pacini Hernandez 2006). In Somerville, Puerto Ricans continue to make up one of the largest Spanish-speaking Latino groups with 776 self-identified residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2001).

Dominicans began to arrive in the 1960s as well, following political unrest related to the brutal Trujillo dictatorship and subsequent military coups and interventions following the assassination of Rafael Trujillo in 1961. Many of these new arrivals settled in the cities of Boston and Cambridge after passing through Puerto Rico and/or the Dominican community of New York City. The Boston area is also home to many Cuban immigrants who fled the island following the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Somerville reports only 173 Dominicans and 173 Cubans, however, suggesting that the geographical centers of these populations likely lie in other neighborhoods and area cities such as Boston (U.S. Census Bureau 2001).

While Caribbean immigration and migration has continued to the present day, during the 1970s and 1980s a new wave of immigration brought many Central Americans to the Boston area. In the 1960s and 1970s, small numbers of affluent and educated Central Americans arrived in the Boston area to study and work. The 1980s brought an era of political and social instability to Central America, with the rise of moderate leftist leaders who were systematically overthrown

in US supported coup d'états and replaced by military and right-wing dictatorships. Refugees began to arrive in the Boston area from Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala (Uriarte 2002). This new generation of immigrants included many without documents or legal status in the United States, creating challenges for employment and access to social services that were aggravated by the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), which made it illegal for employers to hire undocumented immigrants, among other restrictions. The Immigration Act of 1990 created a new process by which undocumented immigrants could apply for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in specific cases and be granted a work permit. While this status does not make undocumented immigrants eligible for citizenship and prevents them from leaving the country, it has been taken advantage of by many undocumented citizens of Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras seeking legal status and working permits within the United States.

The latest figures available in the 2000 United States Census list Salvadorans as the largest Central American group in Somerville with 2,075 residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2001)¹. This number likely undercounts the true number due to the undocumented status of many Salvadorans making them less likely to report to the census. In addition, inconsistencies in census data and anecdotal evidence suggest that many Salvadorans and other Central Americans identify themselves as Mexican because of the proximity of El Salvador to Mexico and lack of clarity on census forms (Pacini Hernandez 2006). Guatemalans and Hondurans are the next largest identified groups with 202 and 102 residents reporting, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). The large Salvadoran community is evident given the presence of many Salvadoran restaurants and social organizations, such as the Committee for Refugees from El Salvador.

As indicated above, the 373 residents identifying as Mexican in the 2006-8 American Community Survey may represent a Mexican immigrant community in Somerville but it is likely that at least a portion of those residents are actually from a different Central American nation.

¹ Data broken down by ethnic background and country of origin was not available for the 2010 Census at the time of writing.

The Mexican community in Somerville, as in most New England communities, has traditionally been quite small. Evidence such as Mexican restaurants can be misleading, as many Salvadorans serve similar food under the label “Mexican” in order to attract customers who may be less familiar with El Salvador.

The third major, unique group of Spanish-speaking, Latin American immigrants in Boston is South Americans. As members of the smallest group of Latin American immigrants, arrivals from Chile, Argentina, and Colombia have typically been a part of the educated, upper class that has come to the Boston area to work and study. In recent years, Somerville has attracted a growing lower-income Colombian population seeking refuge from political unrest and drug-related guerrilla warfare in Colombia. The latest data available in the census of 2000 reported 219 Colombians in the city, with Peruvians and Argentineans making up the second largest groups with 71 and 75 residents, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). In Massachusetts as a whole, Colombians are overwhelmingly the largest South American group with over 12,000 residents in 2000, and Peruvians are a distant second with just over 3,000 in the state.

Brazilian immigrants are the largest group of recent Latin American immigration, with 3,870 residents identifying as of Brazilian descent in the census of 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). While Brazilians play a large role in the Somerville community, the fact that they speak Portuguese differentiates them from other Latin American immigrants. The large Brazilian community is extremely evident in Somerville from the prevalence of Brazilian flags in business windows, grocery and convenience stores selling Brazilian products, specialty restaurants, and other businesses oriented toward an entirely Brazilian clientele. While Brazilians are a very large, important immigrant group in Somerville, Spanish-speaking Latin American immigrants in Somerville are the primary focus of this thesis. However, it is important to note that Somerville’s current immigrant population is very diverse beyond Latin American immigration. Haitians, Cape Verdeans, Vietnamese, and Chinese immigrants all have a significant presence

within the Somerville community and have arrived largely toward the end of the twentieth century.

Figure 2: Somerville Hispanic/Latino residents by national origin (U.S. Census Bureau 2001)

Country of origin	Population
Brazil ²	3,870
El Salvador	2,075
Puerto Rico	776
Mexico	464
Colombia	219
Guatemala	202
Cuba	173
Dominican Republic	173
Honduras	102
Argentina	75
Peru	71

Defining “Latino”

Before embarking on a discussion of the contemporary role of Latin American immigrants in Somerville, it is important to examine the terminology and assumptions that connect and differentiate between individuals sharing ties to Latin America. In the United States, the census uses the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” interchangeably, referring to the Office of Budget and Management’s official definition of the category as ““a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race”” (quoted in Grieco and Cassidy 2001). The individuals included in the broad census category range from recent immigrants from South America, to descendants of immigrants, citizens of United States territories such as Puerto Rico, and residents of the southwest descended from Mexican citizens whose territories were incorporated in the United States following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Individuals of Latin American origin who are not counted as Latino nor typically self-identify as Latino include Brazilians, Belizeans, Haitians, Jamaicans, among others, as well as Spaniards who may identify as of Hispanic origin but not Latino, although

² Brazilians do not typically identify as Latino, but are included here as a reference given that they are the largest Latin American immigrant group in the City of Somerville.

these boundaries are certainly fluid (Marrow 2007). In the United States, “Hispanic/Latino” has historically been treated as a racial category, further complicating the self-identification of individuals in a society where racial identification and location³ can define the opportunities and barriers available to individuals.

The diverse group of individuals grouped under the label “Hispanic/Latino” claim varied racial identities, linguistic backgrounds, religions, and national origins, and many scholars argue that the historical, arbitrary grouping of “Hispanics” has little theoretical or practical relevance in its current use in policy settings (Oboler 1995). Simultaneously, however, many scholars and community organizers advocate for the adoption of a term that unifies the group commonly identified as “Hispanic,” noting that “cross-ethnic unity” and collective action are political needs in the United States where Latinos have been racialized as outsiders (Oboler 1995). The term “Latino” has been adopted as a self-identifier for this diverse community in (United States of) American society⁴, differentiating from “Hispanic”—a designation historically defined and applied by the White, dominant culture of the United States government. While the Latino community is diverse in origin and characteristics, the utility of the term lies in the development of a collective identity and a powerful social force that deserves recognition as a permanent component of (United States of) American society.

Somerville’s geography and neighborhoods

Somerville is a Boston suburb, but due to high population density and several commercial districts, it operates as both an independent economic, social, and cultural center and a commuter suburb. Somerville borders the west side of Charlestown and is located directly north of

³ I use racial identification to refer to an individual’s personal, self-identification with a particular racial group or groups, while racial location refers to the grouping and racialization of individuals by society, despite self-identification. For example, a Dominican-American descended from African, Native American, and White European heritage may identify racially as “Latino and Native American,” but will likely be racialized as Black in the United States due to the social construction of Blackness in (United States of) American society.

⁴ I use the term (United States of) American to differentiate from Latin American or pan-American. This usage is intended to replicate the Spanish adjective *estadounidense*, which is a descriptive form of United States. In English, the use of the term “American” to describe culture or society that is actually *estadounidense* reflects an ethnocentrism that ignores the large number of countries that are part of the Americas.

Cambridge. The proximity of Somerville and Cambridge result in a fluidity between local economies—many residents of Somerville work and study in Cambridge, and much of Somerville’s immigrant population has arrived in Somerville via Cambridge following rising housing prices and gentrification in Cambridge’s main squares (Uriarte et.al 2003). Somerville borders Arlington on its western edge, and Medford and Malden lie to the north. See Figure 1 on page viii for a map of Somerville and its surrounding communities.

Somerville is divided into many neighborhoods that have very different characteristics demographically, from foreign-born population to median income. The following descriptions of neighborhoods, while not inclusive of all of Somerville’s variety, figure prominently in this thesis and represent several of the largest commercial and residential areas in the city.

Union Square

Union Square is a unique, multi-use area that is home to immigrants from at least four continents. Geographically, Union Square is located in the heart of the eastern end of Somerville, north of Central and Harvard Squares in Cambridge. Public transportation accessibility is limited to several bus lines that connect the area to Porter, Harvard, and Central Squares in Cambridge and Lechmere and Sullivan Stations on the borders of Somerville.

The mixed-use square is home to many immigrant-owned businesses specializing in products and services directed toward an immigrant clientele—from Indian to Thai, El Salvadoran, Haitian, Brazilian, Chinese, Italian, Portuguese, Greek, and more. Former Community Action Agency of Somerville executive director Jack Hamilton estimates that over fifty languages are spoken within the Union Square neighborhood (Hamilton, pers.comm.). The large immigrant community in the area is likely the result of several influences—low rents in buildings featuring an eclectic mix of architectural styles, the relative inaccessibility to public transportation, and complicated traffic patterns have traditionally made Union Square an unpopular destination for wealthier Somerville residents. Immigrants appropriated the space and have transformed it into a vibrant community.

The unique cultural character of the immigrant Union Square neighborhood has drawn the attention of young professionals looking for inexpensive housing with close proximity to ethnic restaurants and stores. The relative proximity to Cambridge and West Somerville has made Union Square a logical next destination for gentrification and the expansion of the local, young professional community. The younger, wealthier crowd has brought with it a host of new businesses that sit side-by-side ethnic markets but attract a much different clientele. From high-end pet groomers to upscale cafes serving expensive drinks and sandwiches, these businesses strike a stark contrast to the storefronts with windows covered in posters in Spanish and Portuguese. Union Square has been selected as the site of a future local rail stop on the extension of the Green Line from Lechmere, a project that will likely bring significant changes to the area and its demographics. The implications of these changes are discussed further in Chapter Three.

East Somerville

East Somerville is known as Somerville's largest immigrant neighborhood and has struggled with negative reputation as a rundown and unprofitable commercial area. Carrie Dancy, director of East Somerville Main Streets, asserts that this perspective reflects the tendency of many Somerville residents to exclude profitable immigrant-owned and niche market businesses from the discussion of "successful businesses" (Dancy 2010). Broadway, Somerville's longest thoroughfare, stretches from the ends of West Somerville all the way to Charlestown and serves as the principal commercial district in East Somerville. Broadway has remained an immigrant area due to its inaccessibility to public transport, and this is unlikely to change as the area was excluded when planning for the extension of the Green Line.

West Somerville

West Somerville is home to Tufts University and Davis Square, a vibrant commercial district that has attracted a large number of high-end restaurants and a growing number of chain stores over the last twenty years. The arrival of the Red Line of the local rail system in the late

1980s brought significant changes to this Somerville neighborhood; once home to a large, White working class population, West Somerville's popularity has resulted in increasingly expensive housing that has attracted a large, urban professional class. The history of Davis Square's transformation is detailed in Chapter Three. The presence of Tufts University in West Somerville on the border with Medford creates an additional economic and social presence of approximately six thousand undergraduate and graduate students, many of whom live in the neighborhoods surrounding the campus and frequent businesses in the Davis, Teele, and Ball Square commercial districts of West Somerville.

Spaces in between

Somerville's other neighborhoods and squares are less commercial and are located on the borders of these three primary districts. Businesses line the main arteries of Somerville—Holland Street/Elm Street/Somerville Avenue, Highland Avenue, Broadway/Medford Street, and Mystic Avenue—but the spaces in between the main squares face greater challenges with regard to access and foot traffic. Some of the restaurants discussed in this thesis are located off the beaten track, and their locations certainly play an important role in their customer bases and profitability. The busy commercial area of Porter Square, for example, lies almost entirely in Cambridge, but its location on the border with Somerville has created opportunities for some businesses on nearby Elm Street and Massachusetts Avenue.

Literature Review

This thesis draws on a wide variety of literature and conceptual frameworks due to its interdisciplinary nature. The stories of Latino immigrant-owned restaurants in Somerville are local history, but they are also part of larger dialogues on Latin American immigration to Massachusetts, immigrant entrepreneurship, and the relationships between immigrant-owned small businesses and changing neighborhoods. The following review of relevant literature spans several fields and theoretical frameworks and suggests how the analysis of the experience of Latino immigrant-owned restaurants in Somerville, Massachusetts contributes to many larger

narratives and interdisciplinary studies of immigration and changing neighborhoods. This overview of literature was compiled by examining local history documents, searching university library records, and speaking with scholars within the fields represented.

Recent studies of immigration and immigrant entrepreneurship have largely overlooked Massachusetts as a contemporary destination for recently arrived immigrants, while traditional centers that have much larger immigrant populations such as California, New York, and Florida have been studied extensively (Halter 1995). Several authors have examined Latino immigration and community within the Boston area (Halter 1995; Uriarte 1992; Torres 2006), but these studies have been limited in scope and focus primarily on the Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Cuban populations that have established roots in the New England area extending back to the early twentieth century. Central American immigration to the area, particularly Salvadoran and Guatemalan, has increased significantly since the 1980s and has been largely overlooked in the literature. These immigrants have arrived in different circumstances than Caribbean immigrants, often as refugees escaping civil wars and unrest that limited educational opportunities and literacy. South American immigrants have also been overlooked due to their smaller numbers, but nevertheless have an identifiable presence in the Latino communities of the Boston area (Halter 1995). Significant work remains in the study of the experiences of Central and South American immigrants to develop a comprehensive understanding of the diversity of Latino experiences in Boston.

As indicated previously, Somerville, Massachusetts is one of several cities bordering Boston that has traditionally been home to a large immigrant population and has seen increasing numbers of Latino immigrants since the 1980s. Despite the growing number of Salvadoran immigrants, among others, and the clear evidence of a large Salvadoran community in the growing number of stores and restaurants specializing in Salvadoran products, to this date academic studies have neglected the experience of Latinos in Somerville. Students from Tufts University have conducted numerous oral history interviews with Latino immigrants through

The Somerville Latino Community History Project (2002-2010) and organizations such as the Somerville Community Corporation have reached out to Latino community members through the East Somerville Initiative (2008), but there has been no comprehensive history written regarding the arrival of Latinos in Somerville and their incorporation into the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the city. Somerville's published histories (Elliott 1896; Donovan and Kelley 1942; Morris and St. Martin 2008) focus almost entirely on the settlement of the city, its early residents of western European heritage, and the role of Somerville residents in the American Revolution. Johnston's *Under the Interstate* (1975) is the first Somerville history to address the experiences of immigrants; however, its structure is a series of anonymous excerpts from oral history interviews that are printed with little effort to create a larger narrative of the immigrant experience. The experiences of immigrants who arrived in Somerville after 1975 have yet to be studied, and the changes in the demographics of immigration throughout the 1980s to the present have not been addressed in any history of Somerville and its immigrants.

Immigrant entrepreneurship has been theorized extensively by scholars of economic sociology, but similarly to other sociological studies of immigration it has focused primarily on cities such as Los Angeles, Miami, and New York. One exception is Halter's (1995) compilation of essays on Boston-area entrepreneurs, but in her review of the literature she too acknowledges the lack of scholarship and opportunities for research on immigrant entrepreneurship in Massachusetts. These analyses have examined the place of immigrant entrepreneurship within the larger labor market and the strategic exploitation of economic opportunities by immigrant entrepreneurs through the theories of middleman minorities (Bonacich 1987; Greene and Butler 2004; Olmos and Garrido 2009), the "enclave economy" (Light and Rosenstein 1995; Olmos and Garrido 2009), and the ethnic economy (Light and Rosenstein 1995; Granovetter 1995; Portes 1987). While these theoretical frameworks support the understanding of the place of immigrant small businesses within the context of a larger social and economic context, these analyses are typically devoid of the voices and narratives of immigrant entrepreneurs. Immigrant

entrepreneurship has not been addressed significantly beyond the fields of economic and immigrant sociology and thus has been analyzed traditionally as a method of strategic labor market exploitation and economic incorporation or assimilation (see Portes 1987) by immigrant communities.

Finally, the relationship between low-income immigrant communities and neighborhood change has been theorized in a large body of work on gentrification that began in 1960s with the labeling of the term by British sociologist Ruth Glass (Smith 1996). Theories of gentrification have traditionally focused primarily on the “gentrifiers,” or the middle class individuals who move into working class communities, changing the “social character” of neighborhoods (Smith 1996; Saracino-Brown 2009). Smith (1996) examines the local, social, and global forces that lead to gentrification, while Saracino-Brown (2009) challenges traditional theorizations of gentrifiers but follows the tradition of focusing on motivations and forces that create the process. The “gentrified” are described demographically (Smith 1996; Marcuse 1986) and their protests are detailed, but the many different realities of those who are displaced or those who remain through processes of gentrification are overlooked in the literature.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

My research explores the position of Latin American-immigrant owned restaurants as economic, social, and cultural institutions and centers of community within Somerville and the Greater Boston Latino community. Looking beyond the traditional conception of entrepreneurial activity as motivated by economic profit and individual pursuit of a rational self-interest, I explore the intersectionality of economic institutions with social networks and the promotion of cultural traditions within ethnic communities. This analysis draws on the traditions of economic anthropologists and sociologists in viewing the economy and individual decision-making as “embedded” within larger social and cultural contexts (Polanyi 1944; Gudeman 2001; Portes 1995; Granovetter 1985). While restaurants serve as centers of economic activity that support the capitalist accumulation of profits for the individual entrepreneur, I posit that the operation of

these restaurants is often influenced by their social context within a larger immigrant and/or Latino community and that they play an important role in the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions through food and eating. To understand immigrant entrepreneurship and the position of Latin American immigrant owned restaurants in Somerville, we must look beyond traditional economic definitions of the entrepreneur or sociological understandings of ethnic entrepreneurship.

My research avoids quantitative data which has figured prominently in many sociological and economic studies of immigrant entrepreneurship. I seek to connect the voices and lived experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs to theory by incorporating individual narratives and qualitative research. The use of oral history interviews privileges the voice and perspectives of groups that are often excluded from the main narratives of United States history (Yow 1994), and with this research I seek to contribute to a largely absent field of scholarship on immigration, entrepreneurship, and gentrification within the Latino community in Somerville, Massachusetts.

My primary sources of information are owners of Somerville Latino immigrant-owned restaurants. These restaurants have been selected based on the willingness of owners to participate in the study and are intended to reflect the diversity of Spanish-speaking, Latin American immigrant groups in Somerville. In addition, these restaurants are located in different neighborhoods within the city. This geographic diversity is intentional and is essential in considering the impacts of neighborhood change and gentrification in different communities. Finally, these restaurants represent the variety of different types of Latino immigrant-owned restaurants in the city—from fast food to fine dining to a family, sit-down restaurant. It is important to note that while they are one of the largest Latin American immigrant groups in Somerville, this study has not focused on Brazilian restaurants due to the practical consideration of my lack of fluency in Portuguese and the recognition of unique historic trends and culture within the Brazilian immigrant community. The Tufts University Institutional Review Board

approved my study with restaurant owners, and all interviews were digitally recorded lasted between thirty and ninety minutes.

The oral history interviews with restaurant owners focus on the background of restaurant owners in their countries of origin and their arrival in Somerville, the process of opening a business, the role that these restaurants play within the larger immigrant community, and the challenges that they have faced or foresee as owners of small businesses through processes of recession and neighborhood change. These interviews were conducted in English or Spanish based on each owner's preference, and are quoted in the original language with translations as necessary. In addition to oral histories with restaurant owners, my analysis is informed by interviews with Somerville community leaders who work with small businesses and focus on the preservation and promotion of neighborhood immigrant history and diversity. This includes an interview with the executive director of East Somerville Main Streets, a community organization that use the national "Main Streets" model to promote "economic development within the context of historic preservation" (East Somerville Main Streets 2011).

Finally, my research has also drawn on the archives of The Somerville Latino Community History Project (2002-2010), the primary source of information on Latino immigrants in Somerville. Student reports over the years detail the history of Somerville's Latino immigrants and their participation in various sectors of the local economy, cultural practices, and social networks. Using original interview transcripts and summaries, I seek to connect several years of oral histories with the current experiences of Latino immigrant business owners, constructing a larger narrative of Latino experiences in the Somerville community.

This thesis is the first extensive project documenting the history of Latino immigrants in Somerville and will serve to challenge the main narrative of Somerville's history that has privileged the stories of White males from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The results of this research will also be a resource for community organizations that work with small businesses in Somerville. By highlighting many of the challenges faced by immigrant restaurant

owners, organizations that traditionally have worked with white, native business owners such as the Chamber of Commerce may be able develop unique programs to address the needs of immigrant restaurant owners. Through the discussion of changing neighborhoods I hope to gather information that can be used in community organizing projects preparing for the arrival of the MBTA Green Line in Somerville. The stories of these immigrant restaurant owners are current and relevant, and can be used in the development of new policies and projects within the Somerville immigrant community.

This thesis will explore the place of Latino immigrant-owned restaurants within the Somerville community by examining how these immigrant entrepreneurs got started, how their businesses represent and preserve culture while playing a role within the larger Somerville community and/or Boston area Latino community, and how the businesses have and continue to navigate the challenges of changing neighborhoods. This chapter has provided an overview of the history of Somerville's development as an "immigrant city" since its incorporation in 1842, with a particular attention paid to the arrival of Latin American immigrants in the Boston metropolitan area including the city of Somerville. Chapter One introduces the restaurants that form the basis for this analysis, examining the stories of their owners and how they got started and looking at the role of economics in immigrant entrepreneurship. Chapter Two explores the role of these restaurants within the community by looking at the social, cultural, and economic functions of the restaurants within the Somerville community and the larger, regional Latino community. Chapter Three addresses the challenges of changing neighborhoods for restaurant owners by examining the impacts of transient immigrant populations, demographic changes, and gentrification.

Chapter One

Latino Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Somerville: Class and Capital

Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants are first and foremost small businesses founded to make a profit and bring economic success to their owners. This chapter explores Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants as economic institutions embedded within a larger social and cultural framework. These restaurants are businesses created to bring in a profit and improve the economic wellbeing of the owner. Immigrant-owned businesses are a common method of immigrant incorporation in (United States of) American society and offer opportunities for independence and significant advancement to immigrants. While entrepreneurship is a common path to economic self-sufficiency for many immigrants, the creation, growth, and survival of immigrant-owned businesses is dependent on different forms of capital possessed by owners that extends beyond economic capital and reflects the complicated relationships between class, race, education, and culture. In addition, the economic success of immigrant-owned business is dependent on larger community institutions such as the city government and Chambers of Commerce that are often dominated by White, native populations and can limit the independence and opportunities for immigrant business owners.

The stories of Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners narrate a common process of immigration and incorporation in (United States of) American society, regardless of national origin and background. Their experiences diverge based on class background and capital conversion with regard to the business planning, goals, and growth of their businesses, but share similar experiences working with the larger institutional structure of the City of

Somerville. Class and capital emerge as the primary sources of difference in the processes of immigrant economic incorporation in this chapter, but further differences will be discussed in the following chapter that examines the importance of culture and community in the creation, growth, and survival of Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the several restaurants that will form the basis of this analysis, and continues by detailing the process of immigration, economic incorporation and founding a business in Somerville. Following the stories of several local Latino restaurant owners, I expand on the economic role of these restaurants and their growth and survival within the local community, connecting the experiences of restaurant owners to relevant theories on immigrant entrepreneurship. The stories included in this chapter are based on interviews with restaurant owners and archives from The Somerville Latino Community History Project (2002-2010).

Introduction to the restaurants

While Somerville is home to a wide range of immigrant-owned businesses, the most easily identifiable immigrant-owned businesses typically serve a niche market and have a large immigrant clientele. The presence of immigrant entrepreneurs is evident in all of Somerville's neighborhoods—from small convenience and grocery stores specializing in imported products to restaurants serving traditional cuisine. Somerville's immigrant business community is too large to survey in this thesis, so this research explores one sector of Somerville's immigrant economy that is prominent and connected to the immigrant cultural and social experience: Latino immigrant-owned restaurants. My research focuses on five of the approximately fifteen Latino immigrant-owned restaurants in Somerville—a number that fluctuates as new restaurants open and close every year. These five restaurants have persisted beyond their first four years and represent several different nationalities and styles of cuisine. Interviews were conducted with three of the business owners, and the other two business owners are featured due to the availability of secondary sources featuring their restaurants. Machu Picchu and Maya Sol are

featured to give breadth to the types of restaurants and the nationalities present in Somerville, but neither are discussed in depth because neither owner was interviewed.

While all five restaurants are grouped under the title “Latino immigrant-owned,” they vary significantly in style, ambiance, and clientele. Two are upscale, fine dining restaurants that cater to a middle-to-upper class population, one is a family-oriented, casual sit-down restaurant, and the final two have fast-food style dining. The clientele differ significantly across the restaurants, although the primary customers are typically either Latino immigrants themselves or White, young urban professionals. The way in which these two populations interact and serve as two very different customer bases will be explored later, but it is important to be aware of the presence of these two populations in Somerville and their roles as patrons of immigrant-owned businesses.

El Potro Mexican Grill

El Potro is one of Somerville’s newer Latino immigrant-owned restaurants. Founded in 2006 by Elias Interiano, El Potro is located in Union Square—a neighborhood known for diversity of both its residents and business owners. A casual, sit-down restaurant, El Potro’s dining room is a colorful and features a full bar and several televisions. The walls are decorated with portraits of Mexican movie stars from the mid-twentieth century, and the furniture is handcrafted and painted with traditional scenes of Mexico by artists in Guadalajara, Mexico. The food reflects the traditional cuisine of owner Elias Interiano’s native El Salvador as well as standard Mexican fare that is drawn from Interiano’s love of Mexican culture. Weekends at El Potro feature live mariachi music, karaoke, and a local disc jockey from a Spanish-speaking radio station. El Potro is open for lunch, dinner, and late night entertainment and has experienced significant growth since its opening (Interiano 2011).

Restaurante Turístico Machu Picchu

Restaurante Turístico Machu Picchu was founded in 2003 by Rosy Cerna with a goal of recreating the “culinary art” of her native Peru. Located in Union Square in Somerville, the

restaurant is housed in a brick storefront adjoined with International Optical. A red and yellow awning advertising “Peruvian Culinary Art” identifies the restaurant. An elegant, fine dining restaurant with an above average price point, Machu Picchu offers a wide selection of Peruvian cuisine and features live Andean music on Friday nights. The ambience is reminiscent of a typical restaurant in South America with elegant white table cloths and an eclectic décor. The earthen-colored interior evokes a simple, natural feel, and a giant poster of Peru’s own Machu Picchu situated behind the bar reminds visitors of the indigenous history of the country. Strains of peaceful panpipe-heavy music play in the background and Peruvian paintings, photos of children in Peruvian dress, and tourist posters decorate the walls. The television above the bar features the ever-present Latin American cultural tradition: soccer.

Maya Sol Mexican Grill

Unlike the previous restaurants, Maya Sol is located on Broadway in East Somerville—an area of Somerville known for lower housing prices and home to the majority of the city’s Salvadoran community, although Brazilians make up the largest immigrant group in the neighborhood (East Somerville Main Streets 2011). The restaurant’s interior is brick and dark wood, and the walls are decorated with traditional Mexican art. The food is served behind a long counter, and as with the other restaurants discussed so far, two ever-present televisions feature soccer and/or Spanish language television. While Maya Sol claims to be a Mexican grill, its menu includes a wide variety of Salvadoran specialties reflecting the Salvadoran heritage of owner Benjamin Argueta. In addition to Maya Sol, Argueta and his family members, including prominent businessman and religious leader Luis “Tony” Morales, are the owners of several other restaurants and a grocery store in Somerville. Their businesses include another Latino restaurant, Taco Loco, a small, fast-food style storefront specializing in Salvadoran and Mexican cuisine. Taco Loco is also located on Broadway in East Somerville, near Maya Sol.

Tacos Lupita

Tacos Lupita is a small, fast-food style restaurant located in between Porter and Union Squares on Elm Street. Located further from transportation hubs and other eateries, Tacos Lupita nonetheless has a strong following in the community. The restaurant has a plain exterior and interior and is reminiscent of a typical restaurant in a Latin American country. The walls feature framed posters advertising tourism in El Salvador and Mexican cuisine. To the left of the entrance, however, the customer will notice a shrine to the restaurant's namesake, Our Lady of Guadalupe—the Mexican icon and patron saint of the Americas. At Tacos Lupita, the customer orders at the counter which looks into the kitchen where food is made to order by the two employees who serve simultaneously as cashiers, cooks, and dishwashers. The cuisine, advertised as Mexican and Salvadoran, features a larger number of Mexican and Salvadoran specialties reflecting owner Leo Zuñiga's Mexican heritage and his wife's Salvadoran culture. Zuñiga founded the restaurant in 1999.

Tu y Yo Mexican Fonda

Tu y Yo is an upscale, traditional Mexican restaurant located in West Somerville's Powder House Circle between Tufts University and Davis Square. Similar to many of the previous restaurants, the storefront is brick and connected to several other businesses, and a simple awning advertises Tu y Yo's Mexican Fonda. Specializing in traditional Mexican cuisine that includes pre-Columbian specialties, Tu y Yo offers a unique experience quite different from other local Mexican restaurants that serve tacos, enchiladas, and fajitas. Chefs prepare a variety of family recipes from every province of Mexico dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century. The restaurant is designed to represent the historical Mexican "fonda," a family-style eatery popular in 18th century Mexico (Tu y Yo 2011). Tu y Yo was founded in 2000 by Mexican immigrant Epigmenio Guzmán, who recently opened Tu y Yo Mexican Cuisine in Needham, Massachusetts, a suburban community southwest of Boston.

Immigration and economic incorporation

The owners of Tu y Yo, El Potro, and Tacos Lupita restaurants are all immigrants from Latin American countries who arrived in the United States over a decade ago and, after living and working all across the country eventually arrived in Somerville and where they opened their own businesses. The primary reason cited by these restaurant owners for deciding to come to the United States was economic opportunity (Zuñiga 2003; Interiano 2011; Guzmán 2011). Arriving in the United States, the first priority of many new immigrants is establishing economic stability and self-sufficiency. While some immigrants arrive with experience in skilled and professional employment in their home countries, many are blocked from entry into the mainstream job market due to lack of language skills or qualifications. During the first waves of Latin American immigration in the early twentieth century, workers often found employment in agriculture or large factories (Pacini Hernandez 2006). As manufacturing declined and workers increasingly arrived from urban settings, many Latino immigrants found employment in the service industry—particularly as housekeepers and restaurant staff (Uriarte et. al 2003; Pacini Hernandez 2006). Within these industries lie opportunities for advancement, and the managers typically are immigrants themselves who have worked their way up through the industry.

The process of immigrant incorporation in (United States of) American society and the tendency of industry specialization has been identified and analyzed, originally by Edna Bonacich, as “middleman minority theory” (Bonacich 1973). In the case of immigrant-owned restaurants, this theory suggests that an upper level of management, that is, owners and managers, serve as “middlemen” who are simultaneously subject to the demands of an economic market controlled by the dominant, native population while occupying a position of power with regard to newly arrived immigrants seeking employment. Immigrant restaurant workers who begin at the lowest level—dishwashing or bussing tables—have an opportunity to advance within the industry, but are often confined by the limits of the local restaurant market. While immigrants have the opportunity to rise within the restaurant market to the level of managers and owners, at the highest level attainable within the industry they face demands of local

municipalities and chambers of commerce that are typically controlled by a native, White population. Opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs are usually limited to certain industries and niche markets due to language barriers, different levels of education and qualifications in their country of origin, and different skills sets or levels of experience required than jobs in the United States. Restaurants are therefore a common first stop for newly-arrived Latino immigrants, in particular, seeking employment (Uriarte et. al 2003).

The backgrounds of Somerville's Latino restaurant owners reflect the larger trends of immigrant entrepreneurship and economic incorporation in (United States of) American society. Both Tacos Lupita's and El Potro's owners arrived in the country in the 1980s and moved initially to states with large Latino populations—Zuñiga left Mexico for California in 1983 and Interiano arrived in Florida from El Salvador in 1987. Both entrepreneurs began working in different industries ranging from textiles to mechanics, but settled finally on the restaurant industry due to the opportunities available and their own personal interests in the industry (Zuñiga 2003, Interiano 2011). Tu y Yo's owner Epigmenio Guzmán arrived in the United States in 1978 from Mexico and moved initially to Alaska, followed by Seattle. He had worked in discothèques and restaurants in Mexico, and quickly found employment in the restaurant and hospitality industry in the United States. The stories of these entrepreneurs reflect a common experience of immigrant arrival, incorporation, and advancement in (United States of) American society, as well as the restrictions of immigrant entrepreneurs in a largely White, native community in Massachusetts.

Leo Zuñiga entered the food industry because he saw the popularity of “taco trucks” in Los Angeles and decided to take advantage of the economic opportunity in that market (Zuñiga 2003). He began catering Mexican food from his home in Los Angeles, and his success led to starting a taco truck with the support of friends and family members in Los Angeles (Pistrang and Chasan 2003). “Cocinero no soy (I am no cook),” offers Zuñiga, laughing, but he learned to make tacos because it was a profitable economic opportunity. Zuñiga's wife, a Salvadoran

immigrant, had family in Somerville who suggested that Zuñiga and his family come to Massachusetts and open a restaurant as business partners. In 1999, Zuñiga and his wife moved to the area to found Tacos Lupita with her sister and brother-in-law. The restaurant opened in December of 1999, and Zuñiga and his wife bought the other half of the restaurant from his wife's family the following year.

Elias Interiano began working in the restaurant industry following his move to Massachusetts from Florida where he had worked in several different industries. He started in an entry level position at the Marino Restaurant in Cambridge and quickly worked his way up through the restaurant hierarchy, learning every aspect of the trade (Interiano 2011). By the time the restaurant closed in 2006, Interiano had risen to the level of head chef, despite no professional training. El Potro's manager Jason Interiano, the son of owner Elias Interiano, describes his father as a hard worker who picked up cooking and management skills quickly and began to dream of owning his own restaurant. After working briefly outside of the restaurant industry, he decided to start his own restaurant in Somerville.

For Zuñiga and Interiano, entry in the restaurant industry was not necessarily a personal choice, but rather reflected the limited opportunities open to recently-arrived immigrants with little to no professional training or experience. Carrie Dancy of East Somerville Main Streets has noted this pattern in her work with immigrant business owners, and suggests entrepreneurship, often in restaurants and specialty convenience or grocery stores, offers immigrants independence and an opportunity to be economically self-sufficient that can be difficult to find in other industries (Dancy 2010). As the prevalence of entrepreneurship has declined within (United States of) American society, the immigrant business sector has remained vibrant do to the unique characteristics of immigrant communities and niche markets (Halter 1995). These trends are clear in Somerville, and Chapter Two will explore the characteristics of culture and community that figure prominently in improving the economic viability of immigrant-owned small businesses.

For both Zuñiga and Interiano, entrepreneurship is a family business. Zuñiga and his wife started Tacos Lupita with his wife's sister and her husband, and Interiano's business has grown and benefitted from the involvement of his wife and two sons who have grown up largely in their parents' restaurant. Not only does starting a restaurant offer independence and economic opportunity to the owner, but it also offers employment for extended family members, friends, and neighbors.

Unlike Zuñiga and Interiano, Epigmenio Guzmán had experience in the hospitality and entertainment industries when he first arrived in the United States. He worked for years in restaurants and hotels in Alaska, Seattle, and Massachusetts where he learned different aspects of the business. He describes his decision to start a business as an opportunity to combine different elements of his previous employers based on what he had learned led to success, and what did not work. For Guzmán, starting a restaurant was a business decision driven not only by his own experience, but also by his interest in promoting traditional Mexican cuisine (Guzmán 2011). Guzmán's ability to look beyond economic profitability from the start reflected his background in the hospitality industry, and this sets him apart from both Zuñiga and Interiano.

Interiano, Zuñiga, and Guzmán arrived in the United States during a similar time period and found work in the restaurant industry with significant opportunities for advancement. As they gained experience, the three entrepreneurs decided it would be profitable to strike out on their own and start their own businesses. While the experiences of these men are similar with regards to immigration and incorporation, their stories diverge here. The different styles of restaurants with unique missions and target customer bases reflect differences in class and capital between these entrepreneurs.

Class and converting capital

Socioeconomic class figures prominently in the experiences of Somerville's Latino immigrant entrepreneurs. While economically Somerville's immigrant restaurant owners appear to be members of a similar middle class with similar human capital (skills), Somerville's Latino

immigrant restaurant owners possess different forms of social and cultural capital⁵ that impact their business and marketing strategies. These differences in capital have shaped both the processes by and directions in which the restaurants developed, and are important to acknowledge in discussions of economic creation, growth, and survival.

Guzmán suggests that educational differences between many Mexican immigrants and Salvadoran immigrants can explain some of the differences between his restaurant and other Latino restaurants, such as El Potro and Tacos Lupita. While Guzmán arrived in the United States with experience in the industry and a higher level of education, many Salvadoran immigrants fleeing years of civil war and unrest that limited educational and economic opportunities for children growing up in the 1970s and 1980s led to a generation of young men, in particular, with fewer skills entering the labor market (Uriarte et.al 2003). Guzmán describes what he sees as a common process of Salvadoran immigrant incorporation as different from his own story, in which his career was motivated more by choice and specific interest than forced specialization due to lack of economic opportunity. Salvadoran immigrants arrive in the country with few skills, find opportunity in the restaurant industry, and work their way up to the point of opening their own businesses, he explains (Guzmán 2011). Guzmán arrived in the United States possessing not only human capital in the form of job experience, but also acquired cultural capital valued by the dominant, White upper-middle class population in the United States. His understanding of the interests and choices of young, middle-class professionals in Somerville led him to target the menu, atmosphere, and mission of Tu y Yo to reflect the desires of this particular group. Guzmán has effectively converted his acquisition of dominant cultural capital into economic capital through his restaurant.

Zuñiga and Interiano's backgrounds have exploited other forms of capital to achieve economic success. Both entrepreneurs gained human capital working their way up through the

⁵ French scholar Pierre Bourdieu expanded on the traditional notion of economic capital as a determinant of status within society and suggested that both cultural and social capital impact an individual's position within society and can be converted into economic capital. Cultural capital includes forms of knowledge, possessions, and educational qualifications and social capital primarily refers to "connections" within social networks (Bourdieu 1986).

food service industry, and also took advantage of social capital in starting their restaurants. Zuñiga relied heavily on his connections in the area to support his business as he got started, while Interiano also employed friends and family members at the start. Manager Jason Interiano suggested that his family's business benefitted significantly from support in the Salvadoran community following its founding (Interiano 2011). High levels of social capital is common within immigrant communities, while dominant cultural capital is often costly to acquire and may conflict with and result in the devaluation of different forms of cultural capital possessed by Latino immigrants (Valenzuela 1999).⁶ While Guzmán decided to concentrate primarily on marketing to a non-Latino market and took advantage of his dominant cultural capital, Interiano and Zuñiga used social and human capital in the form of family and community connections and hard work and drew a different customer base initially, with higher numbers of co-ethnic Latinos.

While class and capital differences figure prominently in the initial choices of Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners, their experiences founding their business shared similar challenges working with the City of Somerville. The relationship between immigrant business owners and the institutional structure of the city government demonstrates the ways in which these entrepreneurs are categorized as "outsiders" despite the possession of different levels and forms and dominant cultural capital and social capital.

Starting a business in Somerville

Opening a new business in Somerville requires numerous meetings and hearings with several departments of the municipality. The process is rather straightforward, assert many immigrant business owners, but can be challenging for immigrants with limited English capacity (Zuñiga 2003; Pistrang and Chasan 2003; Palchik 2004). Comparing Somerville's business community to that of Los Angeles, Zuñiga noted that previously he was able to get by speaking little English, but the city government of Somerville did not have any Spanish speakers so he conducted the entire business creation process in English. Many other business owners have

⁶ See Valenzuela for a discussion of different forms of cultural capital and how educational institutions tend to "subtract" non-dominant forms of cultural capital from Latino students.

described this obstacle as well, citing that language is the primary challenge in starting a business. Immigrants seeking to open an independent business are confined by the restrictions of the local, native government that conducts business only in English—a clear example of the limits to immigrant independence within a local economic market. The large number of immigrant-owned businesses in Somerville, however, suggests that immigrants of all nationalities have been able to navigate the system successfully, despite the language barrier for some.

The relationship between local government and immigrant business owners is fairly nonexistent following the founding of a business, explain several owners (Pistrang and Chasan 2003; Zuñiga 2003). While the city does not create difficulties for most immigrant business owners, most assert that they do not find it a supportive entity either. There is currently no network of Latino business owners, and while some participate in the Somerville Chamber of Commerce, such as Interiano, most operate fairly independently and communicate little with local government. Past interviews with prominent Latino businessman Luis “Tony” Morales have indicated his intention to form a Latino Chamber of Commerce, but at the present there is no such organization, according to business owners (Morales 2004; Interiano 2011). Guzmán found the city of Somerville challenging to deal with getting started particularly with regards to getting a liquor license and putting up an awning, but suggested that they have been helpful following the founding of his business (Guzmán 2011). His opinion, however, seems to be unique among Latino business owners and may reflect his acquired cultural capital that puts him at ease interacting with the White, dominant population at City Hall.

Latino immigrant business owners’ accounts of their relationship with the City of Somerville highlight an important commonality that stretches across the boundaries of class and national origin: the challenge of the language barrier. Somerville prides itself on its diversity and large immigrant community (City of Somerville 2008), and the reports of Latino immigrant business owners seem to reflect a notable lack of anti-immigrant prejudice, racism, or

discrimination in the founding of their businesses. The absence of translated materials and the lack of language capacity at City Hall create an environment that discriminates against immigrant entrepreneurs, however, and limits the opportunities of individuals seeking economic advancement within (United States of) American society. While many immigrant entrepreneurs indicate that they were able to navigate the process in English (Guzmán 2011; Pistrang and Chasan 2003), it is reasonable to assume that others have been turned away by the lack of language capacity at the City of Somerville. Both the City of Somerville and the Latino business community would likely benefit from improved communication and multilingual resources.

Economic growth, change, and survival in Somerville

The restaurants discussed here are unique in that they have survived the test of time and have developed a strategy for success throughout periods of recession and economic difficulty. In Somerville, one restaurant owner asserts that surviving four years is the test—after that, a business is unlikely to fail (Morales 2004). The stories of restaurants that have closed their doors are numerous, however; Carrie Dancy suggests that poor location, lack of bookkeeping and managerial experience are frequent causes of business closures (Dancy 2010). The businesses that have survived the test of time have unique stories, however, that demonstrate the keys to economic success in Somerville. All three restaurants discussed here have expanded physically, either within their current location or through new locations in surrounding communities. The owners emphasize the importance of appealing to a wide range of customers as instrumental to their success. In Somerville, a city with four major demographic groups—older, White working class families, students, young professionals, and immigrant families—restaurants must appeal to more than one group to achieve success. Finally, growth and survival has depended significantly on awards such as the Best of Boston, word of mouth, and online reviews and blogs that promote the restaurants to a wide audience.

Since its opening in 2006, El Potro has seen constant growth and improvement as a result of the owner's ingenuity and hard work at expanding its customer base. Manager Jason Interiano

describes the original restaurant as much smaller with only a table or two and four chairs. His father expanded the size of the restaurant, adding many more tables, eventually importing all handcrafted and painted woodwork for the tables and chairs from Guadalajara, Mexico. Improving the appearance of the restaurant has been a key focus of the Interiano family, and the strikingly colorful décor has likely drawn the attention of many passing through the Union Square area. As Union Square has conducted improvements to alter traffic patterns and increase pedestrian access to the area, El Potro has benefitted from foot traffic much more so than Tacos Lupita and Tu y Yo, both of which are located in areas that receive more automobile traffic.

The original menu has been expanded, and as the restaurant has improved its appearance, prices have risen to reflect higher quality food and ambience. El Potro began to serve alcohol beginning in the fall of 2010, and this has been a tremendous boon to business (Interiano 2011). Interiano describes the process of improvement and change as constant and intentional, and asserts that the restaurant has seen the results in the form of an increased new customer base in addition to local, regular customers (Interiano 2011). Adding late night hours and entertainment on weekends has made El Potro a part of the local nightlife as well, drawing positive reviews on yelp.com and urbanspoon.com for karaoke nights and mariachi band performances (Yelp 2011; Urbanspoon 2011).

While El Potro has pursued an aggressive improvement strategy, Tacos Lupita has remained largely unchanged in appearance and menu since its founding in 1999. Speaking about his experiences in a 2003 interview, owner Leo Zuñiga characterized business as “*está bien, está bueno—o sea, no es ni malo ni muy bueno; está en términos medios* (it’s good, it’s going well—that is, it’s not bad but it’s not very good; it’s in the middle)” (Zuñiga 2003). Zuñiga’s restaurant has a steady customer base and owes its success to its popular food, recommended highly on websites such as urbanspoon.com and yelp.com (Urbanspoon 2011; Yelp 2011). During its twelve years of existence, Tacos Lupita has won several awards for its basic Tex-Mex-style and specialized Salvadoran food. The quality food has expanded the customer base beyond just the

local Salvadoran community to include many of the White, middle-to-upper class individuals living in the Porter Square area near Tacos Lupita. Far from the large Salvadoran neighborhoods of East Somerville, Tacos Lupita has depended on attracting a wide variety of customers and has appears to have been successful due to word of mouth, winning awards, and reviews on online communities. Tacos Lupita has opened four more locations since 2003 in Lynn, Revere, Lawrence, and Haverhill, focusing more on expansion to new communities than changing the recipes or décor of the original restaurant (Urbanspoon 2011).

Guzmán's strategy at Tu y Yo is based in carefully researched decision-making and constant improvement. Starting out in 2000, he faced the challenge of being located on a corner in Somerville with little foot traffic but significant automobile traffic. Guzmán cited traffic studies regarding the number of pedestrians and automobiles that pass his restaurant daily, explaining the importance of data and analysis in his process of business growth and expansion (Guzmán 2011). Guzmán also suggested that his traditional Mexican menu as a challenge initially as well, explaining "me costó mucho porque tienes que sacrificar clientes que te buscan porque quieren comer comida mexicana-americana (it cost me a lot because you have to sacrifice clients that come [to your restaurant] because they want to eat Mexican-American food)" (Guzmán 2011).

He attributes his gradual success to word of mouth, citing this method as the most effective in developing a loyal following. Refusing to compromise his traditional cuisine by including Tex-Mex favorites, Guzmán saw success develop slowly but is pleased with the customers he does have. "El restaurante es destino (the restaurant is a destination)," suggests Guzmán, "la gente maneja dos horas, dos horas y media para llegar a [Tu y Yo de] Somerville (people drive two or two and a half hours to come to [Tu y Yo in] Somerville) (Guzmán 2011). For Guzmán, improvement means perfecting traditional Mexican cuisine and finding the customers that will appreciate traditional, homemade Mexican cuisine—a task that he cites has been easier in Somerville than at his other restaurant, Tu y Yo Mexican Cuisine in Needham,

Massachusetts. The two restaurants have different menus, and Needham has added Southwest Mexican Mondays which feature tacos and enchiladas—Mexican-American cuisine more familiar to the non-Mexican New England population.

Guzmán's business decisions are carefully calculated, and he relies on market studies and comment cards filled out by his customers to determine his advertising techniques and make business decisions. After investing in an advertisement in the *Improper Bostonian*, Guzmán carefully noted that only three new customers had been brought in, and quickly nixed that advertising strategy, recognizing that word of mouth continued to be the primary method of arrival at his restaurant cited on his comment cards. Guzmán cites a friend working at Harvard as his source of information for the organization of his menu, demonstrating his use of both social and dominant cultural capital strategically to increase economic returns at his restaurant.

Un amigo que tengo que trabaja en Harvard me dice mira, la gente es floja para leer. Hay estadísticas y estudios que la gente va al restaurante y no lee el menú. Entonces lo que es primero que tú quieres vender es lo que primero tienes que poner arriba—no ni en el medio ni abajo—porque es lo que la gente va a leer. (A friend of mine who works at Harvard says to me, look—people are lazy about reading. There are statistics and studies [that say] people go to restaurants and don't read the menu. Therefore, whatever you want to sell most, you have to put at the top—not in the middle or below—because that is what people are going to read) (Guzmán 2011).

As quality has improved and word has gotten out about the authenticity of Tu y Yo's cuisine, Guzmán has received recognition in both the Best of Boston awards and numerous newspaper reviews featuring Tu y Yo as one of two truly authentic Mexican restaurants in the Boston area, the other being Ole Mexican Cuisine in Cambridge (Guzmán 2011).

Guzmán's expansion and growth has led to the founding of Tu y Yo Mexican Cuisine in Needham, Massachusetts, a sister restaurant with an entirely different menu. His brother-in-law currently manages the Somerville restaurant, while Guzmán spends his time in Needham in an

effort to get the newer business off the ground. Guzmán initially opened the restaurant in Needham hoping that the Somerville clientele would travel south to try an entirely different menu of traditional Mexican dishes, but he has found that despite the willingness of Tu y Yo customers to travel from north of Boston to the Somerville location, few are willing to travel south to Needham. Realizing that his initial business strategy did not work, Guzmán has changed his approach to reaching out to the less adventurous, suburban Needham community with events such as Southwest Mexican Mondays, a full bar and outdoor patio seating (Guzmán 2011).

The processes of expansion and renovation of Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants further demonstrate the differences in class background of their owners. While Zuñiga has expanded geographically using a basic formula that he developed working on a taco truck in California, Guzmán carefully analyzes demographics, market trends, and studies to make his business decisions. Guzmán draws on his familiarity with dominant cultural capital to appeal to new customer bases and White, native populations, while Zuñiga relies on human and social capital to open new restaurants and attract customers. Interiano's growth strategy has focused on a combination of forms of capital that he has converted to economic success—from social capital in the form of networks and family members who serve as both customers and employees, to acquired human capital through years of experience, to cultural capital that reflects an understanding of both the local Latino community and the growing community of White, middle-class professionals in Union Square. The experiences of these three entrepreneurs are similar tales of immigrant incorporation in (United States of) American society, but their experiences and the way they have chosen to grow and expand their businesses are shaped significantly by their possession of different forms of capital that is often dependent on socioeconomic class.

Restaurant owners as “middlemen minorities”

While most of the restaurants began as family-owned and run, as they have expanded they have been forced to hire more employees. In the case of El Potro, almost all employees are members of the Interiano extended family. Owner Elias Interiano has assumed the role of employer by giving recently-arrived immigrant family members a similar opportunity to that which he found at the Marino Restaurant in Cambridge. Similarly, Leo Zuñiga employs members of the local Salvadoran community who have arrived more recently and have fewer skills. Guzmán, his wife, her sister, and his brother-in-law manage the two Tu y Yo restaurants, and the majority of his employees are Latino but hail from different countries—Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, and others. Guzmán claims that the lack of a unified Mexican community and the fact that most Mexicans in New England come from a more educated, professional class has led him to hire Latino immigrants of different national origins, and he trains them in preparing traditional Mexican cuisine (Guzmán 2011).

The pattern of transformation from employee to employer has been documented by economic sociologists who highlight the challenges for both owners and employers in this relationship (Bonacich 1987; Butler and Kozmetsky 2004). Current owners such as Zuñiga and Guzmán arrived in the United States and began working at lower level positions within restaurants—positions which often are able to pay lower wages than other sectors of the United States economy due to the relative scarcity of employment opportunities for recently arrived immigrants with limited English, and competition with undocumented immigrants who are willing to accept less than the minimum wage. As Latino immigrants transition to the role of employer and owner, they are faced with a choice between paying a “fair” or market wage to newly arrived employees, or exploiting the opportunities to employ undocumented and documented Latino immigrants at less than market or minimum wage. While many ethically would prefer to choose the former, competition with other restaurants that are willing to exploit opportunities to reduce labor costs may force owners to pay a lower wage in order to survive. Bonacich characterizes the position of restaurant owners in this case as the “middlemen

minorities,” that is, these owners serve as middlemen who are subject to operating under the conditions of a market regulated by a government and institutions controlled by a native, White population, but simultaneously determine the level of economic opportunity available to newly arrived immigrants. While this topic is difficult to broach among immigrant restaurant owners who naturally would never admit to paying less than fair wages or exploiting undocumented labor, one can imagine that many of Somerville’s restaurant owners are faced with these difficult choices as a result of their position as “middlemen minorities” (Bonacich 1973, 1987).

In addition to the relationships between owner and employees, the gender dichotomy of employees is quite evident within these businesses, although this is a small sample. Other than *Restaurante Turistico Machu Picchu*, all of the owners and managers are male. The few women involved are employed primarily in food preparation and as servers and hosts, with the exception of *Tu y Yo* which employs a woman as business manager due to her degree in business (Guzmán 2011). In the Latino immigrant community, this may reflect the prevalence of traditional gender roles and the tradition of male dominance in most Latin American countries. In addition, the prevalence of male restaurant owners often reflects the tendency of many men to immigrate to the United States prior to their partners to establish an economic foundation, although this trend has lessened somewhat particularly among Salvadoran immigrants who tend to immigrate in family groups (Uriarte et. al 2003). Historically, men enter the workplace first and are exposed to opportunities to learn English and advance within businesses before women arrive, and are thus one step ahead when their partners arrive in the country. Examining the topic of gender relations in Somerville’s Latino immigrant-owned restaurants is beyond the scope of this thesis, but would be a valuable topic for future investigation.

Somerville’s Latino immigrant-owned businesses are first and foremost economic institutions. They were founded by individuals who came to the United States seeking economic opportunity and found it in an industry with entry level opportunities requiring little to no skills

or experience. While Guzmán possessed and acquired high levels of dominant cultural capital, Zuñiga and Interiano relied heavily on social and acquired human capital to found their businesses and seek economic success. As they rose within the restaurant industry, Zuñiga, Interiano, and Guzmán saw opportunities to use what they had learned and become entrepreneurs. Their dreams were dependent, however, on the government and regulations of the City of Somerville, an institution dominated by a White, native population with no support for Spanish or other foreign language-speaking immigrants. All of these owners were successful in getting started and expanding, and throughout the process have established themselves as successful entrepreneurs and employers of a new generation of Latino immigrants.

Beyond their role as economic institutions, however, Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants occupy a unique position in the local community as promoters and preservers of culture and centers of various levels of local and regional communities. The ways in which Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants are created, grow, and survive depend on more than just capital; Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants are shaped and defined by their relationships with surrounding communities and their conceptualizations of cultural and ethnic identity. Chapter Two examines the importance of culture and community in the creation, growth, and survival of Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants

Chapter Two

Restaurants, Culture, and Community

Restaurants occupy a unique space as not only economic institutions, but also as promoters and preservers of culture and community. The social and cultural missions of Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants coexist with their economic missions; that is, the local economy of Latino immigrant-owned restaurants is embedded within social and cultural frameworks that shape business decisions. The creation, growth, and survival of Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants depend significantly on the ways in which their owners conceptualize culture and their own roles within different communities. Rather than pursue economic success at all costs, Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners appear to make business decisions based on the ways in which their restaurants simultaneously serve as economic, social, and cultural institutions. This chapter explores the ways in which Latino immigrant-owned restaurants represent and preserve different conceptions of culture, and the position of Latino immigrant-owned restaurants within the networks of culture and community in Somerville, the New England region, and the growing virtual community of diners and critics.

While many of Somerville's Latino restaurants advertise themselves as "Mexican," the ways in which Mexican and Salvadoran culture are represented differ significantly across the

businesses and illustrate different processes of immigration and incorporation in (United States of) American society. The cultures represented in both cuisine, artwork, music, and environment vary from traditional Latin American national identities to Somerville's own "Latino" culture, combining traditions of the large local Salvadoran community with other local, Spanish-speaking cultures and native, non-Latino perspectives on Latino culture. The ways in which Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners identify and interact with Latino and national identities affect the business decisions of these entrepreneurs, and have a significant impact on their position within the larger Somerville community.

As institutions that preserve various conceptions of Latino and Latin American culture, Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants serve a wide variety of customers and functions within many different, intersecting communities. Within largely Latino neighborhoods, some of the restaurants offer local residents access to traditional food and music. For other restaurants with more widely-spread, disconnected immigrant communities, such as the Boston-area Mexican community, restaurants can serve as a connection to tradition and home for immigrants who lack a more traditional, local community. Beyond the Latino community, Latino immigrant-owned restaurants offer customers of other ethnicities an opportunity to try new cuisine and experience an unfamiliar culture within the boundaries of their own community. The Boston-area virtual community of "foodies" and bloggers, and critics in search of high quality, gourmet, or exotic cuisine can serve to make or break restaurants, and in the last ten years has played an important role in advertising and promotion of restaurants that may have previously been overlooked by newspaper critics and casual diners. The second half of this chapter explores how Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners interact with and utilize different methods of communication within these communities, and the impact of these decisions on economic success and the promotion of culture.

Representing culture

Immigrant-owned restaurants are often founded not only with a goal of achieving economic success for the owner, but also to preserve traditional culture from the owner's country of origin or represent a regional Latino culture. Some owners recreate traditional recipes from home that are difficult to find in the United States while others seek to create an environment representative of a broader sense of Latino culture accessible and familiar to a wide range of individuals. Whether intentional or not, immigrant-owned restaurants exist as unique cultural institutions within the larger environment of White, dominant (United States of) American society in which Latin American cultures are viewed as outside of the "mainstream" (Oboler 1995). Somerville's restaurant owners take different approaches to representing culture and their interpretations and representations of Latino and Latin American culture define their roles within the different communities that cross and connect locally, regionally, and virtually.

Somerville's restaurants and the construction of identity

The complicated process of constructing a definition of Latino, as described in the Introduction, highlights the tremendous differences in culture across individuals identifying as Latino. The conceptions of culture across Somerville's Latino restaurants are varied and demonstrate the wide range of individual experiences of immigrant restaurant owners and their own identification with the Latino identity and community. While representing culture means adhering strictly to tradition for some, for others it means creating an environment that reflects not one nationality but rather a "Latinismo" that incorporates a shared understanding of a cross-ethnic identity (Padilla 1985). The complexities of possessing dual identities as both cultural institutions representing a particular nationality and existing within a larger, cross-ethnic community are evident for some restaurant owners, while others move fluidly between the two identities. Somerville's Tu y Yo and El Potro in particular highlight two different constructions of Latino culture and identity in the United States, and their differences are indicative of the

struggle between national affiliation and participation in a larger, cross-ethnic “imagined” community⁷.

Epigmenio Guzmán places a large emphasis on tradition and culture at Tu y Yo, identifying his restaurant as Mexican while simultaneously acknowledging his participation in a larger community of Latino restaurant owners (Guzmán 2011). Guzmán distinguishes his experience, mission, and cuisine from other Mexican and Salvadoran restaurants using culture. While he shares stories with other restaurant owners of coming to the United States and dealing with the City of Somerville in English, Guzmán’s restaurant must be understood as both a Latino restaurant and a culturally Mexican restaurant. The complexities of multiple identities are clear in his interview; Guzmán is simultaneously critical of other restaurants that claim to represent Mexican culture while acknowledging the validity of their existence and approaches on the level of fellow Latino immigrant restaurant owners (Guzmán 2011).

Guzmán emphasizes tradition most directly through his menu—his greatest source of pride at Tu y Yo. All of his recipes are traditional and have been handed down through various members of his extended family, and many date back to the early twentieth century. Guzmán stresses that Mexico has over 34,000 traditional dishes so his menu is constantly changing to reflect different family recipes. The dishes are not restricted to one region of Mexico, but rather the menu gives the diner an opportunity to experience the variety of Mexican cuisine. This menu includes specialties ranging from Cochinita Pibil, a pork dish from 1908 accredited to María Ruz Viuda de Espinosa, to Chile Relleno de Camarón, a recipe from 2003 created by Juan José Sandoval Guzmán. Most of the dishes on the menu have a year and creator next to them, and Guzmán notes that they come from the home-cooking of his grandmother, mother, aunts, and other family members. Guzmán imports forty percent of his ingredients from Mexico, and they arrive in Somerville via New York. His chefs are currently Mexican and Guatemalan, but he

⁷ The term “imagined communities” was coined by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities*, and refers to the social construction of nations or groups that are not directly connected but share a collective consciousness and awareness (Anderson 1983).

says he has had to train all of his chefs in traditional cooking regardless of their experience or nationality. Guzmán describes the challenges of getting the recipes right so that they truly represent the cuisine of Mexico.

Cuántas salsas que echan a perder; tienen que componerlas y hacerlas otra vez ... al final te encuentra que te sale caro... para que cuando ya te funcione bien como tú quieres, pero ya te costó en tu bolsillo muchas cosas se van a perder y finalmente son costos. (How many sauces are ruined; they have to be fixed and remade... in the end it is expensive... when you finally get them right, you have already paid the price [lit. it cost you in your pocket] and things are going to be lost that in the end are costly) (Guzmán 2011).

The importance of getting the sauces and flavors right is evident with Guzmán, however, and he is willing to invest in training chefs who have some familiarity with Mexican cuisine.

Guzmán's concept of culture is highly localized; Tu y Yo is Mex-Mex cuisine, not Tex-Mex, not New Mexico-Mex, not Arizona-Mex, asserts Guzmán (2011). Guzmán's recipes are restricted within the borders of Mexico, but within that space he recognizes the contributions of various cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups that make up the Mexican population. His specialties span the large nation and include pre-Colombian dishes prepared by indigenous peoples that date back hundreds of years. Missing from his menu are chips and salsa, tacos, burritos, and enchiladas—foods that the (United States of) American community as a whole associates with Mexico, Guzmán says. While critical of these neo-traditional Mexican dishes, Guzmán recognizes that many of his fellow Latino restaurant owners have made their living by working their way up the hierarchy of these “Mexican” restaurants and achieve economic success by opening their own—including Somerville's own Tacos Lupita and El Potro. Guzmán wavers between acknowledgment of the accomplishments of these Latino restaurants and criticism—suggesting the difficulty of identifying culturally with a particular nationality but simultaneously being part of a cross-ethnic community that faces similar economic and political challenges immigrating and opening a business.

Guzmán cites his adherence to tradition as essential to the creation and survival of his business. His customers, he says, are those looking for a different kind of experience that they cannot find elsewhere, and they are part of networks of like-minded individuals who share information about restaurants specializing in “slow food”—a movement discussed in the following section of this chapter. Word of mouth has brought customers to Somerville from up to two and a half hours away, and Guzmán cites this method of advertising as far more effective than advertisements in magazines or newspapers (Guzmán 2011). Guzmán’s promotion of traditional Mexican culture is unique in the Boston area, and customers are attracted to the authenticity of his cuisine and his highly localized cultural focus.

While only ten percent of his clientele is Latino, Guzmán identifies one of his primary goals as satisfying Mexican customers. He describes Mexicans as his most difficult clientele because of their familiarity with how traditional recipes should taste—

porque el mexicano...tu mama cocina todos los días diferente, entonces, tu paladar inconscientemente se hace muy estricto a todos los sabores y detecta...los sabores ya inconscientemente (because [for] Mexicans...your mother cooks differently every day, and therefore your palate unconsciously becomes very strict to all of the flavors and detects...the [differences] in flavors [and seasonings] unconsciously (Guzmán 2011).

While there is not a large Mexican community in the Boston area, Guzmán says his restaurant has received the seal of approval from many Mexican immigrants and visiting critics as an authentic restaurant (Guzmán 2011).

At Tu y Yo, culture is represented in the form of tradition and does not bend nor change to adapt to (United States of) American society. If Guzmán executes his approach perfectly, a diner should be able to get the same meal at Tu y Yo that would have been available at a traditional Mexican fonda 3,000 miles southwest of Somerville. Guzmán’s perspective and business plan differs significantly from Elias Interiano’s at El Potro Mexican Grill—a contrast that highlights the differences in the conception of Latino and national cultural identity. Tu y Yo

is a truly Mexican restaurant, while El Potro is more representative of the Somerville Latino community than any particular nationality in the way it mixes the familiarity of Mexican popular culture with Salvadoran cuisine that appeals to the large Somerville Salvadoran community.

El Potro Mexican Grill incorporates traditional Mexican and Salvadoran culture with Latino traditions in the United States to create a unique, Somerville-specific representation of Latino culture, emphasizing Salvadoran tradition while appealing to the familiarity of both Latinos and non-Latinos with Mexican and Mexican-American culture. Speaking with manager Jason Interiano, who was born in the United States, it is clear that his conception of Latino identity extends beyond his Salvadoran heritage and reflects his experience growing up in the greater Boston area where the Latino community includes a wide range of different heritage groups and national origins. El Potro is a Latino restaurant that serves a mix of Mexican and Salvadoran cuisine that owner Elias Interiano developed over the years as a restaurant employee and chef in the United States. While his recipes reflect dishes popular across the southwestern United States, Mexico, and El Salvador, they are designed to appeal to a wide range of customers here in the United States.

Owner Elias Interiano was born and raised in El Salvador, but became familiar with nearby Mexico's culture through his participation in a mariachi band. Manager Jason Interiano describes his father's passion for Mexican culture as his primary reason for the large emphasis on Mexican food, art, and music within the restaurant. The décor of the restaurant plays homage to the history and culture of the country—the walls are decorated with portraits of famous Mexican movie stars and singers from the twentieth century, particularly actors featured in Mexico's popular *comedias rancheras*, similar to American westerns featuring singing cowboys. All of the furniture inside El Potro is hand-carved and painted in Guadalajara, Mexico and shipped to the Somerville via an importer in Connecticut. The benches, chairs, and tables feature hand-painted, brightly-colored scenes and images of traditional Mexican culture as it is viewed in the United

States—cowboys on horseback herd farm animals and women in traditional dress look on from the doors of their small, adobe houses.

The imagery and ambience differs significantly from that of Tu y Yo, as do the philosophies behind the owners' choices. Jason Interiano describes the importance of pleasing the customer and creating a quality experience, while Guzmán focuses on developing a dedicated clientele through high-quality, traditional food (Interiano 2011; Guzmán 2011). Jason Interiano describes the primary goal of his family's restaurant as welcoming all customers into a family environment. "The majority of our employees are family...It's more like a family type of thing...we try to be...very warm and good to our clientele. It doesn't matter the race, like, Salvadorian, Mexican, Caucasian, Asian, anything like that...always treat them...with the same respect" (Interiano 2011). The family atmosphere of El Potro differs significantly from the formal Tu y Yo, despite the latter's designation as representative of the traditional, family-style Mexican fonda.

At El Potro, representing culture means coming together in a family environment to enjoy food familiar to almost all customers, from Tex-Mex standards such as tacos, fajitas, and enchiladas, to a selection of Salvadoran specialties, such as pupusas, a Salvadoran fried cornmeal pancake filled with beans, meat, cheese, for the Salvadoran community or more adventurous customers from different cultural backgrounds. The Interiano family owns and operates the restaurant, and manager Jason Interiano describes their mission as welcoming diners into their family so that they feel comfortable and at home (2011). Culture at El Potro is a fusion of Salvadoran, Mexican, and (United States of) American tradition—walking in to the restaurant, the customer enters a unique cultural space that reflects Interiano's personal interpretations of Latino culture in the United States rather than traditional culture in Mexico or El Salvador.

Interiano's representation of Latino culture reflects an association with a particular configuration of the larger, cross-ethnic Latino community in the United States that stretches beyond his own identity as Salvadoran. Living for years within the United States, working

within restaurants that employ Latino immigrants from many different national backgrounds, and participating in cultural activities such as traditional Mexican mariachi led Interiano to construct an identity as a member of the Boston-area Latino community, not only as a Salvadoran-American. As a Latino restaurant, El Potro does not reflect any particular national culture but rather a cross-ethnic, Somerville Latino culture that attracts customers from varied Latino and non-Latino backgrounds.

Restaurants and community

Restaurants as cultural centers and gathering spaces serve as centers of physical and “imagined” communities united by common bonds of culture, language, geography, and interest. Somerville’s Latino immigrant-owned restaurants cross and connect within these circles of community and culture, and their successes and challenges are largely defined by how owners identify and interact with different communities. As previously discussed, Somerville’s restaurant owners identify with many different culturally and politically defined “imagined communities,” but the influence of geographic location also plays a role in the existence of restaurants and their economic success.

The hyper-local: the importance of neighborhoods

One would expect that local, co-ethnic national communities and the cross-ethnic Latino community would play a significant role in the business decisions, success, and challenges of Latino immigrant-owned restaurants. The relationship between Somerville’s local Latino communities and these restaurants is certainly important, but varies across neighborhoods and restaurants. Some owners benefit significantly from their relationship with and location in largely Latino neighborhoods, while others cite a lack of a significant large Latino clientele.

Maya Sol Mexican Grill and nearby Taco Loco both benefit significantly from the large Salvadoran community in East Somerville. Due to their location within a large co-ethnic neighborhood and their relatively poor accessibility to public transportation, Maya Sol and Taco Loco depend on the business of the Salvadoran community. Despite the similarity in cuisine

with Taco Loco and Maya Sol, Tacos Lupita depends significantly on a White, non-Latino population that lives in the surrounding neighborhood. Most customers on a typical evening order in English. Tacos Lupita's location far from the heavily Salvadoran neighborhoods of East Somerville has required that it develop a different base of customers, including local residents and many who seek out the restaurant as a result of reading online reviews. The importance of this "virtual community" will be discussed in the following sections.

El Potro depended initially on the local Salvadoran community as its primary source of business. Manager Jason Interiano identifies one of his family's primary goals as reaching out to a larger clientele beyond the local Latino community. As the restaurant has grown, Interiano notes that the clientele continues to expand and is representative of the diversity of the Union Square area (Interiano 2011). The importance of the co-ethnic community was essential in getting started, however, and providing the support necessary for expansion.

For some restaurants, such as Tu y Yo and Machu Picchu, there is no large co-ethnic community present in Somerville. When asked if a Mexican community exists in the Boston area, Guzmán responded,

todos [los mexicanos] están en todas partes...todo el mundo está, todo el resto [de inmigrantes] está en estas comunidades, por ejemplo los armenios están en Watertown... si, hay comunidades de varias [grupos inmigrantes], pero el mexicano no (they [Mexicans] are everywhere...all of the rest [of immigrants] are in these communities, for example, the Armenians are in Watertown...yes, there are communities for various [immigrant groups], but not Mexicans) (Guzmán 2011).

Guzmán explains that he believes most Boston-area Mexicans come from a more educated, professional sector of the Mexican population and are thus scattered across the region, unlike many other Latinos who immigrate to an area with a large community of co-ethnics and find employment close to home (Guzmán 2011). As a result, Guzmán has focused primarily on attracting local young professionals and college students with disposable income and an interest

in trying traditional Mexican food. Similarly, the lack of a large Peruvian population in Somerville even the Boston area has led Machu Picchu to depend on a largely non-Peruvian clientele.

Marketing to the regional Latino community

Beyond Somerville, many Latino immigrant-owned businesses function as regional centers of culture and community. Interiano and Zuñiga both mentioned radio promotions on Spanish language stations as their only investments in advertising (Interiano 2011; Zuñiga 2003). Within the Boston area Latino community, radio serves as a primary tool of connecting working-class individuals that is easily accessible and affordable. Castañeda Paredes (2003) has documented the growth of Spanish-language radio in the last twenty years, and it is a fast growing market that serves to connect Latino communities across urban areas that often do not have access to other forms of mass media, such as print newspapers or online networks. While owners connect with their middle-class, White, professional clientele through the internet and social media, they make conscious decisions to reach out to the local Latino community by advertising on Spanish-language radio. El Potro hosts a popular, local Spanish-language disc jockey every Sunday evening, and manager Jason Interiano identifies this as a popular event within the local Latino community.

Despite identifying only ten percent of his clientele as Latino, Epigmenio Guzmán says that pleasing his Mexican customers is important because they are his biggest critics. He cites several studies that have been conducted about eating out and says he markets primarily to a White audience because studies show the average White American eats meals out six times a week (including lunches), while Latinos eat out only twice a month. The important difference is, however, that White Americans tend to eat out alone more often, while Latinos bring their entire extended families (Guzmán 2011). Marketing to Latinos is important to improve word-of-mouth recommendations, particularly with regards to the authenticity of his traditional cuisine. Guzmán claims that his Mexican customers in general tend to be satisfied with his food—a fact that gives

him much pride. Of course there are customers who claim their mothers and grandmothers cooked differently, but as a whole Guzmán says his Mexican customers come back (Guzmán 2011). In a region with no concrete center of the Mexican community, Guzmán's restaurant serves as a connection to Mexican culture and cuisine for professional immigrants in the Boston region.

Virtual communities: Restaurant reviews, social media, and free advertising

Reviews have always played an important role in the restaurant industry and can make or break a restaurant. With the advent of different forms of social media and networking tools on the internet, any customer now has the ability to review his or her dining experience and reach an infinite number of potential customers accessing reviews on both computers and mobile devices. Websites such as urbanspoon.com and yelp.com aggregate professional and customer reviews, providing detailed information about service, food, entertainment, and ambiance in eateries that range from the smallest, hole-in-the-wall take out joint to fine dining restaurants in major urban centers. In addition to these formal websites, bloggers contribute significantly to the online base of information about local restaurants. Blogs reviewing Tex-Mex specialties such as tacos and burritos are numerous and their writers often seek out the smallest, most "authentic" (read: non-English-speaking and frequented by a solely Latino customer base). The ability of anyone to add a restaurant review revolutionizes the process by which diners learn of restaurants and decide where to go on any given night. The demographics of those who use restaurant review websites are limited, however, to a largely middle and upper-class population who often have instantaneous access to these online communities. As discussed previously, these websites are less frequented by the Latino community, which in the Somerville area tends to be largely low-income and less computer literate (Granberry and Rustan 2010).

At El Potro, the Interiano family pays close attention to their restaurant's reviews and employees regularly respond to customer comments on yelp.com thanking customers for their kind words and encouraging them to come back (Yelp 2011; Interiano 2011). Jason Interiano

speaks of the importance of these websites to his family's restaurant, mentioning that favorable reviews draw in new customers (Interiano 2011). Recent reviews mention the success of El Potro's new focus on nighttime entertainment and bar and serve as a free source of advertising for El Potro's recent changes and improvements.

Tacos Lupita owes much of its success to internet reviews which have drawn in a local, White, middle-class population that may not otherwise have arrived at the small, simple restaurant that is located somewhat outside of the commercial Porter Square neighborhood. Bloggers reviewing Zuñiga's tacos and burritos reference other blogs, food review websites, and awards listings as how they found Tacos Lupita in Somerville. The reputation of affordable, familiar cuisine brings diners from the surrounding area to try Tacos Lupita's specialties, and has allowed the restaurant to focus on expansion to the surrounding area rather than advertising or improving the simple set-up in Somerville. Tacos Lupita does not have its own website and does not actively use social media to interact with potential customers, but its customers have filled in the gap and have created pages on food review websites and blogs that feature Zuñiga's restaurant.

Epigmenio Guzmán relies heavily on word-of-mouth advertising, and the internet has been particularly effective in attracting customers through Tu y Yo's affiliation with the "slow food" movement." Tu y Yo's website links to slow food communities, and Guzmán emphasizes his own philosophical attachment to the movement and the promotion of traditional cuisine. Many of his customers, he asserts, come from far away to Somerville because they are motivated by the commitment to slow food (Guzmán 2011). The not-for-profit Slow Food describes the philosophy of the movement as "[w]e believe that everyone has a fundamental right to the pleasure of good food and consequently the responsibility to protect the heritage of food, tradition and culture that make this pleasure possible" (Slow Food 2011). The commitment to slow food has developed largely through online communities which serve to spread information through a more technological system of "word-of-mouth" than the traditional sense of the term.

In addition to review websites, both Guzmán and Rosy Cerna at Machu Picchu communicate with regular customers through periodic emails. Machu Picchu advertises holiday specials and promotions ranging from special menus for Mothers' Day and Valentine's Day to the Day of the Pisco Sour, a traditional Peruvian drink. Guzmán's "VIP list" is designed to inform regular customers of promotions and maintain the interest of those who travel from far away to eat at his restaurant.

Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants exist as much more than economic institutions within the context of the Somerville community, and as such their existence, growth, and survival must also be analyzed in the contexts of culture and community. Restaurant owners found their restaurants based on specific principles drawn from identification with different cultures and communities, not only as institutions designed to profit the owner and other stakeholders. Looking at Somerville's Latino restaurants, we see that these conceptions of culture vary significantly due to the complexities of what it means to identify as Latino versus other identifiers including national, linguistic, racial, religious and cultural that vary across the cross-ethnic Latino community.

While all of the restaurant owners spoken with in Somerville identify as part of a larger Latino community, the ways that their restaurants participate and represent this community differ significantly. Epigmenio Guzmán identifies Tu y Yo as primarily a Mexican restaurant and takes that identifier seriously; every aspect of the restaurant reflects traditional representations of Mexican culture. While the Interianos also promote their restaurant as Mexican and Salvadoran, the inclusion of a wide variety of foods and décor reflects their identification with the local Latino community that extends beyond the borders of one particular nation. The tensions between the complexities of these identities demonstrate the desire of many immigrants to represent the culture of their individual national and ethnic background, and the political and

economic necessity and social benefits of identifying as a part of a larger Latino community with shared characteristics and interests.

Beyond the cross-ethnic Latino and co-ethnic national conceptions of culture, Somerville's Latino restaurants exist in geographical spaces that influence their creation, growth, and survival. From the local neighborhood to the regional Boston-area community, the location of Somerville's restaurants and their reach shape the decision-making processes of Somerville's Latino restaurant owners. A new virtual community has developed with the advent of widely accessible internet technology that allows customers to create and access information about restaurants instantaneously on computers and mobile devices. The way that owners interact with this virtual community are tied to both the economic and cultural foundations of their restaurants, and this new method of advertising and promotion can make or break restaurants in ways that were previously impossible.

Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants serve as important economic and cultural institutions within a complicated network of intersecting communities. These physical, virtual, and imagined communities are far from static, however. Imagined cultural and national communities are in constant flux, and virtual communities change daily due to their universal accessibility and endless potential for innovation. While physical communities transform more slowly, changing neighborhoods have a large impact on the opportunities for the creation, growth, and survival of Latino immigrant-owned businesses. The next chapter explores the history and implications of changing neighborhoods in Somerville, and how this relates to the Latino immigrant-owned restaurant community.

Chapter Three

Changing Neighborhoods: The Impact of Gentrification on Immigrant Communities

Cities are constantly in motion, and Somerville is no exception. This chapter focuses on changing neighborhoods in Somerville and their impact on local businesses, residents, workers, and visitors. Somerville's history of industry and immigration, its proximity to several institutions of higher education, and its changing history of access to transportation to downtown Boston make it an interesting example of trends in housing and economic development that have been studied by urban planners, geographers, and sociologists. In particular, Somerville's recent history and future has been and continues to be shaped by gentrification (Goldberg et. al 2007).

The term *gentrification* refers to a process by which typically middle-class, White individuals move in to working class neighborhoods and "revitalize" them through intensive private investment, resulting in significant displacement of previous residents and a change in the cultural fabric of neighborhoods (Smith 1996). Since the original coinage of this term, gentrification has had a negative connotation despite efforts by developers to re-brand it as a positive force of renewal and revitalization for "needy" neighborhoods. The "neighborhood revitalization" interpretation has won the favor of many development and transportation advocates, including Somerville's own STEP who state on their website that "the T stop

revitalized Davis Square and can revitalize other parts of Somerville” (Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership 2011). This perspective is problematic, however, because it fails to acknowledge the resources and strengths of the diverse businesses and residents that are forced out due to increasing rents and the new desirability of their homes and neighborhoods for White and middle class residents. The following history and commentary from restaurant owners discusses how gentrification has played an important role in Somerville’s recent past and will without a doubt figure prominently in its future.

While Somerville’s Latino immigrant restaurant owners are certainly aware of the dynamics of changing neighborhoods, their time is often focused on business decisions in the short term. The relationships between Somerville’s Latino immigrant restaurant owners, the large local immigrant community, and the growing population of young, urban professionals demonstrate a precarious balance and unequal power distribution that has the potential to significantly alter the demographics of the Somerville community. The implications of long term change that affect immigrant entrepreneurs are easy to overlook, and as result community organizations have developed in Somerville to organize residents and business owners who otherwise may not engage in political efforts to moderate displacement. As Somerville’s neighborhoods change, its Latino immigrant-owned restaurants face both opportunities and challenges with regard to survival, and they must alter their strategies or organize to deal with these changes.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of early gentrification in West Somerville’s Davis Square area during the 1980s and its impact on the local community, and then address the implications of the Green Line light rail extension, scheduled for completion within the next ten years, that has raised resident and business hopes and concerns across Somerville about increasing rents and new opportunities. I examine the interesting relationship between Somerville’s immigrant community and the growing population of young, urban professionals in Somerville, and finally, I look at the neighborhoods of East Somerville—home to a large

immigrant population and arguably the least gentrified areas of Somerville—and discuss the future of this community whose vibrant business district remains outside the realm of the White, middle-class Somerville population.

The Red Line and early gentrification

The story of neighborhood change in West Somerville is well-known citywide and informs the perspectives and opinions of many Somerville residents regarding the impact of gentrification. The face of contemporary West Somerville has its roots in policies and planning that followed the economic decline of the 1970s and 1980s. The following history of the transformation Davis Square neighborhood of West Somerville highlights an example of gentrification and its impact on the demographics of the community. As future change is discussed in other Somerville neighborhoods, Davis Square serves as an example of the economic, social, and cultural consequences of the introduction of rail transportation to a working-class community.

Somerville's population peaked in the 1930s. Following the shutdown of many local railroads, manufacturing and jobs left the city continuously throughout the rest of the century (DARBI 2010). Once a thriving commercial center, by the 1970s and 1980s Davis Square had lost businesses and was difficult to access due to dangerous and congested traffic patterns (Nikitin 2011). Residents began organizing in the early 1970s to push for the extension of the Red Line from Harvard Station to the Somerville neighborhood as an effort to revitalize the Davis Square commercial district. Simultaneous with the push for transportation access, residents organized the Davis Square Task Force to increase resident involvement in the planning for the redevelopment of the square.

The Red Line finally arrived in Somerville at the end of 1984 and was followed by extensive development. Residents and members of the Davis Square Task Force struggled with decisions about what was desirable development and what should be preserved. Cynthia Nikitin,

a research consultant who has studied the development of Davis Square, chronicles some of the challenges faced by local residents:

During the planning stages, the resident members of the Davis Square Task Force struggled to keep Davis Square from becoming overdeveloped. According to Lee Auspitz, a long-time member of the Task Force, local residents (who at the time wielded more power than the business interests on the Task Force) had at first opposed the subway extension, fearing that it would "ruin the neighborhood." Preserving a stable, residential environment was their primary goal and they fought to prevent Davis Square from becoming just another regional shopping mall. If they had to have a subway then "the subway was to be there for the community, not the community for the subway" (Nikitin 2011).

The community pushed to preserve the demographic composition of the residential neighborhood and promote local business interests that included many European, immigrant-owned small businesses, but as time passed many of these individuals were forced out due to the desirability of the location for wealthier residents and more upscale businesses. As rents increased, local residents and businesspeople were forced to move out.

The Davis Square neighborhood continues to struggle with its past as it looks forward to the future. Urban planners hail Davis Square's redevelopment as a model of success (Project for Public Spaces, Inc. 2008), but many residents are quick to point out that while Davis Square has become home to trendy, upscale businesses that attract the attention of the young urban professional ("yuppies"), many of the former residents of the area have been forced out due to high real estate prices and are unable to enjoy the benefits of access to public transportation.

Epigmenio Guzmán, owner of Tu y Yo Mexican Fonda in Powder House Circle in West Somerville, discussed the impact of the upscale West Somerville community on his business. His restaurant is located outside of Davis Square because it was more affordable, and he did not have a large amount of investment capital when he founded Tu y Yo in 2000. Guzmán's target

market is a young, adventurous crowd who appreciate traditional Mexican cuisine. During his interview, Guzmán pulled out demographic information published by a Somerville real estate firm and pointed to the number of individuals living in the West Somerville area, citing the proximity of over five thousand Tufts University students living within a several block radius, as well as the large presence of yuppies, graduate students, a large international community, and young families. Guzman suggests that these demographic groups are more likely to eat out and be adventurous in their choices, compared to the community near his Needham restaurant which is home to primarily White, suburban families (Guzmán 2011). While Guzmán has benefitted from the populations attracted by a gentrified neighborhood, his business is also limited by its location outside of the more walkable Davis Square area. Guzmán discusses the challenges of being located on an area with more vehicle than pedestrian traffic, and the lack of parking at his current location. He cannot afford to move, however, so he says he must work hard to overcome the obstacles of his location (Guzmán 2011).

Guzmán's experiences demonstrate the challenges of immigrant restaurant owners in gentrified areas. With little start-up capital, Guzmán was unable to afford a property closer to the subway stop in Davis Square and therefore benefits little from the nearby rail transportation. He does benefit from the local residential population, however, making his location both a benefit and challenge to his business. The local Latino community arrived in Somerville primarily during the 1980s and 1990s and therefore did not experience the displacement from the Davis Square area that other European immigrant groups did, but have nonetheless been affected by the neighborhood changes and gentrification.

The story of Davis Square demonstrates the challenges of preserving affordable housing and immigrant businesses in the face of forces of gentrification. Despite resident and business owner organizing through the Davis Square Task Force, local property values inevitably increased and new businesses such as upscale restaurants and bars, trendy art and gift stores, and several cafes have moved in. Some older businesses, such as an older tailor shop owned by a

Greek immigrant and McKinnon's meat market have survived, but the numbers continue to decrease and newer businesses that cater to the yuppie crowd move in to replace them. As Somerville anticipates the extension of the Green Line light rail from Lechmere, the experience of Davis Square is frequently cited as an example of what could happen to Somerville's other neighborhoods.

The Green Line extension and the future of Somerville

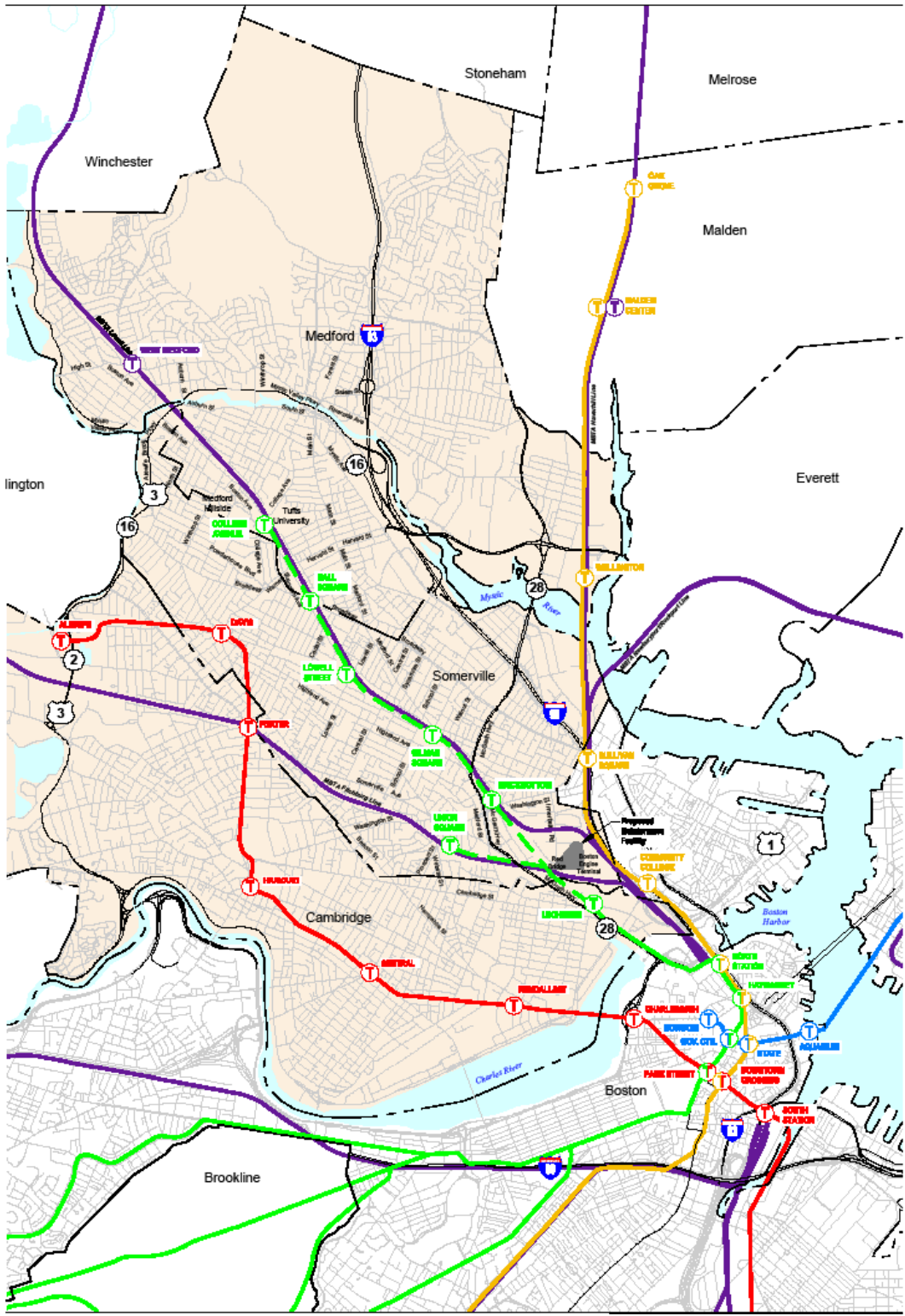
While eight passenger trains pass through the 4.2 square miles incorporated as the city of Somerville, only one train line stops. Despite Somerville's residents being the second most reliant on public transportation in the area and a population of 6,000 immigrants per square mile, less than a quarter of Somerville residents live within a half mile of a T-stop (Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership 2011). Somerville's lack of access to public transportation has kept property values low in many areas and has presented a challenge to business owners who must draw their customer base primarily from local neighborhoods. The lack of accessible rail transportation has contributed significantly to the existence of immigrant neighborhoods with specialty stores and restaurants catering to local residents. The East Somerville neighborhood demonstrates this insularity—its business district draws customers largely from within the nearby neighborhoods, and few “outsiders” make their way to its restaurants and stores due to its relative inaccessibility. While the lack of rail transportation has contributed to the development of more affordable immigrant neighborhoods, it also means that residents are forced to ride several buses and trains to travel distances less than three miles away. The environmental impacts of the large number of trains and highways that pass through Somerville without stopping include high rates of asthma, heart attacks, and lung cancer among residents (Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership 2011).

The possibility of extending train service from north from Lechmere Station in Cambridge into Somerville and Medford has been considered since the 1920s. While the concept was periodically revived throughout the century, it was not until 1990 that the state of

Massachusetts promised to extend the Green Line as part of a plan to offset violations of the Clean Air Act from the Big Dig project that re-routed the Central Artery Route 93 through a tunnel in downtown Boston. Lawsuits by the Conservation Law Foundation combined with protests and pressure from Somerville citizens resulted in the state's promise and legal obligation to extend Green Line Service by 2014. In 2008, the state announced its preferred station locations which would place five new stations within Somerville's borders and two other stations in Medford within a half mile of many Somerville residents, including residents of a large public housing development in West Somerville. Station design workshops have begun, and the current deadline for project completion is 2014. (Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership 2011)

The proposed station locations are displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Map of Proposed Green Line Extension



Source: Massachusetts Department of Transportation 2010

Somerville's response to the Green Line has been mixed, even from its biggest proponents. While most residents seem to agree that rail access is long overdue, many residents and community organizations have expressed concerns regarding the impact of the Green Line on Somerville's unique and diverse neighborhoods. The leading group organizing to increase

citizen involvement in the planning process has been the Community Corridor Planning coalition, a collaborative effort including the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC), Groundwork Somerville, the Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership (STEP), and the Somerville Community Health Agenda. Through community organizing efforts and planning meetings, the group has identified priorities that reflect the concerns of many residents about the impact of the Green Line extension on residents and businesses. One of the primary priority statements reflects the probability that new transportation access will raise property values and force low-income and immigrant families out. The coalition's literature states:

Keep Somerville Affordable: We want to make sure people of all economic means have the ability to afford housing and living costs, so that Somerville residents, such as child care workers, cab drivers, local business employees and others can stay here affordably (Somerville Community Corporation 2009).

A second principle reflecting the fear that the Green Line will change the demographics of Somerville's community asserts: "Maintain Our Diversity: Preserve and encourage economic and ethnic diversity of residents and businesses" (Somerville Community Corporation 2009).

Somerville's experience with gentrification as a result of the extension of transportation in Davis Square has informed the efforts to understand and plan for the potential detrimental impacts of the Green Line extension. The popular refrain among organizers, "we don't want another Davis Square" reflects a community sentiment of frustration with the process of gentrification that followed the arrival of the Red Line extension in Davis Square in 1984. As community organizations, residents, and small businesses plan for the coming of the Green Line, sentiments are mixed.

Union Square

The Union Square neighborhood is one of the largest commercial areas that will soon be accessible by train. A vibrant, largely immigrant business district, Union Square has already begun to experience gentrification as a result of its proximity to Cambridge and the growing

numbers of yuppies, graduate students, and young families that have spilled over the border from Central, Inman, and Harvard Squares. The presence of a large artist community, including the Brickbottom Studios near Union Square and several other community art organizations, has also contributed to an increased number of White, educated, middle-class individuals in the area.

Union Square is currently in a state of precarious equilibrium—new businesses such as an upscale pet store, several yoga studios, two trendy cafes, and several bars catering to a yuppie crowd sit side-by-side older immigrant-owned businesses such as the La Internacional Market specializing in Latin American products, Fiesta Bakery serving traditional Haitian food, variety store Pão de Açúcar Brazilian Market, and restaurants offering Salvadoran, Mexican, Peruvian, Indian, Thai, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, and Brazilian cuisine. Local business manager Jason Interiano of El Potro says that the area has increasingly become a popular area for nightlife and his business has sought to take advantage of the growing number of individuals frequenting the square (Interiano 2011). Reaching out to a wide variety of customers has been instrumental to the Interiano family's success at El Potro, and they have expanded their reach by opening a full bar and late night entertainment.

Interiano says his family has not thought much about the upcoming Green Line extension into Union Square because it still seems so distant, but he imagines that it will be good for business. His family continues to seek to expand their reach using tools such as yelp.com to promote their restaurant, and Interiano suggests that more customers will be able to arrive more easily if the Green Line stops in Union Square. In addition, he cites the importance of foot traffic in attracting new customers. The vibrant art and decorations of El Potro attract the attention of passersby, and Interiano identifies this as a common way that customers arrive at his restaurant (Interiano 2011). Interiano does not have concerns about the Green Line coming and believes his family's restaurant can deal with the pressures of rising prices. His confidence comes from his restaurant's ability to market to the new customer base—even if the local

immigrant community were forced out of the Union Square area due to rising prices, Interiano suggests that El Potro would survive on the business of a yuppie crowd.

Ball Square

A second commercial area that will be significantly impacted by the Green Line extension is the Ball Square area in West Somerville. Home to a wide variety of businesses, the area caters primarily to nearby Tufts University students and the White, professional population of West Somerville. There are several older, immigrant-owned businesses, however, and Epigmenio Guzmán's Tu y Yo is located nearby in Powder House circle, about a five minute walk from Ball Square and slightly farther from Davis Square. Guzmán was unaware that the Green Line extension would come so close to his restaurant, and at first doubted that it would have any impact on his business. After thinking about it during the interview, Guzmán suggested that it might help to solve the problem of transportation to his restaurant. Lack of parking has always been a problem, and many diners are unwilling to walk the ten minutes from Davis Square to his restaurant. A closer rail stop could help bring in new customers, Guzmán suggested (Guzmán 2011). Similar to Interiano, however, Guzmán has given the Green Line extension little thought in his future business plans. Carrie Dancy, executive director of East Somerville Main Streets, suggests that long term planning can be challenging for small business owners who are concerned with the day-to-day survival of their businesses, and is therefore often overlooked despite its potential impact on business (Dancy 2010). For both Interiano and Guzmán, the Green Line could have a significant impact on their future customer base, but neither of them was particularly aware of the details or timeline of the project.

Organizing and the Green Line

Discussions with Interiano and Guzmán regarding the impact of the Green Line extension into their neighborhoods revealed a general lack of awareness about the potential impact of a change in transportation on business. While the Green Line extension's completion date remains years away due to difficulties in funding, the planning process of station location and design is

nearly complete, and neither business owner had the opportunity to contribute despite their stake in these decisions. The long term nature of the project conflicts with the short term viewpoint of immigrant business owners concerned with immediate challenges. This disconnect suggests that the involvement of community organizations such as the Community Corridor Planning coalition in spreading awareness and coordinating resident and business involvement is essential in influencing the early stages of the planning process. Without the support of organizations such as the Somerville Community Corporation, immigrant entrepreneurs such as Epigmenio Guzmán and Elias Interiano would be left out of the planning process entirely due to their preoccupation with the immediate, everyday challenges of running their businesses.

Yuppies and immigrants: Somerville's precarious balance

The relationship between Somerville's immigrant community and large young, urban professional population makes the city a unique environment for immigrant entrepreneurship, particularly immigrant-owned restaurants. As discussed throughout the previous chapters, most of Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants, and certainly those that are most successful economically, depend on the business of the large "yuppie" population that is concentrated in West Somerville and is spreading to the Union Square area. This subset of the Somerville population is highly educated, tends to be fairly liberal, and has significant disposable income. Epigmenio Guzmán describes Somerville's young professionals as adventurous and interested in international food and culture (2011). Guzmán has targeted his restaurant specifically toward this population with his higher prices and upscale ambience, while El Potro has similarly worked to attract the growing yuppie demographic in Union Square by obtaining a liquor license and starting to compete with late night entertainment in the neighborhood that has previously attracted young professionals to the area (Guzmán 2011; Interiano 2011). Tacos Lupita has benefitted significantly from this demographic, but has done little to explicitly target the yuppie audience—in fact, many of their employees speak extremely limited English and the menu

features descriptions in Spanish before English translations. Ironically, the “hole-in-the-wall” nature of Tacos Lupita seems to have been a primary draw for many yuppie patrons who blog about Mexican-American restaurants and compete to find the “most authentic” establishments.

While Somerville’s Latino immigrant-owned restaurants benefit significantly from patronage by the large, young professional community, this relationship is not without challenges and hangs in a precarious balance. The power relationship between Latino immigrant restaurant owners and yuppies is uneven. While the yuppies are active in local politics and widely represented in community organizations, Somerville’s Latino community lacks the political power and organization to advocate for itself. Somerville’s yuppies draw on significant economic capital that translates into political power, while the Latino community and larger immigrant community is as a whole is largely working class. Yuppies also share cultural capital that is recognized and valued in dominant (United States of) American society. Somerville’s immigrant community largely does not possess dominant cultural capital that is valued within political and organizational settings, and faces challenges to establishing a united political force due to significant differences in class, national origin, language, and culture.

The power imbalance in Somerville has the potential to result in political, economic, and social changes that affect populations unequally. As more yuppies move in to Somerville, often attracted by the proximity of immigrant neighborhoods (and their emblematic features: restaurants), housing prices will likely rise and drive out lower-income immigrant families. While gentrification can bring economic success to immigrant businesses in the short term, the long term impacts of large demographic changes could ultimately hurt the Somerville immigrant community due to the large power imbalance between immigrants and yuppie gentrifiers.

Immigrant East Somerville: ignored or independent?

East Somerville is the one area of the City of Somerville that has been excluded entirely from all transportation planning and remains far from the reaches of both the Red Line and the proposed Green Line. Bordered by McGrath Highway and Interstate 93, East Somerville bears

much of the burden of pollution caused by highway traffic but remains largely out of reach from the rail system. While parts of East Somerville lie within walking distance of public transportation by way of the Orange Line at Sullivan Station and thus have access to downtown Boston, most of the community is only accessible to other Somerville neighborhoods by bus. Demographically, East Somerville has a large immigrant population and the lowest property values due to its proximity to the highways, poor air quality, and lack of rail access, and the recent closure of Broadway's Star Market makes the area a "food desert" as well, with no convenient, large-scale neighborhood supermarket.

East Somerville's neighborhood characteristics are without a doubt correlated. Somerville's development as a city crisscrossed by railroads and highways is consistent with its existence as an immigrant working-class community. Poor air quality, lack of green space, and high levels of traffic translate into low property values which attract an immigrant working-class population working for minimum wage. The cycle of exploitation, low property values, and immigrant settlement has been part of East Somerville's history since its early years as a city divided by railroads. In the last decade, however, East Somerville has sought to promote and preserve its immigrant heritage and culture through various organizing and promotional initiatives. While East Somerville attempts to promote a new image modeled after Union Square, it has remained overlooked or ignored by policymakers. The Green Line extension bypasses East Broadway entirely, instead passing through residential neighborhoods.

Questions that arise regarding East Somerville are complex—why has East Somerville experienced less new development and demographic changes? Is this a good thing for its businesses and residential communities? The histories of other Somerville neighborhoods suggest that bringing public transportation to a neighborhood leads to inevitable gentrification that pushes out many low-income residents and immigrant business owners. Lack of public transportation access, however, often means more cars for those who can afford them and thus greater levels of pollution, longer travel times to work, school, doctors' visits, or the

supermarket, and more money spent on transportation. Residents and business owners of East Somerville have not been presented with the opportunity to choose, however, and their community has been left off of the Green Line extension.

Is East Somerville better off remaining isolated and developing its own insular immigrant business community? East Somerville Main Streets has worked to support the development of a vibrant business district in the neighborhood and their experiences suggest that East Somerville is doing well on its own (Dancy 2010). Given the patterns of development of West Somerville and the Union Square area, it is likely only a matter of time until East Somerville is faced with choices about preserving affordability and diversity versus gentrification. The future of East Somerville will depend on whether or not gentrifiers take an interest in the community, and the capacity of the immigrant community and its supporters to organize in response.

Somerville is a dynamic, changing community that has experienced significant new development over the last thirty years. The gentrification of West Somerville has served as an example of the ways in which neighborhood and demographic changes occur in working class and immigrant communities, and as Somerville moves forward this experience informs the opinions and perspectives of local residents and business owners. As the Green Line extension is planned, Somerville residents and business owners have begun to organize with the support of the Community Corridor Planning coalition to preserve the affordability and diversity of Somerville's neighborhoods.

Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners, while vaguely aware of the prospect of a Green Line extension, are largely unaware of the potential impact of such a project on their businesses. While both Interiano and Guzmán indicate that it would bring in new customers and improve accessibility to their restaurants, neither was involved in the planning process.

Immigrant entrepreneurs such as these restaurant owners are typically focused on the short term

and immediate business decisions, and therefore do not have the time to focus on projects that could have significant long term impacts on their communities and neighborhoods.

The unequal relationship between Somerville's immigrant and yuppie populations suggests that the gentrifiers have an upper hand, and organizing efforts are necessary to unite Somerville's various immigrant groups to form a political force. Immigrant business owners are focused on the short term and do not have the time to focus on the distant future, so therefore community organizations can play an important role advocating for and working with immigrant business owners and residents of neighborhoods that face gentrification and demographic changes.

Conclusion

Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants are complex establishments whose creation, growth, and survival are dependent on their roles as institutions of economic

incorporation for immigrants, preservers and promoters of culture, and positions within multiple geographical and virtual communities. The analysis of Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned restaurants demonstrates the importance of placing economy within the context of social and cultural networks and relations; the business decisions faced by entrepreneurs including setting target customer bases, developing a menu, advertising, and expansion are motivated by a variety of concerns that extend beyond making a profit. These business strategies of Somerville's Latino immigrant entrepreneurs are influenced by their identifications with national cultural traditions and with a larger Latino cultural community. In addition, Somerville's restaurants are influenced by local, regional, and virtual communities whose preferences and personal backgrounds direct many of the choices made by Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners.

Summary of findings

Restaurants serve as institutions of economic incorporation for immigrants who arrive in the United States with limited skills and education. The prevalence of fellow immigrants within the industry and the potential for advancement make restaurants attractive employers. As immigrant employees work their way up through the hierarchy of restaurants, many learn the skills necessary to open their own businesses. Entrepreneurship allows for economic advancement and some degree of independence, although immigrant entrepreneurs in Somerville remain subject to the policies and power of a government in which they have little representation. The economic opportunities and success of these small businesses are highly dependent on the individual capital possessed by the individual entrepreneurs, including economic, human, social, and cultural capital. While most immigrant entrepreneurs economically are members of a similar class, their levels of education, forms of cultural and social capital, and human capital differ, resulting in the foundation of varying styles of restaurants with unique missions and target customer bases.

Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners opened their own businesses with economic goals in mind, but their missions extend beyond profit to reflect their personal

identifications with their national cultures and a wider affiliation with Latino culture. Restaurant owner Epigmenio Guzmán chose to open a traditional Mexican restaurant to promote the cuisine of his native country. He acknowledges that his restaurant has suffered from this decision and his refusal to offer Tex-Mex or modern Mexican cuisine more familiar to a wider audience, but Guzmán is dedicated to preserving traditional Mexican culture and is unwilling to compromise his values and identity for profit. Simultaneously, however, the Interiano family at El Potro interprets Latino culture in Somerville as a mixture of Mexican and Salvadoran popular culture and tradition. Unconcerned with the boundaries between different countries, history, and culture, Elias Interiano offers dishes familiar to both immigrants and non-Latinos, reflecting a uniquely Somerville conception of Latino identity that reflects the presence of a larger Central American population in the city. The Interiano family welcomes customers into the restaurant and seeks to provide a comfortable, welcoming experience that is familiar to all customers—both Latinos and non-Latinos. Their menu is a mixture of specialties familiar to Salvadoran and Mexican immigrants but also to the non-Latino customers whose perception of “Mexican” food may be limited to tacos, fajitas, and quesadillas. Similar to the Interiano family, Leo Zuñiga at Tacos Lupita combines his family’s Mexican and Salvadoran cultures to create basic, familiar recipes that appeal to Latino and non-Latino audiences. The ways in which Somerville’s Latino immigrant restaurant owners conceptualize culture and identity define their restaurants’ missions beyond making a profit. The economy of Latino immigrant-owned restaurants is embedded within social and cultural networks, and to understand the creation, growth, and survival of these restaurants their multiple roles and missions must be examined simultaneously.

Somerville’s Latino immigrant-owned restaurants also exist within multiple communities that determine how they are founded, grow, and survive. The immediate community—the local neighborhood—is the most important for some restaurants, such as Maya Sol, that are located directly within a co-ethnic neighborhood. El Potro and Tacos Lupita also depend significantly on their local neighborhoods, but these customer bases include significantly larger non-Latino

populations. Beyond the local neighborhood, the larger regional community is an important customer base for some restaurants—in particular, Tu y Yo and Machu Picchu. Because they offer traditional cuisine of countries that lack unified immigrant communities in the Boston area, both restaurants serve as destinations for co-ethnic populations scattered throughout New England. In addition, as upscale, higher-priced restaurants, both serve as common destinations for other residents of the region interested in exploring new forms of Latin American cuisine. Finally, the Boston-area on-line communities of “foodies” and bloggers plays an extremely important role in the survival of Somerville’s Latino immigrant-owned restaurants by providing free advertising and promotion among middle and upper class users of social media—customer bases that were not directly targeted by many restaurant owners in their outreach and promotion strategies.

Somerville is a dynamic community, and the portrait of Somerville’s Latino immigrant restaurants presented in this thesis represents a snapshot of economic activity at a single point in time. Somerville has experienced significant demographic changes over the past thirty years as a result of expanded accessibility to transportation and regional changes that have led to gentrification and a growing population of young professionals, particularly in West Somerville. As Somerville anticipates the extension of the Green Line and the construction of five new stations within its borders, residents and business owners cite past experiences as an example of the type of development that will occur around the new stations. Tu y Yo and El Potro will directly experience the consequences of this development, and both owners suggest that it will likely be good for business. They have not been involved in the planning process up until this point, however, and their experiences suggest that the involvement of community groups in organizing efforts could be beneficial to increase the power of existing immigrant business owners. As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, the distribution of power in Somerville has created a lack of representation of immigrant business owners in local government, and thus

decisions that affect these entrepreneurs may not reflect the interests and needs for the future survival of Somerville's immigrant business community.

The stories of Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners demonstrate the importance of looking at how restaurants and other immigrant-owned businesses function as more than solely economic institutions but as essential parts of the fabric of communities. Analyzing the way in which Somerville's immigrant-owned restaurants operate using basic economic assumptions that cite profit maximization as the primary goal of businesses ignores many of the factors that impact how these restaurants operate and make decisions. To truly understand this important sector of the Somerville economy, one must examine how economy is intricately linked to social and community relationships, and culture.

Implications

The stories of Somerville's Latino immigrant entrepreneurs highlight a range of experiences that are an important part of Somerville's history. Immigrants have figured prominently in the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the city since its foundation, but their experiences have largely been overlooked in recorded community histories. The most recent immigrants to Somerville come from every continent, but Latin American immigrants make up the largest foreign-born group living within the city (U.S. Census Bureau 2011) A true history of Somerville cannot ignore the contributions and presence of Latino immigrants and this thesis seeks to document their stories for the community's sake.

In addition to serving as narratives of Somerville's immigrant history, the stories of Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners provide valuable insight to community organizations and local government that promote economic development and immigrant activism in local politics. When working with immigrant-owned businesses, organizations must take into consideration the importance of culture and community in how businesses operate. Within Somerville's Latino immigrant-owned businesses, for example, it is important to understand and

acknowledge the relationship between identification with a particular national origin group and the larger Latino community.

Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant owners can also provide community groups with insight in regard to organizing immigrants to increase political power. Many immigrant entrepreneurs are preoccupied with the challenges of running their businesses on a daily basis and do not have the time to actively engage in political processes that may affect their businesses in the long run. Community organizations such as the Somerville Community Corporation can provide valuable support for these entrepreneurs whose interests may not be represented in planning processes and policies at the local and state level. The need for these organizers was made very apparent in interviews with restaurant owners who emphasized their preoccupation with short-term business decisions and lack of time and manpower to focus on political engagement focused on the long run.

Opportunities for future research

This thesis focused primarily on interviews with three restaurant owners from three Mexican and Salvadoran restaurants. Future research on Somerville's Latino immigrant restaurant community would benefit from more extensive interviews with owners from different national origins. While Machu Picchu and Maya Sol were highlighted briefly throughout this thesis, unfortunately I was unable to secure interviews with these owners and their stories and experiences are all related through secondary sources. Directly interviewing the owners of these restaurants as well as the approximately ten additional Latino immigrant-owned restaurants in Somerville would bring additional perspectives on culture and the connection with a larger Latino community. In particular, interviewing restaurant owners from different countries could expand the range of experiences and stories to create a more accurate picture of Latino immigrant entrepreneurship in the city of Somerville.

An additional research opportunity would be examining the role of gender in these institutions. All three restaurant owners featured in this thesis are male, and their perspectives

likely differ from those of female restaurant owners and employees. Examining the role of culture and the construction of gender identity within the context of employment and entrepreneurship may yield different recommendations or areas of opportunity for the involvement of community organizations and local government. Any analysis of Latino immigrant entrepreneurship is incomplete if it focuses solely on the role of males in these businesses.

Other topics with potential for research include the relationship between the Somerville immigrant community and a growing population of young urban professionals who interact more often than one might initially assume, or an in-depth look at the economy of East Somerville and its relationship with other surrounding Somerville neighborhoods. These relationships highlight the value of maintaining diverse populations in Somerville, and further research could be used to support neighborhood organizing to protect the diversity of Somerville's neighborhoods through policy and community advocacy.

The stories of Latino immigrant restaurant owners demonstrate the unique character of the city of Somerville, Massachusetts. The diverse communities that cross and connect throughout Somerville's many neighborhoods allow for the survival of a variety of small businesses, from upscale restaurants to small, specialized grocery stores. The continued prosperity of Somerville's immigrant business sector is far from guaranteed, however, given recent trends of rising housing prices and gentrification. To preserve the character of this diverse community, Somerville's residents and business people must work to understand the history of their city and unite to advocate for the values that make Somerville unique.

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